

Article

# Young people's well-being: 2017

How young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK are faring in a range of areas that matter to their quality of life, reflecting both the circumstances of their lives and their own perspectives.

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# 1 . Main points

- Several aspects of young people's quality of life and well-being have improved in this latest update; many of these relate to education, employment and skills, while some measures of how young people feel about their lives provide a more mixed picture.
- Overall satisfaction with health has improved and the gap between young men's and young women's satisfaction with their health has narrowed.
- In 2016, the proportions of young people who were unemployed or not in education, employment or training (NEET) both reached their lowest levels since 2004.
- The proportion of young people reporting that they find it difficult to get by financially decreased to 7% in the period 2014 to 2015 from 15% in 2009 to 2010 but the proportion of young people living in households at risk of poverty increased from 19% in 2008 to 25% in 2015.
- The proportion of young people reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression increased from 18% in the period 2009 to 2010 to 21% in 2013 to 2014; young women were more likely than young men to report symptoms of anxiety or depression.
- On social connections, the proportion of young people who said they had someone to rely a lot on, decreased from 80% in the period 2010 to 2011 to 76% in 2013 to 2014 but the proportion of young people who agreed or strongly agreed that they belong to their neighbourhood, increased from 50% in 2009 to 2010 to 57% in 2014 to 2015.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

This article presents a picture of how young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK are faring in a range of areas that matter to their quality of life. We monitor young people's quality of life using a set of 28 headline indicators designed to shed light both on their current well-being and on their future prospects. The measures include objective data (for example, educational attainment) and subjective data (such as a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood where they live). The aim is to provide a holistic view of life in the UK for young people reflecting both the circumstances of their lives and their own perspectives.

The analysis uses the latest data available as of April 2017, however It is important to recognise that the data underpinning the indicators are from a range of different sources with different timeliness and coverage. Further information on the source of each indicator can be found in the [dataset](#).

The measures for young people's personal well-being have been aligned with the data presented in the [Personal well-being statistical bulletin](#). These changes offer more detailed data for young people. The measure is provided for 16- to 19-year-olds and 20- to-24-year-olds, and the "high or very high" rating (low or very low for anxiety) is now only "very high" (9 or 10 out of 10) or "very low" (0 or 1 out of 10). In addition, the measure for long-term illness and disability has been changed from the Equality Act core disabled definition to the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonised Standard definition.

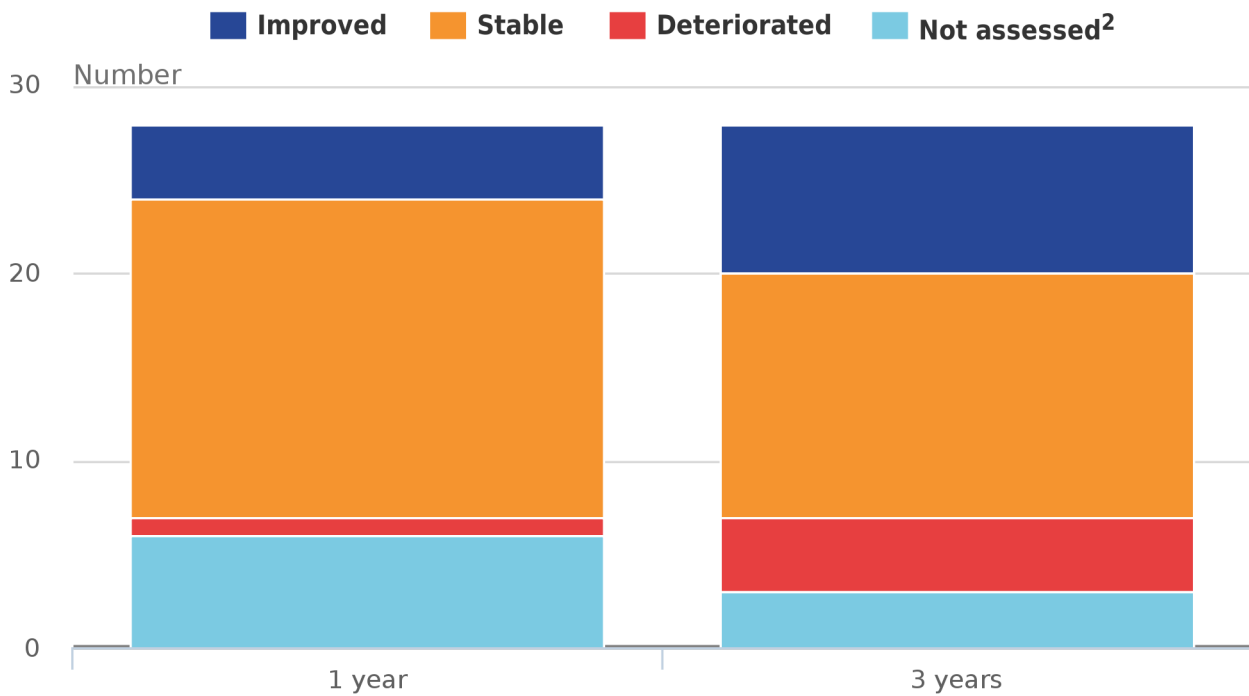
The principles of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonised Standard are designed to be consistent with a conceptual framework of disability that encompasses medical, individual and societal factors as documented in the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), the World Health Organisation's definition of disability and the disablement process. This approach is consistent with the collection of traditional data on activity restriction, long-standing illness and impairment, as well as data on the importance of aspects of society which restrict the participation of people with impairments relative to those without impairments.

### 3 . Assessments of change

To give a sense of whether and how quality of life is improving for young people in the UK, we assess whether each indicator has improved, deteriorated or remained unchanged. Comparisons are made with the previous year's data, as well as change over a 3-year period. Where possible, the article also includes trends over a longer period to provide further context.

**Figure 1: Assessment of young people's<sup>1</sup> well-being measures over 1 and 3 years**

April 2017 release



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. If data are not available for the previous period, the measure has not been assessed.
2. Where data are not available for the previous period, the measure has not been assessed.

Over a 1-year period, the majority (17) of indicators remained unchanged, while four improved and one deteriorated. Six indicators were not assessed for this publication because data were not available for the previous period.

Over a 3-year period eight indicators of young people's quality of life improved, while 13 remained unchanged, and four deteriorated. Three indicators were not assessed for this publication because data were not available for the previous period.

The overall picture is one of stability or improvement in young people's quality of life, though with some notable exceptions, particularly in relation to the proportion of young people in households at risk of poverty, young people's mental health and well-being and the social support available to them. A more in-depth review of these factors and their contribution to young people's quality of life is presented below.

## 4 . Personal well-being

Our personal well-being questions allow individuals to assess their own quality of life. People aged 16 and over are asked to evaluate their satisfaction with life overall, whether they feel the things they do in life are worthwhile, how happy they were yesterday and how anxious they were yesterday. The proportions of young people who gave very high ratings (9 or 10 out of 10) of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness and very low ratings (0 or 1 out of 10) of anxiety for financial year ending (FYE) 2016 are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Proportions reporting very high life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness and very low anxiety for those aged 16 to 19 and 20 to 24**

	UK: financial year ending 2016	
	16 to 19	20 to 24
Life Satisfaction (very high)	36.4	26.8
Worthwhile (very high)	32.5	31.1
Happiness (very high)	39.6	32.7
Anxiety (very low)	42.2	41.4

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages for 'very high' relates to those who responded 9 or 10 on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 was not at all satisfied and 10 was completely satisfied.
2. For Life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness, percentages for 'very high' relates to those who responded 9 or 10 on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 was not at all and 10 was completely.

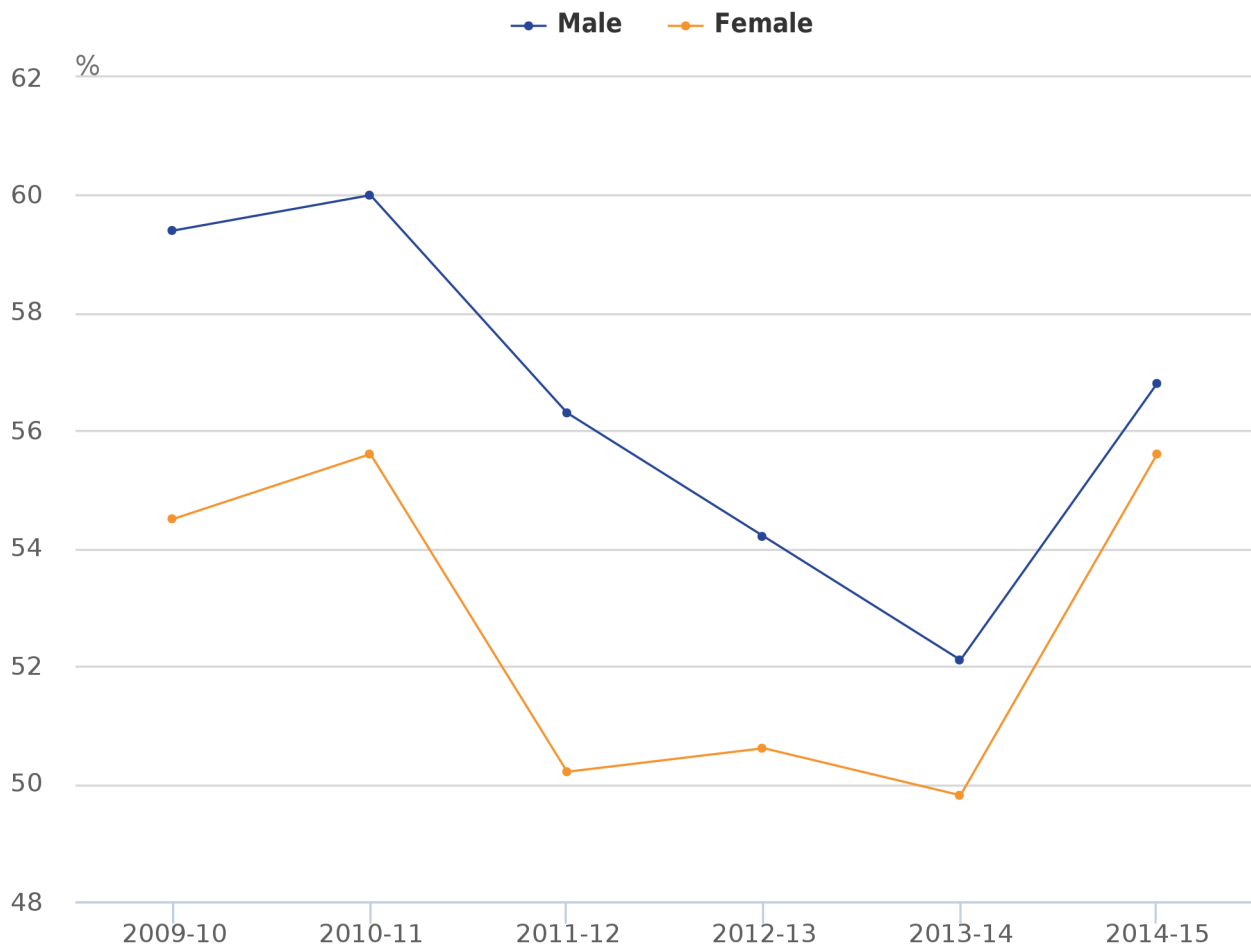
In the FYE 2016, a larger proportion of people aged 16 to 19 in the UK reported very high levels of life satisfaction and happiness than those aged 20 to 24. There are no differences between the two age groups in the proportions giving very high ratings that the things they do in life are worthwhile and very low levels of anxiety. There has been no change in the proportions of both age groups reporting very high life satisfaction, worthwhile or happiness, or very low anxiety compared with the previous year (FYE 2015).

## 5 . Health

Previous analysis has found a strong relationship between self-reported health and personal well-being ( [What matters most to personal well-being? ONS, 2013](#)). The most recent estimate shows that 56% of young people aged 16 to 24 were mostly or completely satisfied with their health in the period 2014 to 2015. This measure deteriorated between the periods 2009 to 2010 and 2013 to 2014, and was driven by a fall in the proportion of young men, who reported that they were mostly or completely satisfied with their health (59% to 52%). While satisfaction with health for both young men and young women improved between 2013 to 2014 and 2014 to 2015, young women's satisfaction increased more sharply from 50% to 56%. This has effectively closed the gap between young men's and young women's reported health satisfaction.

**Figure 2: Proportion of young people<sup>1</sup> mostly or completely satisfied with health by sex, 2009 to 2010 through 2014 to 2015**

UK



Source: Understanding Society: the UK Household Longitudinal Survey

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.

In terms of objective measures of health, the [Health Survey for England](#) estimates around 39% of young people aged 16 to 24 in England were classified as overweight or obese in 2015. People in this age group are the least likely of all adult age groups to be overweight or obese, compared for example with those aged 25 to 34 (52%) and 55 to 64 (75%). The proportion of young people who are overweight or obese has remained largely stable since 2012.

The Labour Force Survey captures information about people's disability status using the principles of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonised Standard<sup>1</sup>. In 2015, around 12% of young people were classified as disabled or having a long-term illness, an increase from 9% in 2013.

## Notes for: Health

1. The principles of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonised Standard are designed to be consistent with a conceptual framework of disability that encompasses medical, individual and societal factors as documented in the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), the World Health Organisation's definition of disability and the disablement process. This approach is consistent with the collection of traditional data on activity restriction, long-standing illness and impairment, as well as data on the importance of aspects of society which restrict the participation of people with impairments relative to those without impairments.

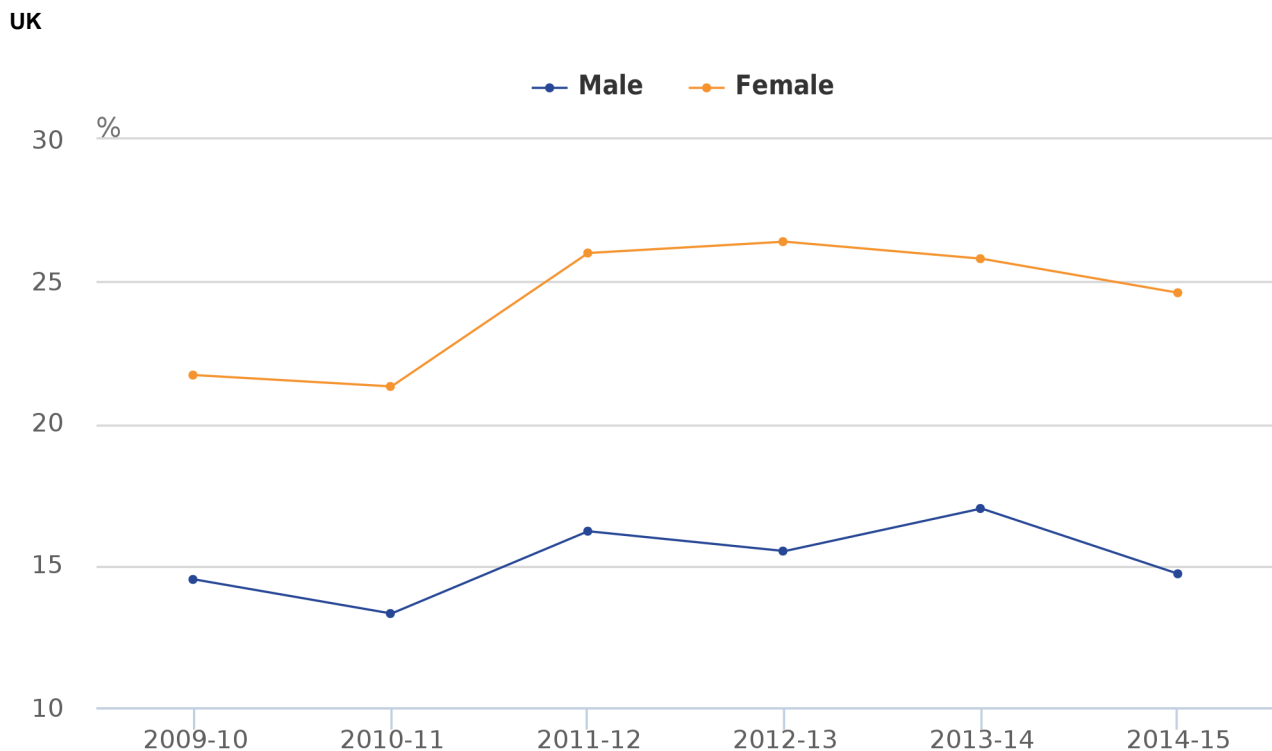
## 6 . Mental health and well-being

Recent longitudinal research on well-being over the life course suggests that mental ill-health may be an important contributory factor to subsequent life satisfaction, educational success, earnings, and physical health ( [Layard, 2013](#)).

Overall, the proportion of young people with symptoms of anxiety or depression <sup>1</sup> increased from 18% to 21% between the periods 2009 to 2010 and 2013 to 2014. Although this fell to 19% in the period 2014 to 2015, the change was not statistically significant.

The increase to 2013 to 2014 was primarily due to an increase in the proportion of young women reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression; in 2013 to 2014 around 26% of young women reported symptoms compared with 22% in 2009 to 2010. Overall, young women were significantly more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression than young men; in 2014 to 2015, around 1 in 4 young women (25%) reported symptoms of anxiety or depression compared with fewer than 1 in 6 young men (15%).

**Figure 3: Proportion of young people <sup>1</sup> showing signs of depression or anxiety by sex, 2009 to 2010 through 2014 to 2015**



Source: Understanding Society: the UK Household Longitudinal Survey

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.

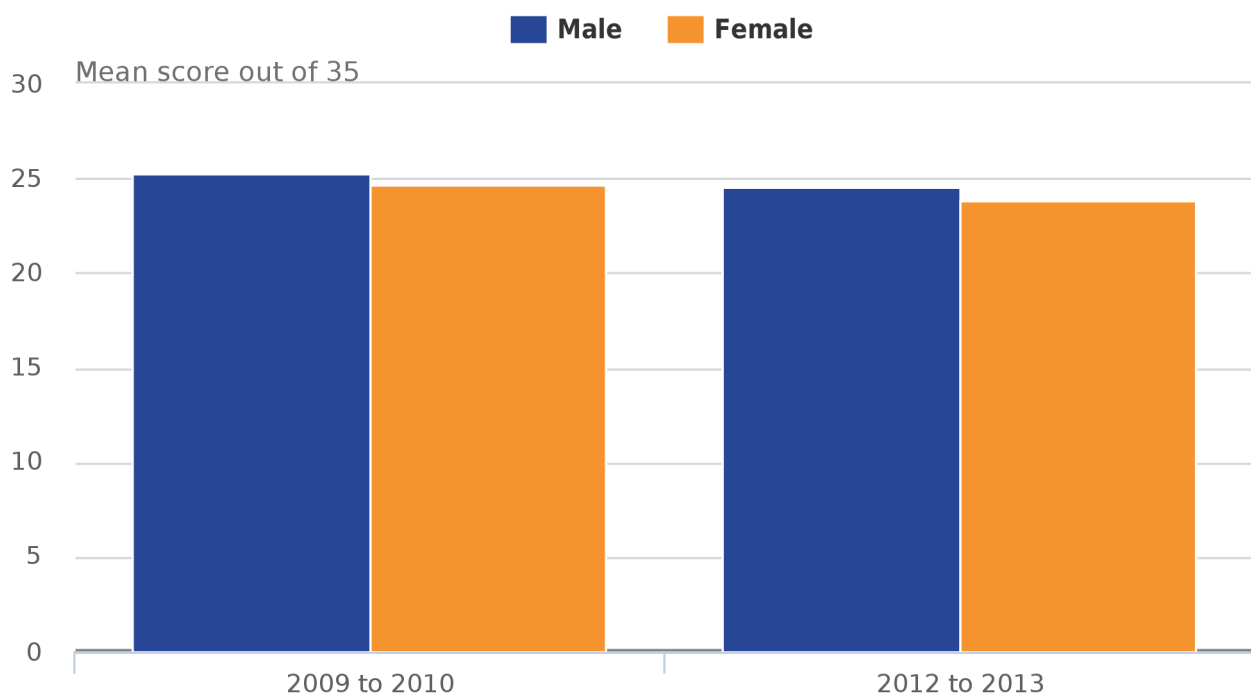
In contrast to mental ill-health, mental well-being focuses on whether people are feeling and functioning well. It has been described as, “a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community” ( [Foresight report, 2008](#)).

The mental well-being indicator used here is based on the shortened version of the [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale](#) (SWEMWBS) developed to measure the mental well-being of populations and groups over time. It provides a mean score (out of 35) of population mental well-being. Changes over time are assessed by examining differences in the mean score but it cannot be used to categorise good, average or poor mental well-being<sup>2</sup>.

According to this measure, young people’s mental well-being deteriorated between the periods 2009 to 2010 and 2012 to 2013 (from an average score of 25.0 to 24.2). Young women’s mental well-being scores were significantly lower than young men’s in both years and declined more than men’s. In 2012 to 2013 the average score for young women was 23.8 compared with 24.6 for young men. It is important to note that this may not reflect the current situation as the most recent estimate is from 2012 to 2013.

**Figure 4: Mean mental well-being score of young people<sup>1</sup> by sex, 2009 to 2010 through 2012 to 2013**

UK



Source: Understanding Society; the UK Household Longitudinal Survey

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.

## Notes for: Mental health and wellbeing

1. The mental ill-health measure used here focusses on whether a person has a higher likelihood of a clinically diagnosable illness, from anxiety or depression to problems such as bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia.
2. As well as not being designed to identify people who have, or probably have a mental illness, WEMWBS does not have a “cut-off” level to divide the population into those who have “good” and those who have “poor” mental well-being, in the way that scores on other mental health measures do, for example the GHQ 12.

## **7 . Employment, volunteering, education and skills**

A crucial aspect of young people’s current quality of life relates to whether they are engaged in fulfilling activities such as education, training, volunteering or work. These things also contribute to how well they are prepared to make the transition to the world of work and financial independence as they get older and as such, are important to their future well-being.

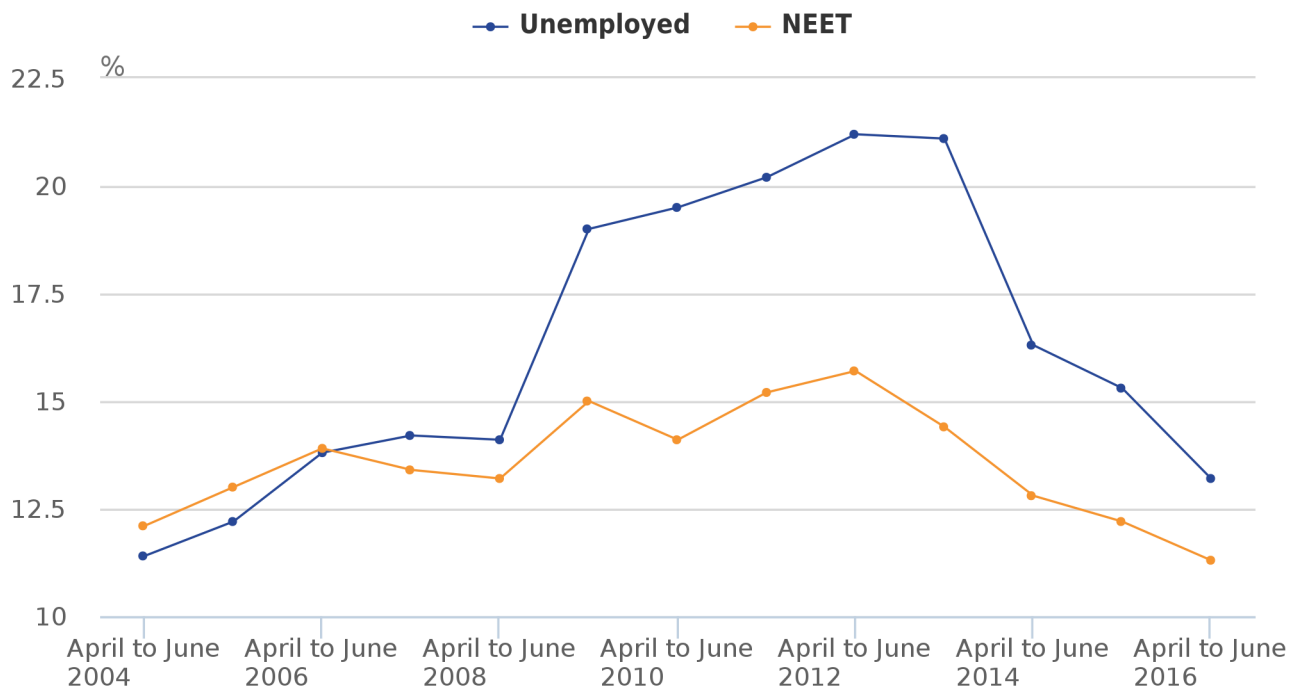
The Education and Skills Act 2008 made it compulsory to be in full-time education or training (such as an apprenticeship), or part-time education if they were employed or volunteering for at least 20 hours a week to age 17 in England from 2013 and to age 18 by 2015.

Recent labour market data show that the proportion of unemployed young people declined to 13% (around 1 in 8) in 2016 after peaking in 2012 at 21% (around 1 in 5). Similarly, the proportion of young people across the UK who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) increased between 2008 and 2012 (the lowest point of the economic downturn), before returning to pre-downturn levels in 2015. By 2016, both the unemployment rate for young people and the NEET rate were lower than before the economic downturn. This is likely to reflect the combined impacts of the Education and Skills Act coming into force as well as wider economic conditions.



**Figure 5: Proportion of young people<sup>1</sup> unemployed and proportion of young people not in education, employment or training,<sup>2</sup> 2004 to 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey; Office for National Statistics

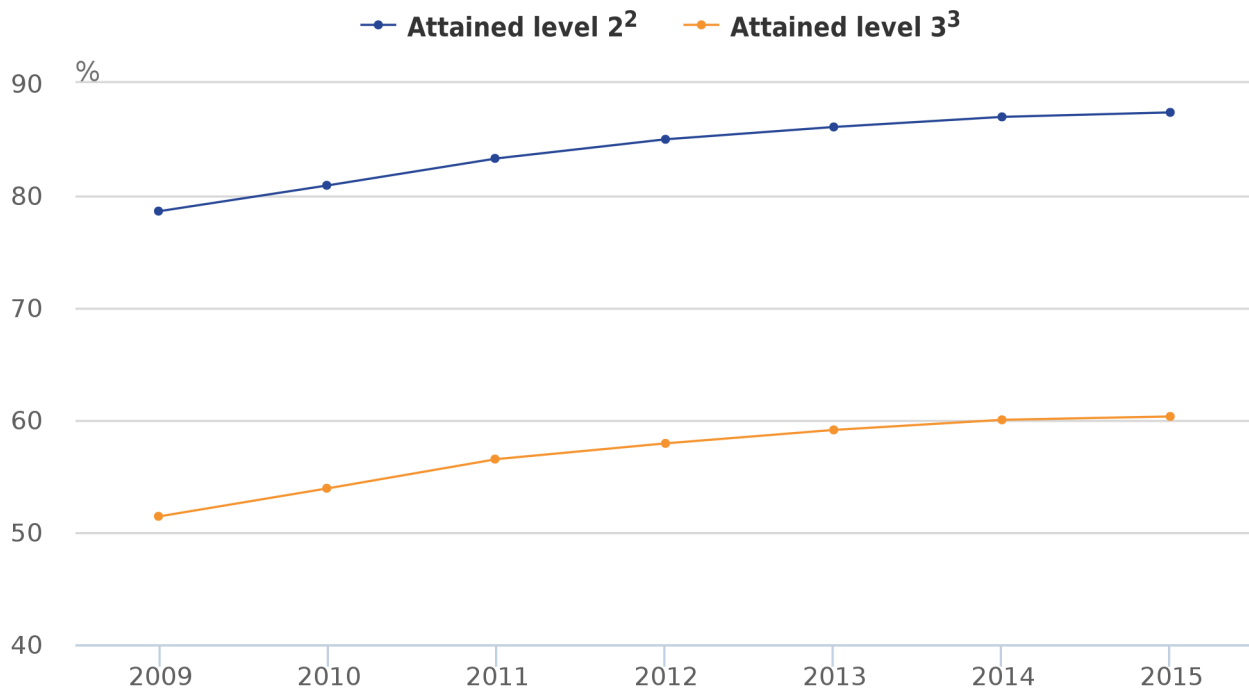
Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.
2. A person identified as NEET will always be either unemployed or economically inactive, although not all unemployed and economically inactive persons will be NEET.

There has also been a steady increase in the proportion of 19-year-olds in England attaining a Level 2 qualification<sup>1</sup>, up from 79% in 2009 to 87% in 2015. Furthermore, around 60% of 19-year-olds in 2015 had attained qualifications equivalent to level 3 of the NQF (for example, A-levels or the International Baccalaureate). This is an increase from 51% in 2009.

**Figure 6: Educational attainment at age 19,<sup>1</sup> 2009 to 2015**

England



Source: Department for Education administrative data

Notes:

1. Those aged 19 in reference year.
2. Level 2 of the National Qualifications framework includes 5 A\*-C GCSEs, and BTEC first Diplomas.
3. Level 3 of the National Qualifications framework includes A levels or the International Baccalaureate.

The proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK reporting that they volunteered several times a year or more remained stable between 2009 to 2010 and 2014 to 2015. However, [recent analysis of volunteering](#) using time-use data and other data sources presents a more detailed picture over the longer term. Data from the UK Harmonised European Time Use survey (HETUS) suggest that between 2000 and 2015, young people increased the time they devote to volunteering from an average of 8.6 minutes per day to 17.0 minutes per day. Data from the [Community Life Survey](#) also show that in England, young people saw the highest increase of any age group in volunteering participation (at least once a year) from 40% in 2000 to 51% in 2015.

## Notes for: Employment, volunteering, education and skills

1. Qualifications equivalent of Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) include 5 GCSEs A\*-C and BTEC first diplomas.

## 8 . Personal finance

The latest data provide a mixed picture of young people's personal finances. The subjective measures – how young people feel about their finances – have improved. At the same time, the objective measure of the proportion of young people living in households at risk of poverty has deteriorated.

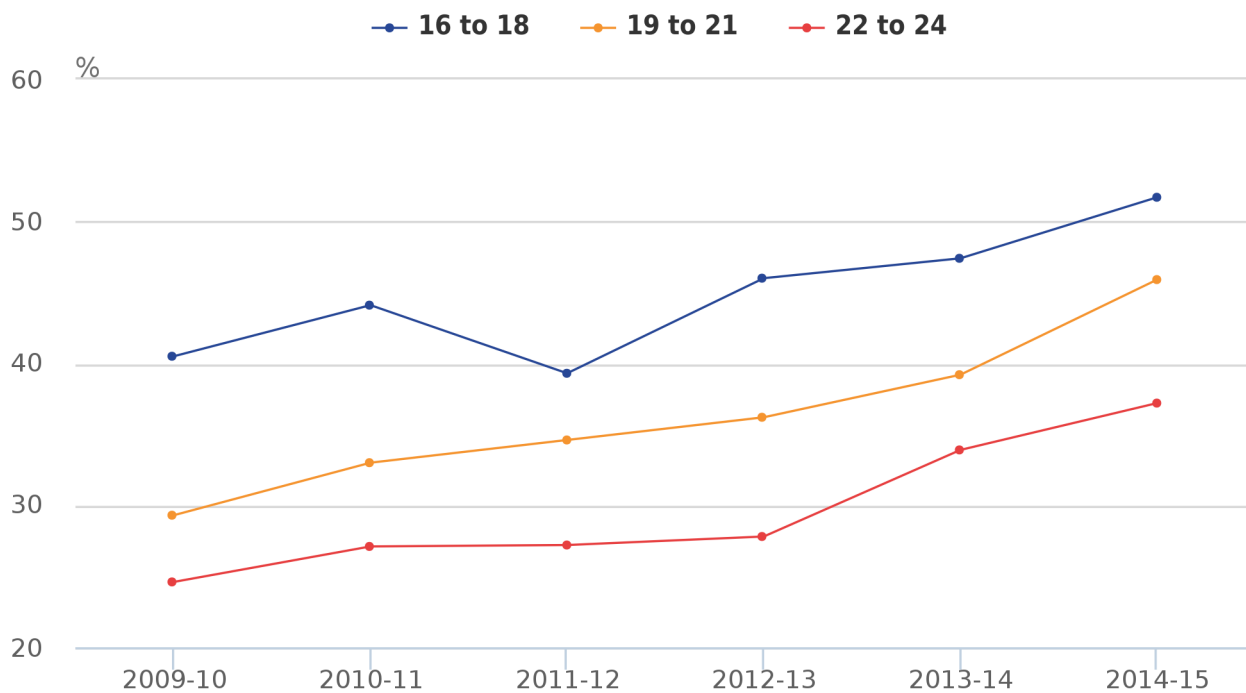
The proportion of young people who say they are mostly or completely satisfied with their household income has increased from 31% in the period 2009 to 2010 to 45% in 2014 to 2015. However, [a recent release on economic well-being](#) looked at data for the 12 months to December 2016 and found that respondents (all adults aged 16 and over) reported a worsening in their perception of both the general economic situation and their own financial situation over the last year.

In the period 2014 to 2015, those aged 16 to 18 were significantly more likely to say they were mostly or completely satisfied with their household income (52%) than those aged 22 to 24 (37%). This probably reflects the fact that 16- to 18-year-olds are usually still living in the parental home, so continue to benefit from the household income of their parents. Those aged 22 to 24 are more likely to have their own financial responsibilities, such as rent and bills and a level of household income reflecting their individual earnings. However, a higher proportion of people aged 22 to 24 in 2014 to 2015 were satisfied with their household income than those of the same age in 2009 to 2010. This coincided with an increase in the proportion of young people in this age group still living with their parents. In 2009, around 39% of young people aged 22 to 24 lived with their parents; in 2016 the proportion increased to 46%.

The largest increase in the proportion reporting they were mostly or completely satisfaction with household income was among those aged 19 to 21 between the periods 2009 to 2010 and 2014 to 2015 (29% and 46% respectively). Among this age group the proportion living with their parents remained relatively stable.

**Figure 7: Proportion of young people mostly or completely satisfied with their household income by age group, 2009 to 2010 to 2014 to 2015**

UK



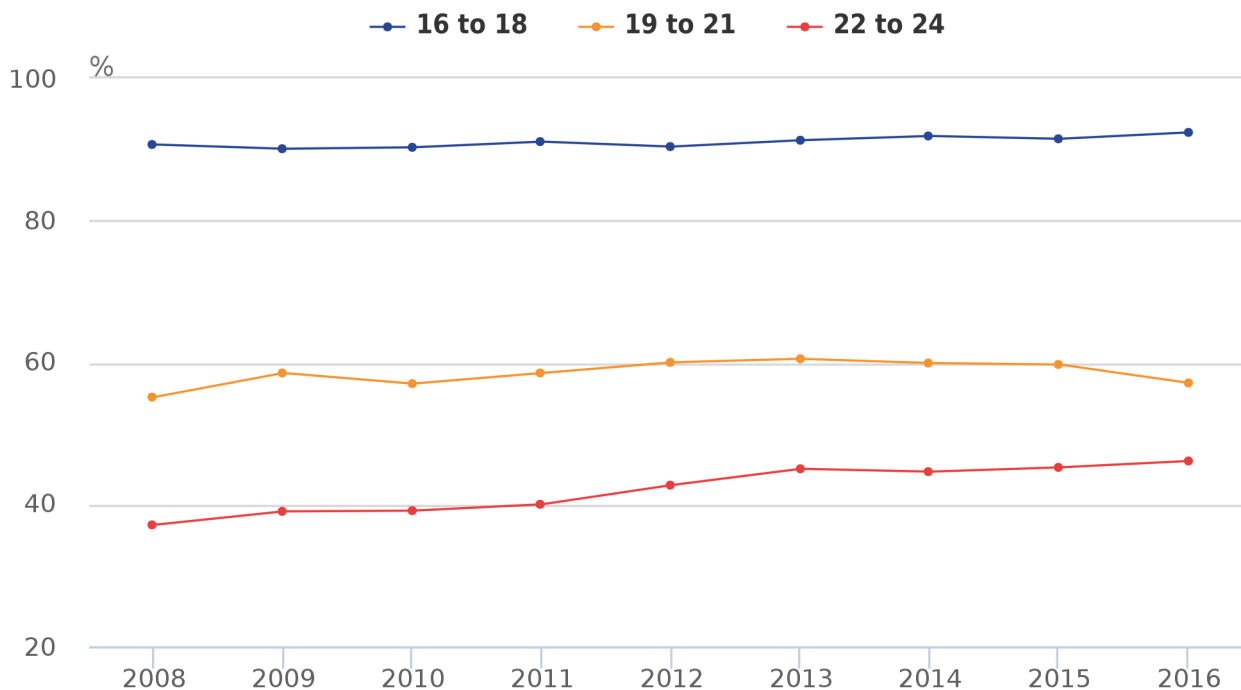
Source: Understanding Society; the UK Household Longitudinal Survey

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.

**Figure 8: Proportion of young people living with their parents by age group, 2008 to 2016**

UK



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

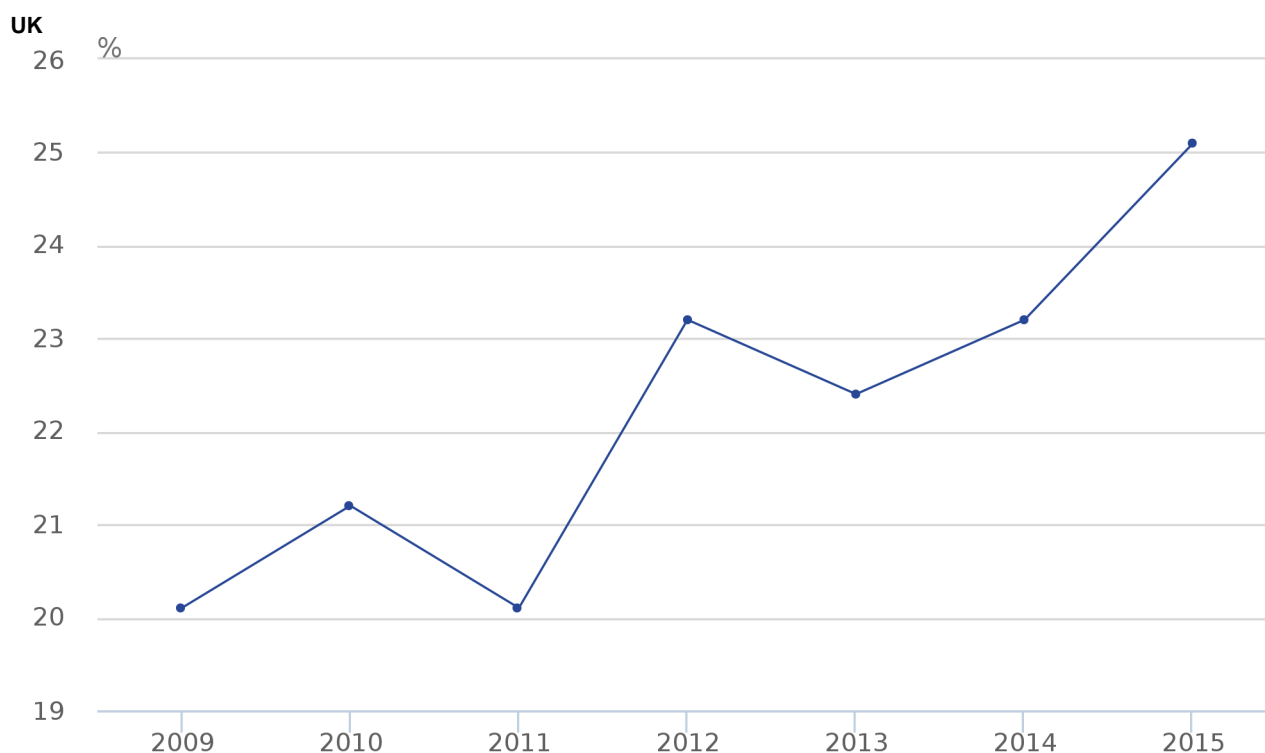
1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.
2. Data has been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Once a person either lives with a partner or has a child, they are considered to have formed their own family and are no longer counted as being part of their parents' family even if they still live in the same household. Therefore such people are deemed to be not living with their parents here.
4. The term 'Parent' could include grandparents, step parents or foster parents.
5. Students living in halls of residence during term-time and living with their parents outside term-time are counted as not living with their parents here.

The proportion of young people reporting they are finding it difficult or very difficult to manage financially has decreased from 15% in the period 2009 to 2010 to 7% in 2014 to 2015 while the proportion reporting that they are financially “comfortable” increased from 22% to 31% over the same period.

Although those aged 16 to 18 were more likely than others in the 16 to 24 age range to report being financially comfortable in 2014 to 2015 (80% of those aged 16 to 18; 73% of those aged 19 to 21; and 70% of those aged 22 to 24), all age groups have shown significant decreases in the proportions reporting they are finding it difficult to manage financially.

Despite these positive developments in how young people are feeling about their finances, the proportion of young people living in households at risk of poverty has increased. [Median household disposable income in the UK](#) was estimated as £25,700 in the financial year ending (FYE) 2015. The level of 60% of median household income is used as a poverty “threshold”<sup>1</sup>. Estimates from the [European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey](#) show that in 2015, around 1 in 4 young people in the UK (25%) lived in households with less than 60% of the UK’s median income. This proportion has increased since 2008 when around 1 in 5 (19%) of 16- to 24-year-olds lived in households with less than 60% of median income.

**Figure 9: Proportion of young people<sup>1</sup> living in households with less than 60% median income,<sup>2</sup> 2009 to 2015**



Source: Eurostat, Survey of Income and Living Conditions

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.
2. After housing costs.

Although there appears to be a disparity between the increased proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds in households at risk of poverty and young people's subjective assessments of their financial situation, it may be that the aggregate indicators are masking differences in the experiences of young people. For example, [recent analysis by ONS of young people's well-being and personal finance](#) (May 2016) found that around 1 in 5 young people in social rental housing rated their current financial situation as difficult or very difficult compared with an average of 1 in 14 young people in other accommodation types in 2013 to 2014. This is something we aim to explore further as part of a wider focus on well-being inequalities.

## Notes for: Personal finance

1. Median income is the middle point in the income range, with equal numbers of households on incomes above and below that point. The 60% level is chosen as an indicator of the income at which those below are likely to be suffering hardship.

## 9 . Social support, personal security and sense of belonging

Positive social connections and relationships are very important to quality of life and to physical and mental well-being. Public Health England's report, [Reducing social isolation across the lifecourse](#) (2015), highlights the positive benefits of social connectedness and the detrimental impact of prolonged social isolation on people of all ages. Using a life course approach, they describe how social isolation in childhood is associated with isolation in adolescence and adulthood, potentially casting a long shadow throughout life:

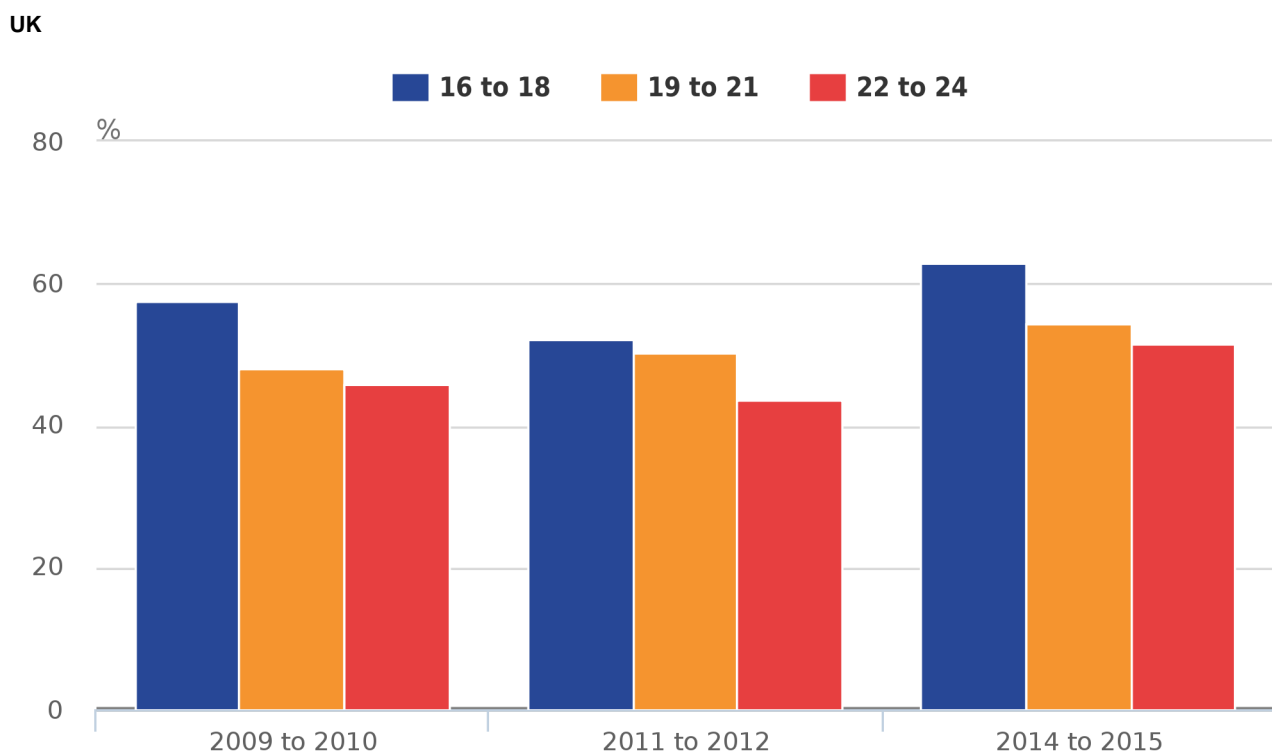
“Children who experience social isolation in childhood tend to have lower educational outcomes and lower adult social class (based on occupation), and higher likelihoods of smoking, obesity and psychological distress in adulthood.”

One of the indicators that can help to assess this issue is whether young people feel they have a spouse, family member or friend they can rely on if they have a serious problem. The latest data available showed deterioration in 2013 to 2014 when 76% of young people aged 16 to 24 reported they had someone they could rely on a lot, down from 80% in the period 2010 to 2011. In 2013 to 2014, young women were significantly more likely than young men to say they had someone they could rely on a lot (81% and 72%, respectively).

Assessing young people’s sense of belonging to their neighbourhood is another way of looking at their social connections. The proportion of young people who agreed or strongly agreed that they belong to their neighbourhood improved from 50% in the period 2009 to 2010 to 57% in 2014 to 2015.

Young people aged 16 to 18 are more likely to feel they belong to their neighbourhood than either those aged 19 to 21 or 22 to 24. This may be because those in the younger age group are more likely to be living in the parental home where they grew up.

**Figure 10: Proportion of young people<sup>1</sup> who agree or strongly agree they belong to their neighbourhood by age group, 2009 to 2010 to 2014 to 2015**



Source: Understanding Society; the UK Household Longitudinal Survey

Notes:

1. Young people aged 16 to 24 years.

Our analysis of the [personal well-being of victims of crime published](#) in 2015 shows that victims of crime have lower well-being than non-victims, and that the largest differences in well-being between victims and non-victims were found in the 16 to 24 age group. In addition, the most recent data from the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) financial year ending 2016 showed people aged 16 to 24 were more likely to be victims of crime – and particularly of violent crimes – than those aged 35 and over.

Despite this, the proportion of young people who have been victims of any type of crime declined from 26% in the financial year ending (FYE) 2013 to 21% in the FYE 2016. The proportion of young people who have been a victim of personal crime (for example, violence, robbery, theft from the person, and other theft of personal property) also decreased from 12% to 8% over this period.

## 10 . Quality and methodology

The aim of the young people's well-being indicator set is to help us better understand young people's quality of life and well-being, and to monitor it over time. This report includes assessments showing the direction of change for each of the measures, whether they have improved, shown no overall change, or deteriorated. Comparisons have been made with the previous year's data, as well as an assessment of change over a 3-year period, where data are available.

Broadly speaking, indicators have only been assessed as having improved or deteriorated if the difference between the comparison periods is statistically significant using 95% confidence intervals. If a difference is said to be statistically significant, it is unlikely that it could have occurred by chance.

Confidence intervals give a measure of the statistical precision of an estimate and show the range of uncertainty around the estimate. As a general rule, if the confidence intervals around the estimate overlap with the interval around another, there is no statistically significant difference between the estimates.

Some indicators such as educational attainment have been assessed using the actual increase or decrease as this is not an estimate. Other indicators such as parental relationships have not been assessed because there are not enough data points to provide a comparison.

For more information on how we assess change, please contact us via [QualityofLife@ons.gov.uk](mailto:QualityofLife@ons.gov.uk). Further links to the data used in each measure can be found in the [data table](#).