



Forum for the Future

UCAS

the future leaders survey 2006/07





UCAS

Forum for the Future is the UK's leading sustainable development charity. Our aim is to show that a sustainable future is both possible and desirable. We work with forward-looking organisations in business and the public sector to find practical ways to build a future that is environmentally viable, socially just and economically prosperous.

Registered charity number 1040519

www.forumforthefuture.org.uk

UCAS is the not-for-profit central organisation that manages applications for full-time undergraduate courses at UK universities and colleges.

www.ucas.com

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Foreword **Anthony McClaran**

With 42% of 18–30 year olds now going on to higher education, this landmark survey of university and college students represents the views of a large number of our 'future leaders'. These are the people who'll be leaders and opinion formers in politics and commerce, as well as in media, religion and education. Their attitudes towards pressing matters of the day will be highly influential in the years to come.

The views they hold today may well underpin their decisions of tomorrow. The future of our country, even our planet, is in their hands.

That's why UCAS initiated and collaborated on this major survey with Forum for the Future. We have done so for two major reasons.

Firstly, as the central admissions service for processing all applications (some 500,000 a year) to undergraduate courses in the UK, UCAS has the unique opportunity to communicate directly with all prospective full time university and college students. Education is at the heart of what we do, and the remarkable rise of electronic applications (over 99% of all applicants have applied electronically so far this year) means that we can communicate with young people of today in a way which has a far greater immediacy. So a survey is not only about gathering the views of respondents, it also serves to inform and educate even those who do not reply on the issues at hand.

Secondly, the advent of variable fees in higher education has put a considerable focus on the reasons why individuals decide to go on to higher education. Much emphasis has been placed on the financial rewards for those students who embark on a university career. While personal rewards are important, we should not assume that materialism is the only driver of young people today. This survey shows that many value the less tangible benefits – community, empathy and engagement with what is important – more highly than a well-paid career.

We are very grateful to the sponsors of the survey findings – Channel Four, British Gas, Unilever UK and HBOS plc – without whom we would not have been able to bring the results to a wider audience. Given the timing of the survey (before the publication of the Stern Review) and the importance of the subject matter, we hope that this could become an annual event, tracking our students' attitudes as global and environmental events unfold. Please take note of the findings and their implications.

Anthony McClaran is Chief Executive of UCAS

Introduction **Jonathon Porritt**

I shudder to think just how angry young people are going to be when they wake up to the full extent of my generation's negligence. If you subscribe to that uplifting aphorism that "we do not inherit the earth from our parents, but borrow it from our children", then we've really screwed up.

Having spent the last 20 years or so in outright denial about the declining state of the world, we've now leapt in one fell swoop from denial to despair. More and more leading scientists involved in the climate change debate are claiming that it may already be too late to stabilise emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases at a 'safe' level – i.e. a level that doesn't trigger runaway 'dangerous' climate change. Having stolen their future, we are about to steal whatever reasons to be hopeful young people might still have.

I rather hope that the 54,240 'future leaders' who responded to this survey will have something to say about that. Their awareness about climate change is impressive, seeing it as an extremely urgent, potentially life-threatening phenomenon, not something to be kicked further off into the long grass. And there is a lot of evidence here that this is certainly the most environmentally-aware generation we've ever seen.

But their responses also show us that this is a transitional generation, with one foot planted confidently in the low-carbon environment-friendly economy of the future, but the other still rooted in today's high-speed, high-consumption, carbon-intensive lifestyles. So emissions from aviation are quite rightly fingered as a growing problem, but perish the thought that this means they'll end up flying a lot less than their parents!

But for those seeking their own 'reasons to be hopeful', in the face of growing ecological doom and gloom, there is a huge amount to be optimistic about in this survey. As far as most of our future leaders are concerned, their glasses are undoubtedly half full when they look out on the world ahead. And long may it stay that way.



Jonathon Porritt is Founder Director of Forum for the Future and Chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission

The Future Leaders Survey 2006/7

We invited everyone aged 21 and under, resident in the UK and applying to universities and colleges in 2006, to complete a survey. We asked them how they see themselves compared to their parents' generation, what they think will make them happy and what they expect from the future.

This is what they said...

What will the world be like in 2031?

"The standard of living in the West will have to change dramatically."

Ben Unsworth, 19,
University of
Leeds

"It seems likely that by 2031 we will have either run out of oil or will have very little left. Competition over this resource is unlikely to end in a civilised way."

O. Hunt, 18,
Lancaster University

"The world has the potential to be a fantastic place in the next 20-30 years."

Heminder Ahluwalia, 18,
University of
Sheffield

In 2031, our respondents will be in their early to mid-forties, at the height of their careers, perhaps with a young family.

They expect the world they'll be living in to be technologically advanced, but environmentally impoverished.

Despite current efforts to aid the developing world, they expect inequality between rich and poor countries to have widened.

The world

A world where resources are at a premium and are unevenly distributed between rich and poor
66% expect oil to have run out.
52% predict a war will have been fought over access to water.
80% believe inequality between rich and poor countries will have grown.
Only 7% think that the end of poverty in Africa is likely or very likely by 2031.

UK

A United Kingdom where quality of life may have improved but divisions still exist
50% expect quality of life in the UK to be better than it is today, though 72% expect the gap between rich and poor people to have grown.
47% think smoking will have been made illegal.

Technology

A more technologically advanced world
74% expect to be talking to their computers rather than using a keyboard.
44% expect computers to be more intelligent than humans.
12% think virtual reality holidays will be popular.

Environment

A world suffering the ravages of climate change
91% expect the effects of climate change to be felt. Almost four-fifths (78%) of these think climate change will make their lives a little or a lot worse. And 55% expect that business will take more responsibility than governments for dealing with climate change.
75% predict green taxes on air travel (though 54% expect long haul air travel to be cheaper than today).
70% think tigers will be extinct in the wild.

Can we survive?

Our future leaders give a powerful mandate for change. Most **(85%)** believe it is likely or very likely that human civilisation will survive the next century. But **76%** believe that lifestyles need to change radically across the board, or at least in many areas, for this to happen.

This is a clear rejection of the notion that business as usual, with minor amendments, is capable of delivering a more sustainable world for the generations to come. Only 21% said that little or no change is needed. The concern of our future leaders should be a wake-up call for today's leaders in government and business.

Our future leaders think that Government has the most responsibility to create the change needed, followed by individuals and then business. But very few think that Government is doing a lot (7%). Most think Government is doing a little, very little or nothing to help (91% in total), and the same goes for individuals and business.

Only 4% of our survey respondents believe that celebrities have a responsibility to create change. Of this small group, 72% say that celebrities are doing very little or nothing to address social and environmental problems.

"World leaders currently have the opportunity to change the consequences of poverty and climate change, but don't seem to be making much effort. If this attitude continues it will be 2031 before we know it and nothing will have been done."

Bindi Senghani, 18,
City University

"I don't read the newspapers anymore because they remind me that the world we live in is all going wrong."

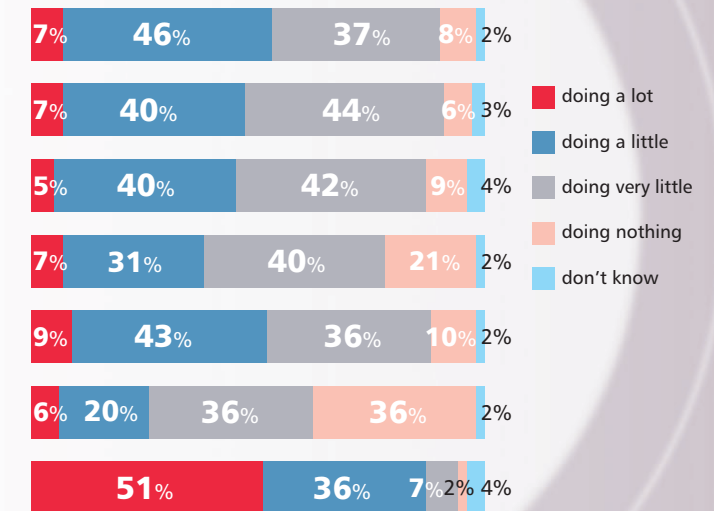
Miranda Jackson,
UEA

Whose responsibility is it to create change most urgently?

% mentioning
(3 mentions per respondent)

88%	Government
69%	Individuals
47%	Business
32%	Media
32%	Education system
4%	Celebrities
2%	Campaigning charities

How much are they doing?
(% of those mentioning)



"Unless major changes are made to the way the UK, as well as all other countries (particularly the USA and China) treat energy and energy production, then the world will be a far worse place."

Sina Hossaini, 19,
University of Nottingham

"Those with the power to promote change must do so immediately, and must not be frozen in fear of the chaos that climate change threatens."

Maya Osborne, 18,
on her gap year

How do our future leaders see themselves?

Our future leaders think of themselves as more materialistic, more affected by crime and less healthy than their parents' generation. And they're more worried about what the future holds.

Today's young people have an unenviable reputation, easily characterised by 'hoodies', petty crime, hyper-consumption and obsession with celebrities. But our survey paints a much more positive picture, of a generation willing to face up to the difficult social and environmental issues that they are inheriting.

We asked our respondents how they see themselves compared to their parents when they were the same age. This would have been around 1980-1, when British Steel workers went on strike over pay, the British Olympic Association voted to send athletes to the Moscow games in defiance of the government, the first London marathon was held, John Lennon was murdered and a CND anti-nuclear march in London attracted over 250,000 people.

¹ www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/crime0506summ.pdf

² WWF Living Planet report 2006

³ Starke, L (ed.) (2006) 'Vital Signs 2006-2007: The trends that are shaping our future', W.W.Norton & Co: London

⁴ National Statistics Office www.statistics.gov.uk

Compared to their parents at the same age, this generation of university and college applicants sees itself as...

More materialistic (65%)

...with 23% saying there's no difference and 6% saying they see themselves as less materialistic. This is despite the fact that, elsewhere in our survey, they say that a well-paid job is less important for personal happiness in the next ten years than a job that is interesting (see 'What will make our future leaders happy?', page 10).

More affected by crime (57%)

...with 25% saying there's no difference and 9% saying that they see themselves as less affected. But according to the British Crime Survey, the number of crimes in England and Wales in 2005 was at around the same level as in 1981, having declined from a peak in 1995.¹

More worried about the future (42%)

...with 36% saying there's no difference and 15% saying that their parents were more worried about the future.

More concerned about the environment (55%)

...with 28% saying there's no difference and 8% saying that their parents were more concerned about the environment. This is not surprising considering that the population of terrestrial, marine and freshwater vertebrate species declined by 29% between 1970 and 2003.² From 1980 to 2004, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increased from around 339 parts per million to 377 parts per million.³

Less physically healthy (36%)

...with 44% saying there's no difference and 16% saying that their generation is more healthy. But life expectancy at birth in the UK actually increased between 1981 and 2003 by 5.5 years for men and 3.9 years for women. In the same period, infant mortality fell by over 50 per cent.⁴ Our respondents may well be reacting to new uncertainties such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic or the long-term effects of obesity. Indeed, almost 55% thought that a new, human-made epidemic disease was likely or very likely in the next 25 years.

"Only when the mindset of previous generations becomes extinct will real progress have been made."

James Cumby, 18,
University of Birmingham

"I for one have high hopes. I long to see enhanced education systems; better care for our environment; the eradication of corruption; the elimination of poverty world-wide; and the removal of barriers between differing cultures and religions. The root of all these problems lies within ourselves."

Sarah Goldie-Scot, 19,
University of Durham

What will make our future leaders happy?

"We have to learn to live in peace and harmony with each and everybody for the world to be a better place. It has to start from the top, from people like the politicians, who are meant to set an example to us."

Munpreet Kaur Mangat,
20, University of
Central England

"The life of the consumer will become the life of the survivor."

Anna Casey, 21,
University College
Falmouth

Future leaders are much less motivated by prospective wealth than many might think. Almost four-fifths (79%) say that having an interesting job will be very important for their personal happiness in the next ten years. Only 33% say the same about having a job that pays well.

This suggests that the familiar enticement of higher salaries for graduates is misplaced, though attitudes might change as student debts mount up. Instead, prospective students are more likely to be attracted to universities or colleges that can help them cultivate their interests.

Although our respondents in general see themselves as more materialistic than their parents at the same age, it is the non-material things that they look to for fulfilment in the next decade. Spending time with friends and family far outweighs more material concerns such as owning a house or car, or having the latest technological gadgets.

This is reassuring given that increasing consumption of material goods is a major reason for unsustainable development and today's environmental crisis.

Older applicants think more about the future

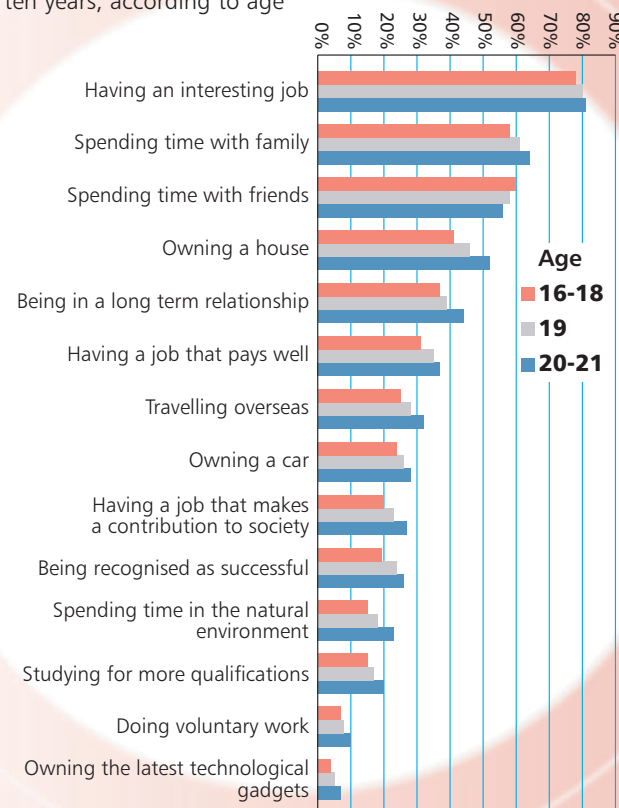
Respondents aged 20 or 21 rated almost every measure as more important than respondents aged 19 did, who in turn rated each measure higher than 16–18 year olds.

This may be because older applicants to higher education are thinking more about their future: about what sort of career they want, about their independence and their lifestyles. This may also explain why older respondents say that they take environmental considerations into account more than younger respondents do, when making key life decisions (see 'Changing personal behaviour' page 12).

One measure alone bucks the trend: spending time with friends. This declines in importance as respondents get older.

What will make our future leaders happy?

% saying this is very important for their personal happiness in the next ten years, according to age



There are interesting regional differences in what will make our future leaders happy

Having a job that pays well

Most important in: London (45% saying this was very important) and West Midlands (36%)

Least important in: South West (25%) and South East (27%)

Owning a house

Most important in: London (53%) and Northern Ireland (48%)

Least important in: South West (38%) and South East (40%)

Having an interesting job

Most important in: Northern Ireland (81%) and South West (81%)

Least important in: London (77%) and North East (78%)

Spending time with friends

Most important in: Northern Ireland (68%) and Scotland (64%)

Least important in: London (54%) and East Midlands (57%)

Spending time in the natural environment

Most important in: South West (21%) and South East (19%)

Least important in: East Midlands (16%) and North East (16%)

Changing personal behaviour

Most (69%) of our respondents believe that individuals are responsible for the change required for civilisation to continue. So what have future leaders themselves done, and what do they expect to do in the next ten years?

A majority of our respondents – **62%** – have walked or cycled instead of travelling by car, for environmental reasons. A further **15%** can imagine doing this in the next ten years.

In contrast, only **4%** have decided not to take an air flight for environmental reasons, while 10% say that they could see themselves taking that decision in the next ten years. A massive **67%** say they will not give up an air flight for environmental reasons in the next ten years, despite the fact that aviation could be responsible for a quarter of the UK's contribution to climate change by 2030, according to the Department for Transport.⁵

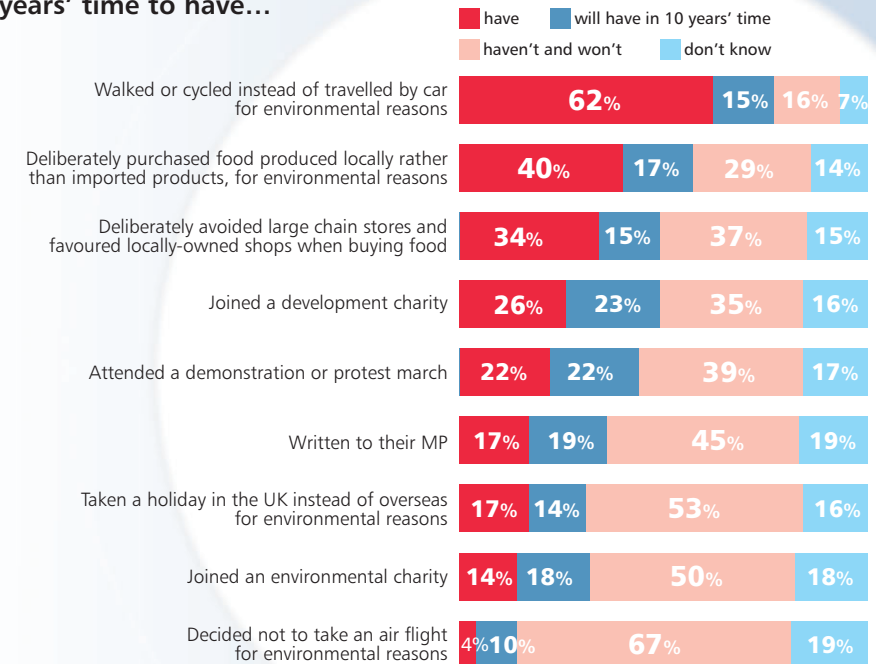
⁵ The Future of Air Transport White Paper, DfT 2003

There is a startling conflict in the attitudes of our respondents. Our future leaders are aware of climate change, with 91% of them believing the effects of climate change will be felt by 2031, and mostly for the worse. Three-quarters expect a green tax on air travel in the next 25 years, and changes to individual behaviour are seen as critically important in addressing problems such as climate change. Yet few seem prepared to rein in their own air travel for environmental reasons.

Where acting in an environmentally friendly way calls for smaller changes in behaviour rather than sacrifice, our respondents are much more willing to contribute personally. 40% say that they have bought locally produced food for environmental reasons, and a further 17% think that they will have done so in ten years' time. Almost a third (32%) have either joined an environmental charity or expect to do so in the next ten years.

Past and future personal behaviour

% of future leaders saying they have or expect in ten years' time to have...



Many of our respondents say that environmental considerations are important when making big decisions about their lives.

Overall, **46%** say that environmental considerations are important or very important when deciding what organisation to work for, and **42%** say the same when deciding what type of career to go into. These figures go up dramatically for 20- and 21-year-old respondents, to 52% and 50% respectively. Employers can expect more and more searching questions about their environmental performance from prospective graduate recruits. Failure to provide adequate answers could result in missing out on a large proportion of the workforce.

When choosing a car, **73%** believe that environmental concerns are important or very important. And when it comes to voting, the environment is high on the agenda: **74%** of future leaders say the environment is important or very important when choosing how to vote. This sends a powerful message to political parties struggling to engage the young electorate.

Given that banks have an enormous influence over the economy through the money they invest, it is surprising that only 21% of respondents think that environmental considerations are important or very important when choosing which bank to open an account with. Again this was higher for the older respondents (30%).

How do the genders differ?

Our survey shows stark differences in attitudes and behaviour between men and women. Female future leaders are less optimistic about the future than their male counterparts, feel more change is necessary and are more prepared to contribute to that change.

Whereas **55%** of men think it's very likely that human civilisation will survive into the 22nd century, only **39%** of women feel the same way.

82% of women believe that lifestyles need to change radically, or in many areas, for human civilisation to survive. The equivalent figure for men is **70%**.

Gender and personal happiness in the next ten years

When it comes to their future happiness, men allot more importance to owning their own car, having a well-paid job and owning the latest technological gadgets than women do.

Women say that they are more motivated by other factors, in particular:

- 83% of women say that **having an interesting job** is very important, compared to 75% of men
- 64% of women say that **spending time with friends** is very important, compared to 53% of men
- 67% of women say that **spending time with family** is very important, compared to 50% of men
- 25% of women say that **having a job that contributes to society** is very important, compared to 18% of men.

Whereas men say that spending time with friends will be more important to them than spending time with family, it is the other way around for women.

Gender and personal behaviour

It's a similar pattern when comparing men's and women's personal behaviour. Women are more likely to have joined a charity (especially development charities such as Oxfam or Christian Aid) and more women expect to do so in the next ten years.

Women are more likely to have walked or cycled instead of travelling by car, and to have bought locally produced food, both for environmental reasons.

On other forms of political engagement, the genders are more equal. About the same proportion of men and women have

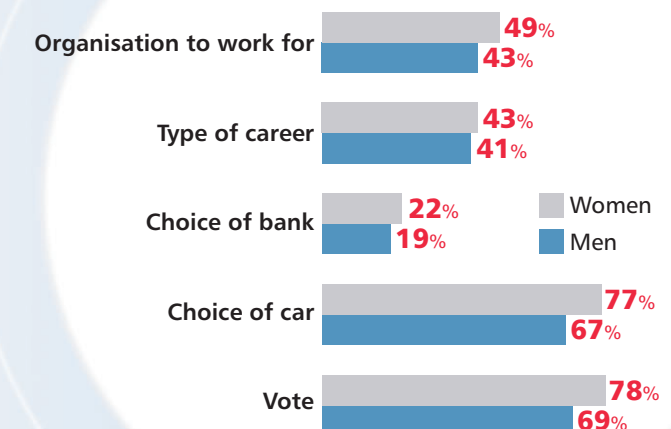
written to their MP or expect to in the next ten years. The same is true for attending a protest or demonstration. The genders are equally reluctant to sacrifice air flights for environmental reasons.

However, when we asked how important environmental considerations are when making key life decisions, women answered more positively in all cases.

These differences leave us with a number of questions. Why are women more engaged on environmental issues, less optimistic about the future and more prepared to change their behaviour in many cases? Is it a failure of the environment movement and those promoting sustainable development to present the issues in ways that make sense to, and motivate, men?

How important will environmental concerns be when making the following decisions?

% saying important or very important



"The world we are living in is being destroyed by everything around us and the politicians are not doing enough to protect it."

Jemma Neely, 20,
Queens University
Belfast

"I think climate change will become a big issue in the next 25 years, which world leaders need to address."

Jack Short, 19,
University of
Sheffield

How important is sustainable development in higher education?

"Refusing to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions is the easy option. I hope that education will help... so that people can make informed choices about how they can reduce their carbon emissions. It's important for the government to realise that they need to make 'eco-friendly' living attractive to everyone."

Ruth, 18, University of Brighton

Veterinary science and agriculture applicants are most driven by environmental factors in making key life decisions. Almost 15% think that environmental considerations are important or very important in every case when thinking about their future employer, career, bank, car and voting decision.

% saying environmental considerations are important or very important for all five of the following: employer, type of career, bank, car and voting

Top five

Veterinary science and agriculture (n=540)	14.6%
Creative arts and design (6,388)	14.4%
Social sciences combined with art (923)	14.3%
Social studies (3,260)	14.1%
Linguistics, classics and religious studies (1,890)	13.2%

Bottom five

Technologies (164)	4.3%
Combined sciences (275)	7.3%
Engineering (2,301)	8.5%
Architecture, building and planning (920)	10%
Medicine and dentistry (2,579)	10.4%

How important was sustainable development in choosing a course?

'Sustainable development' is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.⁶ Being provided with the knowledge and skills to deal with sustainable development issues was an important factor for many of our respondents when applying for their university or college place.

In looking for a course, sustainable development was most important for applicants to:

- architecture, building and planning, with **74%** saying that learning how to address sustainable development issues was important or very important when choosing their course
- social studies (64%)
- education (62%)
- engineering (61%)

It's interesting to note that architecture, engineering, and building and planning applicants were keen to learn about sustainable development, but take environmental considerations less into account in making key life decisions.

Sustainable development was least important for linguistics, classics and religious studies applicants (31%), language and literature applicants (32%), and historians and philosophers (37%) when choosing their course.

The track-record of the university or college on sustainable development issues was important for some applicants, with **45%** of those intending to study education, social sciences, architecture, and building and planning saying a good track record on sustainable development was important or very important in choosing where to study.

"There is not a clear enough understanding of sustainability... The very basis of our interaction with each other is the key to solving most of our self-created problems. Such problems must be addressed at their source, globally, before it is too late."

Mark Jones, 21, University of Birmingham

⁶ The Brundtland definition of sustainable development. WCED (1987), 'Our Common Future', Oxford: Oxford University Press

Methodology

We conducted our survey between 28 July and 11 September 2006. Invitations to participate were sent by email to all university and college applicants with a UK correspondence address, between the ages of 16 and 21, who supplied an email address and had opted into receiving third party emails. A total of 233,364 applicants were contacted and 54,240 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of just over 23%. The sample broke down as follows:

Group	Number
Female	34,203
Male	20,037
Age 16-18	36,768
Age 19	12,006
Age 20-21	5,466
East Midlands	3,684
Eastern	5,561
Greater London	7,309
North East	2,046
North West	5,674
Northern Ireland	1,585
Scotland	4,607
South East	8,461
South West	4,370
Wales	2,374
West Midlands	4,678
Yorkshire & The Humber	3,872
Total	54,240

"I'm hoping all the effort going in to the Africa poverty situation will continue. I think the economic boom in China will drive competition with Europe and the US, which I hope will be healthy for global markets."

Tom Williams

"I won't be surprised if we will be wearing snow boots in summer."

Jennifer Saunders,
18

The sample was weighted so that it had the same age and gender profile as the target group of all 2006 UK applicants aged 17 to 21. Data presented in this report can be taken as broadly representative of this group.

Forum for the Future and UCAS received advice on the questionnaire and weighting from the National Centre for Social Research.

The Future Leaders Survey 2006 aims to be the first in a series of yearly surveys of university and college applicants in the UK, to be conducted by UCAS and Forum for the Future.

"If the current generation decides to really tackle the climate change crisis, I believe that the world will indeed be a better place. It will mean a transition to an economic system which does not encourage competition and consumption, but cooperation and empathy."

Sam Coates, 18,
Exeter University

"Perhaps the next question our generation needs to ask itself is 'What am I going to do to impact the world for the better in 25 years' time?'"

Fiona, 18,
on gap year

A note from our sponsors

Forum for the Future and UCAS wish to express their thanks to British Gas, Channel 4, HBOS plc and Unilever UK for their support for the publication and launch of this research.



As the country's largest energy supplier **British Gas** has a clear responsibility to future generations in taking measures to tackle the impact of climate change, arguably the biggest issue that our 'future leaders' will face. We are working hard to encourage homeowners to take more responsibility for their own personal energy 'wastage' and contribution to climate change.

www.house.co.uk/ee



Channel 4 is at its best when it understands and reports on the world in which we live, especially from the perspective of younger people. This research demonstrates that this generation is aware of many of the issues we face in the years ahead and appreciates we all need to take more responsibility for our actions.

www.channel4.com



As the UK's only AAA rated High Street bank for environmental, social and governance policies, **HBOS plc** is proud to sponsor this report. The fact that so many future leaders acknowledge the importance of these issues bodes well not just for HBOS plc but for UK industry in general.

www.hbosplc.com



Unilever UK is delighted to support the Future Leaders Survey which provides many valuable insights into the world in which we can expect to live. The next generation of leaders are perhaps more prepared to acknowledge the gravity of the challenges the world faces, and the report presses upon us the need for more action today.

www.unilever.co.uk

This report was prepared by James Goodman, Head of Futures at Forum for the Future. Thanks for invaluable contributions throughout the project go to Anne-Marie Dabrowska, Virginia Isaac, Imogen Martineau, Vicki Phair, Eleanor Stevens and Alyson Walsh.

The National Centre for Social Research advised on the design of the questionnaire, weighting and analysis of data. www.natcen.ac.uk

The questionnaire was hosted online by SDA/GIDE. www.sda-ltd.com

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What if 54,240 of the UK's brightest young people – our future leaders – told you that:

- they think of themselves as more materialistic, more affected by crime and less healthy than their parents' generation, and more worried about what the future holds;
- **91%** of them think the effects of climate change will be hitting hard by 2031;
- **70%** expect tigers to be extinct in the wild by the same year;
- **80%** of them think inequality between rich countries and poor countries will grow;
- human civilisation will survive into the 22nd century, but over three-quarters think that significant changes are needed now for this to happen?



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