

Mateenah

THE FUTURE OF CHILDHOOD

RAISING CHILDREN'S VOICES ABOUT THE FUTURE

TREAT
OTHERS
WITH

RESPECT!!!



Save the
Children

'Treat others with respect': Mateenah's vision for the future of childhood

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is based on our consultation with 447* children aged 4 to 11 from across the UK, and 19 professionals working in children's policy, education, and services. The results are based on these consultations only.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future of childhood: what do children want?

We asked 447* children aged 4 to 11 across the UK what they would want childhood to be like for children growing up in 2040. They shared five main aspirations:

- A future which meets everyone's basic needs of food, shelter and love
- An equal future without discrimination
- A positive role for technology in the future
- A future where children can connect with and care for the environment
- A fun future with opportunities for playing and relaxing

The children we heard from dream of a future where everyone has a caring family, a clean environment, and access to the same resources. They want a future without inequality and discrimination – free from racism, homophobia, poverty and homelessness – and with more connection to nature and each other. They are excited about how technology might improve the future, but also hope that, in 2040, children will have opportunities to put down devices and enjoy the outdoors. They want to ensure we protect and care for the natural world and each other, and want children in the future to have lots of opportunities for both playing and relaxing.

The future of childhood: where are we heading?

We asked 19 professionals working in children's policy, education and services what we can expect childhood to be like in 20 years' time if nothing changes. We combined their views to paint a picture of what childhood might look like in 2040, in each nation of the UK.

The professionals we spoke to in each nation of the UK predicted a generation of children in 2040 that will be enabled and empowered by technology and social media. This generation may have increased access to green spaces and could be involved in activism around inequality and the climate emergency. Professionals felt that society's understanding of the importance of play will continue to increase, as will our understanding of children's mental health. For children growing up in nations prioritising child rights or implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, professionals predicted that children are likely to have their voices heard on the issues that matter to them.

These professionals also worried that more children would experience poverty in the future, in line with recent increases in child poverty across the UK, and that children in the future may not have their basic needs met. They were concerned about the impact of climate change on children growing up in 2040 and were especially worried about children's mental health and the support that will be available in 20 years' time, based on today's provision. Depending on where in the UK a child grows up, professionals worried about children's ability to shape the decisions and services that affect their lives.

Reflection

The children who took part in this project have set out a bold vision: an equal future where technology is used well, the planet is cared for, and children can play and relax. Children are the experts in what makes a great childhood. That's why we now need to ask ourselves how we can change our current trajectories, to better align with their vision for the future.

INTRODUCTION

What do children in the UK want the future to be like? How can we work towards a better childhood for children in the future?

We know that decisions are made today that will inform what happens in the future. We also know that children are the experts in what makes a great childhood. That's why we set out to understand children's hopes and dreams for what childhood might be like in the future. We partnered with schools and community groups in the areas we work in across the UK and asked children to use a range of creative methods to share their vision for the future. We want to share this vision to amplify their voices, so we can all challenge ourselves and others to work towards their vision for the future in the decisions we make today.

We also wanted to hear from professionals working in children's policy, education and services, to understand what childhood is likely to be like in 2040, if nothing changes. Using these insights, we'll present

a possible future for each nation of the UK, to help us understand what's working well and what we need to change to make children's vision of the future a reality.

This project was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund as part of their 'Emerging Futures' funding programme. With this funding, organisations and communities across the UK worked together to imagine a future they wanted to create. These future visions were developed by communities during the pandemic, as a way of identifying the futures they wanted to work towards, and how they might get there.

The first section of this report explores children's vision for the future of childhood, and the second explores a possible future for an imaginary child in each nation of the UK, based on what we know now. The final section brings the findings together and asks readers to reflect on how we can work towards a better future, designed by children.



As part of the Future of Childhood project, 447* children, aged 4 to 11 across the four nations of the UK, gave their views on what childhood should be like in the future. They reflected on issues including being happy and healthy, learning and play, and the world around them, using an activity pack and a range of creative methods. We brought all their views together to identify the key priorities emerging from their collective insights.

These children have five key hopes for the future:

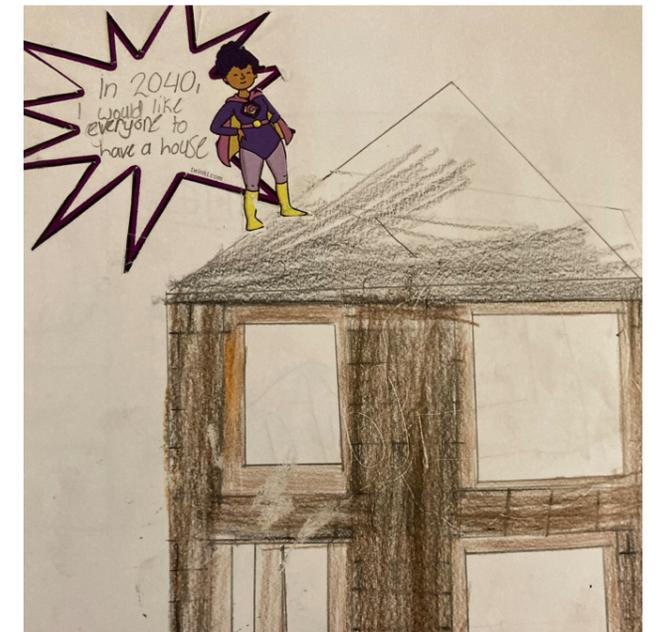
- A future which meets everyone's basic needs of food, shelter and love
- An equal future without discrimination
- A positive role for technology in the future
- A future where children can connect with and care for the environment
- A fun future with opportunities for playing and relaxing

A future where basic needs are met:

'I would like
every child
to have a home'

The children involved in this project hope for a future where food and shelter are widely available and shared equally.

There are many things they want all children to have in the future. Firstly, all children should **have shelter, healthy food, and clean water and air.** All children should have a **caring family, school, and community.** All children should also be able to express themselves and their **uniqueness**, and should at the same time be **treated equally** and feel a sense of belonging.



Section 1

CHILDREN'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF CHILDHOOD

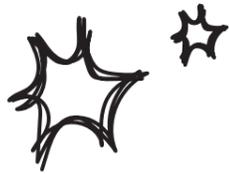


Meeting everyone's needs: Warm meals and homes for all

Many of the children wish that everyone will have a home in the future. One child would like 'every child to have equal opportunities and a sustainable income' – recognising that this is not something everyone has today.



They also want a future free from disease and illness, naming cancer, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19 specifically. They dream of a world where every child has 'clean and fresh food', 'fruit and veg', 'healthy options', a 'warm meal', and 'clean water'. They want everyone to have equal access to these things, too.



These children also worry that things will be more expensive in the future. They want children growing up in 2040 to have 'all [the] things' they need. For them, this might mean giving people 'one million pounds', 'free money' or 'money trees'.



Caring environments: Homes, schools and communities

The children we heard from want every child in the future to have a kind and caring family, showing how important this is to children. One child shared, 'my family is what makes me happy. They make me smile every day. I also hope everyone gets a loving family like mine.'

They also want every child to have a school to go to, where they can find supportive teachers and learn interesting things or read 'funny books'. Their community is really important too, with one child writing, 'I would like all children to have access to community clubs.'

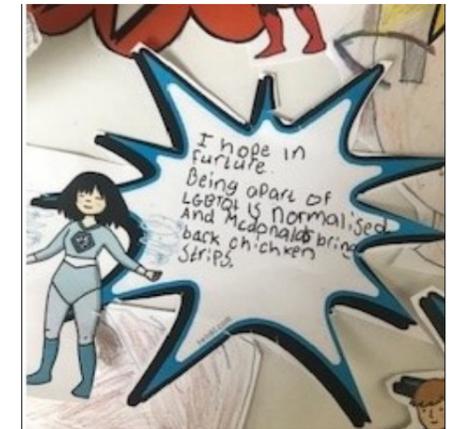
An equal future:

**'I hope being
a part of LGBTQ+
is normalised'**

Being 'normal' but feeling 'unique': the importance of inclusion

The children involved in this project hope that children in 2040 will be happy and free from worry. Feeling included is very important to them. They want to see an **end to racism** and **discrimination on the grounds of sexuality**. One child shared that they hope 'being a part of LGBTQ+ is normalised', and another was clear that there should be 'no more' racism. They also hope for **fewer pressures on girls**, including pressure to behave at school, to always be with friends, and to always be available to socialise.

Having opportunities to **play** as part of exploring who they are is so important for the children who took part in this project. They want children in the future to belong in friendship groups and play as a team but also to feel unique – whether through the games they play, the rules they break, or the clothes they wear.





Using technology well:

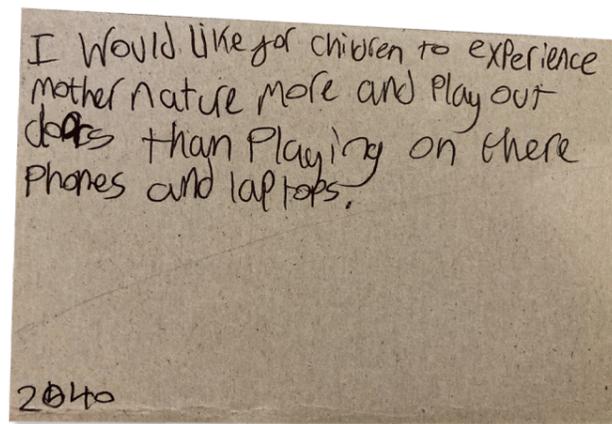
'We love devices', but they might 'take over our happiness'

These children are very focused on technology. They have visions of science fiction-style futures of hoverboards and virtual reality (VR).

They see how technology could **help and harm a good childhood** in 2040. While they welcome more (and new) devices in their lives, they worry that devices will not 'make you happy' or 'healthy'.

Excitement about technology in the future: 'we love devices'

These children see how technology could play a positive role for future generations of children, helping them to learn and play. They feel that holograms and VR might help children in the future understand past events and world history such as wars, or to imagine future scenarios, such as the consequences of climate change. They hope that technology, especially VR, will make learning more fun and will keep children entertained and connected with their friends.

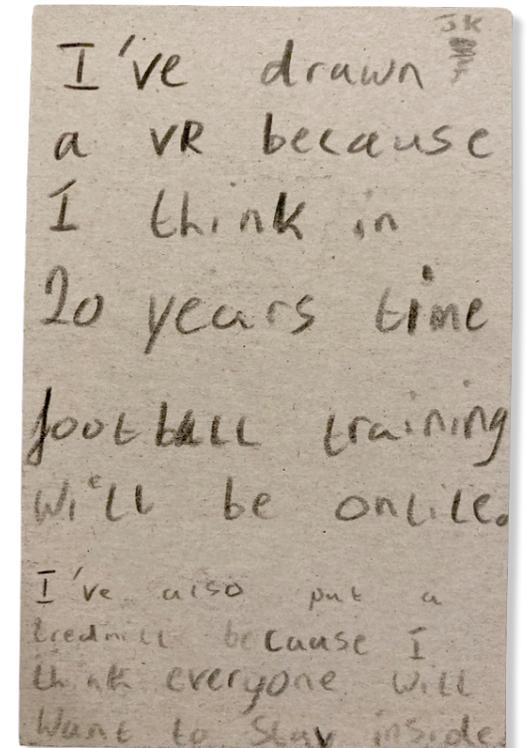


These children also see technology as a tool to make the future more convenient. This could be 'a drone dropping off your McDonalds' or flying trains so children can get around quickly. For them, advances in technology could make things 'easier', solve illness and will allow children in the future to do 'anything' or go 'anywhere' they want.

Worries about technology in the future:

'Devices might take over our happiness and mental health'

Despite this, the children we heard from worry that technology could affect children's wellbeing in the future. For them, more use of technology could affect **happiness and physical activity**. They worry that technology could move most (if not all) activities indoors, which might reduce opportunities to go outdoors and connect with 'mother nature'. This could also limit opportunities to play and spend time with other children.



Connecting with and caring for the environment:

'I would like to have a lot more trees in the world'

The children who took part in this research care a lot about the environment and the world around them. They worry about **climate change** and want children in the future to have opportunities to connect with **animals, plants, and green spaces**.

Children's thoughts on climate change: more trees and clean seas

Lots of these children worry about the future of trees. They want to stop trees from being cut down, and to make sure that more trees are planted so children in the future can enjoy them. They also want to protect honeybees and to keep the sea, beaches, and air clean. They suggest that in the future, everyone should do more recycling and walking instead of driving, to be kind to nature.



The importance of connection: knowing the world while you 'have the chance'

In line with their views on technology, these children worry that the future generation will spend more time indoors on their devices and miss out on seeing the world around them while they 'have the chance.'

They also hope future children can spend time with animals. They want the generation of 2040 to have the opportunity to walk dogs, to ride and care for horses, and even bring pets to school.



Playing and relaxing:

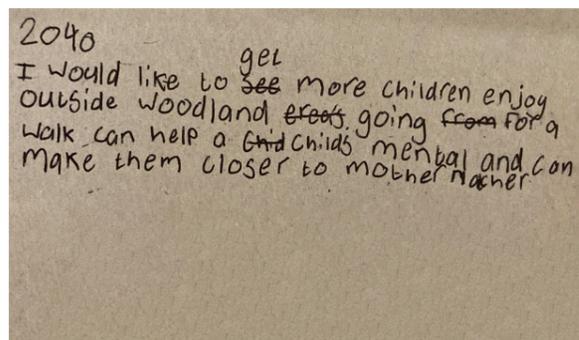
'Very fun games' and 'comfortable classrooms'

Finally, these children want children growing up in 2040 to have lots of different ways to play and have fun. They want children to have access to both the **indoor and outdoor play activities** that they have today. At the same time, they feel it is important for children to have opportunities to relax and be comfortable.

A future of fun: water, balls, and bouncy castles

For the children we heard from, it is important that children growing up in 2040 have access to fun, full-sensory activities. They imagine a future full of experiences like swimming in the sea, having 'pool parties', or spending time in the park, where there could be slides, swings and bouncy castles.

Children hope for more parks and spaces to play ball sports, like football and cricket, and go out on their bikes and scooters. They want to keep parks and play spaces free, and under less supervision from adults. One child talked about the need for a 'no adult' zone.

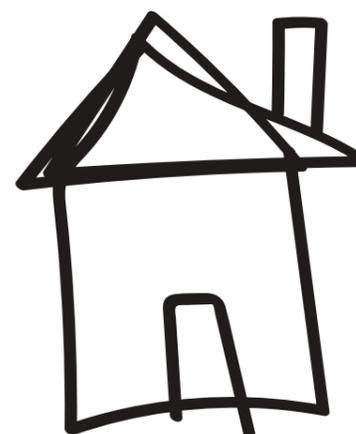
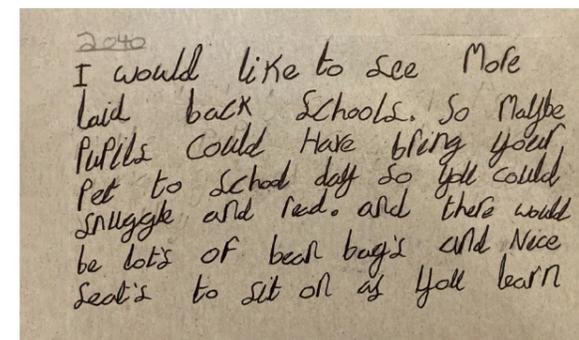


Opportunities to relax: beanbags, books and cuddling dogs

While the vision for the future that these children shared often included leading busy lives full of play, technology and outdoor activities, many children also want time and space for **reading and relaxing**. Some of the children who took part in this project hope children in the future will have beanbags in their classrooms, the chance to read and write more stories, and the ability to sleep well.

These children want children in the future to have the chance to relax at school. They hoped they will have a 'more comfortable classroom' and a more 'laid back' school.

These children have shared a compelling vision for the future. They imagine that a child growing up in 2040 should live in a world where everyone's basic needs are met. They see a world with equality and no discrimination because of race or sexuality, where children have a clean and safe environment they can enjoy. They imagine a world where we use technology for good (and are aware of the harm it can do), and where children have lots of opportunities for both playing and relaxing.





Section 2

THE FUTURE OF CHILDHOOD IF NOTHING CHANGES

Children's policy differs widely across the four nations of the UK. To understand what childhood might be like 20 years from now in each nation, we spoke to professionals working in children's policy, education and services. We asked them to imagine what childhood would be like in 2040 if we continue along the same trajectory, and if no major children's policy change is introduced. We summarised their perspectives as stories to imagine what childhood might look like in 2040.

Many reports exploring the future give a statistical prediction. Here, we take a different approach, telling a story for an imaginary child in each nation of the UK to illustrate the risks and opportunities they may face.

The following stories are possible futures, based on the perspectives of a small group of individual professionals working with children in each nation of the UK. They represent one possible future, of which there could be many. In contrast to the first section of the report where children imagined an ideal future, we have asked professionals to imagine a likely future based on today's realities.

We wanted to capture the most important themes and ideas in each nation, according to the professionals we interviewed. As a result of this, and the differences in the national policy contexts, the possible futures for each nation focus on slightly different issues. For this reason, each nation's story should be read individually, and not in comparison.

Scotland

If a child, Zara, is born in Scotland 20 years from now:

The professionals we spoke to in Scotland felt that Zara could be born into an environment where she is **empowered to speak her mind** and be an active member of her community, if legislation on child rights and the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are followed. In this case, Zara would know that she doesn't have to wait until she is an adult to be allowed to have an opinion about things that affect her life. Professionals felt that this could result in Zara having higher self-esteem and self-confidence, as she will know that her thoughts and ideas are valued.

If the UNCRC is not properly implemented, or if the adults around her don't support her to be an active citizen, professionals worried that Zara will not be encouraged to raise her voice about the issues that affect her, giving her fewer opportunities to shape her community, education, and the world around her.

'We don't need any more policy in Scotland, if we got others, maybe it would be a distraction... [the] focus now is on implementation [of the UNCRC] and supporting public bodies to do this fully.'

Marguerite Hunter Blair, Play Scotland

The professionals we spoke to felt that Zara would likely have the opportunity to be in a **caring educational environment** where she is treated well and with respect by teachers. They felt that there is an increasing awareness in Scotland around the importance of play and early childhood development, which could mean that Zara will have better early learning opportunities than children growing up today.

Imagining Zara's life, they envisaged her having a full childhood, with opportunities to learn through **play**, take risks, enjoy friendships, explore nature, make mistakes, and build resilience. They saw that play would be at the heart of her wellbeing and would enhance every aspect of her life, including her social, physical, intellectual, creative, and emotional development.

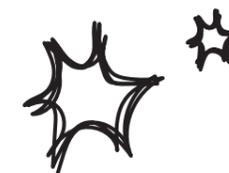
Professionals were optimistic about the impact of policies protecting green spaces, and as a result felt that Zara's **environment** could have cleaner air, and her right to use the green space around her should be protected, because of today's policies on children's rights to green spaces.

They expect that Zara's life will be shaped by political events, including the ongoing impacts of the UK leaving the EU, and the potential for Scottish independence. As a child growing up in 2040, Zara may worry about the impact of climate change on her life, and this could impact her **mental health**.

Based on current rates of child poverty, Zara has a 1 in 4 chance of being born into **poverty**. Experiencing poverty is likely to create a lot of stress and anxiety for Zara, affecting her mental and physical health. However, if Scotland achieves its target of reducing child poverty to 1 in 10 children by 2030, Zara's chances of being born into poverty are significantly reduced, as are those of her peers.

'There are people, including many in disadvantaged communities, who want to make children's lives better and develop and deliver services like breakfast clubs or after school clubs. This welfare approach of course does help those children and families in the short term, but it doesn't address systemic issues in relation to poverty or change how we think about and value children as a society. Adopting a human rights approach removes the need for 'charity' and moves us into the space of having human rights respected, protected and fulfilled. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a clear framework and provides a route to developing policies and practices which are consistent and sustainable.'

Cathy McCulloch, Children's Parliament





England

If a child, Maya, is born in England 20 years from now:

The professionals we spoke to in England felt that Maya's life is likely to be strongly influenced by **technology**, which could be a big part of her education and entertainment. They saw virtual reality being at the centre of sport and play for Maya, and artificial intelligence 'buddies' being used to support her mental health. For them, digitalisation could create further opportunities for Maya to have a better future, but it could also create challenges. They worried about the pressure from social media that children will continue to face and were especially concerned about the additional pressure **social media** puts on girls about their appearance and behaviour. However, they thought that by 2040, Maya could expect to have more safeguarding systems around her to protect her from online abuse and exploitation.

Maya could be under pressure in **school** to achieve high academic grades. Although they see an increasing awareness about the importance of play, which they hoped would carry on into 2040, professionals imagined that Maya's school day will be less focused on her extra-curricular activities, and more focussed on academic achievement. While achieving at school will be important for Maya, professionals felt that a balance is needed, with too much pressure to achieve high grades potentially creating stress and anxiety.

Experiencing stress and anxiety could increase the likelihood of Maya experiencing poor **mental health**. Professionals predicted that the lack of availability of children's mental health support will continue into 2040, if government policy and funding do not change. In this case, Maya could be dependent on her school for mental health support, where the amount of support she receives could vary widely.

'If nothing improves in the future, early and low-level mental health issues are very unlikely to get help and young people are increasingly pessimistic about whether they'll get anything so don't even seek it.'

Chloe Darlington, Children England

Based on current rates of child poverty, Maya has a 1 in 3 chance of being born into **poverty**. Living in poverty is likely to affect Maya's **physical and mental health** and **educational attainment**. The effects of this could be amplified if she is born into a lone parent family or a family with more children, as, based on today's policies, welfare support is likely to be inadequate. If Maya is born into a refugee or asylum seeker community, professionals anticipated that her family may receive little support from the government and more support from the community around them.

Based on what we know about the areas currently experiencing the highest population growth, professionals predicted that Maya is likely grow up in a densely populated urban area. Here, she could be living in overcrowded **housing** without a garden.

Growing up in 2040, Maya is likely to live in a society that acknowledges the risk of **climate change**. She could be recycling, walking to school, and might even enjoy a better quality of air around her, based on today's policies to reduce emissions from traffic.

Living in England, professionals felt that Maya is less likely to have a say in the decisions and services that affect her life, as policy and legislation focusses less on child rights and children's voices than in some nations of the UK. However, with developments in both traditional and social media, Maya and her peers could be more politically aware and active at a young age. As a result, she could be more engaged in **politics and campaigning** for the causes she cares about.



Northern Ireland

If a child, Peter, is born in Northern Ireland 20 years from now:

Professionals in Northern Ireland felt that Peter will have a lot of support from his community, with good friendships and opportunities to play with his peers and in his local area. In their view, these strong relationships with his **family and friends** could improve his health, happiness and learning.

Thinking about play and the environment, professionals felt that Peter is likely to experience plenty of community initiatives which protect green spaces and his outdoor play **environment**.

Professionals predicted that the lack of availability of children's mental health support will continue into 2040, if government policy and funding do not change before then. They expect that demand for children's mental health support will be greater in 2040, but funding will not meet these needs, and that Peter may have to wait a long time to get professional help. As a result, Peter may have to rely on his community for **mental health** support.

They anticipated that Peter and his peers could be at a greater risk of experiencing mental health issues, due to the nation's history of conflict and the resulting inter-generational trauma. Over the next 20 years, additional stress could build up, due to lasting consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential consequences of the UK leaving the EU. Professionals worried that if recent unrest continues into 2040, this will have a significant impact on the lives of Peter and his peers.

'Although we signed the Peace Agreement in 1998, we are still a community in transition, and people don't understand that. Communities are still emerging from conflict. Political decisions are often still attached to what happened during the 'troubles' ... that is an issue for young people in 20 years' time if we don't get the social issues right in terms of poverty and deprivation, otherwise there will be another generation lost.'

Ellen Finlay, Children in Northern Ireland

Based on current rates of child poverty, Peter has a 1 in 4 chance of being born into **poverty**. Professionals anticipated that his experience of poverty will be more challenging than for children today, due to an increased cost of living. They do not expect that additional funding for families experiencing poverty will be made available in the next 20 years. Living in poverty is likely to have an impact on Peter's mental health and wellbeing, and he could experience food poverty, social exclusion, and **health inequalities**. He could also experience overcrowded **housing**, homelessness, and temporary accommodation.

At school, professionals predicted that Peter is likely to achieve worse results than other children if he is from a vulnerable group, and he may also have his school choices restricted if transfer tests are still in place.

Social media is likely to be important in Peter's life. It will help him build skills, connect with people, and could help him raise his voice about the issues that affect him.



Wales



If a child, Rhys, is born in Wales 20 years from now:

As a result of initiatives to protect the **environment** in Wales, such as the pause on building new roads and the National Forest for Wales, professionals in Wales anticipated that Rhys would have access to more green spaces where he can play and enjoy his environment. If Wales maintains this focus on tackling climate change, Rhys could grow up in a society which is contributing to a safer planet and a cared-for environment. Despite this, as a child growing up in 2040, professionals were concerned that Rhys will experience stress and anxiety around climate change.

Rhys will have a 1 in 3 chance of being born into poverty. If Rhys grows up in **poverty**, his parents or carers could be less likely to have a sustainable income and may be unemployed or working zero-hour contracts or part-time jobs. In this scenario, professionals worried that Rhys could go to school hungry or experience childhood obesity due to the high cost of nutritious food and lack of access to an oven or somewhere to eat his meals. If Rhys grows up in poverty, this could cause anxiety and stress for the whole family, and could increase the likelihood that Rhys will need support with his **mental health**.

Professionals anticipated that Rhys's **school and community** are likely to do all they can to support his family if they are experiencing poverty and saw the role of schools as a vital support for the community increasing. They felt that schools would continue to play a key role as community 'hubs'. However, based on today's policies, they predicted that schools will not have the funding to provide all the support that Rhys's family need. If he grows up in poverty, Rhys's experience of poverty is likely to be different depending on whether he grows up in an urban, post-industrial, coastal, or rural part of the country.

Rhys's **physical health** could be improved by the legal right to play for children in Wales. If free school meals for lower income children during school holidays continue, professionals anticipated that Rhys may be able to expect better physical health in the future than he could today. However, if today's policies continue, there is likely to continue to be a significant number of children growing up in poverty who are not eligible for free school meals and would not benefit from this.

With advancements in **technology**, Rhys is likely to be surrounded by more artificial intelligence, and online homework could be a key part of his learning. However, professionals predicted that his experience of having the right equipment and the latest technology is likely to be shaped by his family's income. Rhys may use technology to explore a range of his subjects at school, in line with the new national curriculum in Wales.

Social media will be key to Rhys's life. Professionals anticipated that, as Rhys's parents or carers may have been exposed to social media when they were young, they may be able to better support him with managing some of the challenges around interacting with others online.

As a result of legislation around the UNCRC in Wales, and the nation's focus on **child rights**, Rhys could grow up in a society where his opinion is valued, and his participation in the decisions and services that shape his life is encouraged.

'There is very good buy-in and support for the UNCRC and the legislation around it...but the key thing is...what action are we going to take over a sustained period? It comes down to action and policy implementation.'

Children's services professional, Wales

Across the UK: what can we currently expect from the future of childhood?



Future values

The professionals we spoke to in each nation of the UK predicted a generation of children in 2040 that will be enabled and empowered by technology and social media. This generation may have increased access to green spaces and could be involved in activism around inequality and the climate emergency. These professionals felt that society's understanding of the importance of play will continue to increase. For children growing up in nations prioritising child rights, or implementing the UNCRC, professionals predicted that children are likely to have their voices heard on the issues that matter to them.

Similar themes were reflected on by professionals working across the UK as a whole. In addition, they expressed hope of an increased awareness of food insecurity in the current generation, as a result of the pandemic, which may increase activism or shape policy for the next generation. Similarly, they were hopeful about an increased awareness of, and lack of stigma attached to, children's mental health issues. If this trajectory continues, it could help break down barriers to accessing mental health support for future generations.

The challenges of inequality

Despite this positivity, professionals across each nation were concerned about children's poverty and mental health, and the impact of climate change. These issues could affect children differently in each nation of the UK, but there were many similar concerns, including lack of funding for schools and mental health support. Resoundingly, both within each nation and from professionals working across the UK as a whole, growing up in poverty was predicted to impact children's physical and mental health, food security, digital inclusion, and opportunities for playing and learning. Professionals felt that the climate emergency was an urgent concern which could fuel rising levels of anxiety and stress for future generations of children.

Concerns around levels of child poverty and mental and physical health inequalities in 20 years' time were, in many of the nations, rooted in a lack of progress made on these issues over the past 20 years.

Professionals in each nation and those working across the UK as a whole felt that government inability, or unwillingness, to meet children's fundamental needs for food, fit-for-purpose housing and safe and inspirational spaces in the natural environment, as well as online, was a cause for concern both now and for the next generation.

'If you're expecting children to do well at school but still accepting the fact that they are growing up in poverty, there's a disconnect there... Policymakers need to be thinking more about family income when they're thinking about children's educational outcomes and thinking less about an intervention that happens once when that child is already disadvantaged and has faced many years of disadvantage through the education system.'

Children's policy professional, UK



Section 3

REFLECTION



The children who took part in this research shared a bold and positive vision for the future. The future that they imagine is one that enables equality; a future without racism or homophobia, where everyone is included and able to express their unique self.

They see a future where everyone has their basic needs met: where everyone has a safe home, hot meals, and a loving family around them.

The children we spoke to worry about how the climate around them might change, and how other children may not get to experience the world as they see it today. They hope for a future where trees, animals, green spaces, and the air they breathe are protected, and where all children experience a clean and cared-for environment around them.

These children want to ensure future generations have opportunities to play, learn, and relax, both indoors and outdoors. They want to make sure technology plays a positive role in their play and learning, enabling them to experience more, but doesn't take away from their ability to enjoy the world around them or be together.

Interviews with children's sector professionals present a starker picture. While some existing policies in each of the nations may create an environment where children have more of a say in the decisions that affect their lives, and where climate policy may be helping to create the cleaner environment and access to green spaces that children want to see, it's clear that children will still experience many challenges. Significant policy change is needed to meet children's fundamental needs for food, fit-for-purpose housing, good mental and physical health, and safe spaces online. The climate emergency is predicted to have a significant impact on children, causing significant anxiety and stress.

Depending on where they live, the challenges facing children could also include experiencing inter-generational stress and trauma, a lack of decision-making power in issues that directly affect them, and the ongoing impact of significant political events of the 20 years prior.

The challenges facing children will be significantly exacerbated where children are experiencing poverty or inequality. Children in these circumstances are likely to experience higher rates of stress and anxiety, poor mental or physical health, a lack of equal education opportunities, and ongoing issues around digital exclusion.

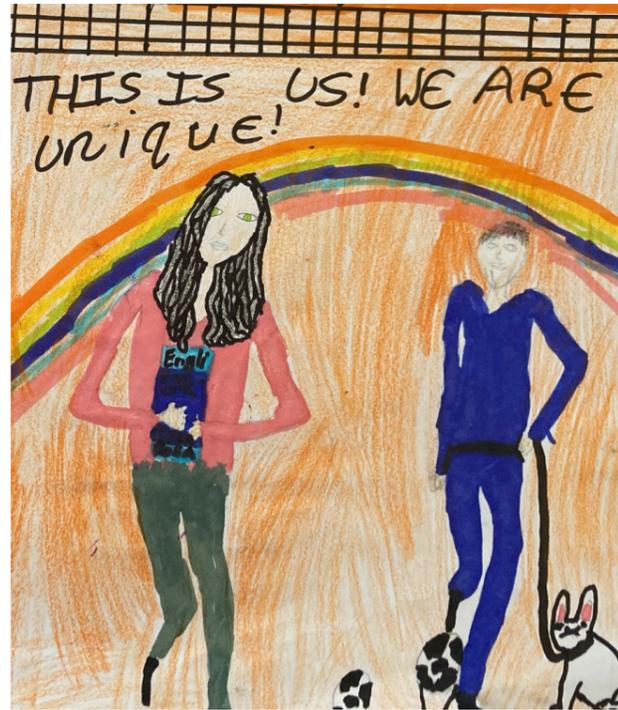
There are many insights from professionals which also give us hope for the future. There are existing initiatives to protect green spaces, support children's play and early development, and help children to amplify their voices on the issues that matter to them. We should explore how we can learn from each other and to build on these initiatives, to make these opportunities available to all children.

The priorities children shared should also give us hope for the future. Their values of including and caring for others, challenging discrimination, learning, playing, and protecting the world around them are a strong call to action. Children are the experts in what makes a good childhood, so we must act on what they have told us. We need to ask ourselves what we can do to work towards their vision for the future, to build a future of childhood that is designed by children.



Reflection questions

1. The children we heard from imagine a future free from discrimination, with equal opportunities for everyone. What would we need to put in place now, in each nation of the UK, to ensure this reality for children in 20 years' time?
2. These children show real concern about access to money, shelter, and warm meals, which was strongly reflected in professionals' views about the challenges children would face if they were experiencing poverty. Children dream of everyone having access to the same resources. What do we need to do now to work towards making that a reality in 20 years' time?
3. Children show a real awareness of both the challenges and opportunities of technology. How can we ensure that we listen to their views and opinions when making decisions about the role of technology in their world?
4. The children who took part in this research expressed urgent concern about the environment. How can we amplify their voices and act on their views as we address this issue, which we know will directly affect their lives?
5. These children are keen for children in the future to have opportunities for both physical and technological play, but also highlighted the importance of relaxing. What might children be telling us, and how can we create these opportunities for them?



Methodology

Children's views

447* children aged 4 to 11 participated in the project. We invited schools and community groups based in Save the Children's priority geographic areas to take part, including many organisations Save the Children has previously partnered with. Children took part in a range of activities which were facilitated by teachers and group leaders using an activity pack we developed for the project. This pack is available online at www.savethechildren.org.uk/future-of-childhood. These activities were run in schools and community settings across June and July 2021. Both children and their parents were asked for consent for children to take part in the research. Full details of this process can also be found in the activity pack.

Children were asked to reflect on the following themes in order to tell us what would be important for children in the future: happy and healthy, learning, play, home and family, your local area, our world and taking part. Children were able to express their thoughts through a variety of means including drawings, animations, written reflections and collages.

For the analysis, we used a rigorous and reflexive thematic analysis approach to explore the children and young people's data. This approach prioritised understanding similarities in their hopes for and understandings of the future and therefore grouped children's views into main areas of concern. The data was interpreted using questions such as: 'what is this drawing trying to tell us?', and 'what does this young person mean?' We also used interpretations provided by the children themselves, where they had shared an explanation of a drawing or artwork.

The findings of this research are not representative of the UK. Sample sizes were small and there was not an even distribution across age ranges, demographics, or nations of the UK. These findings should not be used to draw any comparisons between nations and are representative only of the group of children who took part in the project.

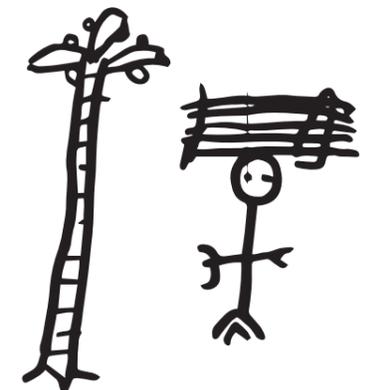
Professional views

To paint a picture of what childhood might look like in 2040, in each nation of the UK, we carried out 19 semi-structured interviews with professionals working in children's policy, education, and services at a national or UK-wide level.

Interviews were carried out across June and July 2021. They aimed to answer questions such as: 'what will the future look like and why?', 'will it be different for children from specific groups?' and 'are there any policies in the pipeline that can make the situation better in the future?' Professionals were asked to share their views based on the assumption that no major policy changes will be introduced, as we wanted to understand possible 'trajectories' of the future, based on what we know now. Interviews for professionals in each nation were guided by the interviewees, who identified the top three trends that will affect the childhood experience in their nation 20 years from now. Professionals working across the whole of the UK were asked to predict the future for the same themes that children were asked about (see above).

For the analysis, interviews were coded against a framework developed to answer the research questions. Content was weighted in terms of dominant themes. Commonalities and differences were mapped across the UK and the devolved nations.

*447 children are estimated to have taken part in this project, based on the number of pieces of data submitted. We have tried to reflect in this figure that some of these contributions were created by more than one child (e.g. class murals). 447 is therefore our best estimate rather than an exact figure.



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