

STUDENT VOICES ON KNIFE CRIME IN LONDON:

A MANIFESTO FOR ACTION



"THE STUDENT COMMISSION SHOULD BE A CATALYST TO START SOMETHING, INSPIRING PEOPLE TO NOT ONLY DISCUSS THE ISSUES BUT GOING OUT AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT"

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



INTRO

The UK is experiencing a surge in youth violence and knife crime with numbers of reported incidents rising. Young people are at risk from this type of crime and Further Education institutions in London are on the front line. Their students have a unique and vital perspective on these issues.

Led by 30 Student Commissioners, our **Student Commission model enabled us to harness the views** and perspectives of over **400 students in London**. This manifesto brings together this research to produce **7 key recommendations**. By utilising these insights, decision-makers can gain a deeper understanding of the wider context surrounding knife crime and act now to **apply effective solutions**.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Student Commission on knife crime in London is a partnership between **Leaders Unlocked and 7 leading colleges** in London. Together, we are **pioneering a new approach** to tackling the serious issue of knife crime in local communities and supporting the anti-knife crime initiatives within colleges.

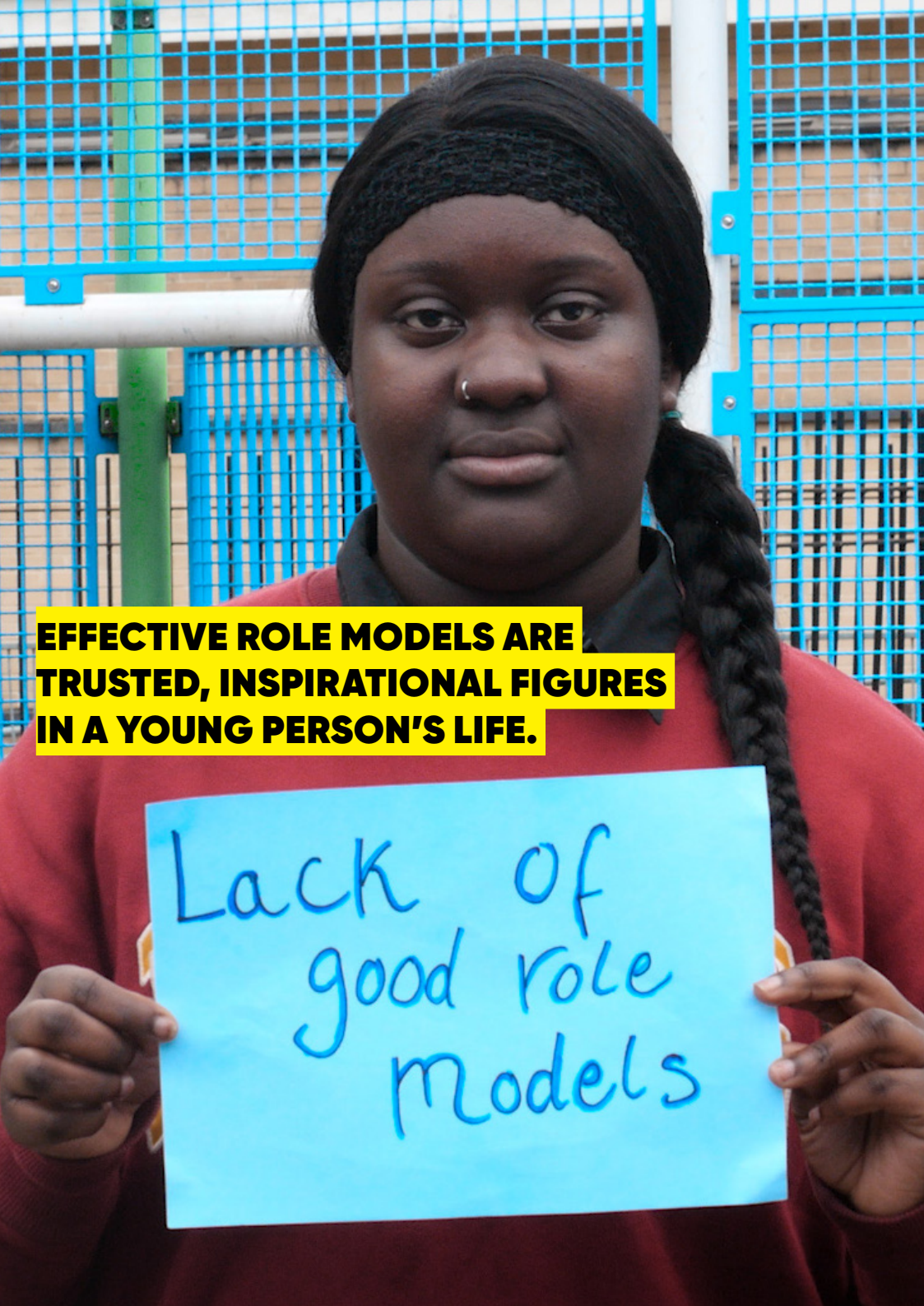
Using innovative **co-creation methods**, peer-to-peer engagement and mentoring, the project moves beyond traditional top-down models, instead **engaging students directly in solutions** to end knife crime in the capital. The project brought together over 30 core students from across **22 London Boroughs**, giving them the opportunity to be part of a collective of young people who want to make a change to their colleges and wider communities.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase access to credible role models. They provide guidance without judgement.
2. Build young people's self-esteem and confidence. It helps them feel both valuable to and valued by society.
3. Create a wide range of opportunities to help young people pursue their ambitions. This creates a sense of optimism which drives positive behaviour.
4. Promote mental health services and initiatives. Without them, many young people do not get the support they need, when they need it.
5. Build and nurture safe and positive spaces for young people to enjoy. They create a sense of community.
6. Give young people a voice to influence decisions. This fosters participation and combats feelings of powerlessness.
7. Help police and authority figures be better integrated with the communities they serve.





EFFECTIVE ROLE MODELS ARE TRUSTED, INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES IN A YOUNG PERSON'S LIFE.

Lack of good role models

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights gathered, our recommendations take a **needs-based approach** that moves the conversation on knife crime away from the standard, 'victim-perpetrator' narrative. This view places individual young people at the centre of this crisis; but for effective holistic solutions to emerge, the conversation is better framed around **systemic failings**.

There are **multiple stakeholders** in the lives of young people including their colleges, the Government, police, family and friends. Funding, partnerships and resourcing is needed from all to see a real impact. **If young people's needs are met** by one or more of these groups, their chances of becoming victims or perpetrators of knife crime decrease.

1. ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

Effective role models are **trusted, inspirational figures** in a young person's life. They do not feel judged by them, therefore they're more comfortable speaking openly and honestly. We found that while mentoring is happening,

not all young people have access to this support. Within colleges, it can feel like the pool of mentors are unrelatable, if they're not diverse in age, ethnicity, background and lived experience.

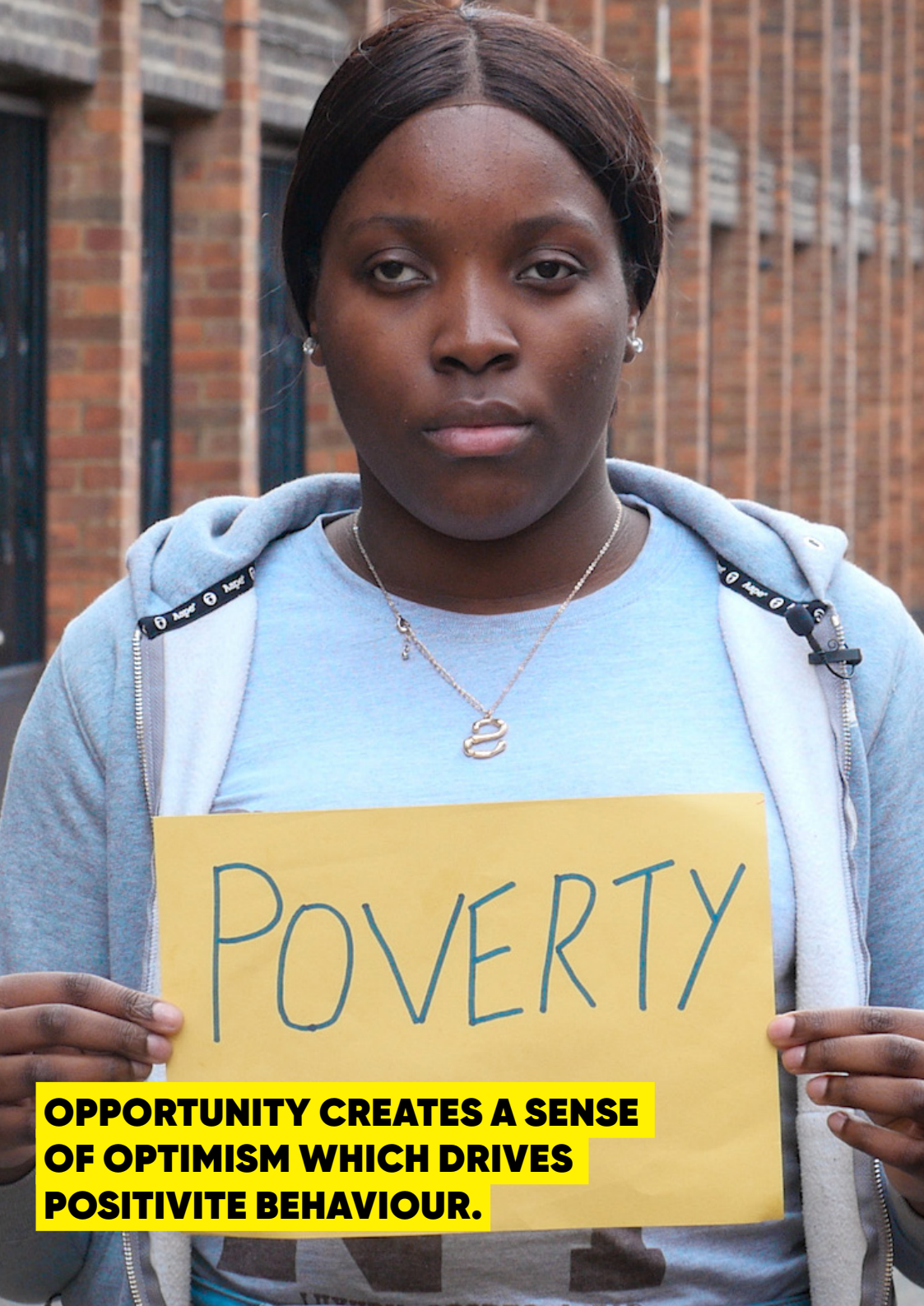
- To increase the positive impact role models and mentors can have...**
1. Students should be better **involved in the recruitment** and training of mentors to ensure that they are relatable.
 2. There should be **peer-to-peer schemes** where young people with more life experience can mentor other young people. Young people of similar ages can relate to each other and trust can be built.

2. CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

High self-esteem and confidence help young people feel both **valuable to and valued by society**. This helps develop self respect and a better appreciation of the way they and

others deserve to be treated. Unfortunately, many **young people suffer from low self-esteem** which can be exacerbated by academic and social pressures.

- To help young people build their self-esteem and confidence...**
1. Self-esteem and **confidence building programmes** should be implemented as standard in schools, colleges and other youth settings.
 2. Education should move away from overt **ability-based grouping**. For example, the naming of sets could be changed from 'top, middle and bottom' to something more neutral.
 3. **Talent-based approaches** to learning and assessment should be taken rather than strict 'intelligence-based' scoring.



OPPORTUNITY CREATES A SENSE OF OPTIMISM WHICH DRIVES POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR.

3. OPPORTUNITY AND ASPIRATION

Opportunity creates a sense of optimism which drives positive behaviour. Young people need to feel like their **goals and aspirations are achievable** because in challenging times, dreams and ambitions are strong deterrents from violence. Young people who feel like they have **nothing to gain** can

also feel like they have nothing to lose. This can negatively affect the choices they make. Initiatives like **work placements, internships and work experience** not only give students the opportunity to develop skills, they also help them feel more positive about the future.

For young people to have access to as many opportunities as possible...

1. **Career and development services** should be an integral part of all courses, with a personalised plan to help each student get into work, business, or higher education.
2. The breadth of **opportunities available** should reflect the world today. Work placements and internships should go beyond typical industries like law, banking and finance and accommodate students' diverse interests and talents.
3. **Corporate social responsibility** should be a crucial part of education policy. Private companies should be required by law to support young people in their local area with opportunities, training and funding for career and development services.

4. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Mental health and wellbeing are overlooked in the current conversation around knife crime even though issues such as **depression and anxiety are on the rise** amongst young people. As well as this, young people can be

unaware that they even have a mental health issue. Over a prolonged period of time, **poor mental health negatively impacts** a young person's outlook on themselves and the world around them.

To help young people maintain good mental health...

1. Mental health and wellbeing activities should go beyond the standard 'mental health week'. Just as maintaining good physical health is accepted as an ongoing priority, so should maintaining good mental health. This could be done through a **regular programme of activities** planned throughout the year aimed at giving students practical tools and advice on maintaining good mental health.
2. Young people who need extra support **should be proactively offered it** rather than relying on reactive interventions. Counselling should be readily available and tailored to the individual's needs.
3. **Funding for mental health services** needs to be increased to provide the same kind of access to care that we expect for our physical health.



GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE INFLUENCE MEANS ALLOWING THEM TO HAVE A VOICE IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES.

5. SAFE AND POSITIVE SPACES

Youth spaces that can be accessed are invaluable. Libraries, sports centres, co-working spaces, youth clubs, theatres and parks **build a sense of community**. Currently there are a lack of free, good quality facilities

for young people to use and enjoy. When these services are offered, young people can channel their energy into **creative and positive outlets**, making less room for negative influences.

To create safe and positive spaces for young people to enjoy together...

1. **Local community spaces** such as colleges, libraries, sports centres and churches should be made available for activities and youth services.
2. Colleges are ideal spaces for this as they have sports halls, libraries, media studios and kitchen facilities. **Students should be trained** and offered paid work to put on youth activity programmes in the evenings, weekends and during holidays.
3. Government should provide local Councils with **funding to reinstate youth clubs** and provide training programmes for young people to gain employment as youth leaders.

6. INFLUENCE AND VOICE

Giving young people influence means allowing them to have a voice in decision making processes. This fosters participation and **mitigates feelings of exclusion and powerlessness** that can lead to poor choices. There are lots of existing youth voice initiatives that can help drive action. These include

local youth councils, UK Youth Parliament and learner voice forums within schools and colleges. However, these programmes need to be **representative of different kinds of young people** rather than just those who are already highly engaged.

To ensure a diverse range of young people have a voice on issues that affect them...

1. The Student Commission model should be adopted widely, across different sectors. This will help **stakeholders engage with the silent majority** of young people who are under-represented in traditional forums.
2. Young people should be given forums to **debate bills going into Parliament** around specific policy areas such as the legalisation of certain drugs, the criminal justice system and housing.
3. Students should be a **core part of governance processes** within education. To be effective, these initiatives should include access to senior management, space to debate college policy and channels for presenting recommendations.



THERE IS A LOT OF MISTRUST FOR POLICE AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

7. RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE POLICE

There is a lot of **mistrust for police** amongst young people with a view that they do not always act in their best interests. The more integrated the police are with the local

community, the better their relationships are. Figures of authority need to be more **transparent and more representative** of the communities they serve.

To foster better relationships between young people and authority figures...

1. There should be more opportunities for **young people to interact** with police officers in informal settings where trust and understanding can increase, for example through community sports events.
2. Young people should be invited to **provide training to the police** on issues like unconscious bias and approaching young people.
3. The police should fund a programme to **educate young people on their rights**, particularly in relation to Stop and Search. This kind of programme coming from the police would show trust and credibility.
4. **Government should increase funding for the police force**, not just to recruit more officers, but for enrichment programmes to improve police relationships within communities, instead of using things like drill music as scapegoats to explain knife crime.

THANK YOU

Thanks for reading. Want to discuss what you've read in more detail or find out about how you can get involved in our next Student Commission?

Contact us at alev@leaders-unlocked.org

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