

In Conversation with Lottie Wilson: graphic text

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Being a Young Person in Politics, Broken Promises, and Reasons for Optimism

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We asked Lottie, Chair of the English Young Liberals, what she wishes politicians understood about being young today. Her answer was one word, “hopelessness”.

[At school] you're working towards your exams and to get really good grades because you're given this promise that you'll get a really good job if you do that. But that promise is gone.

She described a generation doing everything asked of them, from good grades to master's degrees and PhDs, and still not finding the opportunities they were told to expect.

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For Lottie, young people switching off from education isn't a personal failing. It's an understandable response to a system that no longer delivers what it promised.

I would never blame anyone in my generation for coming to the conclusion that [engaging with education] is kind of pointless. So, we need to make it not pointless. That's the answer.

Instead, she wants to see policies that give young people “a light at the end of the tunnel”, something meaningful to work towards.

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Lottie was quick to point out that university isn't the only route, and that we need more vocational options in colleges and sixth forms.

There are so many roles in society... that are so important, that have different pathways... Vocational education is a huge part of the answer.

Our Earning or Learning report found that GCSE entries outnumber Technical Award entries by 16 to 1, and recommends giving technical and vocational qualifications equal standing in how schools are measured.

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University wasn't what Lottie had imagined, and it left her unsure of what came next. The turning point came with her placement year in a parliamentary office.

It's given me that direction again. It's given me something to look forward to again.

She sees placements and industry experience as one of the best ways to tackle hopelessness, by giving young people a real view of what the world of work could hold.

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Lottie's biggest message to politicians was about who gets a seat at the table, and whose job it is to pull out the chair.

You can't be making change about us without us... It can't be an expectation on us to bang down the doors. It has to be flung wide open from the inside.

That's why our Earning or Learning report recommends that young people, including those with experience of being NEET, hold at least 20% of voting rights on new local Youth Skills Boards..

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Despite everything, Lottie left conference feeling hopeful. She went in expecting to be the "token" young person, and found people genuinely wanted to hear from her.

There are people in Parliament and there are people in the generations above us that do want to help... It's not all doom and gloom. There are the people out there who want to listen.

As our Skills Commission prepares to launch its inquiry into apprenticeships, we'll be making sure young people like Lottie are part of the conversation from the start.

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Read the full article, and our Earning or Learning report for all twelve recommendations on reducing youth NEET rates. Link in post above.

Earning or Learning: A New Agenda for Youth NEET Reduction was published by Policy Connect's Skills Commission in May 2026.

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