

# BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

Enabling young people in Lambeth to thrive

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LAMBETH CITIZENS AND KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

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# 1

# INTRODUCTION

# SUMMARY

**At the 2018 Lambeth Citizens Assembly, Lambeth Council agreed to co-produce a social mobility action plan for the borough with Lambeth Citizens and King's College London. Towards this aim, Lambeth Citizens and King's have undertaken a listening campaign to identify the barriers to a better future for Lambeth's young people. The listening has informed recommendations for the Council to act on and improve social mobility for the community.**

Listening to a cross-section of Lambeth's community shows that obstacles to better futures are rooted in four areas:

- 1** Young people's future readiness
- 2** Race and discrimination
- 3** Parental ability to provide support
- 4** Experiences of mental health and wellbeing

To address the issues raised in our listening campaign, we recommend that Lambeth Council act to:

- Support schools and colleges to undertake effective careers guidance and promote a diverse range of education and career progression opportunities
- Evaluate the impact of anti-racism initiative Raising the Game
- Champion the adoption of the Halo Code in schools
- Set up a working group to address the Islamophobia experienced by Muslim students
- Encourage schools to celebrate Latin American Heritage Month
- Increase support for school governing boards to diversify their membership
- Support schools to provide well-informed advice for pupils with a range of immigration statuses
- Connect looked after children and care experienced learners with insecure immigration status to good legal advice
- Achieve recognition for Lambeth as a Living Wage Place
- Provide increased support for parents whose first language is not English
- Encourage a better understanding of student finance amongst parents and young people
- Create a working group with Lambeth Citizens to enable the implementation of the South London Listens action plan
- Work with Lambeth schools to ensure they all have a mental health lead

A full list of recommendations is found on pages 21-24.

# 2

## **LAMBETH'S YOUNG PEOPLE**

# LAMBETH'S YOUNG PEOPLE

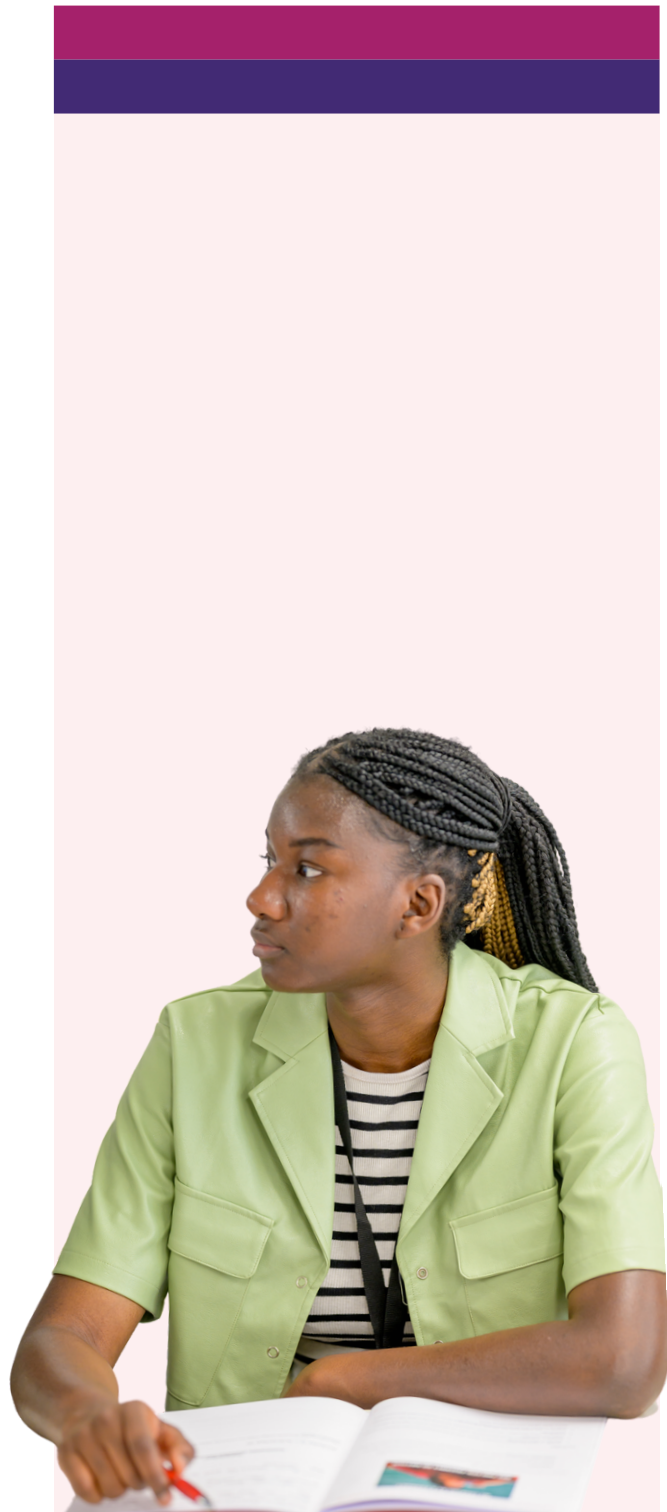
**The hurdles that stand between Lambeth's young people and a bright future are considerable. The barriers they face in their educational and career journeys make the prospect of upward social mobility seem distant.**

Forty three percent of the borough's young people live in poverty<sup>1</sup>. This presents many challenges when it comes to social mobility.

A child living in poverty is more likely to live in unsuitable accommodation. Less than half the houses in Lambeth are affordable<sup>2</sup> and twenty five percent contain the most serious of hazards<sup>3</sup>. Without safe and spacious housing, doing school and college homework is tough.

A young person from a low-income family often has limited access to the learning resources they need. They may leave school with exam results which do not reflect their ability. Although Lambeth pupils do as well in their GCSEs as young people across the country, they do less well than the average London pupil<sup>4</sup>.

Many 18 and 19-year-olds from Lambeth's mainstream state schools progress to university<sup>5</sup>. But those from low-income families are less likely to do so. They are especially less likely to attend a highly competitive university.





Despite good levels of university attendance, a significant number of Lambeth's young people do not go on to further study. Almost forty percent of 19-year-olds do not have a level three qualification<sup>6</sup>.

Young adults heading into a Lambeth workplace are more likely to find themselves on a low-income. Fewer residents earn the local living wage than counterparts in London and the rest of England<sup>7</sup>.

Young people in Lambeth come from diverse backgrounds. Forty three percent of the borough's population is Black, Asian or Multi-Ethnic<sup>8</sup>. In this report's findings, you will read that many young people experience racism and Islamophobia. This impacts their educational and career progression.

It is the same case for those struggling with poor mental health. Even before the pandemic, the number of mental health conditions amongst Lambeth's 5 to 16-year-olds was higher than elsewhere in London and England. More young people from the borough were admitted to hospital than elsewhere in London too<sup>9</sup>.

The case for improving social mobility opportunities for Lambeth's young people is clear.

This report brings together the voices of Lambeth residents and gives life to these statistics. Collectively they show where more must be done so the borough's young people can have high expectations for their futures.

<sup>1</sup> Trust for London, 'Lambeth', [www.trustforlondon.org.uk](http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk), [accessed 28/09/22]

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Lambeth Council (2022), 'State of the Borough 2022', p.78

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.14. Lambeth pupils do slightly better in their average attainment 8 scores (51.3) than pupils across England (50.9), but not as well as the average London pupil (54.2).

<sup>5</sup> TUNDRA MSA data. 51% of Lambeth's young people progress to university compared to a national average of 43%.

<sup>6</sup> Trust for London

<sup>7</sup> Lambeth Council, p.24. The percentage of people earning less than the local living wage is lower in Lambeth (18.7%) than in London (19.5%) or in England (20.4%).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.4

<sup>9</sup> Lambeth Children's Partnership (2017), 'Our children, our future: A children and Young People's Plan for Lambeth 2017 – 22', p.10

# 3

## **THE LISTENING CAMPAIGN**

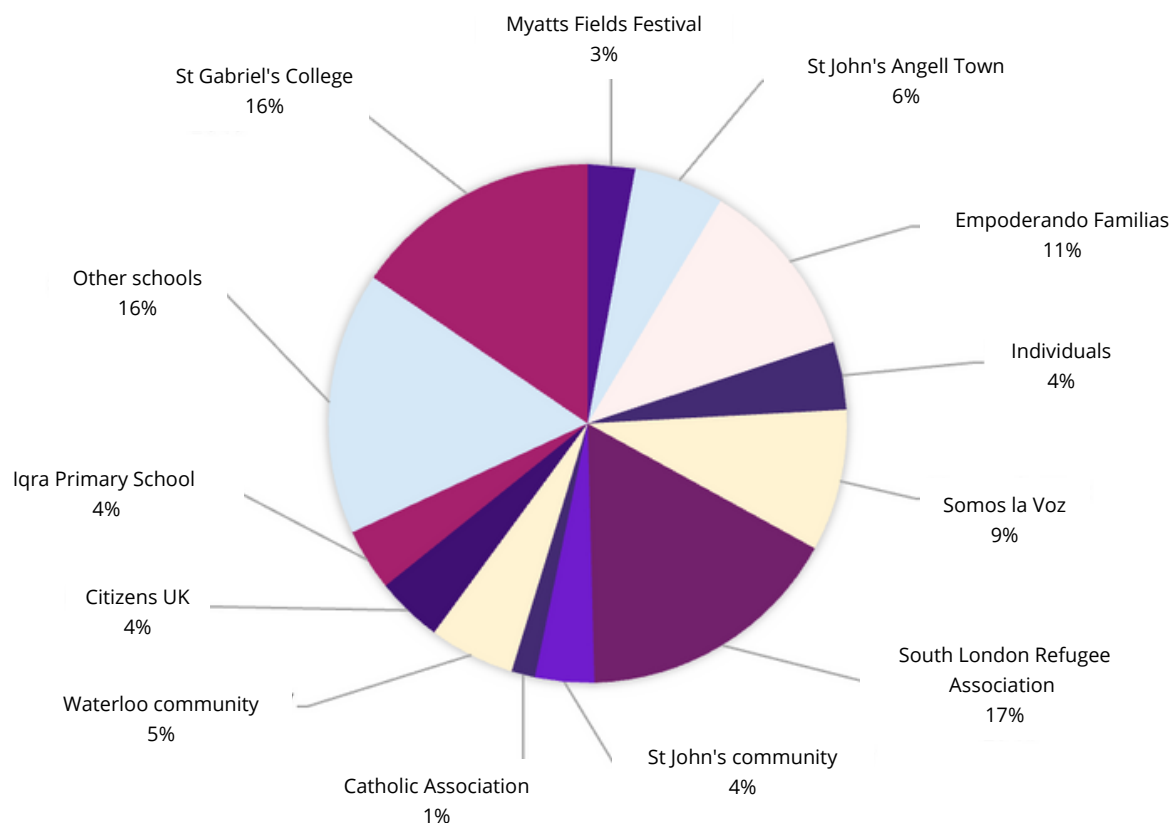


# THE LISTENING CAMPAIGN

From May to September 2021, Lambeth Citizens and King's College London ran and supported listening sessions with 792 parents, pupils and teachers from across Lambeth Citizens' twenty five member civic organisations. Our listening campaign aimed to draw out personal experiences and stories about young people's education attainment. The listening was carried out by local community leaders through one-to-one conversations, group discussions, and house meetings with members of their communities. Answers and experiences were compiled using online survey Typeform.

The communities and leaders that participated in the listening were from civic society organisations across the borough. Schools made up nearly forty three percent of these, community groups nearly thirty four percent, faith institutions another seven percent and other individuals and organisations made up the remaining sixteen percent (*see graph one*).

Graph 1: The Institutions



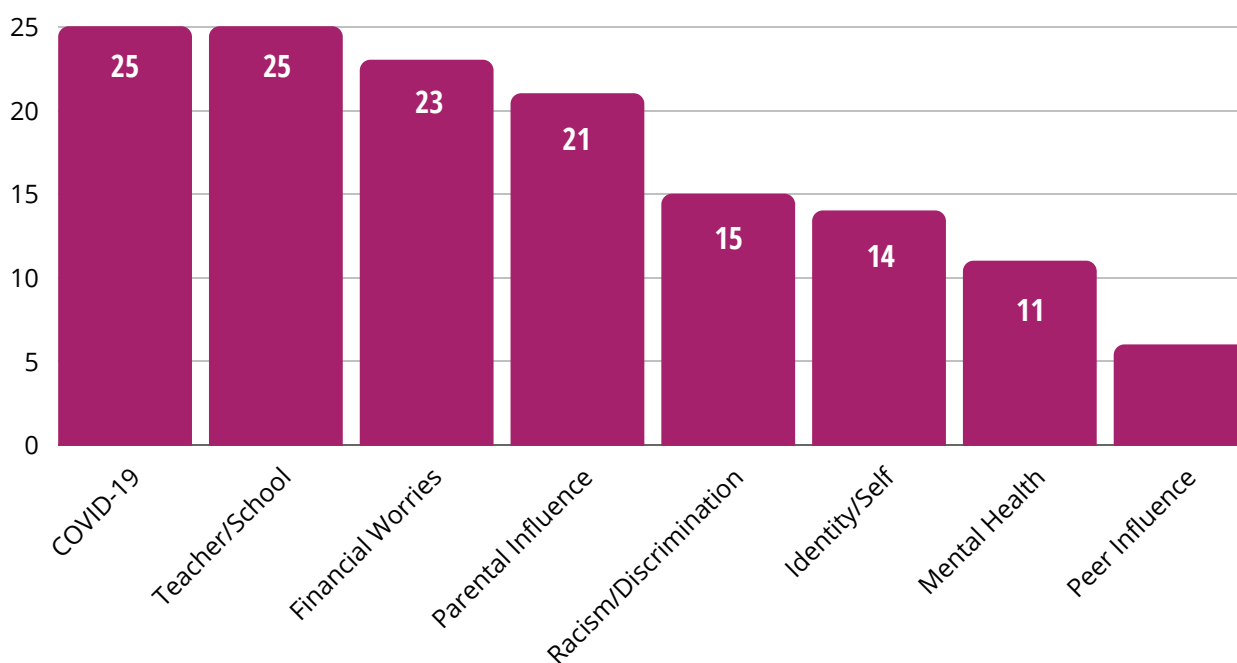
Listening campaign participants were asked the following questions:

- 1 What factors have had the biggest influence on your education experience?
- 2 To what extent are young people in Lambeth able to fulfil their potential?
- 3 How has the pandemic affected your experience of education/educating?
- 4 What would you like to see done differently in Lambeth so that young people fulfil their potential?

## Findings

The specific issues that emerged from the listening were financial struggles and concerns, racism and discrimination, mental health, identity and self-confidence, parental influence, teacher and school influence and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The frequency of these themes in participants' answers is illustrated in graph two.

Graph 2: Themes



COVID-19 was discussed most often during the listening campaign. This confirms that many participants felt that lockdown impacted young people's education. Teacher and school influence sat alongside COVID-19 as the most mentioned topics, followed by financial worries and parental influence. Similarly, racism and discrimination, identity and self-confidence, and mental health were frequently discussed. All these issues interconnect and influence one another. In this report they are grouped into four topics: **(1)** young people's future readiness, **(2)** race and discrimination, **(3)** parental ability to provide support and **(4)** experiences of mental health and wellbeing.

# **4 YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURE READINESS**

# YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURE READINESS

**The COVID-19 crisis put a financial strain on families, especially those with a low household income.**

Many young people do not have space at home from which to work or the access to technology they need. Though worsened by the pandemic, poor and unequal accommodation was an issue that preceded COVID-19. "Long commuting times, changing houses constantly, and general bad housing conditions" acted as a barrier to students' learning experience. Parents also explained how wealthier families had the resources to provide extra tutoring and teaching for their children during the pandemic, putting them at an advantage. Equalising access to academic boosters, like private tuition and extracurricular activities, are seen as important for improving the educational outcomes of those from low-income backgrounds.

Both parents and teachers highlighted the overemphasis on academic performance at schools. In their experience, this fails to nurture creativity and wellbeing and prevents young people exploring alternative pathways. One listening participant stated, "the emphasis is to produce, to follow the line. If you don't fit you will fail." Another highlighted the "general feeling that their dreams were not supported by the wider [school] community."

The practical changes caused by the pandemic, the move to online, hybrid learning and safety measures within classrooms, put a strain on young people's learning experience. Young people and parents highlighted the discrepancies within schools and teachers in adapting to the realities of learning in a pandemic. These discrepancies led to different experiences for difstudents, with some being better supported. "It's like a lottery", one respondent described. Reports of unequal resources and equipment across schools were widespread and, according to participants, explained the widening gap in educational attainment.

***"Young people need to be afforded patience, time, as well as understanding and awareness for their individual situations. It is important for young people to be judged individually rather than by the standards set by others."***

Participants pointed out the need for more guidance for young people as they decide their future pathways. More careers advisors, CV support, mentors, and role models from a wide variety of careers were all deemed helpful. Young people and parents are especially keen to have more support for applying to apprenticeships. It is felt that schools narrowly define success as progression to university and do not always value apprenticeships and other vocational routes. One participant commented, “to fulfil your potential in Lambeth is to be a doctor or a lawyer, but not everyone wants to do that.”

The listening campaign revealed concern from families that financial resources curtail young people’s future opportunities. Since there is “little to no interest-free finance” for university, students for whom interest-based borrowing goes against their faith, struggle to progress to higher education. Difficulty accessing student finance interconnects with immigration status, as many immigrant parents and their children with irregular status cannot apply for it or are too scared to do so.



# 5 **RACE & DISCRIMINATION**

# RACE & DISCRIMINATION

**Experiences of racism and discrimination, as well as a lack of representation, lower students' self-belief and ability to thrive.**

Our listening shows that racism and discrimination affect confidence, sense of control, and belonging. It also causes anxiety. When young people are not sure of themselves and their surroundings, educational aspiration and attainment are hindered. One respondent mentioned how the “system doesn’t enable everyone to develop a strong and healthy self-esteem.”

People from diverse racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds spoke of marginalisation and prejudice. Their stories showed the many ways this harms a young person’s development. Amongst young people and parents' concerns are racism in higher education and the workplace; “kids and parents know of the discrimination they will face in school, jobs and community – it’s disheartening”. This impacted their educational experience and, it was felt, “would ultimately translate into them having less money” in the future. Some mentioned that “unconscious bias and prejudice from teachers” affected their learning and made them feel excluded at school. It was observed that some schools fail to accommodate specific student needs, with reports of “little consideration for dietary requirements,

prayer times, or Ramadan” alienating Muslim children.

An absence of role models was one of the most common reasons given for why children may have low confidence or ambition. Students lack representation of successful people in the media and wider society that look like them and are taught by few teachers who share their background.

***“Role models are important for young people to see and envision. Some young people wish they had had more interaction with other people (for example, alumni school pupils who have been successful) to encourage them during school time.”***

Language limitations sometimes leads to bullying and harassment. Children are often uncomfortable reporting this behaviour and are left feeling “rejected, lonely or ashamed”. This has a deep impact on their wellbeing and sense of agency. It also affects parents who, because of similar difficulties with language and challenges navigating the educational system, feel unable to help.

Young people also struggle with honouring and celebrating their heritage, something which affects their identity, wellbeing and ability to learn. Respondents are clear that young people should feel proud of what they look like and where they come from. They should not have to adapt or

change their names so others can pronounce them and should experience a sense of community in school.

A more inclusive school curriculum, greater representation within schools and racial bias training for staff were identified as key areas in which the educational environment could improve. This is linked to a marked concern about exclusions of Black students, with exclusions perceived as instigating the start of a downward spiral.





# **PARENTAL ABILITY TO PROVIDE SUPPORT**

# PARENTAL ABILITY TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

**Parents' financial position and understanding of how to operate within the educational system emerged as a key factor in the progression of young people.**

Financial strain on parents often transferred onto children who were “desperate to make money to help their families”, either through jobs or criminal activities. Most of the participants had “long-term money worries” and were concerned about rising living expenses in London.

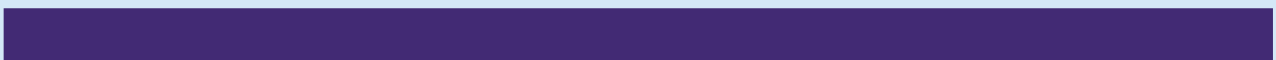
The financial concerns of parents affect their ability to support their children. Multiple stories highlighted that parents often work long hours and multiple jobs. This takes time away from helping their children learn. Some responses mentioned that financial pressure, alongside the desire to do what is best for their children and challenges accessing the education system, have a negative effect on parental mental health. More Living Wage employment opportunities for families would help ease financial stresses.

Those with irregular or unsettled immigration status who struggle to access English classes are less able to support their children's education; “I feel like I don't have the tools to properly support my daughter, I fear she's falling behind because of language skills.”

Community leaders felt that ESOL provision, alongside settling families' migration status and providing information about the education system in multiple languages, were essential to increasing the support parents could give their children.



# 7 MENTAL HEALTH



# MENTAL HEALTH

**The mental health of young people, parents, and teachers featured prominently in the listening campaign. Not being able to name what was happening to them, breaking the stigma and asking for help, and difficulties once 'in the system', all contributed to poor mental health.**

Parents described the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of their children, most often expressed as low motivation and "feeling like you don't want to do anything and nothing matters".

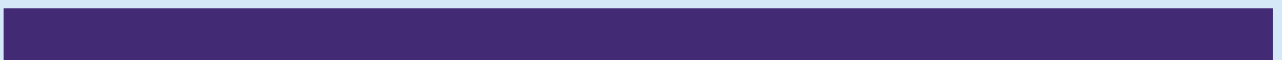


This affected their studies and school performance. Deaths and other pressures caused by the pandemic worsened students' wellbeing. The lockdowns weakened support systems, particularly for young people that were physically isolated from their friends. The ongoing impact of social isolation is tangible. Friendships have grown distant and young people are more likely to confine themselves to their comfort zones.

Young people often feel unable to ask for help and have trouble accessing wellbeing services. Some respondents detailed how students "felt uncertain as to how to ask for good mental health support." Many highlighted that discussing mental health is still taboo; "[mental health] is sometimes perceived or treated as being 'dumb', 'weak' or 'whiny'." Young people emphasised that suffering from poor mental health can affect grades. Important solutions that were suggested during the listening were improving access to mental health services, creating spaces for support within schools, and working to destigmatise the topic.

# 8

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

To tackle the educational injustices highlighted by the listening campaign and improve young people's futures, Lambeth Council are asked to commit to the following recommendations.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURE READINESS

- 1** Lambeth Council should encourage secondary schools, further education colleges, and sixth forms to dedicate staff time to championing a diverse range of education and career progression opportunities and supporting pupils to apply for university access programmes.
- 2** Lambeth Council should engage with schools, parents, and pupils to understand the effectiveness of careers guidance and collaborate to address any limitations. The Council should work with secondary schools, further education colleges, and sixth forms so that they have access to the resource and support they need to implement careers guidance which meets the Gatsby benchmarks and covers apprenticeships and a wide variety of careers.
- 3** Lambeth Council should increase awareness and encourage take-up of the National Tutoring Programme.
- 4** Lambeth Council should adopt the immigration support pledge that local authorities across the UK are signing up to. This pledge ensures that looked after children and care leavers do not experience educational barriers because of their immigration status. By adopting this pledge Lambeth Council commits to identify children and young people with immigration needs, connect them to quality legal advice, provide proactive support and help them seek permanent status.
- 5** Lambeth Council should explore how it can involve Lambeth Citizens in delivering and reviewing Lambeth's Digital Strategy, especially in connection to how effectively it improves digital access for young people living in poverty.

## RACE AND DISCRIMINATION

- 1** Lambeth Council should collaborate with the Lambeth Schools Partnership to carry out an impact evaluation of Raising the Game and publish the findings, with a particular focus on how successful it has been in reducing exclusions of Black Caribbean students. The Council should work with Lambeth Schools Partnership to act on the results by setting out a plan that commits them to strengthening and expanding the programme.
- 2** Lambeth Council should champion the Halo Code with all schools in Lambeth. It should encourage schools to adopt the Halo Code as a policy within their dress codes and should highlight the Code's importance to the community in Lambeth. The Council can do this by working with the Halo Collective.
- 3** Lambeth Council, in collaboration with the Lambeth Schools Partnerships and youth councillors, should create a working group to address structural racism experienced by young Muslims. This group should include the police, local Muslim schools, mosques and other Muslim organisations. It should raise awareness about the existence of Islamophobia, explore how to tackle Islamophobia and counter negative media narratives.

The working group should:

- Work with Lambeth schools to help them devise guidelines, policies and materials highlighting Islamophobia and how to tackle it.
  - Increase celebration of Islam Awareness Month.
  - Work with Lambeth Council, the Lambeth Schools Partnership and Governors forum to create opportunities for school staff training on the faith-related needs of Muslim pupils.
  - Explore the benefits of expanding faith-based secondary education provision for Muslim students in the borough.
- 4** Lambeth Council should support school governing boards to follow best practice guidance on recruiting a diverse range of governors. This includes auditing the diversity of governing boards, using independent recruiters, advertising through a wide range of channels, and focusing on skills-based recruitment. Governing boards should be given guidance and training on how to provide high quality inductions for new governors and how to create inclusive cultures.
  - 5** Lambeth Council should encourage schools to celebrate Latin American Heritage Month.

## PARENTAL ABILITY TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

- 1** Lambeth Council should work with secondary schools, sixth forms, and colleges to equip school staff with the required knowledge of immigration statuses and student finance eligibility to effectively advise pupils and parents. Parents and pupils should be supported to access advice and guidance like that provided by **Refugee Education UK** and to apply for funding opportunities like Sanctuary Scholarships.
- 2** Lambeth Council and Lambeth Citizens should continue their work to achieve recognition for Lambeth as a Living Wage Place by the Living Wage Foundation.
- 3** Lambeth Council should host an English as an Additional Language forum to bring together school staff to share learning and best practice.
- 4** Lambeth Council should produce an accessible explanation of the education system and translate this into languages spoken in the borough (including Portuguese, Spanish, Somali and Polish) and add these to their website.
- 5** Lambeth Council should encourage schools to promote **Blackbullion's** financial skills courses, which are free for both young people and parents and cover university funding.



## MENTAL HEALTH

- 1** Lambeth Council should create a working group with Lambeth Citizens to enable the implementation of the **South London Listens' action plan**. This includes establishing ten Be Well Schools in Lambeth and working with the NHS to embed mental health practitioners in community organisations.
- 2** Lambeth Council should work with the Lambeth Schools Partnership to encourage all Lambeth schools to employ a mental health lead to oversee a whole-school approach to pupil mental health.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to all the organisations and individuals that took part in the listening campaign.

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