



Rethinking the Route:

**Why Gen Z Are Turning
Towards Skilled Careers**

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Foreword

Sally Austin, Group HR Director

At Barratt Redrow, we meet remarkable young people every day - curious, practical, and determined to make a start in life that they can be proud of. They're also navigating a tough landscape: rapidly changing workplaces, rising living costs, and a maze of career choices that can feel overwhelming. That's why I'm delighted to introduce this year's National Apprenticeship report.

The findings you'll read are both encouraging and grounding. Nearly one in two Gen Z respondents tell us they're likely to choose an apprenticeship over university, led by the promise of hands on experience, earning from day one, and avoiding student debt. It's a clear signal that young people want practical routes into good work and financial independence and that our industry is well placed to provide them.

We also see a shift in aspiration. Young people feel that skilled trades are the most aspirational job type

and believe that trade roles will out earn office roles by 2030. The research is candid about perceptions of corporate life: long hours, stress, boredom and meetings crop up frequently, and many say the traditional "ladder" isn't for them.

While we continue to welcome people to Barratt Redrow from all routes and a wide range of roles, apprenticeships work for young people, for our communities, and for our business. They help us answer two national challenges at once: the need for skilled people and the need for paid on-the-job learning.

We'll keep expanding our programmes, making progression transparent, and partnering closely with schools, colleges and local organisations so more young people can see themselves building a future here.

If we keep the promise clear and the pathway simple, more of Gen Z will choose to build with us and together we'll create the skills, homes and opportunities this country needs.

Key findings: Gen Z

48%

of Gen Z are likely to choose an apprenticeship over university.

Top drivers:

hands on 40%



earn from day one 37%



avoid debt 29%



Career priorities:

good pay 46%



work life balance 35%



pride 30%



job security 24%



46%



say the most aspirational job type is a **skilled trade**

Gen Z expect trades to **out-earn** office jobs.

Key findings: Teens

Only 22%

of teens are interested in pursuing an **office-based management role**



48%

say concerns about AI and automation have made some office-based jobs **less appealing**



More than half (51%) of teens said climbing the corporate ladder is “**not for them**”.

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Nearly two-thirds of teenagers say being able to afford a home matters more than having a high-status job title



28%

say earning **enough to buy a home** is one of their biggest worries about the future

Methodology

Based on a survey of 2,000 Gen Z participants across the UK, conducted by Censuswide between 29 December 2025 and 5 January 2026, this report provides a clear, data driven picture of what young people want from work, skills and the future. Participants were aged 13-28, with insights specific to teenagers drawn from the 13-19 subset.



What Gen Z wants

If there's one thing this generation makes clear, it's that they are not idealistic dreamers - they are practical decision makers. Gen Z approaches their careers with a sharp eye on financial realities, personal wellbeing and long term stability. They want security, balance and pride - not just a payslip.

When asked what matters most in a future career, the top responses show a generation with both ambition and pragmatism:

- Good pay (46%)
- Work life balance (35%)
- Feeling proud of what I do (30%)
- Job security (24%)



Chris Bailey, Group Skills Development Manager said: "This is not a cohort solely chasing status symbols or vague notions of

"success." They want work that pays fairly, allows them to live a life outside the job, delivers a sense of purpose, and gives them long term stability.

"Crucially, these are exactly the outcomes that high quality apprenticeships within the construction sector are designed to deliver. Structured training, real responsibility from day one, recognised qualifications and clear progression frameworks mean young people can see and feel their growth."



Luke Mckend, Managing Director at Stepstone Group, Totaljobs

"What's coming through very clearly is that early-career workers are thinking long-term much earlier than previous generations. They're not just looking for a first job, they're looking for reassurance that the organisation they join is prepared to invest in them and support their future.

"Pay still matters, but it's only one part of that picture. Our data shows that construction is already one of the UK's highest-paying sectors, with a median advertised salary of £45,000, and strong early earning potential in skilled trade roles. But younger workers are just as focused on what comes next – visible career pathways, regular progression conversations, and genuine investment in training and development.

"When those opportunities aren't clearly communicated, even well-paid roles can feel uncertain, and people are more likely to look elsewhere. In a sector facing well-documented skills shortages, that clarity really matters.

"Employers who help people understand how today's role leads to tomorrow's career, and who back that up with fair pay, structured development and long-term prospects, will be far better placed to attract and retain the next generation of talent."

What keeps Gen Z awake at night

Their worries are equally telling, and they paint a picture of young people trying to navigate a job market that feels uncertain. When asked what worries them most about their future career the top responses were:

- Choosing the right career (27%)
- Being able to buy a home (27%)
- Getting or finding a job (24%)
- Mental health (23%)
- AI or automation taking jobs (16%)

The top two concerns hold a mirror up to today's economy: a generation unsure about the "right path," and deeply anxious about whether they will ever afford a home. Add to this, worries about job availability, mental wellbeing and the rising tide of automation, and the challenge becomes clear, young people aren't just looking for a job, they want certainty for their future.



Blake Noble – 18, Carpentry & Joinery Level 3 Apprentice, Driffield

"I didn't want to spend three or four years sitting in lecture halls and coming out with student debt. This way I'm earning while I learn, gaining proper skills and real experience – and I'm already out-earning some of my mates."

Totaljobs' 2026 Salary Trends Report reveals that construction stands as the third highest-paying sector, with a median salary of £45,000 - up 3% year-on-year and matching that of Banking and Finance. Demand is especially strong for site operations managers, whose salaries range from £45,000 to £72,800.

Alongside strong pay, the industry is recognised as a leader in pay transparency. Employee sentiment backs this up: construction workers report an 86% salary satisfaction rate, the second highest of any sector, just behind tech.



Teenagers: Where Gen Z's career priorities intensify

Within the broader Gen Z landscape, teenagers stand out as the group where these attitudes and anxieties are strongest. Their expectations for future careers are shaped by financial pressure, uncertainty about the changing world of work, and a desire for stability and pride in what they do.

Half of teenagers (50%) say good pay is the most important factor when thinking about their future career. This is followed by work-life balance (37%), feeling proud of what they do (33%), and job security (27%). In comparison, status or job title holds little weight, selected by just 8%.

As the UK's largest housebuilder, it is of course no surprise for us to see that housing plays a major role in this mindset. Nearly two thirds of teenagers (65%) say being able to afford a home matters more than having a high status job, while more than a quarter (28%) say earning enough to buy a home is one of their biggest worries about the future.

These concerns are reshaping how teenagers view their career routes. With 40% believing trade jobs will earn more than office jobs by 2030, it's unsurprising that 47% say they are choosing an apprenticeship over university, even when their parents took the academic route. This marks a significant shift from three years ago when, 68% of 16-24s reported a stigma around apprenticeships compared with higher education.

What we're seeing is not just a change in preference but a reframing of what a successful career looks like.



Jessica Richardson – 20, Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice, Lincolnshire

"I have always been drawn to bricklaying because of the outdoor nature of the work and the sense of achievement it brings. I like the idea of being able to build a house or a wall and then look back and see what I've achieved."



A clear break from parents' career paths

The findings point to a clear break from the career paths of previous generations, with teenagers actively rejecting the traditional markers of success associated with office-based roles.

61% of teenagers say they want a very different career path from their parents, while half (50%) say job titles matter less to them than they did to their parents' generation.

Toby Leigh – Carpentry Apprentice

Toby Leigh is a carpentry apprentice who chose a practical career over university after seeing the long-term impact of student debt on people around him. Before securing his apprenticeship, Toby worked in labouring and landscaping and initially explored engineering.

"I always knew I wanted a hands-on job," he explains. "A lot of people I know went to university, built up debt and then struggled to find work afterwards."



**Ravinder Dusanjh – 47,
Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice,
Leicester**

"I chose a career in construction because it feels future proof. With so much talk about AI and automation, I wanted a path where my skills will always matter. Construction is hands on, human, and creative. No machine can replace the problem solving and teamwork that goes into building something real. It gives me confidence that the work I'm learning today will still be needed tomorrow."

Where apprenticeships fit in:

1. Financial stability from day one

Paid training removes the financial cliff edge of full time study and builds independence early.

2. A clear, supported route through the career maze

Progression ladders, mentoring and recognised qualifications reduce the anxiety around "choosing right."

3. A credible path to major life milestones

Earning while learning accelerates saving towards deposits, driving licences, rent and long term financial goals.

4. Real experience that beats the fear of job scarcity

With hands on work, apprentices graduate with experience, not just potential a huge advantage in a tight job market.

5. Skills that feel resilient in an age of automation

Future uncertainty is also playing a role, with almost half of teens (48%) saying concerns about AI and automation have made some office-based jobs less appealing.





Sheldon Cooper – 28, Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice, Haddenham

Sheldon began his career at university in 2019, completing two years of study before the Covid pandemic disrupted his course. During that period, he took up labouring work on a construction site and quickly realised he preferred practical, hands-on work. He made the decision not to return to university and instead pursued a trade.

Since starting his apprenticeship in September, Sheldon says the level of structure and support has been a standout. "There's clear progression and people around you who genuinely want you to succeed."



Social media is shaping perceptions

58% of Gen Z have seen trades, DIY or building content on TikTok, Instagram or YouTube. These aren't polished advertisements, they're: day in the life clips, transformations and before/after builds and real people sharing real experiences.

And young people are responding well. These raw, authentic glimpses make skilled work feel human, achievable and genuinely interesting. They cut through

stereotypes that have persisted for generations.

Short, real life stories aren't just entertainment they're reassurance. They show the variety, creativity and progression that traditional messaging hasn't always captured. This presents an opportunity for businesses looking to engage with young people in a more natural, unfiltered environment.

Chris Bailey, Group Skills Development Manager said:



"When young people watch someone their own age learning a trade, solving problems and taking pride in the results, it suddenly becomes real and relatable. Seeing that journey helps them imagine their own."

Construction through Gen Z's eyes

As young people rethink what success looks like, construction is well placed to meet their career priorities, though awareness of the sector still has work to do. Just 7% of Gen Z and 9% of teens say they are most interested in working in construction, despite the industry offering many of the things young people say they value most.

What young people value	What construction offers
Good pay	Strong early earnings
Job security	Chronic skills shortages
Practical work	Core strength
Pride	Visible, tangible outcomes

To help address this and support more young people into the industry, Barratt Redrow is announcing 186 new apprenticeship vacancies as part of National Apprenticeship Week 2026, offering young people the chance to earn while they learn and progress into long-term careers in housebuilding.



Meet some of our apprentices



Ravinder Dusanjh – 47, Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice, Leicester

Ravinder Dusanjh, 47, is a Bricklaying Level 2 apprentice based at Wigston Meadows in Leicester and someone who came to an apprenticeship later in life.

A former frontline infantry soldier in the British Army, Ravinder left the forces due to family commitments and later worked as a lorry driver. In 2018, he suffered a serious cycling accident that resulted in a traumatic brain injury, forcing him to step away from physical work.

After several years of recovery and volunteering, Ravinder enrolled on a Level 1 bricklaying course. Despite setbacks, his confidence and ability steadily returned,

leading him to secure an apprenticeship and return to site-based work.

“This apprenticeship has genuinely changed my life. After everything I’ve been through, being back on site, learning a trade and feeling part of a team again means more than I can say. The support, the structure, the flexibility, it’s all helped me rebuild my confidence. I’m proud to be part of the Barratt Redrow family and proud of the future I’m building, brick by brick.”



**Jessica Richardson – 20,
Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice, Lincolnshire**

Jessica Richardson, 20, is a Bricklaying Level 2 apprentice working at Wigmore Park in New Waltham, Lincolnshire.

Originally from Hertfordshire, Jessica moved to Lincolnshire a year ago and is now building her career on site. She says she has always been drawn to bricklaying because of the outdoor nature of the work and the sense of achievement it brings. "I like the idea of being able to build a house or a wall and then look back and see what I've achieved," she says.

Jessica chose an apprenticeship because she wanted a trade for life. When the opportunity arose with Barratt Redrow, she applied immediately. "I grabbed it with both hands," she says. "I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do, and I was lucky enough to be chosen."

She describes bricklaying as challenging but rewarding and says the apprenticeship has given her a clear path into a long-term career in construction.





**Sheldon Cooper – 28,
Bricklaying Level 2 Apprentice, Haddenham**

Sheldon Cooper, 28, is a Bricklaying Level 2 apprentice based at The Maltings in Haddenham, South East England.

Sheldon began his career at university in 2019, completing two years of study before the Covid pandemic disrupted his course. During that period, he took up labouring work on a construction site and quickly realised he preferred practical, hands-on work. He made the decision not to return to university and instead pursue a trade.

Since starting his apprenticeship in September, Sheldon says the level of structure and support has been a standout. “There’s accommodation when you’re at college, clear progression and people around you who genuinely want you to succeed.”

For Sheldon, bricklaying offers the satisfaction of being involved from the very start to the very end of a build – seeing tangible results from his work.



Blake Noble – 18, Carpentry & Joinery Level 3 Apprentice, Driffield

Blake Noble, 18, is a Carpentry and Joinery Level 3 apprentice based at Mortimer Park in Driffield, East Yorkshire.

Just four months into his apprenticeship, Blake is already certain he made the right decision – particularly as many of his friends are only now starting university. Always hands-on, he knew early on that a classroom-based route wasn't for him. "I didn't want to spend three or four years sitting in lecture halls and coming out with student debt," he says. "This way I'm earning while I learn, gaining proper skills and real experience – and I'm already out-earning some of my mates."

Coming from a non-university background, Blake says the biggest surprise has been how quickly he was trusted on site. Rather than being limited to basic tasks, he was straight into learning and practising his trade. Several of his friends have since told him they wish they'd chosen an apprenticeship too, not least because he's already earning great money.





To find out more about life at Barratt Redrow visit:
barrattcareers.co.uk