



The Top Five Challenges Facing Young People Leaving School this Year

1. A rapidly changing job market and increasingly irrelevant education

The workplace that our young people are entering has radically changed. We have moved from the Information Era into the Conceptual Era; from a left brained job market to a right brained job market - and this is only going to continue. Forecasters suggest that approximately 60% of the jobs our students will be doing don't yet exist! No longer do people leave school and enter a career for life. In fact the average person leaving school this year will have 14 different jobs by the time they are 38! Never before in history has this been the case. A huge proportion of jobs have already been automated and no longer exist. This is going to continue as computers and artificial intelligence develop or as workers in LEDCs can do the same jobs remotely for less money. Google are already trialling AI call centre robots that could replace the 300,000 people in the UK currently employed in call centres.



Since the job market has largely called for left brained functions - analysis, function, logic, activity - our education system has exercised and developed this left brain. A traditional curriculum develops it very well. Unfortunately our curriculum does not exercise to anywhere near the same extent the right brain - the creative side, communication, art, people skills, design and innovation. Yet this is where the future job market lies. A market which is already seeing unprecedented numbers of start-ups maximising the possibilities afforded by the internet and a global marketplace. It's a job market our young people aren't prepared for.

How is it that a student can leave 12-14 years of mandatory education with not one single lesson on how to go about setting up your own business? And what about the transferable skills that are going to be necessary to switch careers or generate new business like adaptability, people management, how to work effectively in team, how to use initiative and creative thinking. Our curriculum and academically focussed education system has developed a generation of young people that have some good GCSEs but little preparation to apply that knowledge in the real world. We have been telling them how important their GCSEs are. It won't take them very long to realise that what we told them wasn't true.

2. Increasing inability to manage emotional wellbeing in a smartphone society.

The world health organisation now believes that 1 in 5 young people will self harm. The figure amongst adolescent girls is higher: 1 in 4. The NHS reported that hospitalisations due to self harm have increased by 68% amongst girls and they attributed this to a large extent to be due to increased use and abuse of social media. 32% of young people admit to having suicidal thoughts at sometime or other. Suicide is the biggest killer of men aged 20-49 in England & Wales. Society has changed enormously and our young people are not coping with those changes. And we are not providing them with the strategies and tools to manage their emotions and maintain balance in life. A generation of parents (myself included) is desperately trying to navigate the world of

parenting children who are addicted to social media and gaming. Parents have no roadmap for this. It's brand new. Our schools provide patently inadequate education on sexting and awareness of the dangers of the internet and social media. And I am yet to come across a school that is actively teaching children how to self regulate their use of social media and screens.

Schools are beginning to recognise the significance of mental health but much of our provision is reactive rather than pre-emptive and preventative. Pastoral staff in schools are overwhelmed by the need and feel powerless to 'get ahead of the game'. The very culture of schools and the teaching profession is unhealthy and the workload unsustainable for a balanced life. Good teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers because they cannot sustain the pace and pressure they are under. We are modelling an unsustainable and mentally unbalanced lifestyle. We end up being a part of the problem, exacerbating a culture of busyness, imbalance and emotional exhaustion that hinders our wellbeing and our ability to form and sustain healthy relationships.



3. Inability to form and sustain healthy relationships

Without doubt the greatest cause of pain, heartache, unhappiness and trauma in life is our relationships. Yet these are also the greatest source of our happiness and overall wellbeing. As human beings we need relationships and our relationships are arguably the greatest achievement of our lives. So why no education about them? Essentially when we are lying on our deathbeds many years from now, none of us will be asking for the framed certificates of our achievements to be brought to the bedside. We want the people we love, the people who know, us to be there. But how do we make our relationships work? How do we build healthy ones? What are the 'secrets' to making relationships last. Statistically almost half of all the young people we teach will, after marrying, get divorced. 67% of those who remarry will get divorced again. And of those who make it to a third marriage 74% will divorce again! The fallout from these divorces is massive! How many children are caught in the crossfire of these statistics? Hundreds of thousands. The breakdown of a parental relationship is one of the most traumatic experiences a child can encounter.



Why are we not helping our young people to understand how to communicate effectively and listen to each other? Why are we not showing them how to handle and resolve conflict? How to manage their emotions? How to develop empathy and understand how people work? And then there's sex! A recent survey by the BBC showed that 55% of people said porn was their main source of sex education. At last count, despite a decade of 'sex education' there has been no change in the overall number of new diagnoses each year of STIs. An increase in the use of emergency contraception. An increase in the number of abortions and an increase in the

number of teenage pregnancies. Not to mention the extent of early sexual activity that took place without consent (but which will never be reported). A culture that is still so sexist and misogynistic that young girls continue to draw their value or self worth from how they are perceived sexually by boys and men. Not to mention the genuine confusion over sexuality and gender identity that drives some to suicide and many others mental health disorders.

It's not more condom demonstrations and scary STI pictures that students need. It's some education about trust and self respect. Some education that questions the messages portrayed by the media and the sex industry. Some space to ask questions and think and reflect.

4. An increasingly unfair and fragmented world driven by a neo-conservative elite

The book and film series *The Hunger Games* a future is depicted where the world's population is divided into thirteen 'districts'. The richest district is called 'The Capital', the poorest is District 13. There is no movement between districts and no real hope for greater prosperity or success for those born in poor Districts. Each District has its function in the great big wheel of the future economic society. District 13 mines the coal for the power used in the Capital. Is this a depiction of the future? Or is this a commentary on the present? Over a fifth of the world's population live on less than £1 per day. There is little to no hope for those born into the world's poorest nations of ever achieving a more prosperous life. Social mobility even in the UK is lower now than in the Year 1900. Western nations are seeing increasingly vocal far right wing, nationalist groups call for governments to shut their borders. In some of these countries these groups now occupy a significant place in government or have risen to take office and set a nationalist, far right wing agenda. The *Hunger Games*' version of society isn't fiction, it's reality.



The terror threat is still being used as a justification for binning the notion of universal human rights – replaced by a British Bill of Rights to take its place. The very real danger is a world which has enshrined in law the idea that some humans have more rights than other humans. Once revolutionary and freedom guaranteeing democratic systems of government are creaking under the pressure of big money, media advertising and social media bot campaigns. Our democratic systems weren't designed with big media in mind. Our students don't know how our system works, where to get information, how to use their voice and how to participate in the political process and how to guard themselves

against the threats of fake news and media coercion. They don't know that the freedoms they take for granted are not a given, that the future is theirs to shape and create, that they can influence the future direction of the world by being informed and empowered.

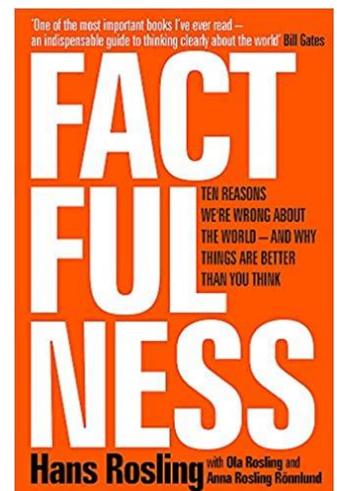
5. Finding true meaning and morality in a multifaith, post-truth, media driven world.

Mark Manson in his book *Everything is F*cked. A book about Hope* suggests that, *"Hope is the fuel for our mental engine... without hope, your whole mental apparatus will stall out or starve.... We spiritually die... The opposite of happiness is not anger or sadness... No the opposite of happiness is hopelessness, an endless grey horizon of resignation and indifference."*

As I have travelled round the country and spoken to students, especially post Covid, I have found a growing sense of hopelessness amongst young people. "What's the point?" This indifference is the culmination of a perfect storm of factors: political disillusionment and distrust of government (Brexit, partygate etc), the awareness of mass injustice (BLM and Everyone's Invited), a climate emergency and political complacency about it, an education system which is patently unfair, a pandemic and its ongoing fallout... which includes the family breakups and conflict which significantly undermine wellbeing. And all the time our daily addiction to negative news stories skews our view of reality.

How do we know what to believe? We are bombarded with conflicting messaging even from previously trusted sources. How do we know who is telling us the truth? Without trust and security our young people feel adrift and alone in a world of uncertainty.

Ironically the truth is very different to what is presented on the news. Hans Rosling in his brilliant book *FACTFULNESS* demonstrates that on almost every imaginable measure the world is in a better state than it was and is getting better. And yet in a study of people in 30 different countries the majority (ranging from 60% - 90%) in **every single country** said they thought the **world is getting worse!**



As educators we have a duty to both tell our students the truth and infuse them with the hope they need to look up, dream big and move forward!

My READY programme is designed to address each of these challenges and help teaching staff do the same. Get in touch to discuss how.

Relationships & Sex

Emotional Wellbeing

Aspiration and Employability

Direction & Hope

Your Voice – Politics & Human Rights

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