

**Written evidence submitted by Leaders Unlocked on behalf of the Student  
Commission on knife crime in London (BYC029)**

**About the Student Commission:**

The Student Commission on knife crime in London is a partnership between Leaders Unlocked and 7 leading colleges in London. The project has brought together over 30 of their students from across 22 London Boroughs.

The Commissioners are engaged in a social action project that supports the colleges anti-knife crime initiatives and tackles the serious issue of knife crime in their local communities.

The Student Commission had their inaugural meeting in January 2019 and is an ongoing project.

**Which Colleges are involved?**

Barnet & Southgate College, Lewisham Southwark College, London South East Colleges, New City College, Newham Sixth Form College, Westminster Kingsway College and West Thames College

**About Leaders Unlocked:**

Leaders Unlocked are a non-profit social enterprise whose work is invested in supporting young people to take social action on matters that most affect their lives. ([www.leaders-unlocked.org](http://www.leaders-unlocked.org))

For more information about the Student Commission please get in touch with project lead Alev Zahir: [alev@leaders-unlocked.org](mailto:alev@leaders-unlocked.org)

## Terms of Reference:

The below is a **capture of verbatim quotes and comments** which the Student Commission has made during their work together looking at knife crime in London.

## General

### 1. How is knife crime affecting a) public services b) health services c) schools d) emergency services?

**Knife crime is affecting colleges in a number of ways.** The Student Commission on knife crime in London was a project for young people in Further Education institutions. Commissioners have been delivering a workshop they developed with students and have **gathered the views of 407 of their peers.**

The 407 students were asked to react to a number of statements to including:

#### a) *The issue of knife crime affects my well-being e.g. mental, physical, emotions.*

- 16% strongly agreed
- 34% agreed
- 31% neither agreed nor disagreed
- 11% disagreed
- 8% strongly disagreed

#### b) *The issue of knife crime has an impact on my ability to reach my goals.*

- 8% strongly agreed
- 19% agreed
- 35% neither agreed nor disagreed
- 24% disagreed
- 14% strongly disagreed

#### c) *I know where to go for support in my college if I experience a knife crime issue.*

- 26% strongly agreed
- 50% agreed
- 13% neither agreed nor disagreed
- 9% disagreed
- 2% strongly disagreed

**Safety in College:** “My college have a lot of measures in place to protect young people: security are invested in their job, an incident where gang members came to the college looking for another young person the college called the police and got the young person a cab home in order to keep him safe.”

# Young people

## 1. What motivates young people to carry knives?

The Student Commission on knife crime identified **16 key motivations and influences** on young people carrying knives. They are:

Fear and Protection, Poverty, Lack of respect and tolerance for each other, Lack of good role models, Gangs and revenge, Peer pressure and family influence, Influence of music, Lack of trust in the government & the police, Money, Status, Cuts to youth clubs and youth services, Drugs, Mental health, Labelling and low self-worth, Unemployment or lack of meaningful purpose, Social media

## 2. Is fear a motivator for young people who carry knives? What causes this? What can be done to address it?

**Yes, fear is a motivator for young people who carry knives.** The Student Commission identified fear as one of the main motivators for young people to carry knives. **Fear can be caused by many different factors.**

- **Mental Health and well-being:** *“The emotional aspect of being in London is intense and young people feel constantly on edge.”*
- **Lack of trust in the police:** *“Many young people do not feel protected by police and have to protect themselves.”*
- **Involvement in criminality:** *“Selling directly involves violence and therefore you have to protect yourself. The police will not protect you if you are selling drugs.”*
- **Relationships with peers:** *“People are dying over some words that are being said.”*
- **Area you live in:** *“Being from different postcodes, invading territory.”*
- **Real or perceived threat:** *“Young people are becoming part of a gang to protect themselves.”*

Through their work the Student Commission are developing a number of **solutions which address fear in young people for example:**

**Safe Spaces:** The use of community spaces such as a colleges to be open in evening hours for use by young people.

These spaces would provide a number of different services e.g. workshops to build resilience and self- esteem, job workshops and access to work experiences and sports.

The space and would be run by professionals, college staff and young students. This would provide a space for young people to go in the evening when they are often on the streets and feeling vulnerable.

College students would be trained to work in the service both providing them with employment and key skills for future employment. Students often have part time jobs alongside they're courses which can cause conflict with their academic learning.

Trust would be built between the young people and staff which would lead to more disclosures being made by students about real and perceived threat or other factors the young people may be facing which lead to them being afraid.

**Recruitment of Intervention and Support Coaches in Colleges:** These staff work with young people who are most at risk of not attending due to behaviour issues/risky behaviours.

Students should be trained to be involved in the recruitment process of these staff to ensure they are relatable to as this is key to trust and rapport being built. If the relationship is good between staff and student, then this can have a big impact. They are more likely to talk about any anxiety they may have which leads to them carrying a knife.

Students could also be used as peer mentors in this role e.g. using the members of the Student Commission as mentors to work with at risk students within their own colleges.

### 3. Is there any evidence that gang culture, social media and/or music impact young people's involvement in knife crime?

The Student Commission discussed **Drill music and if it had an impact on young people's involvement in knife crime.**

- **NO:** *"Drill music is a reflection of reality rather than encouraging violent behaviour."*
- **NO:** *"Taking out drill music could cause even more problems because of a lack of a way to express themselves."*
- **NO:** *"Music is a way of life and is a motivation to do better and succeed."*
- **NO:** *"Footballers and black rap/hip-hop artists are targeted by the media and discredited. Blaming drill for knife crime is just another example of that."*
- **NO:** *'Each wave of increased media presentation of knife crime is linked to different subcultures involving music or fashion. However, the real reasons and the complexity of the subject is ignored.'*

- **YES:** *“A lot of drill music is influencing young people to commit crime because of ‘baiting out’ other gangs and leading to wanting to prove their authority or protect their territory. Not responding to messages targeted at their gang may lead to boosting the other artists following rather than theirs and lead to them losing their ‘clout’.”*

## Prevention

### 1 What could be done to make young people less likely to a) carry knives b) commit knife crime?

The Student Commission **has developed recommendations which would make young people less likely to carry knives and commit knife crime.** They cover a range of themes including: mental health and well-being, youth services, unemployment, the role of professionals, families and relationships, communities, confidence and self-esteem and education.

They are continuing to gather insights from students across London which will generate and further develop existing solutions.

- **Mental Health:** *“The issues are not spoken about enough, it’s an underlying issue, if you’re not providing help such as mental health, then you will not prevent knife crime, we can raise awareness and get people talking about it – if teachers talk about it to it will have a positive effect.”*
- **Youth Services:** *“Growing up everyone met up at the youth club, everyone met up, there’s no one else to meet, in winter time it gets dark and that’s when bad stuff happens, if we got the youths to campaign to government – they are on the street till late hours with their friends – what is our chance with this project to effect cuts to youth services.”*
- **Jobs and Careers:** *“Being without jobs and being worried about jobs, you can get influenced by other people – we are all young, the ones who have job they feel good but the ones who don’t we can help them to get into something.”*
- **Education:** *“Within Colleges there should be programs in place which boost your confidence and self-esteem. This would build resilience in students and teach them the skills to respect each other.”*

## Intervention

### 1 How effective are positive role-models in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity?

The Student Commission have told us that **role models can be extremely effective in deterring young people from gang and criminal activity** for a number of reasons.

- **Empathy and understanding:** *“Having a mentor, who understands you and relates to you can really make a difference. Some people just need a person to speak to, to change”*
- **Self-confidence and aspiration:** *“Labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy leading to becoming what you are told you are. We need examples to look up to, to aspire to. And people to believe in us.”*
- **Opportunity:** *“A lot of young people are not so confident, don't have enough people telling them they are worth more, there's stuff out there for them.”*
- **Trust:** *“Some doctors speak to you to understand your story and try to relate, there is someone to listen. Having the one-on-one experience. Having the blood wiped off you and realising you saved my life; it leads to trust.”*
- **Trust:** *“If you only see someone once it's not going to stick or have as much impact – you might feel inspired in the moment, but it wouldn't necessarily last. It needs to be an on-going relationship with someone you trust.”*
- **Peer to peer impact:** *“We can be role models to the youngsters as older students.”*

Whilst **reviewing colleges knife crime interventions** the Student Commission were positive about the **use of role models with lived experience**. Particularly those working with young people identified as at risk or known to have gang associations and/or carry weapons.

- They felt that these staff will be an inspiration to those who want to change.
- Feelings of lack of judgement encourage the students to feel comfortable in being open and honest.
- They can provide emotional support as well as sound advice.
- Builds a sense of community and that 'someone cares'.

Inviting **role models and influential figures** e.g. Akala and Stormzy to particular college events is also positive as it:

- Provides students with inspiration and insight into how to overcome hardship
- These types of events can feel like a reward for students and encourage engagement from those at risk of dropping out of college

**2) Are the police's stop and search powers effective in promoting safety and/or putting young people off carrying knives?**

The Student Commission discussed the police's stop and search powers and **most did not find them effective** in promoting safety and or putting young people off carrying knives.

- **Lack of trust in the police:** *"I feel like there's always going to be a feud between teens, gangs and police – they think one gang wears tracksuits then every youth that wears tracksuits they are going to stop them."*
- **Lack of trust in the police:** *"What I see on my phone is what I'm gonna go with, if I see police being racist on my phone, if I can't move down my road, I'm not gonna trust them."*
- **Discrimination:** *"Stop and search often is discriminatory and Asian and black people are targeted."*
- **Profiling:** *"You always match the description, most youths in my area wear the same thing."*

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