

A woman with long blonde hair is wearing a VR headset and a dark jacket over a striped top. She is standing in a virtual environment with a blue grid floor and walls. In the background, there are glowing blue and purple lines and a large, stylized, colorful object that looks like a futuristic helmet or a piece of machinery. The overall lighting is dark with vibrant blue and purple accents.

Social mobility inside the Metaverse

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1.

Looking to the future

Developments in technology have already transformed how we work today. But looking to the future, the pace of change is set to accelerate dramatically. At the EY Foundation, a charity in the UK that supports young people from low-income backgrounds to prepare for work, we want to understand the potential implications of new technology on social mobility.

An area of particular significance is the Metaverse, a technology so emergent it doesn't have a commonly agreed definition. But predictions of five billion unique Metaverse users and an economic value of [\\$8-13 trillion by 2030](#) make it impossible to ignore.

At its most basic level, the Metaverse is the evolution of the internet to become more 3D and more closely resemble how we interact with each other in the physical world. And whatever it goes on to become, many of the ingredients for socialising and working within 3D immersive environments exist today.

Gaming platforms like Fortnite and Roblox are leading the way in building this new way of living, but it is about much more than entertainment. For example, the retail sector is already using the Metaverse to [create immersive experiences](#) for its customers. And as this approach is adopted by businesses more widely, it will change the way we work. What impact will this have on future jobs and social mobility? Will working across physical and virtual worlds create new risks or unlock new opportunities?

There is an urgent need to keep pace with the implications of this new technology on social inclusion and this report is the start of that journey.

Note: 'Metaverse' is used throughout this report as shorthand for 'emerging 3D immersive experiences'.

2. Young people collaboration



Our objective is to provide a new perspective on the action needed to ensure the Metaverse is accessible for young people from low-income backgrounds. To ensure insights also responded to location-specific issues, this report draws on the experiences of young people living in Greater Manchester.

Our approach

We built on the 'Humans@Center' project pioneered by the [EY Metaverse Lab](#), who have worked alongside artists with diverse lived experiences to bring creativity and an alternative, non-technical mindset to the potential implications of the Metaverse. This fresh perspective generates new insights into what might happen when technology and people come together in this new world.

For this project, we worked with local award-winning young artist, [Alina Akbar](#), who ran a series of 'Metaverse and work' themed workshops (see Annex for workshop overview) with seven young people from a low-income background, aged between 17 and 23 years old. The reaction of the young people to their immersion into this new world led to the recommendations included in this document.

Drawing on her lived experience, Alina is also working with EY Metaverse Lab to produce an augmented reality Metaverse experience based on a local corner shop. This piece of technology-led art will be designed to help make emerging 3D worlds more accessible for marginalised communities.

Working in partnership

Though this report's recommendations are the responsibility of the EY Foundation, this project has only been possible because of the close support of our partner organisations:

- ▶ EY Metaverse Lab – provided one-to-one mentoring for Alina, helped to shape and deliver the workshop content, and produced Alina's corner shop concept.
- ▶ Ofcom – the UK's communications regulator has a statutory remit to develop [media literacy](#) and is the lead sponsor. Related Ofcom activity in this area includes their recent report, [Future technology and Media literacy: The Metaverse](#).
- ▶ School of Digital Arts (SODA) at Manchester Metropolitan University – hosted the workshops and will produce an academic report in response to the workshops in early 2024.
- ▶ EY Manchester – shared Metaverse expertise and supported delivery of the workshops.



3. Project insights

Before considering the potential impact of the Metaverse, the young people explained that they are regularly confronted by barriers preventing them accessing employment opportunities. This included an absence of quality careers advice and a low level of employability skills training. As a result, their reference point for a future career is centred on what they see within their community. This impacts aspiration and can mean not pursuing the jobs young people want to do.

This insight at the start of the project provided important context to their engagement in the Metaverse and raised an immediate question about whether this is another opportunity that isn't designed for them? For young people at school or college – with competing demands for their time that can involve caring responsibilities and part time work – is it realistic to expect they will invest time and money exploring this technology?

By running a series of workshops, which included hands on experiences with the technology and insights from industry experts, these reservations could be tackled and overcome. But that won't be possible for every other young person who has a similar background and shares similar concerns. So, generating the motivation to engage will be a crucial first step to unlocking the potential of this technology.

Opportunities

These quotes from the young people during the workshops provide an overview of the core opportunities and challenges they identified:

“

The Metaverse feels like a place which could remove barriers to getting a much deeper understanding of different jobs. It could totally change work experience so that a young person can access a diverse range of roles in any industry they want to explore.

“

Making new work connections can be tough and this could be a way to get over that barrier. It would be great if I could use this technology to meet new people and build my own networks, which normally is difficult to do without family connections.

“

Can this technology be used to change how we learn? Immersive skills training should mean that learning methods can be adapted in response to different needs. For example, perhaps a visual learner could learn through 'doing' rather than reading an article.

Challenges - quotes from the young people

“

Unless you get the chance to experience what it's like to be in the Metaverse, it's hard for young people from communities like mine to know if it is relevant to them. So will there be support to help them find out about the sort of jobs that might be available in the Metaverse?

“

Lots of the technology is expensive, so that's an immediate barrier that will stop people using it. Is there anything that can be done to make sure people who can't afford the latest devices can continue to use the Metaverse as it grows and develops?

“

It's hard to know what skills will be needed to work in the Metaverse and how to learn them, so it would be good to know where I can go to develop the skills I need to succeed in this space.

4. Recommendations



At both a societal and organisational level, this project has highlighted the potential of the Metaverse to reimagine our approach to improving social mobility. It offers new ways to unlock opportunities for young people – irrespective of their starting point in life. For employers, it provides the chance to build a more inclusive workforce work, bringing the associated benefits of more diverse teams, such as increased innovation, productivity, and staff engagement.

In responding to the opportunities and challenges identified by the young people, the recommendations include systemic action for policymakers and bespoke action by organisations developing their presence in this environment.

For each recommendation, policymakers and organisations should work directly with young people from low-income backgrounds to ensure the action they take responds to their hopes and concerns about what the Metaverse can become.

Intrinsic motivation

A question regularly raised throughout the workshops was, ‘why is the Metaverse relevant for someone like me?’. To create the motivation to engage, the Metaverse must connect with the lived experience of a sector of society often excluded from the opportunities others take for granted. It is important to show that the Metaverse provides opportunities for ‘people like them’ and is a place where people from their community can thrive.

Creating an internal desire to act is referred to as [intrinsic motivation](#) in behavioural science. But the onus to act differently doesn’t sit with young people who have often been marginalised and ignored. Instead, it is for wider society to remove the obstacles put in their way. How policymakers and organisations can help unlock an internal drive to engage in the Metaverse is the overarching focus of our recommendations.

Sitting underneath intrinsic motivation, are four enablers to build social inclusion:

- ▶ **Awareness:** Know how the Metaverse can impact the future of work
- ▶ **Accessibility:** Ensure easy access to immersive experiences in the Metaverse
- ▶ **Skills:** Understand the skills needed and how they can be learned
- ▶ **Networks:** Opportunity to build new work-related connections

In addition to the suggested actions below, we recommend a follow-up piece of research to better understand how to build intrinsic motivation in the Metaverse amongst young people from a low-income background.

Awareness

Build understanding about how the Metaverse will influence the future of work and why a young person from a low-income background should engage in this new technology.

Policymakers

- ▶ In schools and colleges, the Metaverse should be used to accelerate progress against the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#), which sets standards for careers guidance in the UK. This should include a Metaverse education programme to demonstrate how new technology might impact the future of work.
- ▶ Work experience offered by schools and colleges should use immersive technology to extend the range of opportunities available, ensuring young people can access work placements in the roles they want to pursue.

Organisations

- ▶ Development of an organisation’s presence in emerging 3D worlds should evolve in parallel with consideration of how young people from low-income backgrounds will be supported to understand and engage with their company.
- ▶ Make immersive work experience opportunities freely available for young people who wouldn’t normally be aware of the roles that might exist within the organisation.

Accessibility

In the future there should be universal access to the Metaverse.

Policymakers

- ▶ Establish a minimum standard for all employment related Metaverse environments and experiences to ensure there is a version accessible by a mobile phone.

Organisations

- ▶ Ensure insights from a diversity of lived experiences is incorporated into the design, development, and build of new Metaverse environments.

Skills

The skills requirements for people entering the Metaverse will constantly evolve. In response, young people should be given the support needed to prepare for an unpredictable future.

Policymakers

- ▶ In England, integrate Metaverse employability skills training requirements into the government's [Local Skills Improvement Plans \(LSIPs\)](#), which have been introduced across 33 regions.
- ▶ Incorporate Metaverse training into the government's [skills bootcamps](#) programme, which bring employers and training providers together and are designed to develop the skills needed for the labour market of the future.
- ▶ Work with Metaverse developers to identify the skills needed to thrive in this environment. This includes technical, such as 3D modelling, computer programming and VR development and employability skills, such as media literacy, which is the ability to use, understand and create media online. These skills should be regularly reviewed and used by providers to deliver skills training programmes. Local authorities should work with community-led organisations in areas with high levels of deprivation to ensure skills training support is available to groups who otherwise may become excluded from the Metaverse.

Organisations

- ▶ Engage in the region's LSIP to ensure post-16 technical education and training responds to the emerging labour market needs in the Metaverse.
- ▶ Provide freely available training programmes that develop the Metaverse-related skills needed in their sector of the economy.

Networks

Building a network of work-related connections is often crucial to accessing employment opportunities for young people.

Policymakers

- ▶ Work with [local careers hubs](#) to create networks of diverse and relatable Metaverse career 'influencers', who reach out to excluded communities to introduce the implications of working in an immersive 3D world.

Organisations

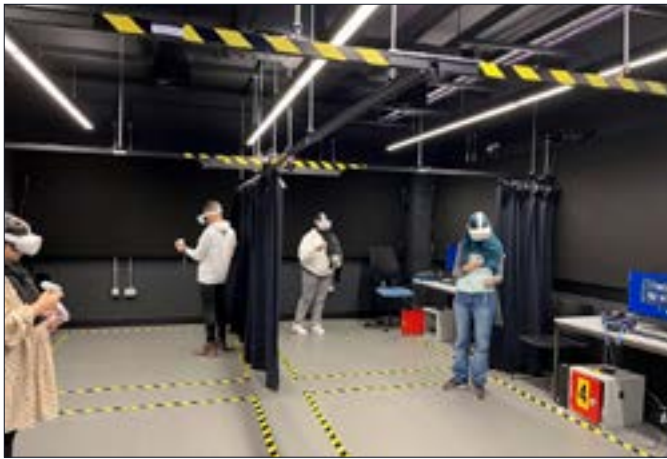
- ▶ Use participation in existing mentoring programmes to develop awareness of emerging job opportunities in the Metaverse.

Get involved

There is a significant potential for the Metaverse to unlock new career opportunities for young people from low-income backgrounds, proving the chance to break through the barriers imposed by a low level of social mobility.

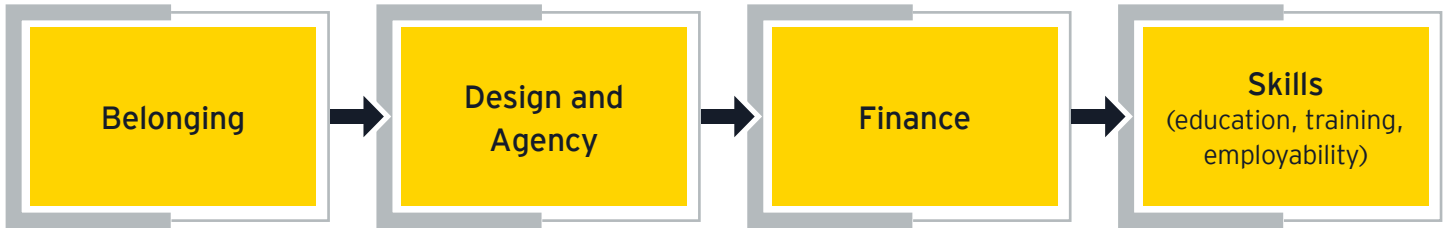
We recognise too that this report is just the start in identifying how this vision can be achieved. We welcome support from others to help promote, implement, and further develop these recommendations.

Young people experiencing the metaverse during a workshop at the School of Digital Arts, Manchester Metropolitan University.



Annex: Workshop overview

The workshops were underpinned by the discussion of key themes:



<p>Monday, 3 July 2:30-4:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Project introduction and exploration of employability challenges for young people from low-income backgrounds in today's world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The artist introduced the project and shared her 3D immersive corner shop framework. Other examples of the Metaverse were shared. ▶ The artist led the discussion on what social mobility means and explored the employability challenges in today's world for young people from low-income backgrounds.
<p>Tuesday, 4 July 3:00-4:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Understanding and exploring the Metaverse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ EY Metaverse expert introduced the Metaverse in more detail. ▶ The artist led the immersion session as the young people explored the Metaverse from laptops.
<p>Wednesday, 5 July 3:00-4:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Discussion of Education, skills and employability challenges and opportunities in the Metaverse in an AI infused world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ofcom provided insights into their broader regulatory role and the importance of media literacy. ▶ The artist led the discussion on the challenges and opportunities the Metaverse may present for young people from low-income backgrounds.
<p>Monday, 10 July 3.00-4.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Metaverse immersion session and discussion of themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The artist and a SODA VR expert led a Metaverse session using SODA VR tools whilst ensuring integrated into the broader discussion. ▶ EY Metaverse Lab team joined the discussion remotely.
<p>Tuesday, 11 July 3.00-4.30 p.m.</p>	<p>Finalising the recommended actions for government and tech cos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Session led by the artist and supported by EY Metaverse Lab.

About the EY Foundation

The EY Foundation is a UK registered charity that works directly with young people, employers and social entrepreneurs to create or support pathways to education, employment or enterprise. EY Foundation operates and is incorporated independently of EY and is governed by a separate trustee board.

The EY Foundation is a charitable company registered in England and Wales and Scotland with registered charity number 1157154 and SC045076. It is also a member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited.

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