Northern Gas Networks

Young Innovators Council

Session 4: Intergenerational Fairness

September 2026

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

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1. Executive Summary

Session 4 of Northern Gas Networks' (NGN) Young Innovators Council (YIC) explored intergenerational fairness, asking how the costs, risks and benefits of long-term investment should be shared between customers today and customers in the future. The YIC considered three approaches:

- Option 1: keep today's bills down
- Option 2: spread the impact
- Option 3: pay back more sooner

They also examined how these choices could be affected by uncertainty about future investment needs, the future role of gas and the number of customers remaining on the network.

The young people recognised that no approach was entirely fair. They were conscious of current cost-of-living pressures but were reluctant to solve these by leaving future customers with disproportionate costs, particularly when those customers may have had no influence over today's decisions or may receive less benefit from the investment. The panel therefore felt fairness should consider who pays, who benefits and who could be left behind, rather than simply treating each generation equally.

The panel stressed that sharing costs fairly does not necessarily mean dividing them equally. Protecting vulnerable and lower-income households was a consistent priority, particularly where customers may be unable to afford a transition away from gas and could be left sharing network costs between fewer households. They also wanted investment decisions to remain flexible as evidence about technology, demand, affordability and future network requirements changes.

The YIC's initial preference was to share investment costs across current and future customers. However, they did not see fairness as a fixed or equal split. Their support depended on affordability, the benefits each generation receives, protection for vulnerable households, and the risk that a smaller future customer base could face disproportionate costs. Discussion of future uncertainty increased support for recovering costs sooner in some circumstances, reinforcing the need for regular review rather than a single permanent approach and indicates that the preferred balance may shift where delaying recovery could leave a smaller and potentially more vulnerable future customer base with disproportionate costs.

Overall, the YIC called for shared but proportionate responsibility. They wanted investment decisions to balance affordability today with responsibility to future generations, protect those least able to manage higher costs, support environmental progress, and maintain safety and reliability. Clear communication about where customers' money is going, what benefits investment will deliver and how different voices have influenced decisions was also seen as essential to a fair and transparent approach.

2. Overview of session

Background to the Young Innovators Council

2026 is the sixth year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC panellists continue to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks, and the business ensures that these young people's thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of decision making.

This year started with 42 YIC panellists, 15 of whom are continuing from last year and the remaining 27 are new to the YIC. This balance of retention and renewal is positive, as a number of long-standing members from previous years have outgrown the age group for this panel. It ensures sustained engagement with youth voice and relevance to the current climate and their unique perceptions. 4 members have since given up their places on the panel, meaning that the panel currently has 38 members.

Background to the Session

Key question: How should NGN balance costs, risks and benefits between today's customers and future customers?
NGN makes decisions about maintaining and investing in gas infrastructure that can affect customers for decades. This raises questions about intergenerational fairness, meaning how costs, risks and benefits are shared between people paying bills today and people who may pay bills in the future. The Adult Customer Panel has already explored three approaches to paying for investment: keeping bills lower today, spreading the impact across generations, and paying more back sooner. This YIC session explored the same core choices and future challenges in a shorter, youth-friendly format. This will enable NGN to compare the views of current bill payers with those of young people who may become future bill payers.

YIC 2026 Session 4: Intergenerational Fairness

Date and time: Wednesday 9th September 2026, 5:15 - 7:00pm
People involved: 3 S4TP facilitators, 5 NGN facilitators, 1 external witness, 2 observers
Panel attendance: 27 **Panel non-attendance:** 7
Apologies: 4

Objectives:

- Explore what fairness means in the context of current and future generations.
- Understand how young people view benefits and burdens inherited from previous generations.
- Explore the same future challenges considered by the Adult Customer Panel.
- Understand whether further information changes young people's preferences.

Pre-work

- **Watch:** What is fairness?: https://youtu.be/HhVjfUO1gRc?si=R3m9iU4e9bdxhOMF
- **Read:** Underinvestment in the water industry - Water bill rises needed after years of low investment, says report - BBC News
- **Think about:** When you think about different generations in the UK today, how fair does society feel? Which generations seem to be doing best at the moment? Which generations seem to face the biggest challenges?

Agenda

5:15	Arrival
5:20	Welcome, "You said... so we...", session framing
5:29	Zoom poll: benefit or burden?
5:36	NGN expert witness presentation: the future of investment at NGN & intergenerational fairness
5:47	Zoom poll: what feels fairest before you discuss it?
5:54	Breakout rooms: three ways to pay for investment
6:20	Feedback from the breakout rooms
6:36	Zoom poll: what feels fairest now?
6:40	Zoom whiteboard: "A fair approach to investing in the gas network is one where..."
6:49	Plenary discussion
7:00	Wrap up, feedback form and finish

3. Attendees

Young Innovators Council

Aaliyah
Akorede
Akshat
Alice
Anna
Ashford
Divya
Dylan
Ellie
Ethan
Florence
Hiba
Ifza
Isabelle
Ismail
Jamari
Josie
Kat
Mojisola
Mubashir
Natalya
Nora
Orla
Sophia
Toby
Zahra
Zinedine

Solutions for the Planet

Amy Ackroyd	Big Ideas Programme Coordinator
Claire Fitton	Youth Insights Programme Manager
Fran Isherwood	Youth Insights Programme Coordinator (Maternity)

Northern Gas Networks

Emma Holman	Sustainability Reporting Lead
Alex Lawson	Net Zero Educator
Hollie Scott	Engagement Coordinator
Kati Sexton	Customer Care Officer
Jenny Wilkinson	Stakeholder Lead

Observers

Alan Lowdon	NGN's Independent Stakeholder Group
Nicola Shelley	NGN's Independent Stakeholder Group

4. Key Discussion Points

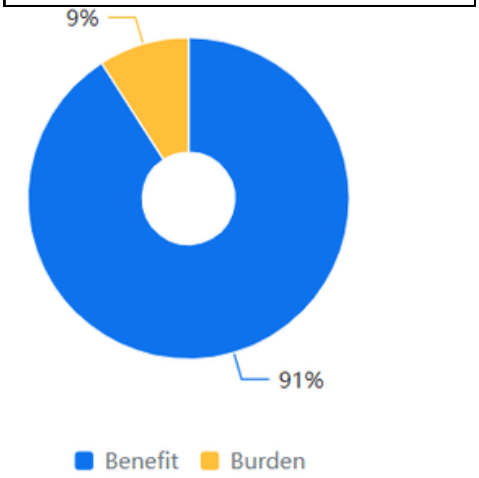
You said... so we're...

Hollie Scott, Northern Gas Networks' Engagement Coordinator, shared how the business has acted on the YIC's insights from Session 3 about improving access to opportunities for young people across their footprint. The panellists had highlighted that one-off school visits can have limited long-term impact, leading NGN to focus on building ongoing relationships with schools and community organisations through follow-up activities and sustained engagement. The YIC's reflections also emphasised the importance of hands-on learning, prompting updates to education programmes to include more practical activities, STEM challenges and real-world examples that help bring energy, engineering and net zero topics to life. In response to concerns about unequal access to careers information and employer engagement, particularly in rural areas, NGN has also expanded partnerships with schools and community groups to reach a wider range of communities and help ensure that where a young person lives does not limit the opportunities available to them.

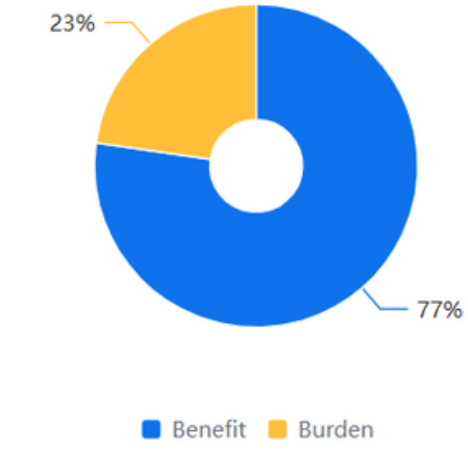
Zoom poll: benefit or burden

To help contextualise the concept of intergenerational fairness for the panellists, a rapid response Zoom poll asked them to decide whether younger generations have inherited 'Mostly a benefit' or 'Mostly a burden' for each of the following examples:

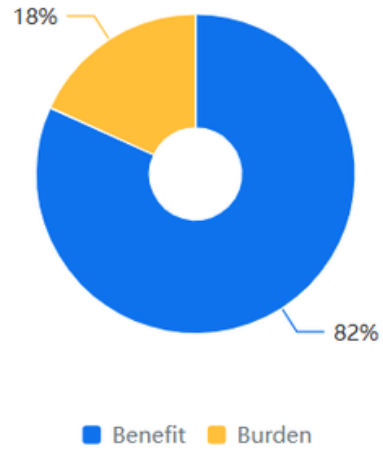
1. NHS and public healthcare



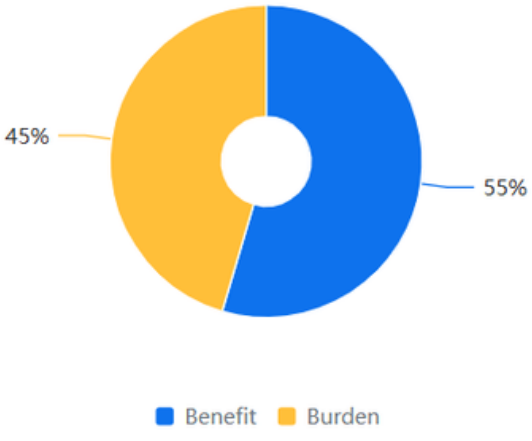
2. University and higher education



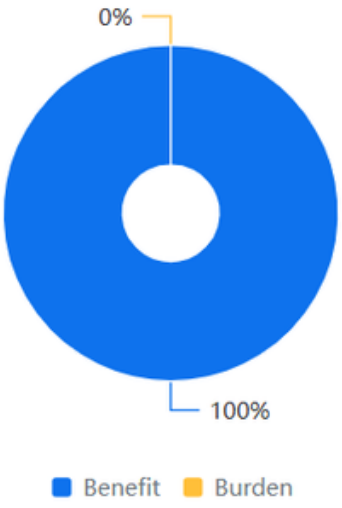
3. Social housing



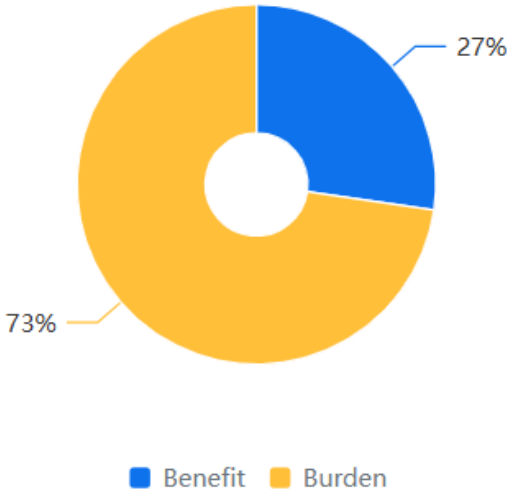
4. Water and sewage systems



5. Scientific and medical advances



6. Environment and climate change



The YIC's responses show that they feel most positively about what they've inherited from older generations when it comes to public services and scientific progress: they all saw scientific and medical advances as an inherited benefit, alongside 91% for NHS and public healthcare, 82% for social housing and 77% for higher education. On the other hand, 73% of the panellists felt they'd inherited a burden when it came to the environment and climate change. This is consistent with previous discussions around the urgency of the climate crisis with this group of young people.

NGN witness presentation

During the witness presentation, Jenny Wilkinson from Northern Gas Networks (NGN) introduced the concept of intergenerational fairness, exploring how the costs, risks and benefits of investing in the gas network should be shared between current and future customers. She explained that investment is needed to maintain and upgrade infrastructure, keep the network safe, and prepare for future changes in the energy system, but that decisions made today can affect customer bills for many years.

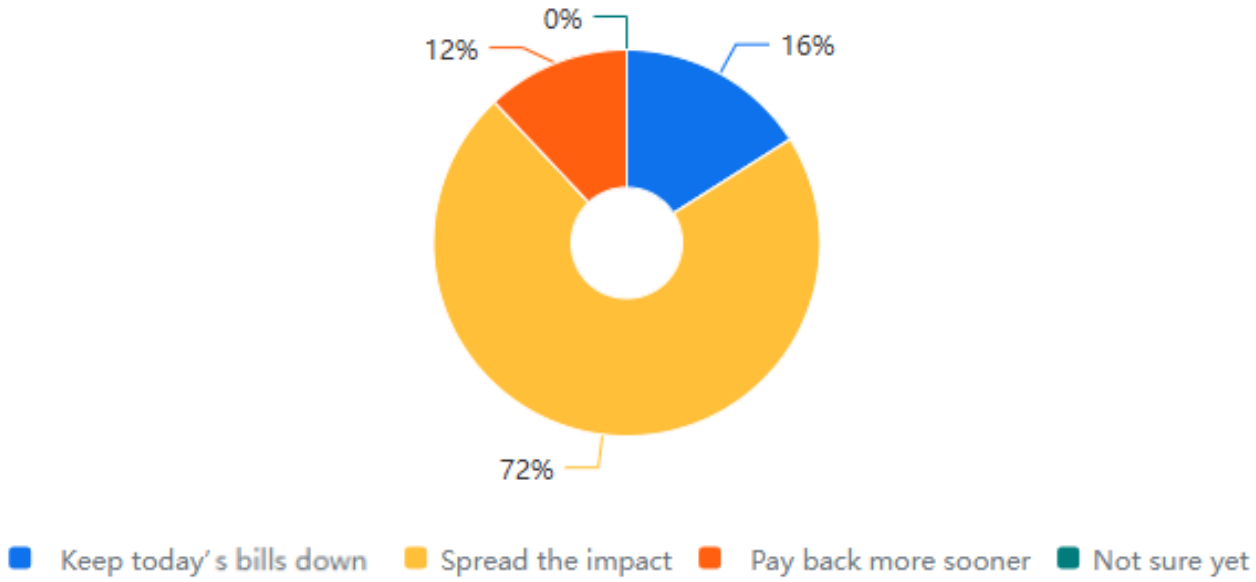
The panellists were invited to consider three possible approaches: keeping bills lower today by spreading costs into the future, sharing costs more evenly across generations, or asking current customers to pay more now to reduce future costs. Three key uncertainties that could affect these decisions were also highlighted: whether future investment needs may reduce as major pipe replacement programmes are completed, whether costs should be recovered more quickly if the future role of gas becomes less certain, and how costs might be shared if fewer customers continue to use the gas network.

Throughout the presentation, the young people were encouraged to reflect on questions of fairness, affordability and responsibility, particularly around who pays, who benefits and who could be left behind by different investment choices.

Zoom poll: What feels fairest before you discuss it?

Before discussing the future challenges in more detail in breakout rooms, the panellists were invited to vote on their gut reaction to the insights from the witness presentation by answering the following question:

Before you discuss them in more detail, which approach do you think feels fairest?



Breakout rooms: three ways to pay for investment

After this quick poll, the panellists were moved into three breakout rooms to discuss each of the future payment options, followed by one of the challenges associated with future investment planning. They were invited to discuss their reactions to each of the possible payment scenarios laid out by NGN and how fair they think each of them is. Questions that came up included:

- Is it right for future customers to pay more to help alleviate today's cost-of-living pressures?
- Does it matter that future customers may not have been involved in today's decisions?
- What are the strengths and drawbacks of taking a middle-ground approach?
- How concerned are you, if at all, about the impact this could have on households today?

Each of the breakout rooms was then asked to interrogate one of the three future challenges:

1. That the regulator might ask gas networks to recover costs more quickly, meaning customers pay more sooner/now to avoid future risk.
2. The large metal pipes replacement programme is ending and NGN might not need to spend as much on big upgrades in the future.
3. That as more customers switch to alternatives such as heat pumps, there may be fewer gas customers sharing higher costs.

The young people were asked to consider how nuanced decision-making could affect today's customers and future customers, including who pays for investment and when. It's also important to note that of course some of these discussions overlapped, because the issues are intrinsically connected and hard to separate.

The groups were asked to feed back to the main room which payment scenario they thought was fairest and why, which future challenge they discussed, and how this challenge impacted their views.

Across all three breakout rooms, the panellists spent considerable time weighing up the fairness of the three payment scenarios and discussing who should bear the costs of investment. They explored the trade-offs between the approaches and recognised that no option was entirely fair.

- Discussions centred on **balancing support for households facing current cost-of-living pressures with ensuring future generations are not left carrying disproportionate costs.** The panellists recognised the pressures many households face today due to the cost of living, but they were also reluctant to pass significant costs onto future customers who would have little influence over current decisions and may face their own financial challenges. Many felt that fairness should consider both who benefits from investment and who bears the cost, rather than simply treating every generation the same.
- **The option of keeping bills lower today and passing more costs onto the future received the least support.** While the young people acknowledged that lower bills could help households currently struggling financially, many felt it was unfair to place a greater burden on future generations, particularly given uncertainty about future economic conditions, inflation and energy use. Concerns were also raised that future customers could end up paying for infrastructure or services they may use less or not benefit from in the long run.
- **The shared-cost approach was most commonly viewed as the fairest option.** The panellists valued the stability and predictability it could provide and felt it avoided disproportionately disadvantaging any single generation. However, many of the young people challenged the assumption that equal costs automatically mean fair outcomes, noting that households have very different financial circumstances. They emphasised that fairness should take into account affordability and the needs of vulnerable customers, not just a simple equal split.
- **Views on paying more now to reduce costs for future customers were mixed.** Some young people argued that today's generation has a responsibility to address current challenges, particularly environmental issues, rather than leaving them for future generations to solve. Others felt paying more now could be justified if it supported investment in cleaner technologies or prevented future customers from inheriting costs for assets they may not use. However, there were significant concerns about the impact of higher bills on households already experiencing financial hardship, and some felt that substantial increases could be difficult to justify during a cost-of-living crisis.

Across all discussions, four consistent themes emerged: the importance of protecting vulnerable households, the difficulty of making decisions amid uncertainty about the future, the need to balance costs and benefits fairly between generations, and a strong desire to avoid leaving future generations with environmental or financial burdens created today. Overall, while opinions varied, the YIC once again demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the trade-offs involved and generally favoured approaches that shared responsibility while remaining sensitive to affordability and fairness.

Breakout room 1, Future Challenge 1: paying money back sooner to reduce future risk

Key discussion points

- Some questioned whether charges could simply be reduced if investment needs fall.
- Generally favoured spreading costs despite this uncertainty, citing the need to protect households facing cost pressures today.
- However, some felt that paying more now might be preferable because future circumstances are unknown and future generations may face even greater challenges.
- Several panellists emphasised that investments made today should continue delivering value in the future, such as supporting hydrogen infrastructure and environmental goals.

Key themes

- Uncertainty about future costs and economic conditions
- Fair distribution of benefits and costs over time
- Desire to ensure investments remain valuable in the future
- Environmental responsibility and support for hydrogen/net zero technologies
- Concerns about today's generation passing costs onto future generations

Feedback to the whole group

- This group preferred option 2: spread the impact, seeing sharing costs between current and future generations as the fairest and most balanced approach.
- Even with the challenge that the regulator might ask gas networks to recover costs more quickly, this approach was described as the “lesser of two evils”; it would help ease financial pressure on both present and future customers rather than placing the burden on a single generation.

Breakout room 2, Future Challenge 2: future costs may be less

Key discussion points

- Panellists expressed concerns about the impact of recovering costs quickly on households already experiencing financial pressure.
- Many felt that asking customers to pay substantially more now could be difficult to justify and risked creating hardship.
- Some argued that paying more now could provide greater certainty and avoid leaving costs to future generations, while others felt current customers should not shoulder the entire burden.
- Extensive discussion about affordability, household income differences and whether costs could be adjusted to support those least able to pay.
- Also considered how customers might react to significant bill increases, with some suggesting this could damage trust and create public backlash.

Key themes

- Balancing short-term affordability against long-term fairness
- Protecting low-income and vulnerable households
- Public acceptability and trust
- Shared responsibility across generations
- Potential need for income-based support mechanisms

Feedback to the whole group

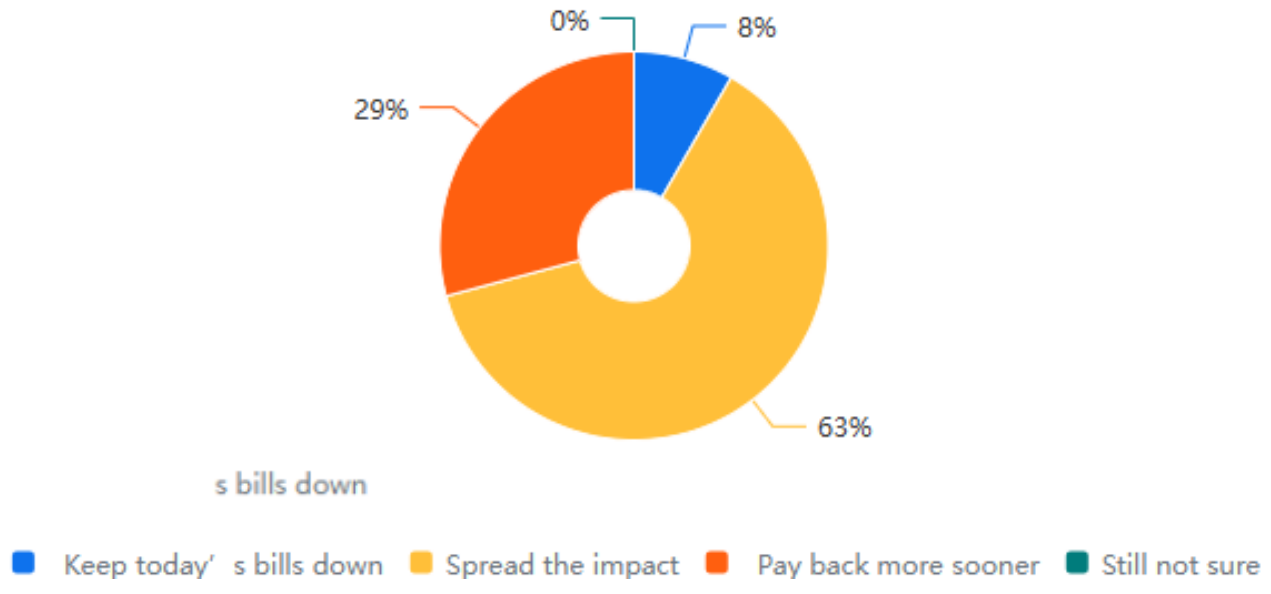
- The group ultimately preferred option 2: spread the impact, viewing it as the fairest approach across society.
- The future challenge ultimately reiterated for this group that so much about the future is uncertain, including future economic conditions, on top of NGN not needing to spend as much on future upgrades.
- This meant that whilst there were concerns that future generations could potentially overpay if circumstances change and costs reduce, any additional investment would still have value if it could support future energy transition projects, giving the examples of hydrogen or electrification.

Breakout room 3, Future Challenge 3: fewer people use gas, fewer people share the cost
Key discussion points • Concerns that customers who remain on the gas network could end up paying disproportionately higher costs, and that those remaining may be more vulnerable households who cannot afford to switch to alternative heating technologies. • Several young people changed their views on the preferred payment option after considering this scenario, with some moving away from a shared-cost approach and towards paying more now to prevent future customers being left with higher costs. • Others emphasised the importance of government support and targeted assistance for vulnerable households.
Key themes • Avoiding vulnerable customers being left behind • Fairness between those who can and cannot afford to transition • Concern about future affordability • Protecting future generations from disproportionate costs • Need for support mechanisms for low-income households
Feedback to the whole group • Began with the discussions holding lots of varying opinions, with a lean towards option 2: spread the impact. • After the introduction of the future challenge that there may be fewer people using gas, the majority ultimately supported option 3: pay back more sooner because investing more now could help avoid greater costs and challenges in the future.

Zoom poll: What feels fairest now?

The YIC was then asked to reconsider the question they were asked at the beginning of the session.

Now that you've discussed the ways to pay and possible future challenges, which approach do you now think feels fairest?



Before the breakout discussions, 72% of the panellists felt option 2: spread the impact (sharing costs between current and future customers) was the fairest approach, compared with 16% who preferred option 1: keeping today's bills down and 12% who favoured option 3: pay back more sooner. After exploring the trade-offs and future challenges in more detail, option 2: spread the impact remained the most popular option at 63%, while support for option 3: pay back more sooner increased to 29% and support for option 1: keep today's bills down fell to 8%. This suggests that the discussions prompted more young people to consider reducing the burden placed on future customers, although shared responsibility across generations remained the preferred approach overall.

Whiteboard activity *[all direct YIC quotes]*:

"A fair approach to investing in the gas network is one where..."
Everyone's needs and conditions are considered so that no one group is forced to pay significantly more for another and everyone can benefit from the service. Everyone should give what they can and get what they need.
Every generation is considered.
All customers, current and future, can benefit equally from investments made today for a more reliable and consistent gas network, so that no single generation is faced with the major upfront costs of improvement.
No one generation should have to pay an exponentially higher amount, whether it is now or later, regardless of future prospects.
Young people aren't left with unfair debt.
The vulnerable are more important.
Bills stay predictable and stable for people who are vulnerable or can't afford it.
Environmental progress isn't delayed.
Costs are shared proportionately.
All people, no matter their background or income, get a say in what happens to them and their bills, and all opinions and thoughts are considered equally, none are valued any more than the other.
Safety and reliability are protected.
Consider how the costs will have an overall financial and social impact on future generations. We should split them so they aren't having to deal with all of their previous generations' investments and decisions.

"A fair approach to investing in the gas network is one where..." [continued...]
Everyone has a voice in decisions.
There is a long term plan to ensure younger generations are not burdened with large costs.
All customers are considered in this regard, but keep them regularly informed on everything going on behind the scenes.
No one generation is disadvantaged.
Everyone has their ideas taken seriously or to the best of your ability.
The vulnerable and lesser off are considered just as much as high income customers.
There is fair and sustainable investment for every postcode and for every generation, funded through a progressive tax system.
The impact on young people is considered.
Both of the generations has problems for this, so we should keep it more equal and change how different people should pay depending on income.
There should be a fair investment, however the rich people should pay more, because this will allow the vulnerable people to pay less bills, because more money is coming, for the fairer energy, and maintenance of those resources.
Every customer is considered, both future and present, meaning that costs are balanced and shared across generations.
Neither generation gets disproportionately impacted in terms of cost and benefit relative to bills or other expenses which might arise.
The current generation is able to comfortably pay without compromising the ability for the future generation to also comfortably pay all without compromising the environment.
Overall, everyone has the lowest price that is possible now and in the future, without making any one generation pay significantly more. Importantly, nobody is severely disadvantaged by the gas price. Specifically communities within generations and generations as a whole. This could mean investing more now where it is possible so as to ensure lower prices in the future, so long as this doesn't disadvantage the current payers.

"A fair approach to investing in the gas network is one where..." [continued...]
All individuals benefit and no one is at an extreme disadvantage.
Everyone's opinions are heard and considered.
All groups should have a chance to learn about the different approaches and impacts and should be able to have a say about it.
It is sustainable, which means helping the world now so the future does not suffer. It's the same with climate change, by not making a significant change in the present impacts the future significantly both environmentally and financially.
Everyone contributes towards a greener future, however a deep consideration to more vulnerable people so individuals with more wealth should help in paying more now which is more sustainable for future generations and vulnerable people.
Everyone knows where their money is going at all times and what benefits these projects will bring.
Consumers have future security and know that the network has capacity to support them.
I believe the fact that the rich should pay more, may not be beneficial for UK economy, because I think that the rich people may not invest in the UK in the future, so it is not a long-term solution.
Where everyone is benefiting and also being able to afford according to their wage and necessary monthly wages taken into account.

As we see consistently with the Young Innovators Council, this whiteboard activity to complete the statement "A fair approach to investing in the gas network is one where..." reveals a strong emphasis on fairness, shared responsibility, and protecting those most affected by investment decisions. The panellists frequently call for costs and benefits to be balanced across current and future generations, with no single group disproportionately disadvantaged. They also stressed the importance of considering affordability and vulnerability, ensuring that decisions take account of different circumstances and do not create unfair financial burdens. Other commonly raised principles included giving customers a voice in decision-making, maintaining transparency about how money is used, supporting environmental sustainability, and ensuring investments continue to deliver safe, reliable and long-term benefits for both present and future customers.
Some of these YIC suggestions do lie outside of NGN's direct control, e.g. "a progressive tax system" or "the rich should pay more". Taken together, these comments reflect a broader concern among participants about affordability, distributional fairness and the protection of more vulnerable customers, although views differed on how this should be achieved.

5. Key Reflections for Northern Gas Networks

1. **Share the costs and benefits of investment fairly across generations.**

- Use a shared-cost approach as the starting point for long-term investment decisions, while reviewing the balance as circumstances change. This remained the preferred option for two of the three breakout rooms, and whilst the third breakout room leant towards paying more now, the YIC's dominant position is that there is a shared but proportionate responsibility, with protection for vulnerability, affordability and future risk.

2. **Protect vulnerable customers from disproportionate costs.**

- Assess who is most likely to struggle under each investment approach and ensure that customers with the least ability to absorb higher bills are not left carrying the greatest burden.

3. **Do not pass avoidable costs to future customers.**

- Avoid option 1: keep today's bills down where this would leave future generations paying significantly more, paying for longer, or contributing towards assets from which they may receive limited benefit. The YIC were particularly concerned that future customers would have had no say in the original decisions.

4. **Keep investment decisions flexible and under review.**

- Build uncertainty into decision-making and regularly reassess assumptions about future gas use, investment requirements, technology and affordability.
- Support for paying more sooner rose from 12% to 29% after the future-risk breakout discussions, suggesting again that YIC's preference is conditional: where fewer customers remain or NGN's future assets may have reduced value, earlier recovery may be viewed as fairer.

5. **Ensure investment continues to deliver long-term value.**

- The panel were more receptive to present-day investment when its future purpose and benefits were clear. Prioritise investment that can remain useful as the energy system changes, supports environmental progress and contributes to a safe, reliable and lower-carbon future.

6. **Make affordability, safety and sustainability core decision-making principles.**

- Young people did not see these as separate considerations and wanted NGN to balance them together.

7. **Be transparent about what customers are paying for.**

- Clearly explain why investment is needed, where customers' money is going, who will benefit and how NGN has assessed the trade-offs. Transparent communication will be particularly important where decisions could increase bills or distribute costs unevenly over time.

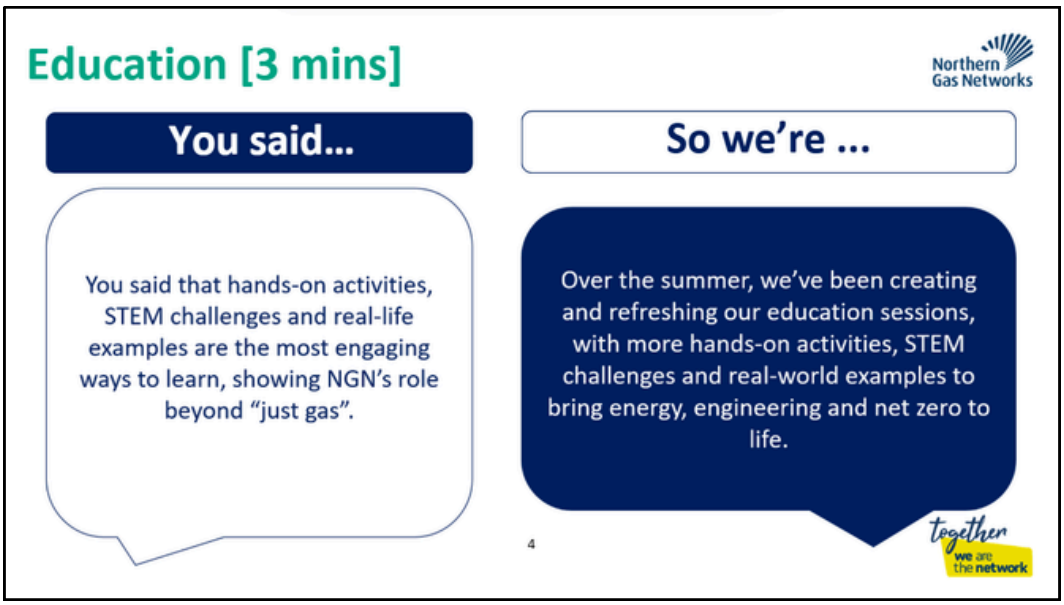
8. **Continue involving young people in long-term investment decisions.**

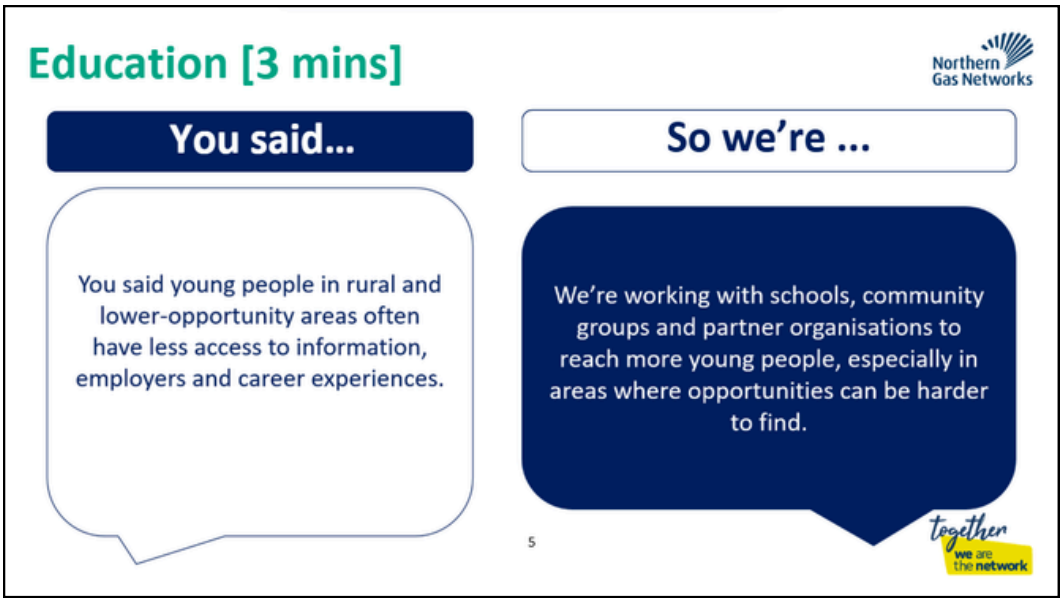
- The YIC wanted different groups to understand the available approaches, have their views considered and be kept informed about decisions made. Giving young people accessible information and meaningful opportunities to shape decisions whose consequences they may inherit was important to the YIC.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: 'You said... So we're' slides from the Session.

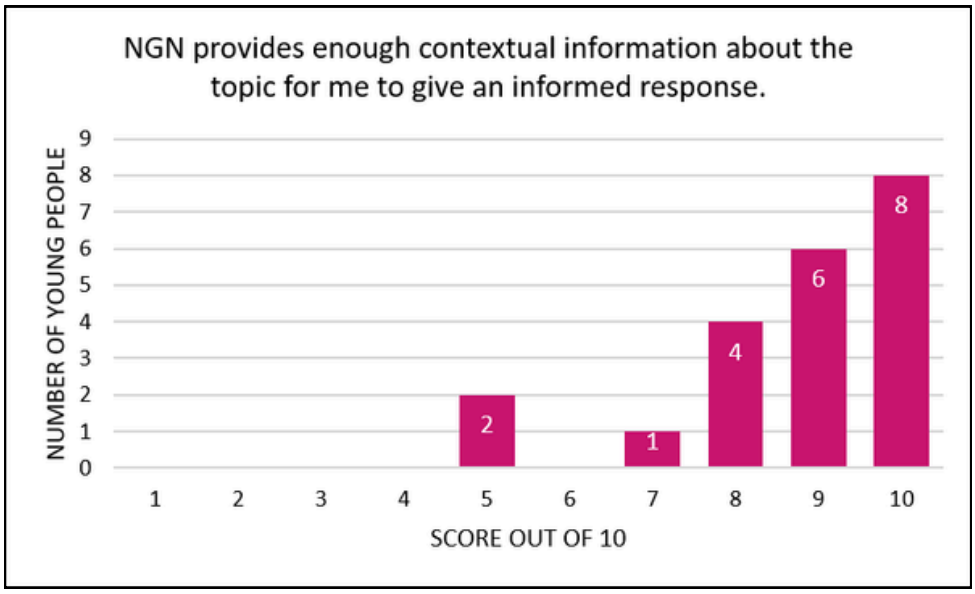




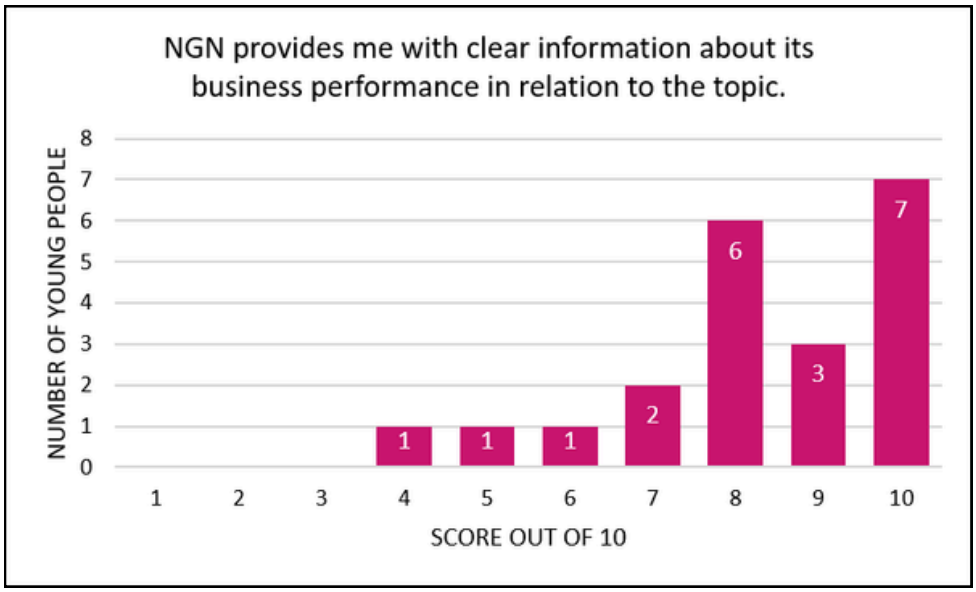


Appendix 2: Post-session Feedback Survey on NGN Engagement. As of 30/09/2026, 21 of the 27 who attended have completed the survey.

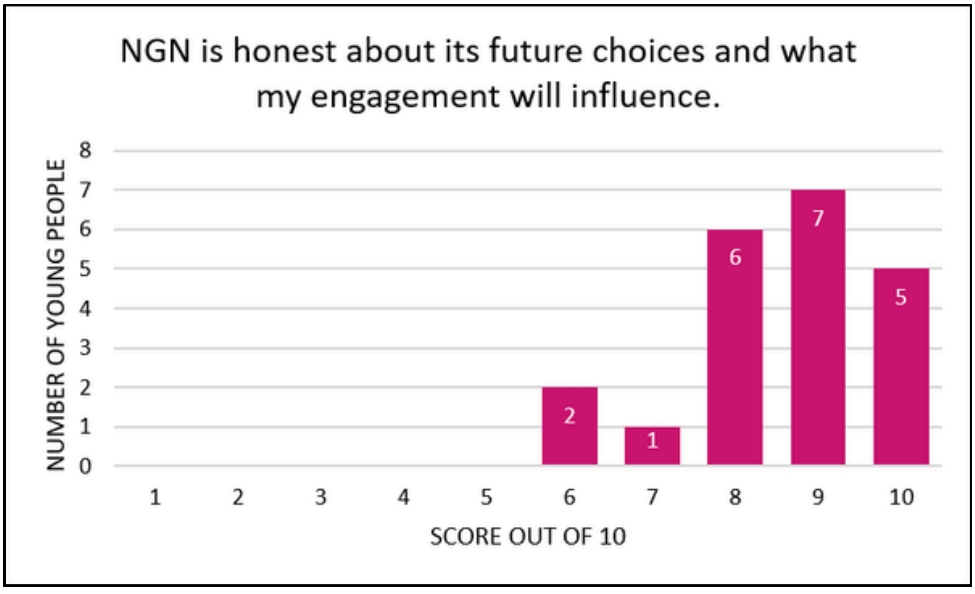
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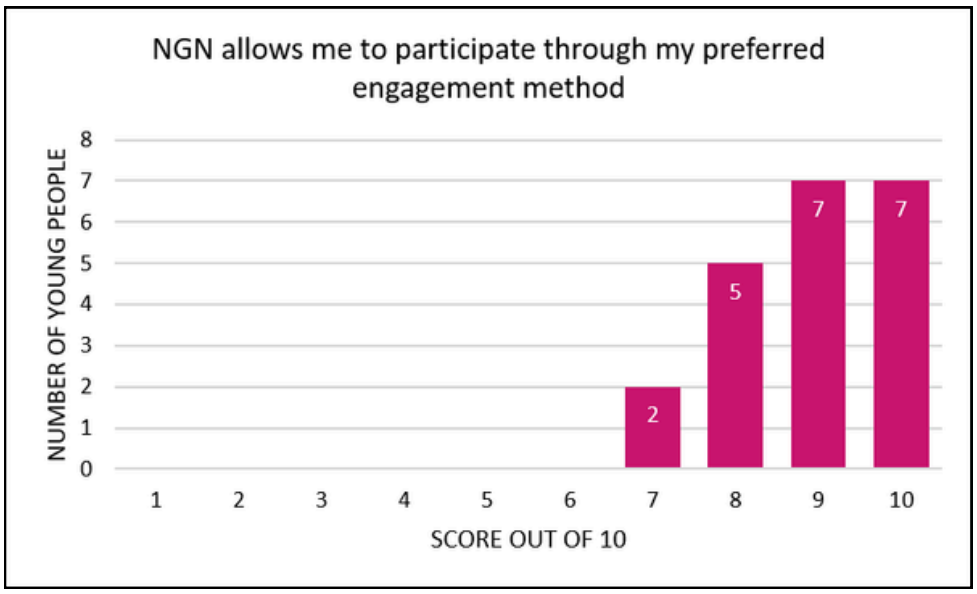
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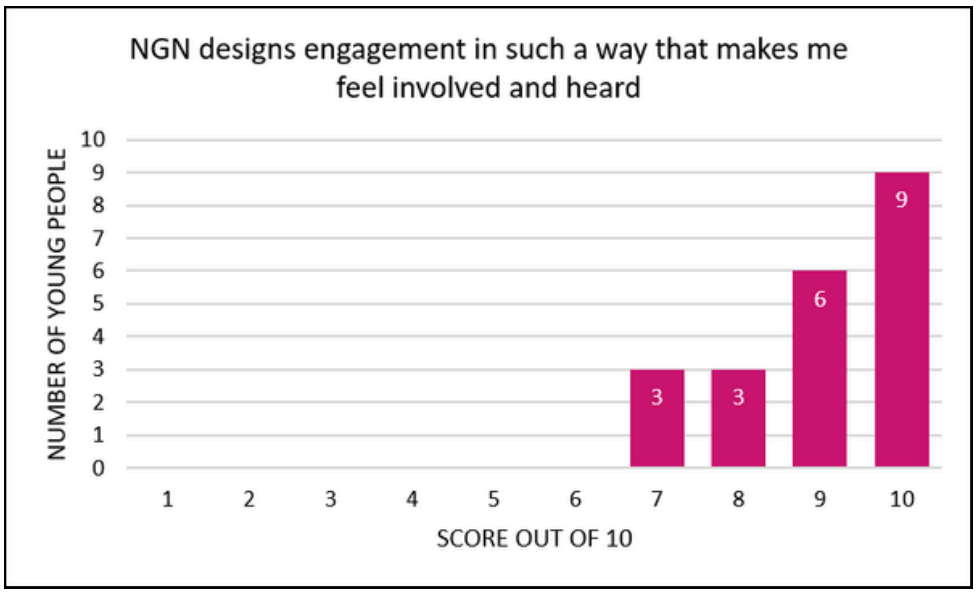
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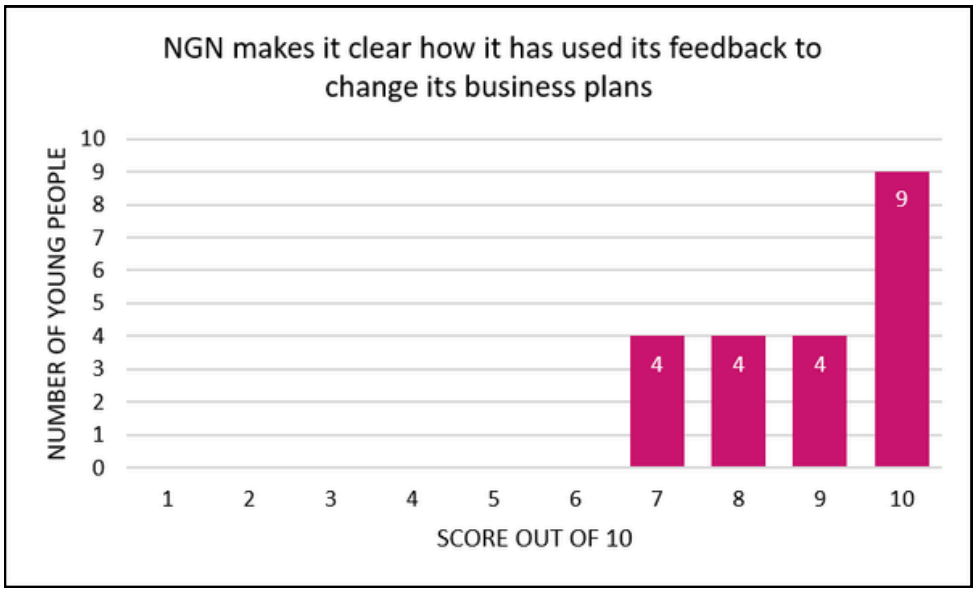
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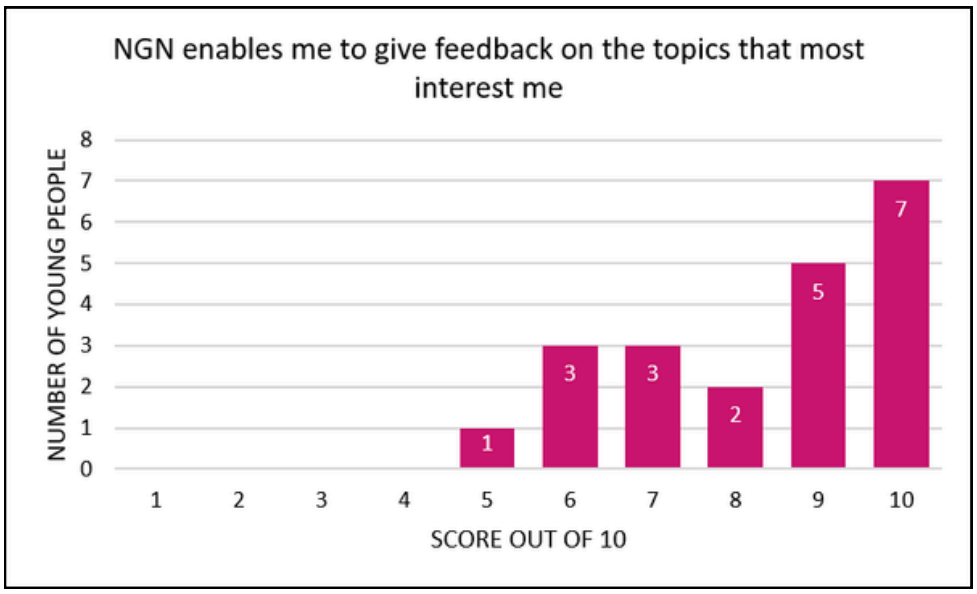
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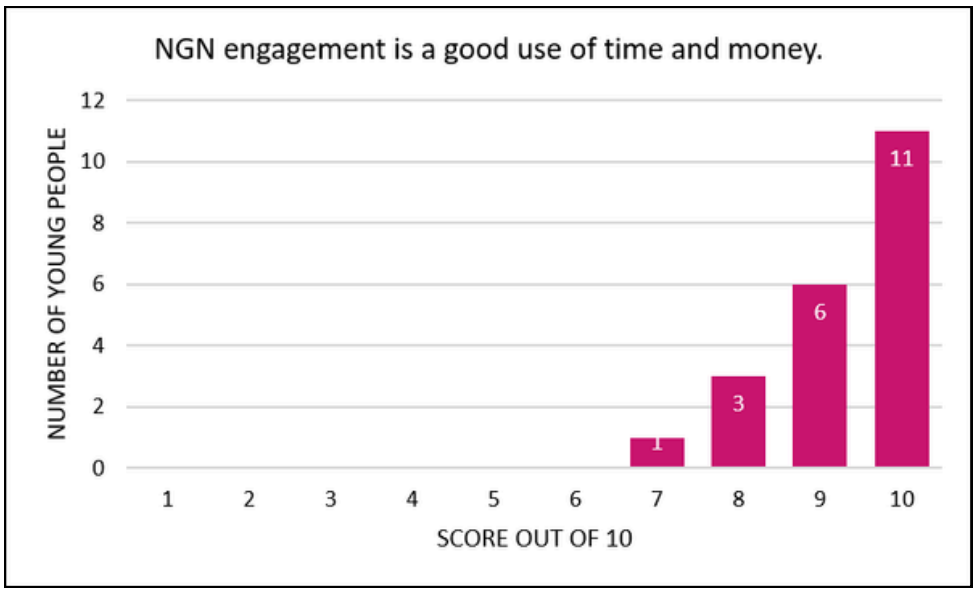
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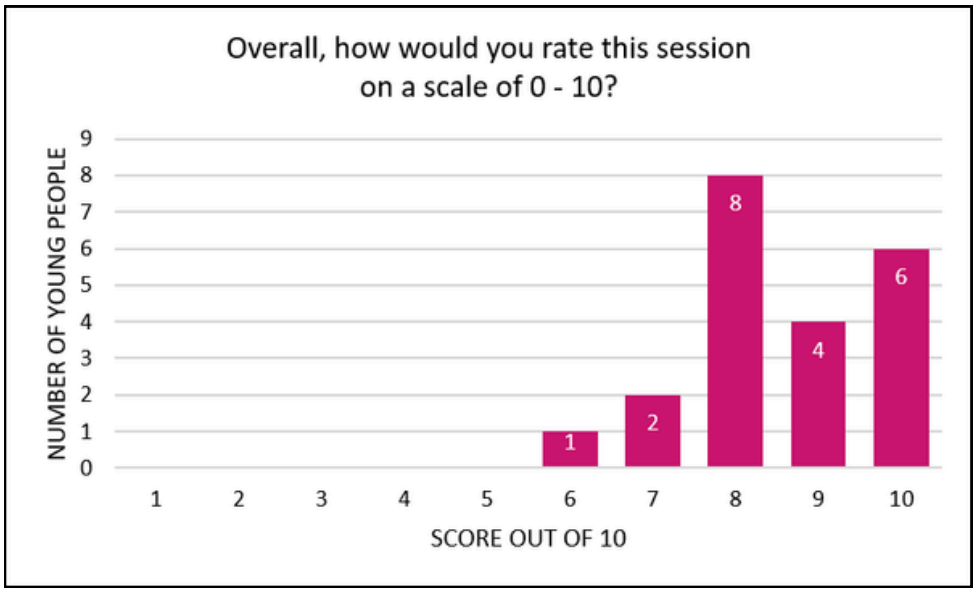
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Appendix 3: Responses to the question 'What was the most interesting or thought-provoking part of the session for you?' *[all direct YIC quotes]*

The debate between spreading the cost and how decisions now have a large impact on the future
Talking about the challenging decision of choosing what to do with the cost of bills and how to make it fair for everyone.
The discussion between the options of price distribution for future planning.
Where the present generation should pay less, and future generation will pay more
Choosing which option e.g. spread the costs and development not increase bills in order to save in the future.
When we split up into groups, we were given questions and challenges to discuss. I liked expressing my thoughts and hearing other perspectives.
Probably the best for me was the breakout rooms
The part with the sticky notes
Thinking about how current investment may affect future customers.
I think it was the curve balls mentioned and evaluation needed to find because not every option is perfect due to subjectivity
How the decisions made now can affect generations to come who never had a say in those decisions; allowed me to feel the gravity of the type of decisions NGN has to make daily, and how many factors have to be weighed against each other
The breakout room dilemmas
The amount of investment that NGN does
When we were all giving feedback about the different options and hearing other people's views
Hearing how considerate everyone was about different generations, and looking at the situation from the perspectives of bill payers
The breakout room discussion
Having to think deeply about what equality really means to people in various circumstances and how they might be affected by the company's decisions
The breakout room conversations
The contrast in some opinions.
The idea of trying to fix the problem by paying now to protect future generations
I was most interested in how NGN makes decisions regarding intergenerational fairness and how it approaches spreading increases in costs to the consumer

Appendix 4: Responses to the question 'Which 3 factors should matter most when NGN makes investment decisions that affect customers today and in the future?'

