

**REDEFINING
SUCCESS**



Perspectives

from

Singapore's



Undergraduates

Produced by



In collaboration with



milieu

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Foreword

Message from Inter-University Network 2025 Core Team

As youths, we believe that the aspirations of our generation are key to shaping Singapore's future. As Singapore continues to evolve, it is important for us to define what success means, the challenges we face, and how society can better support us in navigating our own journeys.

Through the Inter-University Network, this report offers new insights into the perspectives of over 1,100 undergraduates from all six autonomous universities in Singapore – Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore, Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Technology and Design, and Singapore University of Social Sciences. We are encouraged to see that, despite the challenges, our peers continue to value family, personal growth, and career goals, which shows our commitment not only to self-development but also to contributing to the community.

However, the findings also highlight some real concerns we are facing – like financial uncertainty, pressure to meet milestones, and the need for better mental health support. These voices remind us that success is not the same for everyone. It is personal, diverse, and constantly evolving.

We hope that this report sparks meaningful conversations and action among families, universities, employers, and policymakers to work together in empowering youth to create their own unique paths to success.

ABOUT IUN:

Formed in February 2022, the Inter-University Network (IUN) is a ground-up students' union collective, representing more than 70,000 undergraduate students from the autonomous universities in Singapore. This initiative was formed to collectively tackle issues concerning undergraduates, deepen collaboration between student unions and share knowledge on student leadership.

The National Youth Council collaborates with the IUN to allow two-way engagement and partnership between university students and the Government, advocating for youth voices and concerns to be heard in Government programmes and policies.

Executive Summary

Context and Purpose

Undergraduates in Singapore are coming of age amid rising costs of living, changing social norms, and increasing uncertainty around key life transitions such as employment, financial independence, and housing. Traditional markers of success - stable employment, marriage, and home ownership - are being delayed or redefined, while expectations around wellbeing, purpose, and flexibility are becoming more prominent.

To better understand how **undergraduates** define success today and what they need to pursue it meaningfully, the National Youth Council and the Inter-University Network commissioned this study in partnership with Milieu Insights. The survey reached **1,165 undergraduates aged 16 - 35** across Singapore's six autonomous universities (NUS, NTU, SMU, SIT, SUSS, and SUTD), conducted online between 31 July and 27 August 2025.

This study examines three dimensions of success among tertiary students: their values and aspirations, their confidence and concerns about the future, and the support systems they see as critical to their growth.

Key Findings

SUCCESS IS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND PERSONAL.

Undergraduates' definitions of success centre on three domains:

Family

84 %

Self

82 %

Career

72 %



Providing for one's family (83%), achieving financial independence (67%), and pursuing meaningful and passionate work (60%) emerge as the most important markers. Success is increasingly associated with balance, fulfilment, and autonomy.

ASPIRATIONS ARE ACCOMPANIED BY SIGNIFICANT PRESSURE.

Many tertiary students feel compelled to achieve milestones - stable employment, finding a life partner, and home ownership - within fixed timelines. These expectations contribute to significant concerns about financial stability and career readiness. Over half worry about affording their desired lifestyle (52%) or staying competitive in the job market (50%), while 41% are anxious about housing. These concerns point to rising financial and emotional strain.

These concerns may also influence how undergraduates prioritise personal goals, suggesting that many feel the need to achieve financial security before pursuing hobbies and relationships.



OPTIMISM ABOUT SINGAPORE DOES NOT FULLY TRANSLATE INTO CONFIDENCE IN SELF.

While undergraduates remain hopeful about Singapore's collective future, they are less confident about their own. Contributing factors include expectations around achieving key milestones, perceived time pressure to succeed and uncertainty about navigating adulthood. This optimism gap reflects trust in national systems, but uncertainty about personal trajectories - particularly in navigating financial responsibilities, career competition, and major life transitions.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS MATTER.

Undergraduates consistently point to the importance of support from families, universities, employers, and the government. They look to families for emotional assurance, to universities for preparation for the working world and adult life, employers for more progressive workplace norms, and the government for support in areas such as mental health, financial assistance, and recognising diverse pathways to success.



Why the Findings Matter

These findings reflect evolving expectations around success among undergraduates. While they continue to value ambition and achievement, there is now greater emphasis on sustainability, wellbeing, and long-term stability.

Undergraduates desire measures to increase confidence in their ability to navigate these evolving definitions of success. **Three areas have been identified where whole-of-society can provide stronger preparation, support, and pathways to confidently pursue their own trajectories:**

1

MENTAL WELLBEING IS FOUNDATIONAL TO STUDENT SUCCESS.

Many concerns undergraduates express - including financial anxiety, and pressure to meet milestones, highlight the importance of stronger mental health support systems. They want room to experiment, fail, and try again without judgement. Within universities, this can take the form of a stronger mentorship programme or alumni programmes, through which undergraduates can find both advice about their careers and guidance in their personal lives. Destigmatisation is also essential - which includes support for mental health workers and creating a pathway for education and careers within mental health.

2

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SHOULD BE MORE ABOUT GAINING SKILLS FOR LIFE.

Undergraduates want universities to be spaces of exploration, not just credential accumulation. Undergraduates also emphasise the need for more flexibility in curriculum and opportunities to explore interests beyond their majors. In addition to mentorship programmes, they also want more internships, overseas exposure, career guidance and life skills coaching. Further, financial aid - in the form of subsidised school fees, bursaries and scholarships - can further ease the burdens that undergraduates feel.

3

THIRD SPACES FOSTER BELONGING AND BROADEN HORIZONS.

A substantial number of undergraduates have also expressed the need for "third spaces". Youths have been increasingly valuing spaces outside the home and school, that enable and inspire connection and creativity. These spaces allow youths to simply belong, and can encourage them to forge networks beyond their immediate circle, or even feel safe enough in their own identities to embark on less traditional paths. As undergraduates navigate an increasingly complex transition into adulthood, access to communities of belonging may be just as important as academic or financial support in helping them find and pursue their own definitions of success.

By addressing these areas, Singapore can create an environment where undergraduates not only succeed academically and professionally, but also feel genuinely supported in shaping their own definitions of success.



SECTION 1



About the Study

About the Study

To better understand the aspirations of youths in Singapore, the Inter-University Network commissioned this study, an initiative supported by the National Youth Council, in partnership with Milieu Insights. The survey reached 1,165 undergraduates aged 16–35, across 6 autonomous universities in Singapore - NUS, NTU, SMU, SIT, SUSS, and SUTD. Fieldwork was conducted online from 31 July to 27 August 2025.



The study aimed to answer three questions:

What do undergraduates value most in life, and how do they define success?

How confident do they feel about their futures, and what concerns weigh most heavily on them?

What support do they need from families, universities, government, and employers to achieve success on their own terms?

Research Design

METHODOLOGY

Online survey (10–15 minutes)

SAMPLE SIZE

N=1,165 undergraduates

COVERAGE

Singapore's 6 autonomous universities:

- National University of Singapore (NUS)
- Nanyang Technological University (NTU)
- Singapore Management University (SMU)
- Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT)
- Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)
- Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD)

FIELDWORK PERIOD

31 July – 27 August 2025

Respondent Profile

GENDER

56 %
Female

40 %
Male

CITIZENSHIP

79 %
Singapore Citizens

6 %
PRs

15 %
Student Pass

YEAR OF STUDY

46 %
Year 1

23 %
Year 2

31 %
Year 3–5



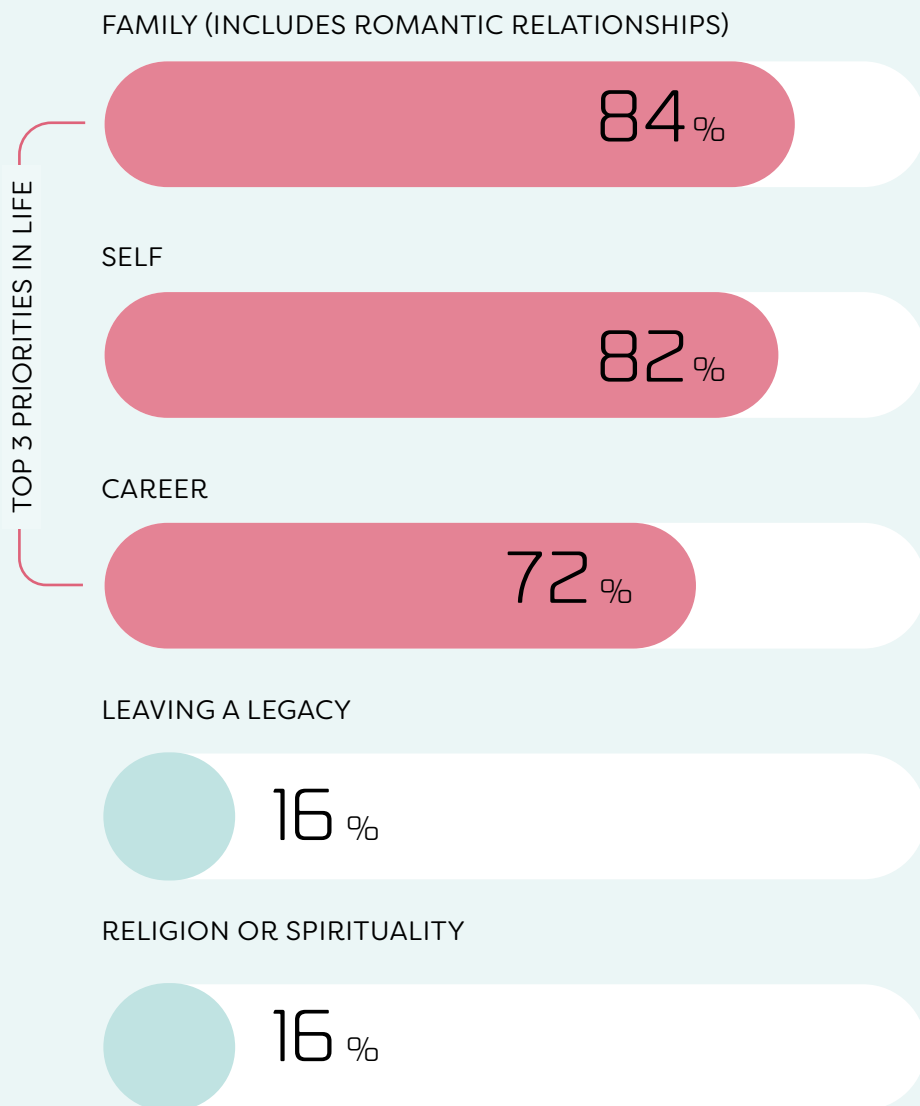
Youth Aspirations Today

What Youths Prioritise in Life

Family, self, and career emerged overwhelmingly as the top three priorities for Singapore's undergraduates. 84% and 82% placed family and self respectively, at the heart of their lives, while 72% selected career.

These priorities reflect the balancing act of a generation: wanting to care for loved ones, while also pursuing independence and meaningful work. Far fewer placed emphasis on legacy (16%) or religion (16%), suggesting that while broader societal contribution and faith remain meaningful for some, most are focused on immediate, tangible aspects of daily life.

Family, self, and career emerged overwhelmingly as the top three priorities for Singapore's undergraduates.



How Youths Define Success

FAMILY

For the majority, success in family life is not measured by grand milestones, but by financial security and meaningful relationships. 83% said being able to provide for their family financially defines success. 62% pointed to finding a life partner, while marriage (31%) and children (28%) ranked lower. This suggests that emotional partnership is valued more than formal status.

Family isn't just blood; it's the chosen family we build with friends and allies who accept us.

Year 2 female student
from SIT, age 22



83%

Being able to provide for their family

62%

Finding a life partner

31%

Marriage

28%

Children

CAREER

Many undergraduates (>50%) want both **passion** and **pay**. 64% defined success as securing a high-paying job, while 60% said it was doing work they loved. 58% emphasised fulfilment and purpose. Interestingly, traditional markers such as working in a prestigious firm or becoming C-suite ranked far lower, signalling a shift towards purpose-driven careers.

Enjoy going to work, and not feeling mentally or physically burnt out.

Year 1 female student
from SUSS, age 23



64%

Securing a high-paying job

60%

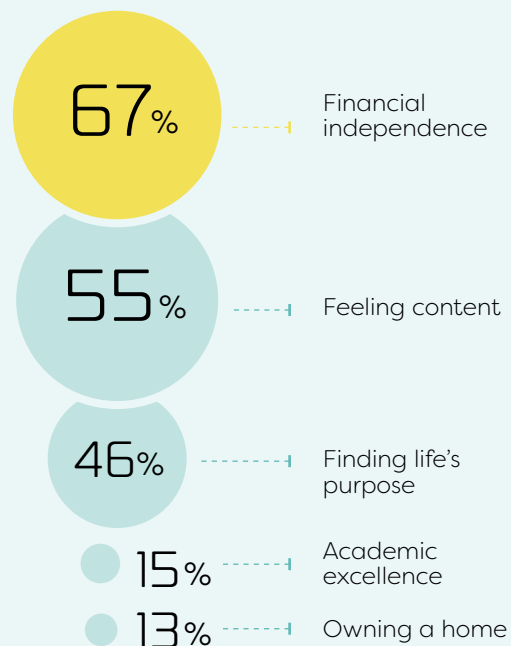
Doing work they loved

58%

Fulfilment and purpose

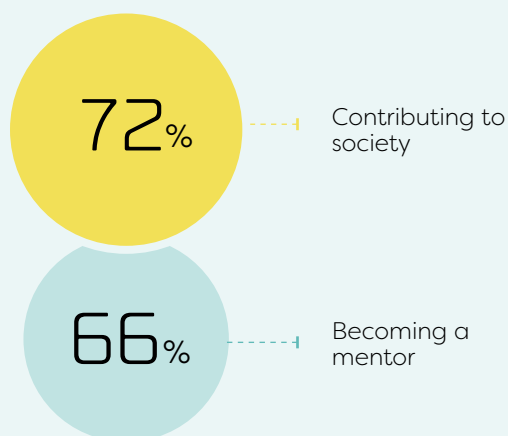
SELF

Personal aspirations centre on independence and contentment. 67% said financial independence is success; 55% emphasised feeling content; 46% highlighted finding life's purpose. Fewer cited material or academic markers such as owning a home (13%) or academic excellence (15%).



LEGACY & SPIRITUALITY

While a smaller proportion prioritised these, out of those who mentioned 'giving back, mentorship, and community', 72% said success meant contributing to society; 66% said becoming a mentor.



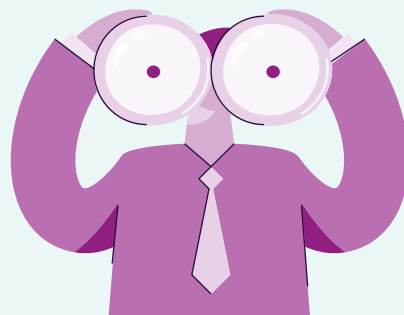


When Aspirations Meet Adulthood Pressures

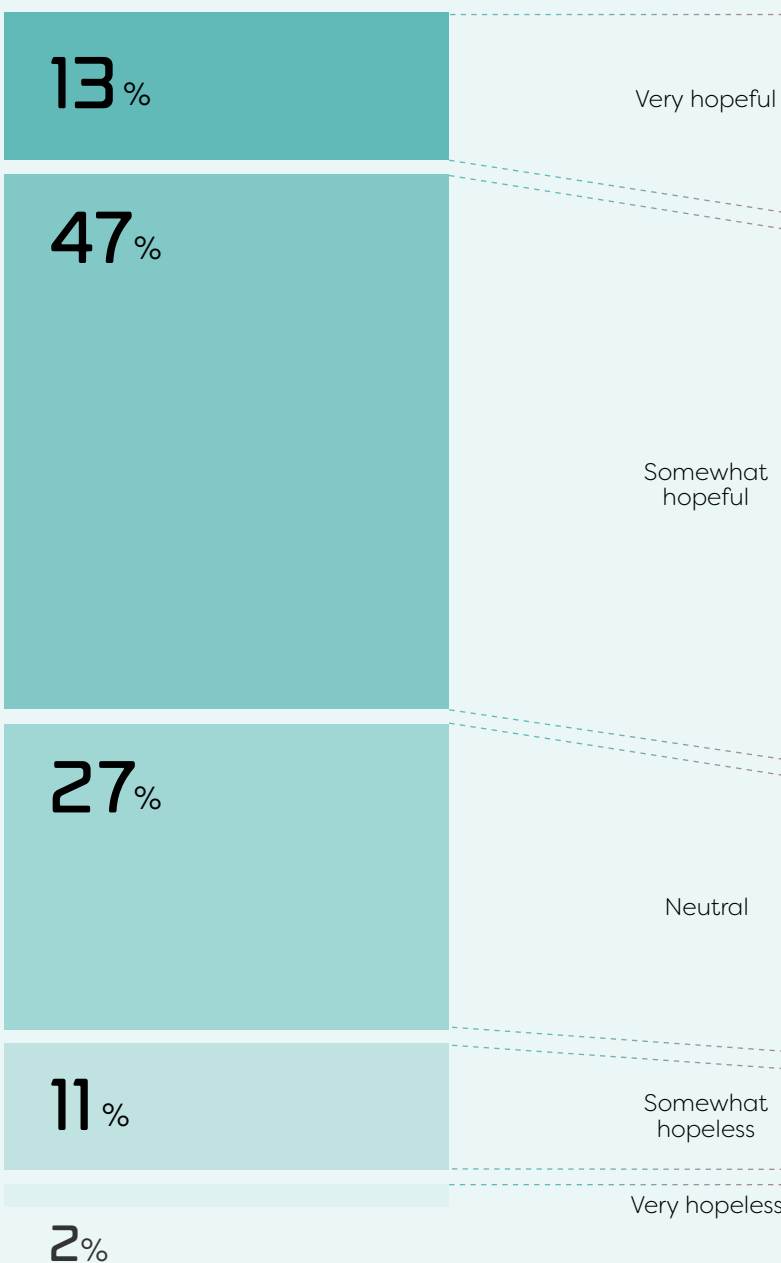
Confidence in the Future

When asked how hopeful they feel about the future, respondents drew a subtle but telling distinction: 68% said they were hopeful about Singapore, compared to 60% about themselves. This optimism for the nation contrasts with uncertainty about personal trajectories.

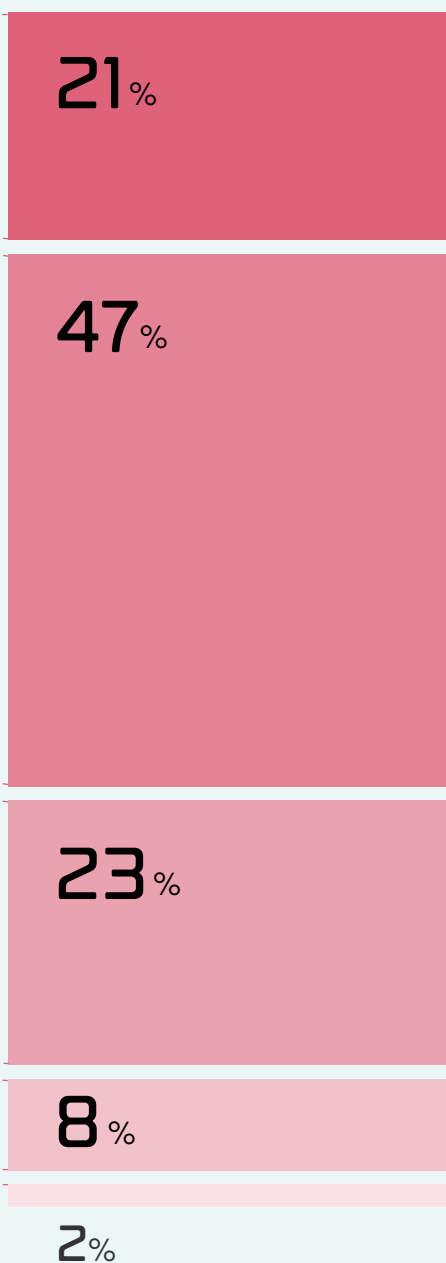
This optimism gap reveals a generation that still trusts the nation's direction but questions its own footing within it. Singapore's systems - education, infrastructure, stability - remain strong anchors of belief. Yet at the individual level, many feel the currents of competition, rising costs, and rigid expectations pushing against them.



HOPE IN OWN FUTURE



HOPE IN SINGAPORE'S FUTURE



The Weight of Milestones

Youth aspirations often mirror traditional milestones, but achieving them now feels harder.



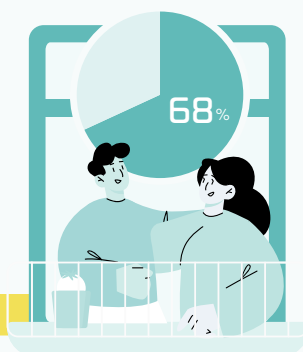
FIRST FULL-TIME JOB

Majority (68%) expect to secure one by 23-26yo.



MARRIAGE/PARTNER

55% expect this milestone by 30yo.



HOUSING

68% anticipate owning a home by mid-30s (35yo), though some fear they may never afford it (41% highlighted this as 'concerns about becoming adult').

Probably making the 'right' choices, as picking the 'wrong' path can feel overwhelming.

Year 1 male student
from NUS, age 24



These expectations resemble those of earlier generations - yet economic realities make them more daunting. Many respondents say that adulthood seems to arrive faster than financial independence, creating a constant sense of being "late."

National data echoes this generational shift. According to the **Singapore Department of Statistics (Singstat), *Statistics on Marriages and Divorces 2023***, the **median age at first marriage rose from 30.2 years for grooms and 28.1 years for brides in 2013 to 31.0 years and 29.5 years respectively in 2023**. This steady climb towards later marriages reflects a broader societal trend — one that aligns closely with own expectations of delaying family formation until financial security is within reach.

Recent data from the Ministry of National Development also shows that among those who purchased BTO flats from 2010-19, only 18 % of 3-room flat buyers did so at ages 30-34, and just 13 % for 4-room flats (MND data, Nov 2020). Resale purchases across all flat types show even lower proportions in the 25-29 age band (2-21%) and higher proportions in 35-39 and older age bands (MND, 2020). These figures underscore how home-ownership is increasingly happening later, aligning with the youth perception that “home” becomes a more distant milestone.

I worry Singapore will be unaffordable for me and I will be forced to migrate.

Year 2 female student from SUSS, age 22



The top concerns about adulthood further illustrate this pressure:

52 %

worry about affording their desired lifestyle

50 %

fear falling behind in a competitive job market

41 %

are anxious about housing affordability

40 %

cite financial management as a stressor

39 %

want to ensure they still have means for hobbies and personal passions



For many, these milestones are not just personal aspirations but social benchmarks of success. The challenge lies not in unwillingness, but in *feasibility*. As costs rise and timelines stretch, the emotional toll of “keeping up” becomes one of the greatest roadblocks to youth confidence.

When Ambition Meets Expectation

The very things undergraduates aspire to - family, career, self - are also the axes where pressure accumulates. They define success via family provision, meaningful work, and personal independence, yet each of these translates into a timeline: when to marry, when to buy a home, when to become financially independent.

When the social environment signals later milestones, the pressure intensifies.

To truly support today's young adults, society must shift from milestone deadlines to milestone dignity: **allowing space, recognising delay, and valuing progress** rather than punctuality.

 SECTION 4

Support Systems Youths Need

Success may begin with personal drive, but sustaining it requires a community of support. Through the survey, respondents emphasised that while self-determination matters, the environment around them - families, educators, employers, and government - profoundly shapes how confidently they can move forward.

The Ecosystem That Shapes Success

When asked who influences their definition of success the most, more than half (56 %) cited *immediate family*, followed by *peers* (47 %) and *social media* (38 %). These everyday reference points guide not only what they strive for, but also how they judge their progress. Family conversations, peer expectations, and curated images of success online all converge to form the cultural backdrop of youth ambition in Singapore.

Yet undergraduates are not merely influenced, they are calling for active partnership. In an open-ended question about what would help them navigate adulthood more confidently, five key themes emerged: **progressive workplace policies, life skills beyond formal education, mentorship, third spaces for community, and accessible mental-health resources.**

PROGRESSIVE WORKPLACE POLICIES

52%

LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

42%

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES

37%

THIRD SPACES FOR COMMUNITY

32%

ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

30%

52%

PROGRESSIVE WORKPLACE POLICIES

More than half of respondents believe employers play a defining role in shaping a healthy vision of success. They want work environments that respect **balance, fairness, and wellbeing**. Many described the ideal job as one where they can “*enjoy going to work, and not feel mentally or physically burnt out*”, seeing this as a form of career success.

Beyond flexible hours or hybrid setups, this call reflects a deeper yearning for psychological safety - workplaces where young employees can experiment, fail safely, and be valued for growth rather than perfection. **Progressive policies**, from mental-health days to empathetic leadership, are seen as signals that success need not come at the cost of wellbeing.

42%

LIFE SKILLS BEYOND FORMAL EDUCATION

While academic achievement remains important, 42% feel that universities focus too narrowly on exams and technical competence. They want more **opportunities to build practical life skills**: financial literacy, emotional resilience, decision-making, and communication.

This desire stems from a gap many students experience when transitioning into adulthood. They can ace a presentation but struggle with budgeting or managing burnout. By integrating life-skills modules, universities can equip graduates not only for employment, but for life itself - helping them **manage uncertainty and build confidence in their personal journeys**.

37%

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES

Over one-third of students highlighted the need for mentorship. They see it as the **bridge between ambition and assurance – a relationship that helps them interpret real-world complexity**. Mentors are valued not just for their success stories, but for their honesty about setbacks.

Just having faith in me that if I fail, I can try another path without hesitation.

Year 1 female student from SMU, age 18



That sentiment captures what mentorship represents to many: the comfort of knowing that mistakes are part of growth. Whether through structured university schemes or workplace pairings, mentorship offers the emotional scaffolding that turns aspiration into action.

32%

THIRD SPACES FOR COMMUNITY

32% interviewed expressed the need for “third spaces” – environments that are **neither home nor work nor school**, but where they can simply belong. These spaces could be creative collectives, co-learning hubs, cafés, or public areas where young people can connect and unwind without judgement.

In a fast-paced society, such spaces serve as pressure valves. They encourage inter-disciplinary friendships and civic engagement, allowing youths to form communities outside competitive settings. The call for third spaces is, at its core, **a call for belonging** – for physical and social places that support connection, creativity, and identity.

30%

ACCESSIBLE MENTAL-HEALTH RESOURCES

Three in ten respondents emphasised **mental-health access as essential to success**. They spoke of the stress of constant performance, of managing expectations from parents and peers, and of the difficulty in seeking help when stigma still lingers.

I think there should be more flexibility in grading and in curriculum, as well as more space for us to do trial and error, as one wrong move in a core module quiz is likely to impact our grades by a lot, and I feel like the grading should also take into account our development and growth over the semester rather than just raw scores.

Year 3 female student from NTU, age 21



This quote, though framed around career preparation, reflects a broader sentiment: they crave environments where vulnerability is normalised and recovery is supported. To them, wellbeing is not a luxury – it is the foundation that sustains ambition. Accessible counselling, peer-support programmes, and open conversations about mental health are central to their idea of a compassionate society.

A Generation Asking for Empowerment, Not Rescue

Taken together, these findings paint a clear picture of what our undergraduates truly seek. They are not asking for handouts or easier paths, but for **fairer, kinder, and more flexible systems that recognise different journeys**. They want workplaces that value growth, universities that prepare them for life, mentors who believe in them, communities that connect them, and systems that care for their wellbeing.

In their words, and through their numbers, a **new definition of success** is emerging, one that blends ambition with empathy, and individual progress with shared responsibility.



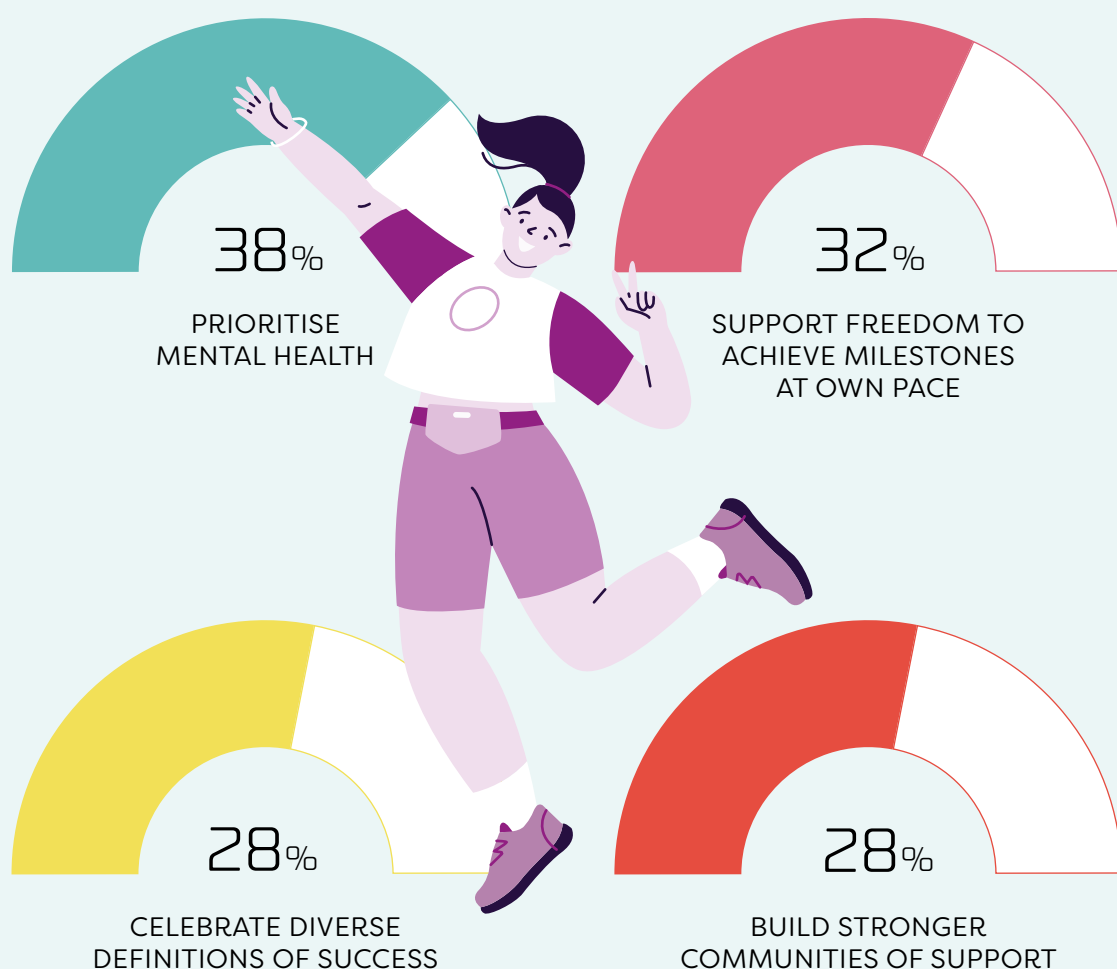


The Future This Generation Envisions

Together, these findings point to more than a set of challenges – they reveal a shift in how success itself is being reimagined. Undergraduates today are not asking for less ambition, but for a more sustainable version of it: one that makes space for wellbeing, flexibility, and diverse pathways. The following section explores what this future could look like, and what it will take to build it.

Redefining Success for Tomorrow

When asked what Singapore should prioritise in enabling their future, undergraduates described a new social compact - one that places *wellbeing, flexibility and inclusivity* at the heart of ambition.



They imagine a Singapore where balance is not an afterthought but a marker of progress - where “doing well” includes being well. This redefinition of success moves away from rigid milestones toward mental health, choice, and shared purpose.

The Ecosystem of Shared Responsibility

Undergraduates are clear that this vision cannot be achieved alone. They see success as a shared responsibility - one shaped by **families, universities, employers, and government.**



Just having faith in me that if I fail, I can try another path without hesitation.



Year 1 female student from SMU, age 18

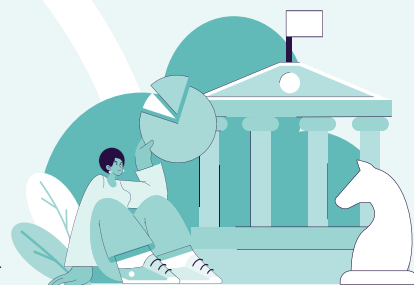
FAMILIES

Provide trust and psychological safety. Young people need reassurance that love and acceptance are not conditional on performance.



EMPLOYERS

Champion inclusive and progressive workplace policies (52% support this), ensuring young workers thrive without sacrificing wellbeing.



GOVERNMENT

Lead cultural change by celebrating diverse paths and providing financial and mental-health support. Many cite the need for housing subsidies, scholarships, and public campaigns that normalise different versions of success.



UNIVERSITIES

Prepare tertiary students for real-world complexity through flexible learning, practical internships, and life-skills training.

Career preparation, workplace readiness, and more space to do trial and error.



Year 1 female student from NUS, age 20

A Singapore That Grows with Its Youths

This generation is not rejecting ambition - they are modernising it. Their vision of success balances achievement with empathy, independence with interdependence, and progress with sustainability.

They ask society to recognise that growth is not linear, and that resilience is built not through pressure, but through partnership. If Singapore can evolve its systems - in education, work, and community - to reflect these values, it will nurture not just successful youths, but fulfilled citizens.



HOPEFUL FOR SINGAPORE'S FUTURE

68%

HOPEFUL FOR OWN FUTURE

60%

68% hopeful for Singapore's future, but only 60% feel hopeful for their own.

This optimism represents both an opportunity and a responsibility: to ensure that young people's faith in Singapore's future is matched by tangible progress in the areas they have identified as priorities.

The question for our whole society is clear:

What can we do, together, to honour the trust they have placed in our shared future?

