GEN Z FITNESS PULSE REPORT

2026

the gym group

FOREWORD

Will Orr
Chief Executive Officer

When we launched our first Gen Z Fitness Pulse Report last year, we could see that gyms and fitness have become a defining part of how young adults live their lives, influencing how they spend their time, their money, and their social life. One year on, our findings show that influence is continuing to grow, extending beyond everyday choices to significant life decisions, such as where to live.

As a generation that will make up more than a third of the UK working population by 2033[1], Gen Z is increasingly shaping the future for gyms and fitness. Understanding their attitudes and behaviours is therefore important not only for our sector, but for any organisation looking to understand this next generation of consumers and employees. With a million members, nearly half of whom are aged between 16 and 29, at The Gym Group we have a unique perspective on how younger people are engaging with gyms and fitness.

Whilst the cost of living has been the biggest concern for UK Gen Z for five consecutive years[2], our research found that more than four in ten (42%) now rank health and fitness memberships as their single highest discretionary spending priority, up from a quarter (26%) a year ago and ahead of eating and drinking out, streaming, fashion and travel.

This year's research shows that gym and fitness habits are becoming part of much broader everyday decision-making. Beyond influencing spending habits, they are influencing where some young adults choose to live, how they build friendships, and how they invest in their physical and mental wellbeing.

It's striking to see in this year's report that for many Gen Z, being close to a gym or fitness facility is now an important consideration when deciding where to live. And it is access to affordable exercise specifically, offering great value for money, that is prioritised.

With over 260 gyms, 55% of the UK population live within 15 minutes' drive of our gyms and we are continuing to expand our national footprint, targeting around 75 new 'high value, low cost' gyms over the next three years.

The research also highlights another vital role gyms play - providing spaces for people to connect in-person. In a world where so much of life now happens online, opportunities to meet people face-to-face have changed significantly. Many traditional community spaces have declined, while social interaction has increasingly moved onto screens. Against that backdrop, it is encouraging to see that gyms provide positive environments to socialise, alongside developing healthier habits.

That wider role matters because the benefits of regular exercise extends well beyond physical fitness. Throughout this report, we continue to see strong links between exercise, mental wellbeing, and healthier lifestyles. With more than a third of adults in England still not meeting the Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines[3] and continued pressure on the NHS, helping younger generations establish lifelong exercise habits has an important role to play in supporting a stronger preventative health agenda for the future. The fitness sector already generates an estimated £7.5 billion in social value each year[4], and this report highlights the opportunity for this to grow even further.

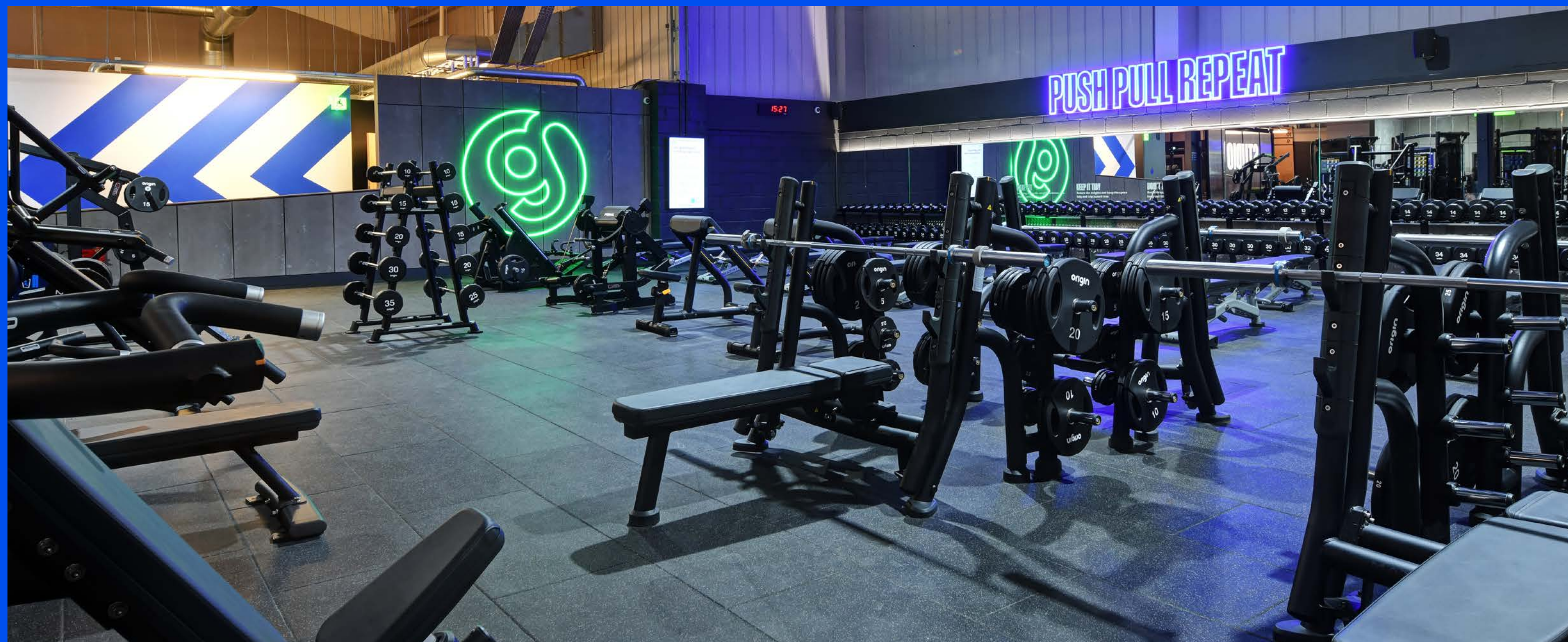
Our ambition at The Gym Group is not simply to provide great gyms, it is to help more people build sustainable exercise habits by making fitness affordable, welcoming, and accessible. This report helps us better understand how expectations are evolving, ensuring we continue to meet the needs of today's members while contributing to wider conversations about the future of health and wellbeing.

[1] Legal & General, Business Insights Report, 2023.

[2] Deloitte, 2026 Gen Z and Millennial Survey, May 2026.

[3] Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2024-25, April 2026.

[4] ukactive, UK Health & Fitness Market Report 2026.



PULSE CHECK: KEY FINDINGS

58%

of Gen Z adults exercise at least twice a week

with more than half of Gen Z (54%) attending the gym at least once a week.

42%

of Gen Z rank health and fitness as their number one discretionary spending priority

ahead of all other categories, and 55% place it first or second priority, up from 44% in 2025.

72%

say access to a gym is important when choosing where to live

rising to 82% in London. A third (32%) would pay more in rent to live closer to one, an average of £40 a month extra.

62%

of Gen Z agree that as well as a place to exercise, the gym is also a place to socialise

and 72% believe going to the gym helps tackle loneliness.

39%

say regular exercise improves their mental wellbeing

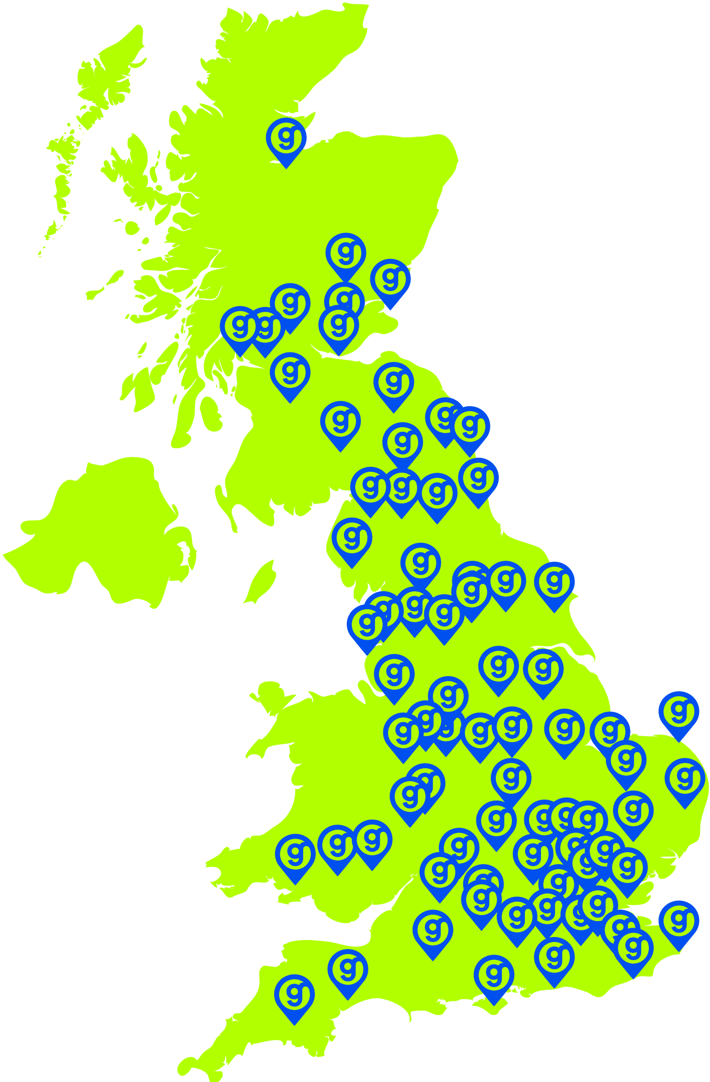
this closely follows 40% choosing to exercise for their fitness levels and physical health.

43%

say value for money is the most important factor when choosing a gym

as the availability of affordable and accessible gyms helps young adults to build healthy fitness habits.

GYM POSTCODES



Choosing where to live has often been driven by factors such as affordability, transport links, schools, or proximity to work. While those considerations remain important, this year's research suggests that Gen Z is adding another factor to the list: access to a gym.

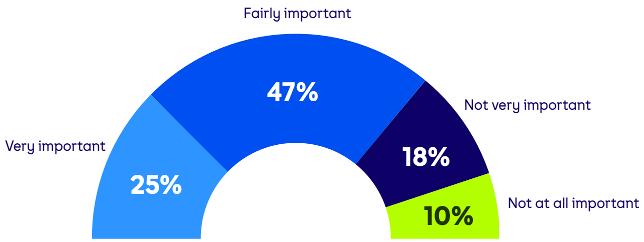
The report findings reveal that nearly three-quarters (72%) of Gen Z say access to a gym or fitness facility is an important consideration when choosing where to live. Almost two-thirds (62%) say they have already chosen or would consider choosing a home because it is close to a gym.

This emergence of the "gym postcode" reflects a broader shift in how young adults view exercise.

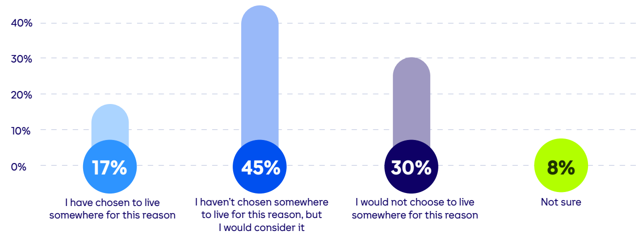
Going to the gym is no longer only an activity that fits around daily life, instead daily life is increasingly organised around maintaining regular exercise habits. With hybrid working also a new normal for many, prioritising routines around exercise means convenient access to a gym has become more important for young people. This becomes clear when Gen Z are asked to rank the local lifestyle amenities that matter most when deciding where to live, they place gyms and fitness facilities first (31%), then recreational shopping facilities (25%), green spaces and parks (21%) or restaurants, bars and cafés (14%).

Convenience has long been recognised as one of the strongest drivers of exercise participation. Research consistently shows that the closer people are to opportunities to be active, the more likely they are to establish and maintain long-term exercise habits.

How important, if at all, is access to a gym when you're choosing where to live?



Have you ever chosen, or would you consider choosing to live somewhere, because it was close to a gym?



For a generation balancing work, study, and increasingly busy lives, reducing the barriers to regular exercise matters. A gym that can be reached on foot, incorporated into a commute, or visited close to home makes maintaining a healthy routine easier.

A significant proportion is even willing to pay more to live within proximity to a gym: almost a third of Gen Z (32%) say they would pay more in rent or housing costs to live closer to a gym and would spend an average of £40 extra rent per month, amounting to £480 per year.

In London, 82% say access to a gym matters when choosing where to live, and a quarter (25%) have already chosen a home partly for that reason. Londoners also spend the most on fitness, at £48 a month, and would pay among the highest rent premium (£45 a month).

As towns and cities continue to evolve, provision for gyms and fitness facilities should increasingly be considered alongside the amenities that help communities thrive. Just as people value nearby supermarkets, parks, cafés or transport hubs, access to high-quality, affordable fitness is becoming part of the infrastructure that supports healthier everyday lives.

More than four in ten (42%) rank health and fitness memberships or apps as their number one discretionary priority, two and a half times the next category, socialising with friends (16%), and ahead of streaming services (14%), eating and drinking out (13%), travel (8%) and fashion (8%). A year ago, that figure was 26%.

The Value Equation

The findings also reinforce the growing importance of value for money. More than two in five gym-goers (43%) say value for money is among the three most important factors when choosing a gym, ahead of convenience and location (36%). Accessibility is therefore not simply about geography; affordability matters too. For many young adults navigating rising costs and wider financial pressures, convenient, affordable gyms enable healthy habits without placing additional pressure on household budgets.

If gyms are becoming part of the infrastructure young adults look for, the second question is what they are prepared to pay for it. Fitness is no longer merely competing for Gen Z's discretionary spending; it is winning outright. More than four in ten (42%) rank health and fitness memberships or apps as their number one discretionary priority, ahead of socialising with friends (16%), and streaming services (14%), eating and drinking out (13%), travel (8%) and fashion (8%). A year ago, that figure was 26%.

"I treat my gym membership like an essential utility bill rather than an optional expense. I think that fitness is so engrained in our lifestyles that it's no longer a question of *if* you go, but *when* you go or *what* you train."

Cordelia
Member of The Gym Group Battersea

Which, if any, of the following are most important to you when choosing a gym?

1st	Value for money	43%
2nd	Convenience and accessibility (e.g. location, opening hours)	36%
3rd	Variety of workout options	32%
4th	A welcoming, inclusive environment	27%
5th	Mental wellbeing support and stress relief	21%
6th	Access to fitness technology and personalised data	18%
7th	Recovery and wellbeing facilities	17%
8th	Opportunities for real-life social connection	16%
9th	None of the above	3%

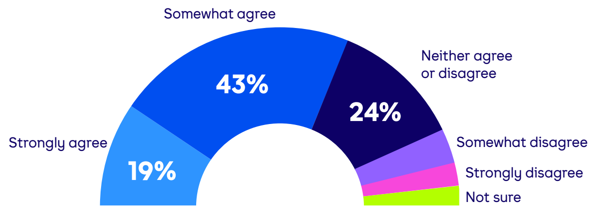
SPACES TO CONNECT IRL

Establishing that Gen Z is a generation that wants to go to the gym, this year's research also looks at why young people choose the gym over other leisure activities.

Gen Z has grown up in the most digitally connected world in history. Social media, messaging apps and online communities have made it easier than ever to stay in touch, yet many young adults are spending less time together in person than previous generations. Against this backdrop, this year's report findings suggest gyms can play an important role that extends beyond exercise. The findings show that 62% of Gen Z agree that the gym is more than somewhere to exercise, it is also a place to socialise and feel part of a community. Whether training with friends, recognising familiar faces or simply sharing a space with people working towards similar goals, gyms provide the opportunity for meaningful in-person connections.

This reflects a broader shift in how younger people view fitness. Exercise is no longer solely about improving physical health or achieving a particular goal, forming gym habits can offer structure, routine and a sense of belonging to a like-minded community.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The gym is more than a place to exercise, it is also a place to socialise and feel part of a community, connecting with others offline."?



> **"I go to the gym with my friends after college which helps keep us motivated and accountable."**
> **Soulaimane**
> Member of The Gym Group Canning Town

Unlike organised social events, gyms provide regular opportunities for repeated interaction.

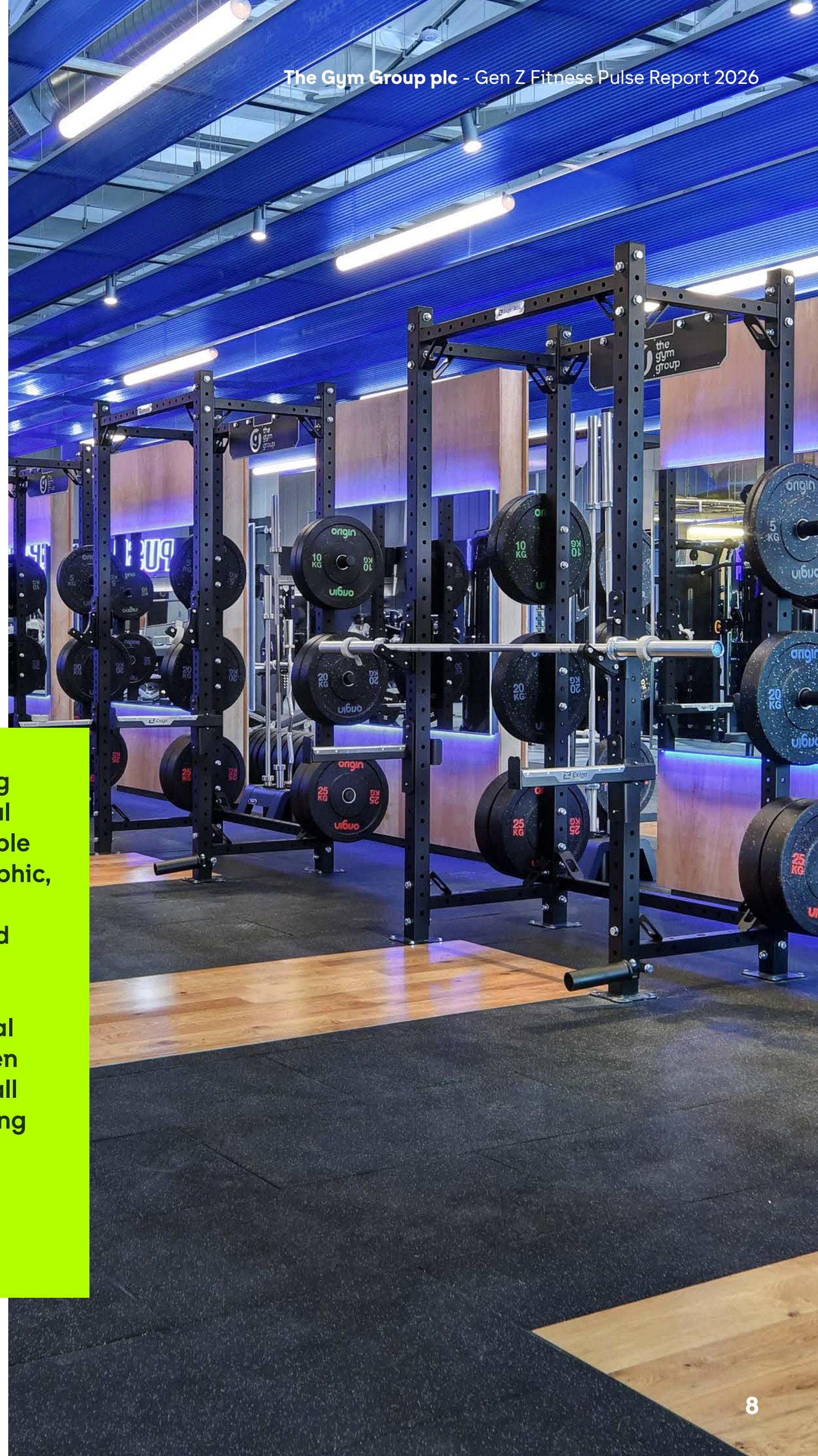
Members can visit at similar times each week, train alongside familiar faces, and gradually develop a sense of belonging within their local gym community. 57% Gen Z agree that the gym is a place where they can make meaningful connections with people in real life, away from screens.

For a generation that values experiences and authenticity, the gym offers something that cannot be replicated through a screen, providing genuine face-to-face interaction centred around a shared interest. This growing social role also reinforces the close relationship between physical activity and wellbeing. Gen Z identifies exercise as supporting both physical and mental health, with 39% saying regular exercise improves their mental wellbeing. While the physiological benefits of exercise are well established, the opportunity to feel connected to others may be an equally important, if less visible, contributor to overall wellbeing.

More than a quarter (27%) of gym-goers name a welcoming, inclusive environment among the three things that matter most when choosing a gym. As younger generations continue to seek meaningful experiences, gyms have an opportunity to become one of the few places combining physical activity and genuine human connection.

"We continue to see Gen Z shift away from exercising strictly for aesthetics and towards improving mental wellbeing, managing stress, and building a sustainable routine. Gen Z remains a health-conscious demographic, taking a holistic approach to fitness that sets them apart from previous generations. They want a varied and dynamic routine that benefits their physical health but also helps to builds their confidence and create a sense of community within the shared social energy of modern gym environments. Ultimately, Gen Z are heavily investing in themselves and their overall lifestyle, spanning everything from running and lifting to hot yoga classes and meaningful recovery."

Jenni Tardiff
Master Trainer
The Gym Group



OUR MEMBERS

Soulaimane, 17, is a student who trains at The Gym Group London Canning Town.

For him, building a consistent routine has helped to boost confidence and productivity. He says: "After focusing on exams, building a dedicated five-day strength routine became a turning point that brought structure and stress relief to my life. I go to the gym with my friends after college which helps keep us motivated and accountable, as we all have different goals but I have a regular routine which I follow.

I'd never look to cancel my gym membership, it's something to do for yourself and it's great to see results and keep progressing each week."

Cordelia, 27, is an Events Manager who exercises four to five times a week at The Gym Group Battersea

She says: "I treat my gym membership like an essential utility bill rather than an optional expense. I think that fitness is so engrained in our lifestyles that it's no longer a question of if you go, but when you go or what you train.

The health benefits and importance of strength training specifically are well-understood across our generation. I use my Apple Watch to track my progress and help to keep me accountable. Having a gym close to home is a real benefit to me and helps me to stick to routine."

CONCLUSION

Regular gym attendance has become a Gen Z habit that many actively protect, prioritising spending on fitness despite continued financial pressures and increasingly seeking convenient, affordable gyms close to where they live. The clearest evidence of that is not how much they spend but where fitness sits on the list with local lifestyle amenities: at the very top for more than four in ten.

This year's Gen Z Fitness Pulse Report also demonstrates that gyms are evolving beyond their traditional role. As opportunities for people to connect face-to-face continue to change, gyms are providing spaces where communities can develop naturally through shared routines and common goals. Alongside supporting physical and mental wellbeing, they are becoming places where young people's confidence grows, friendships are formed, and people feel part of something bigger than themselves.

Engagement with gyms and fitness continues to rise. The latest ukactive Health and Fitness Market Report recorded the highest ever gym and leisure club penetration rate, with 18% of the UK population now members of a gym or leisure facility, equivalent to 12.2 million people, up from 14.6% in 2022. Total sector income has reached £6.5 billion, and visits rose 10% in a year to 679 million[5]. This mirrors The Gym Group's own data: in the first half of 2026, the proportion of Gen Z members visiting a Gym Group location at least twice

a week, increased in like-for-like sites compared with the first half of 2025[6], showing the continued growing engagement amongst this age group.

Encouraging more people to establish sustainable exercise habits from an early age has an important role to play in supporting a healthier nation. For Gen Z, gyms are increasingly making those habits easier to build by being accessible, affordable, and relevant to the way they live today.

"The findings in this year's report paint a clear picture that going to the gym is becoming more than a way to stay active, it is increasingly influencing how young adults organise their everyday lives. From where they choose to live, to how they spend their money, support their mental wellbeing and build friendships, gyms and fitness have become firmly embedded in the routines and priorities of this generation.

"Since pioneering the UK's high value, low cost gym model in 2007, we have focused on making great gyms accessible to more communities. And as this next generation increasingly prioritises gyms and fitness, ensuring high-quality, affordable gyms are available in more communities has never been more important."

Will Orr
CEO of The Gym Group

[5]ukactive UK Health & Fitness Market report 2026.

[6]The Gym Group internal visit data, first half of 2026 compared with the first half of 2025, like-for-like sites.

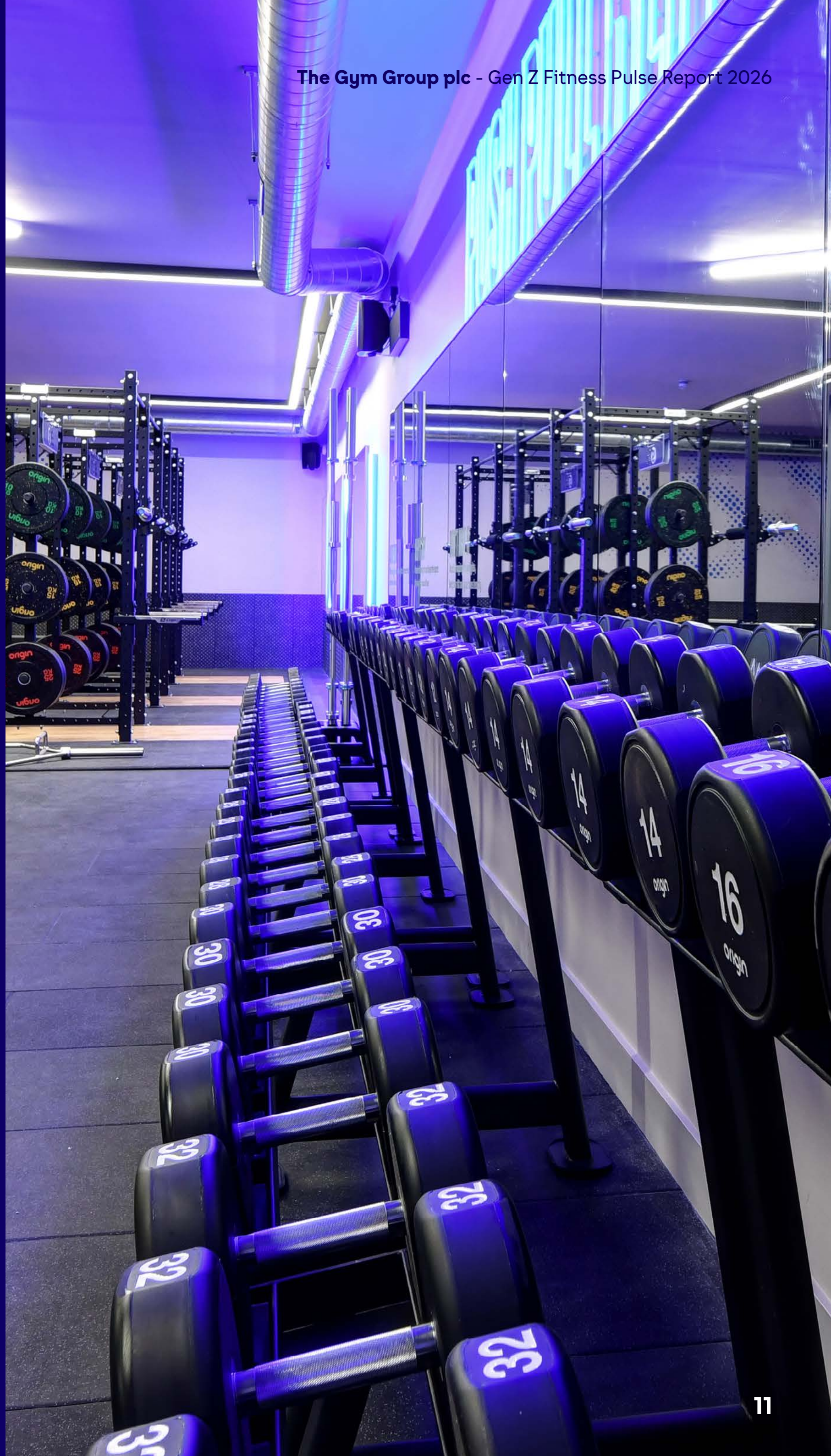
METHODOLOGY

The findings of The Gym Group's 2026 Gen Z Fitness Pulse Report are based on a nationwide survey exploring Gen Z fitness trends and the role fitness and gyms play in Gen Z's lives.

The survey, conducted in partnership with OnePoll, is the third wave of research following surveys carried out in 2024 and 2025, allowing us to compare evolving attitudes and behaviours and provide year-on-year insights.

A total of 2,000 Gen Z respondents aged 16 to 29 took part in the survey, which was distributed online across the UK between the 9th and 14th of July 2026. To capture a comprehensive view of the topic, the questionnaire included a variety of formats such as single-select and multiple-choice questions, ranking exercises, matrix selects, and free-text responses.

Data from the survey was analysed using descriptive statistical methods via the OnePoll platform, which provided summary charts and graphs. Key trends and insights were then identified and interpreted by the report authors to highlight the most relevant findings.



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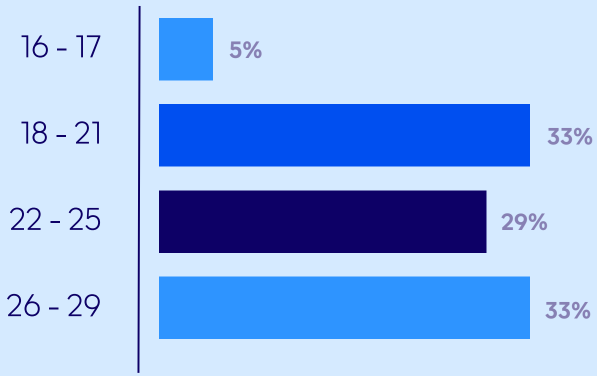

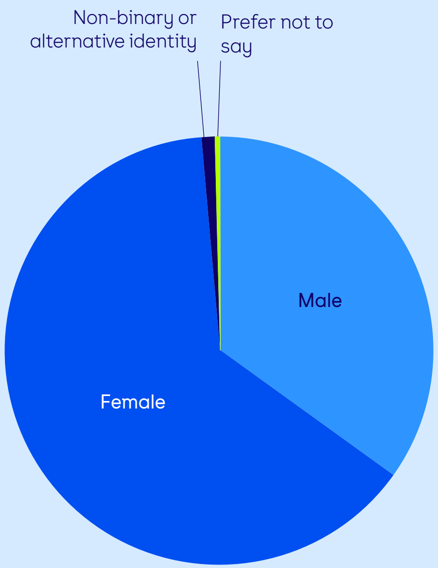

Q1. To confirm, what is your age?

- 16 - 17: 5%
- 18 - 21: 33%
- 22 - 25: 29%
- 26 - 29: 33%

Q2. What is your gender?

- Male: 35%
- Female: 64%
- Non-binary or alternative identity: 1%
- Prefer not to say: 0%

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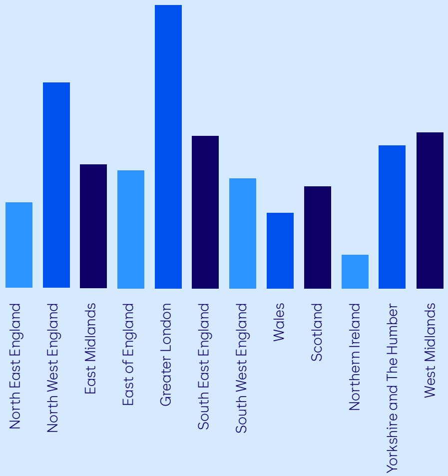

1st	In full-time paid employment	39%
2nd	Student (further or higher education)	25%
3rd	In part-time paid employment	13%
4th	In between jobs / looking for paid employment	7%
5th	Not in paid employment or looking for paid employment	5%
6th	Self employed	4%
7th	Homemaker/looking after children/carer	3%
8th	Currently on extended leave from paid employment (e.g. sabbatical, maternity/paternity, long-term sick)	2%
9th	Secondary school pupil (up to age 16)	1%
10th	Other	1%
11th	Currently retired	0%

Q3. Where do you live?

- North East England: 5%
- North West England: 13%
- East Midlands: 8%
- East of England: 7%
- Greater London: 18%
- South East England: 10%
- South West England: 7%
- Wales: 5%
- Scotland: 6%
- Northern Ireland: 2%
- Yorkshire and The Humber: 9%
- West Midlands: 10%

Q4. What is your occupation?

- In full-time paid employment: 39%
- Student (further or higher education): 25%
- In part-time paid employment: 13%
- In between jobs / looking for paid employment: 7%
- Not in paid employment or looking for paid employment: 5%
- Self-employed: 4%
- Homemaker/looking after children/carer: 3%
- Currently on extended leave from paid employment (e.g. sabbatical, maternity/paternity, long-term sick): 2%
- Secondary school pupil (up to age 16): 1%
- Other: 1%
- Currently retired: 0%

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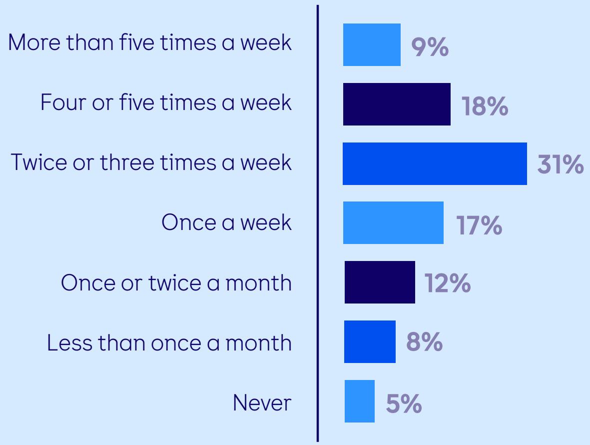
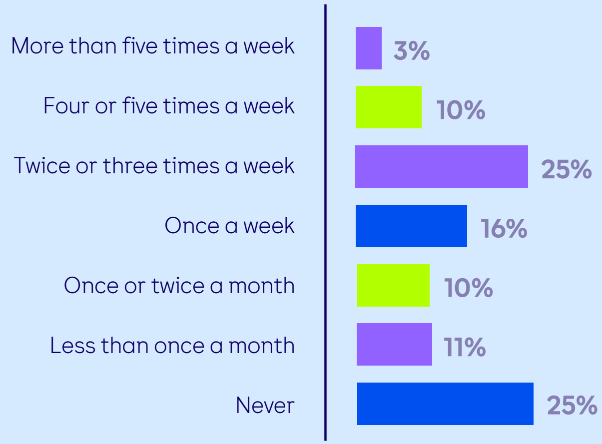


Q5. How often, if at all, do you exercise?

- More than five times a week: 9%
- Four or five times a week: 18%
- Twice or three times a week: 31%
- Once a week: 17%
- Once or twice a month: 12%
- Less than once a month: 8%
- Never: 5%



Q6. How often, if at all, do you go to the gym?

- More than five times a week: 3%
- Four or five times a week: 10%
- Twice or three times a week: 25%
- Once a week: 16%
- Once or twice a month: 10%
- Less than once a month: 11%
- Never: 25%

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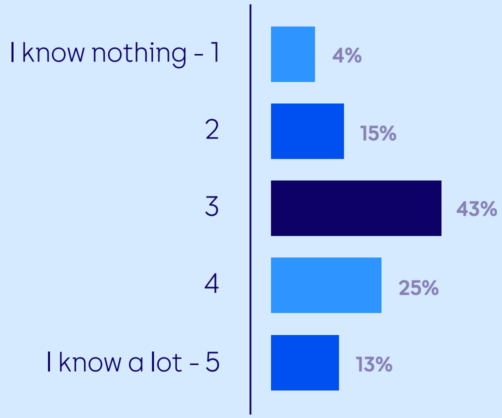
1st	To improve my physical appearance	46%
2nd	To lose weight	40%
3rd	To improve my fitness levels (e.g., cardiovascular health)	40%
4th	To support or improve my mental health and wellbeing	39%
5th	To gain muscle, or tone my physique	35%
6th	To socialise with my friends	12%
7th	To train for a fitness event or challenge	11%
8th	To meet new people	9%
9th	Other	1%



Q7. Which factors most motivate you to exercise?

- To improve my physical appearance: 46%
- To lose weight: 40%
- To improve my fitness levels (e.g., cardiovascular health): 40%
- To support or improve my mental health and wellbeing: 39%
- To gain muscle, or tone my physique: 35%
- To socialise with my friends: 12%
- To train for a fitness event or challenge: 11%
- To meet new people: 9%
- Other: 1%

Q8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how knowledgeable do you feel about physical fitness and exercise?

- 1. I know nothing: 4% - 5. I know a lot: 13%

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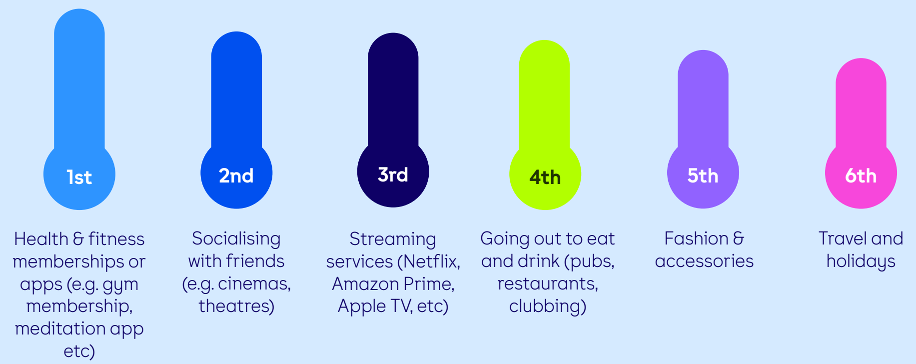

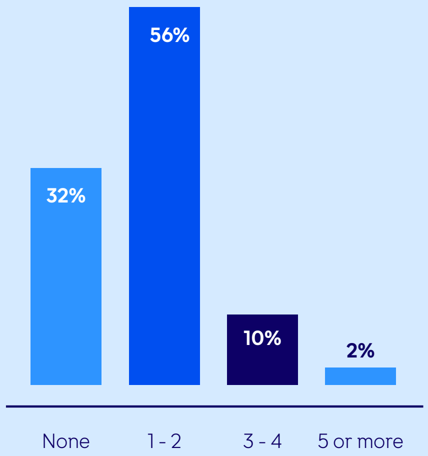

Q9. Thinking about your monthly spending, excluding fixed costs (e.g. rent, mortgage, utility bills) and weekly grocery shopping, which of the following personal purchases based do you prioritise most when budgeting your monthly spending?

- 1st: Health & fitness memberships or apps (e.g. gym membership, meditation app etc)
- 2nd: Socialising with friends (e.g. cinemas, theatres)
- 3rd: Streaming services (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV, etc)
- 4th: Going out to eat and drink (pubs, restaurants, clubbing)
- 5th: Fashion & accessories
- 6th: Travel and holidays

Q10. Thinking about the past 12 months, how many fitness memberships or apps have you paid for?

- None: 32%
- 1 to 2: 56%
- 3 to 4: 10%
- 5 or more: 2%

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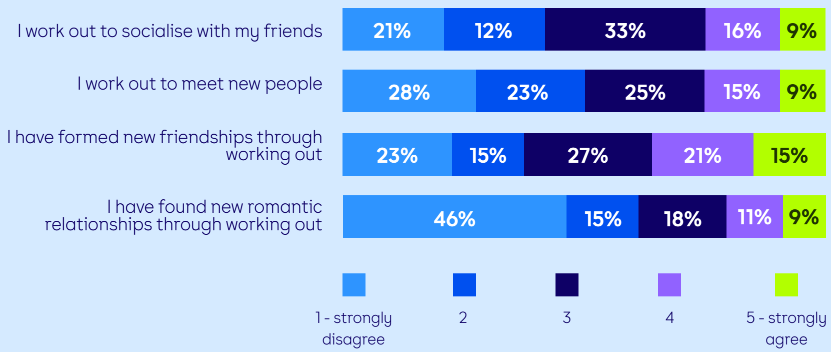

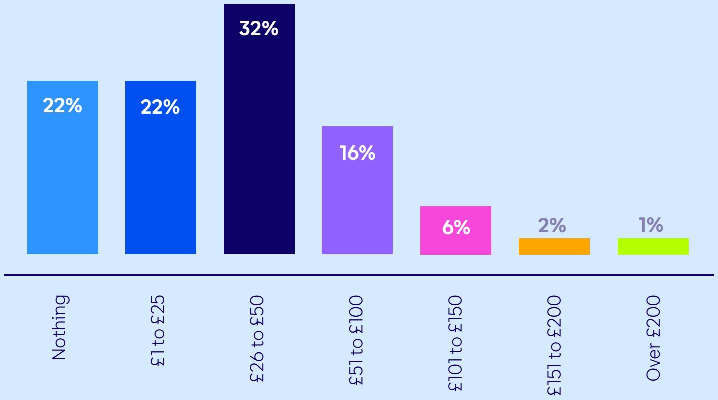

Q11. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree', how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about exercising as a form of socialising?

- **I work out to socialise with my friends**
  1st: 21%, 2nd: 12%, 3rd: 33%, 4th: 16%, 5th: 9%
- **I work out to meet new people**
  1st: 28%, 2nd: 23%, 3rd: 25%, 4th: 15%, 5th: 9%
- **I have formed new friendships through working out**
  1st: 23%, 2nd: 15%, 3rd: 27%, 4th: 21%, 5th: 15%
- **I have found new romantic relationships through working out**
  1st: 46%, 2nd: 15%, 3rd: 18%, 4th: 11%, 5th: 9%

Q12. How much do you spend, on average, per month on health & fitness-related memberships, equipment and activities?

- Nothing: 22%
- £1 to £25: 22%
- £26 to £50: 32%
- £51 to £100: 16%
- £101 to £150: 6%
- £151 to £200: 2%
- Over £200: 1%

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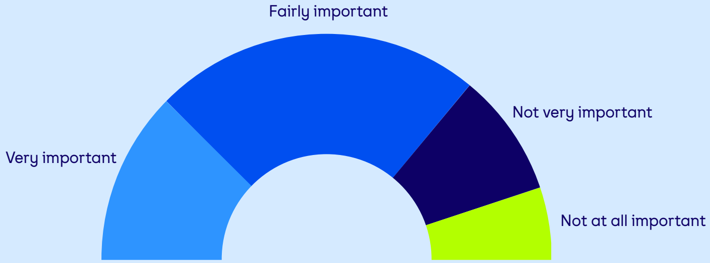

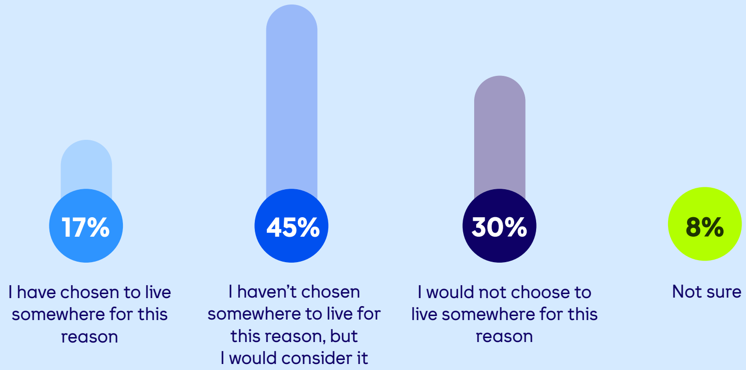

Q13. How important, if at all, is access to a gym when you're choosing where to live?

- Very important: 25%
- Fairly important: 47%
- Not very important: 18%
- Not at all important: 10%

Q14. Have you ever chosen, or would you consider choosing to live somewhere, because it was close to a gym?

- I have chosen to live somewhere for this reason: 17%
- I haven't chosen somewhere to live for this reason, but I would consider it: 45%
- I would not choose to live somewhere for this reason: 30%
- Not sure: 8%

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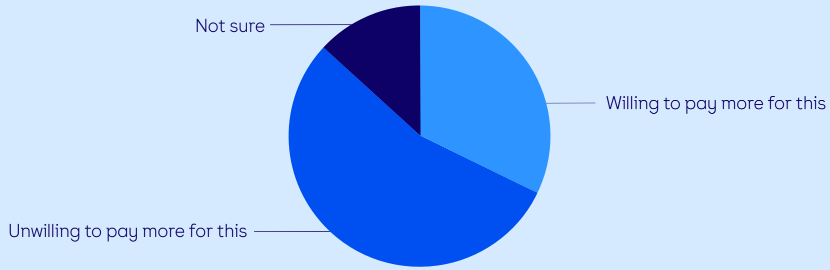
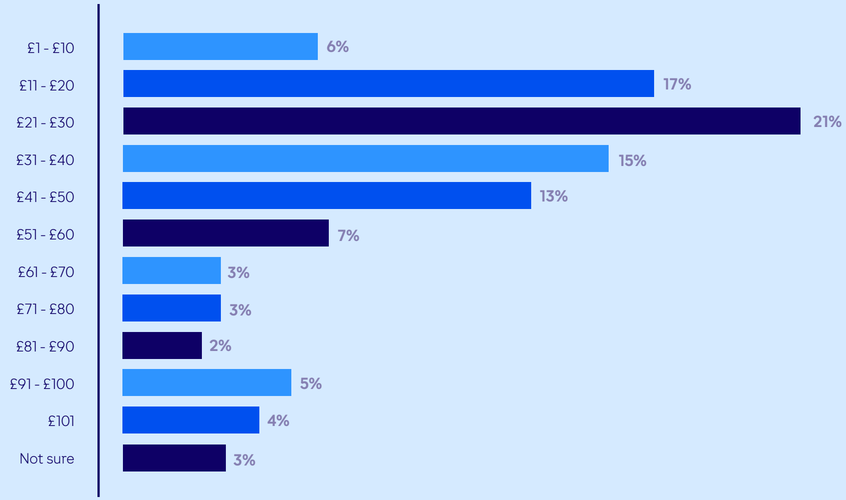




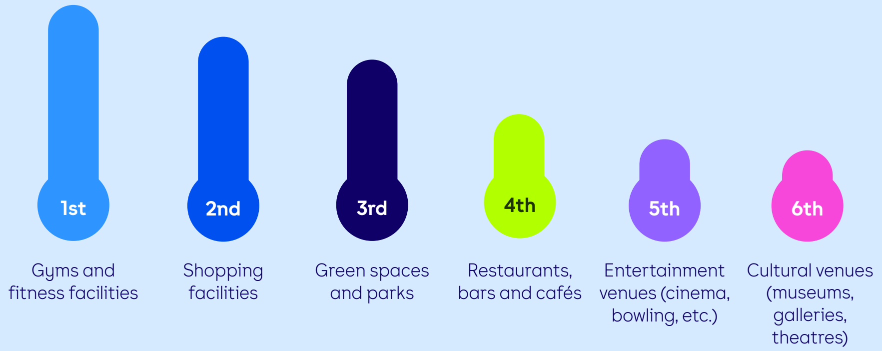
Q15. Would you generally be willing or unwilling to pay more in monthly rent or housing costs to live closer to a gym?

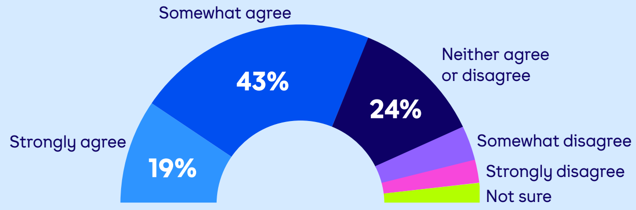
- Not sure: 13%
- Willing to pay more for this: 32%
- Unwilling to pay more for this: 55%

Q16. How much extra per month would you be willing to pay to live closer to a gym/fitness facilities?

- £1 - £10: 6%
- £11 - £20: 17%
- £21 - £30: 21%
- £31 - £40: 15%
- £41 - £50: 13%
- £51 - £60: 7%
- £61 - £70: 3%
- £71 - £80: 3%
- £81 - £90: 2%
- £91 - £100: 5%
- £101+: 4%
- Not sure: 3%

APPENDIX





Q17. Thinking about deciding where to live, which of the following local amenities (outside of essentials, e.g. supermarkets, work, transport) are/would be most important to you?

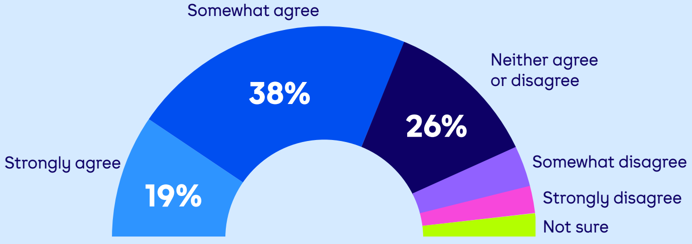
Local amenties ranked first when choosing where to live:

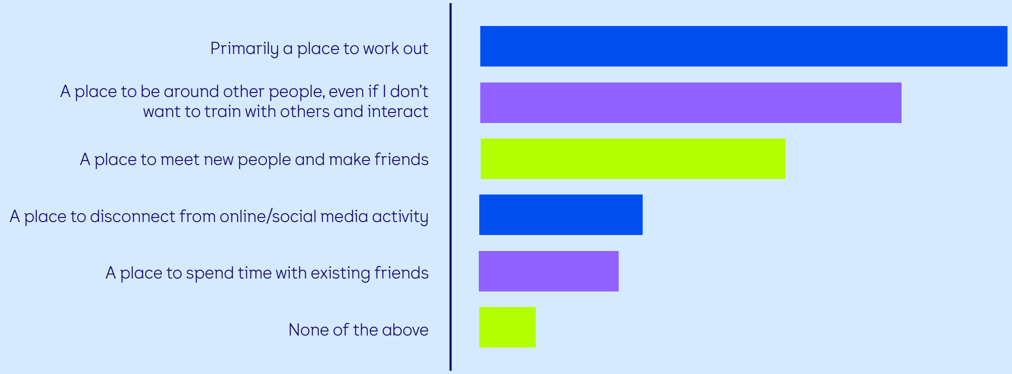
- 1st: Gyms and fitness facilities: 31%
- 2nd: Shopping facilities: 25%
- 3rd: Green spaces and parks: 21%
- 4th: Restaurants, bars and cafes: 14%
- 5th: Entertainment venues (cinema, bowling, etc.): 6%
- 6th: Cultural venues (museums, galleries, theatres): 3%

Q18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The gym is more than a place to exercise, it is also a place to socialise and feel part of a community, connecting with others offline."?

- Strongly agree: 19%
- Somewhat agree: 43%
- Neither agree or disagree: 24%
- Somewhat agree: 6%
- Strongly disagree: 4%
- Not sure: 4%

APPENDIX





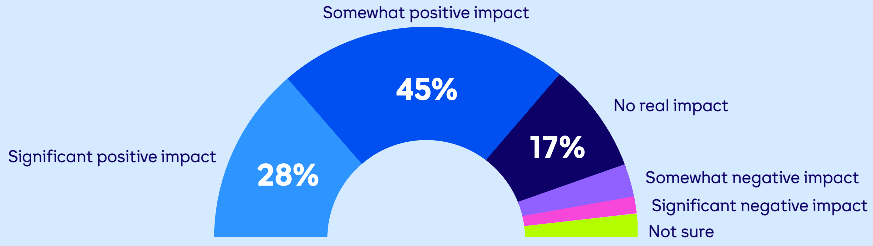
Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The gym is a place where I can/could make meaningful connections with people in real life, away from screens."?

- Strongly agree: 19%
- Somewhat agree: 38%
- Neither agree or disagree: 26%
- Somewhat agree: 10%
- Strongly disagree: 4%
- Not sure: 3%

Q20. Which of the following best describes the role the gym plays in your social life?

- Primarily a place to work out: 33%
- A place to be around other people, even if I don't want to train with others and interact: 26%
- A place to meet new people and make friends: 19%
- A place to disconnect from online/social media activity: 10%
- A place to spend time with existing friends: 9%
- None of the above: 3%

APPENDIX



1st	Value for money	43%
2nd	Convenience and accessibility (e.g. location, opening hours)	36%
3rd	Variety of workout options	32%
4th	A welcoming, inclusive environment	27%
5th	Mental wellbeing support and stress relief	21%
6th	Access to fitness technology and personalised data	18%
7th	Recovery and wellbeing facilities	17%
8th	Opportunities for real-life social connection	16%
9th	None of the above	3%

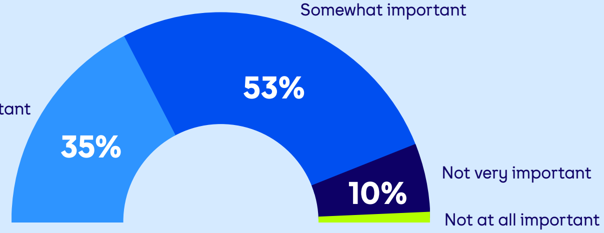
Q21. Even if you don't personally go to the gym, do you think going to the gym generally has/would have a positive impact or negative effect on tackling feelings of loneliness?

- Significant positive impact: 28%
- Somewhat positive impact: 45%
- No real impact: 17%
- Somewhat negative impact: 5%
- Significant negative impact: 2%
- Not sure: 4%

Q22. Which, if any, of the following are most important to you when choosing a gym?

- 1st: Value for money: 43%
- 2nd: Convenience and accessibility (e.g. location, opening hours): 36%
- 3rd: Variety of workout options: 32%
- 4th: A welcoming, inclusive environment: 27%
- 5th: Mental wellbeing support and stress relief: 21%
- 6th: Access to fitness technology and personalised data: 18%
- 7th: Recovery and wellbeing facilities: 17%
- 8th: Opportunities for real-life social connection: 16%
- 9th: None of the above: 3%

APPENDIX



Q21. How important are dedicated recovery and wellness spaces (e.g. stretching areas, recovery zones, massage equipment, saunas or relaxation spaces) when choosing a gym?

- Very important: 35%
- Somewhat important: 53%
- Not very important: 10%
- Not at all important: 2%