

Submission to the Spending Review Consultation

About UK Youth

UK Youth is a leading national charity committed to ensuring all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. With a network of more than 9,000 youth work organisations reaching more than four million young people across the UK, we will not stop until all young people have access to high quality youth work.

We are working closely with the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) on the upcoming National Youth Strategy, both as an individual organisation and through the Back Youth Alliance (BYA).

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Executive Summary

The Spending Review takes place amid fiscal challenges, requiring strategic public service reform to drive national renewal. Treasury investment in youth sector infrastructure is a necessary and high-value intervention that will deliver long-term economic and social benefits.

UK Youth's key recommendations to HM Treasury:

1. Investing in Youth Work as Prevention to Enable Growth

- Growth is not possible without investing in future generations of young people. This must be broader than the formal education system alone.
- Youth work is a cost-effective, preventative intervention delivering at least £3.20 in economic return for every £1 spent.¹
- Strategic investment in youth services reduces pressure on acute public services, including mental health, criminal justice, education, and welfare.²
- People who engage with youth work as teenagers are proven to become happier, healthier, and wealthier adults compared to those from the same socio-economic backgrounds who did not access youth work.³
- A 'getting ahead' prevention strategy should prioritise youth work as a driver of economic and social mobility.

2. Reducing Cross-Departmental Silos to Improve Government Efficiency

- Fragmentation in youth service policy and funding reduces impact and efficiency.
- Establishing a cross-government shared learning system would ensure consistency, avoid duplication, and improve service delivery. We join the Institute for

¹ <https://www.ukyouth.org/untapped/>

² <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/youth-work-and-prevention.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-provision-and-life-outcomes-research>

Government in calling for the establishment of an Office for Government Improvement and Learning, improving collaboration between local and national government.⁴

- The Youth Guarantee must be adequately resourced to ensure meaningful provision for young people, with youth services embedded alongside employment support, education, and health services.

3. Sustaining Investment in Youth Services to Break Down Barriers to Opportunity

- Since 2010, local authority youth service funding in England has been cut by 73% (£1.2bn) and in Wales by 27% (£16.6m), severely impacting provision. This has led to the closure of over half of the UK's youth centres.⁵
- Since 2010/11, 1,536 qualified youth workers have been lost and 634 youth centres closed. The landscape has fundamentally shifted and become increasingly fragmented, with local authorities scaling back investment in youth services in the absence of necessary ring-fenced funds.⁶
- Whilst the Government has been publicly supportive of the work of the sector, and keen to highlight its significance for young people, another reduction in investment at this year's Spending Review will risk pushing the sector over the brink, and with it, support for the country's children and young people.
- The National Youth Strategy needs to be appropriately funded to provide much-needed certainty for the youth sector. Sustainable, long-term investment for youth sector provision is key. UK Youth calls on the Government to ensure any new strategy provides the necessary financial guarantee for youth services to best enable the sector to break down barriers to opportunity for all.
- The Adventures Away from Home Fund must be renewed and extended to ensure equitable access to outdoor learning, a proven tool for developing skills critical for social mobility and engagement with nature.⁷

4. Ensuring Safer Streets Through Youth Work Investment

- Youth work reduces anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime – including violent crime – by providing young people with trusted mentors and safe spaces.⁸
- The Government's commitment to halve knife crime and violence against women and girls cannot be achieved without expansion of youth work services.

⁴ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/preventative-approach-public-services>

⁵ <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ymca-youth-services-beyond-the-brink.pdf>

⁶ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/NYA-Supporting-and-Growing-the-Youth-Work-Workforce-%E2%80%93-The-Critical-Challenge-January-2025.pdf>

⁷ https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/UK_Youth_Adventures_Away_from_Home_2_AAfH2_FULL_Report_V4.pdf

⁸ <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYA-Report-The-social-cost-of-youth-work-cuts-%E2%80%93-Preventing-youth-offending-through-youth-work.pdf>

- The Home Office should allocate set funding for the co-design of the Young Futures programme – both Hubs and Prevention Partnerships – ensuring young people are actively involved in tackling serious violence.

How Investment in Youth Work Can Drive Economic Growth

A Preventative Approach to Public Service Reform

The Government has committed to a mission-led, technology-enabled, and reform-driven approach to public services. Youth work exemplifies this by delivering preventative interventions that reduce future costs for social services, policing, and welfare.

Youth work is a quintessential example of a preventative intervention. UK Youth recommends the development of a ‘getting ahead’ prevention strategy based around youth work investment to reform public services.

- Analysis by UK Youth and Frontier Economics (2022) shows that youth work delivers high value for money for the UK taxpayer, through the positive effects that it has on young people. **Youth work is already saving the Government £3.2bn a year** through improved education and employment outcomes and positive impacts on mental health. It is also contributing £5.7bn annually to the wider economy through jobs, volunteering, and local suppliers.⁹
- The research also found that **for every £1 Government invests in youth work, the benefit to the taxpayer is between £3.20 and £6.40**. With further investment, these benefits would be even higher.
- The **Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024)** found that for every **£1 cut from youth services, nearly £3 is lost** in education and crime-related costs.¹⁰

Without investment in young people, future economic growth is unattainable. Treasury should embed youth work into a ‘getting ahead’ prevention strategy to secure long-term prosperity.

Reducing Government Inefficiency by Improving Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Youth work funding is currently fragmented across multiple departments, leading to duplication, inefficiency, and inconsistency.

Fragmentation around departmental spending has impacted on investment into youth services where responsibility falls between multiple government departments. Youth work policymaking is currently far too fragmented across central government. As a result, local authorities often receive duplicated or conflicting guidance for what is expected of them. Competing demands and direction from Whitehall reduce the likelihood that services will be able to work together and impacts the provision of youth work as a form of prevention. Reform is therefore urgently needed to provide the youth sector with the support it needs.

⁹ <https://www.ukyouth.org/untapped/>

¹⁰ https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/WP202451-The-effects-of-youth-clubs-on-education-and-crime_1.pdf

To maximise impact:

- A **Shared Learning System for Government Improvement** should be established to streamline cross-departmental collaboration.
- The DCMS-led **National Youth Strategy** must be genuinely cross-government and adequately resourced to prevent short-term, siloed policymaking.
- The Youth Guarantee should ensure that youth workers are embedded alongside **meaningful investment** rather than a mere mapping exercise.

Breaking Down Barriers to Opportunity Through Long-Term Investment

Young people are growing up in a complex and increasingly challenging world. There are severe pressures on their mental health, employment prospects, and even physical safety. Youth work is an essential tool to help young people navigate these difficulties and set them up with skills for life.

Sustainable Youth Services Funding

Despite rapidly increasing scale and complexity of young people's needs, cuts to youth services since 2010 have decimated support. YMCA figures show:

- A **73 % reduction in local authority youth service funding** in England (£1.2bn loss) and **27 % in Wales** (£16.6m loss).¹¹
- **16 fewer local authority youth centres** in England in 2023 compared to 2022, marking a **54 % decline since 2010**.

To ensure continuity, the National Youth Strategy must be fully funded, reversing previous cuts that have cost the taxpayer more money.

The Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS)-commissioned projects in 2023, the 'Youth Evidence Base', found that people who engaged in youth work as teenagers were more likely to be happy, healthier and wealthier adults compared to those from the same socio-economic background who did not have access to youth work.¹² Investing in youth sector infrastructure can therefore provide a stable foundation for future economic growth and reduced strain on acute services.

The Youth Guarantee, being delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Education (DfE) is a welcome step in the right direction through its focus on prevention as outlined in the 'Get Britain Working White Paper'. However, it is important that the Youth Guarantee does not duplicate activity or serve only as a mapping exercise. Successful implementation will require funding for youth work alongside employment support and health services that can shape a strong, joined-up local work, health and skills offer, enabling future growth.

Pressure on local authority finances

We understand that the Government, through its devolution plans, may be looking to distribute this funding at a local level. If funding is to be delivered through Local Authority budgets then it must be

¹¹ <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ymca-youth-services-beyond-the-brink.pdf>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-provision-and-life-outcomes-research>

ring fenced, so that it isn't subsumed by other pressures. As the LGA has warned, 63% of councils are anticipating further cuts to services for children, young people, and families in the coming year.

Dormant Assets Scheme

We welcome confirmation that £100m from the Dormant Assets Scheme will be directed to the provision of services, facilities or opportunities to meet the needs of young people. This should be used to invest in Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations across the country that provide life-changing youth work and enrichment to help young people improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and develop essential skills.

Given the landscape of youth provision, we believe the simplest and quickest route to delivery would be to distribute revenue directly to local VCS organisations by the National Lottery Community Fund, in a similar model to the proposed structure of the Youth Opportunity Fund. The application process for the fund needs to reflect the specific challenges around capacity and expertise that voluntary organisations are faced with, as well as incorporate youth voice in decision making.

Renewing and extending the Adventures Away from Home Fund

Outdoor learning plays a crucial role in skill development and social mobility:

- 65 % of young people in the programme had **no prior access to outdoor learning**, highlighting systemic inequity.¹³
- The Fund should be **renewed on a multi-year basis and expanded** to ensure continuity and expand access to disadvantaged young people.

Making Streets Safer Through Youth Work

Youth Work Is Essential to Reduce Crime and ASB

Young people need a trusted adult in their lives to help them navigate challenges and to hold them accountable for their behaviour. For some young people, this will be a parent or family member. For others, they need a youth worker. When preventative support is taken away, young people are more vulnerable to crime and other ASB.¹⁴

Reductions in local youth provision are associated with a rise in certain types of crime and ASB, including: increases in the number of children cautioned or sentenced, the proportion of young people who reoffend, bike thefts, weapon possession offences, and shoplifting.¹⁵

Youth work provides safe spaces, structured activities, and mentorship, reducing youth involvement in crime and ASB.

¹³ https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/UK_Youth_Adventures_Away_from_Home_2_AAfH2_FULL_Report_V4.pdf

¹⁴ https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/WP202451-The-effects-of-youth-clubs-on-education-and-crime_1.pdf

¹⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ce41c3423931001bb7b8b7/Local_Areas_-_Report_-_Youth_Evidence_Base-accessible.pdf

- The Youth Endowment Fund have identified youth work services as one of the most effective mechanisms for reducing violence affecting young people.¹⁶
- A recent Children’s Commissioner report on riots involving young people highlighted the need for **more youth provision**.¹⁷

Young people with lived experience of violence must be involved in designing all policies and interventions that affect their lives. All new initiatives (including the Home Office Young Futures programme) should be:

- Co-designed with young people, following successful models like **The Power of Youth Charter**¹⁸ and **My Ends Programme**.¹⁹
- Specifically funded to ensure they **facilitate meaningful engagement** rather than stretching youth sector resources.

Conclusion

Investment in youth work is an investment in the UK’s economic growth, building opportunities, and creating safer streets. Treasury must recognise that failing to fund youth services will result in higher long-term costs for welfare, healthcare, and criminal justice.

By embedding youth work into a prevention-first approach, the Government can ensure sustainable growth, safer communities, and greater opportunities for the next generation. The Spending Review presents an opportunity to transform the support available to young people through a vibrant youth sector—a vital intervention that will deliver exceptional returns for both the economy and society.

¹⁶ <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/the-vital-role-of-youth-work-in-reducing-violence-and-supporting-young-people/>

¹⁷ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/childrens-involvement-in-the-2024-riots/>

¹⁸ <https://www.iwill.org.uk/organisations/pledges/>

¹⁹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/our-programmes/my-ends-programme>