

IN OUR OWN WORDS

Research exploring the needs and preferences of young people and youth practitioners in England

UK YOUTH



Full Report:
February 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Citizen's Service (NCS) want to understand the latest perceptions, needs and preferences of young people and youth practitioners across England, in relation to youth provision.

In January 2024, NCS commissioned UK Youth to undertake qualitative research to explore this topic. Insights were gathered through mixed methods, with a strong focus on an innovative approach to soliciting and analysing audio-recorded testimonies.



“ They say prevention is better than cure and, for a young person going through a million transitions in their life, if they have the access to the right support, it would really help.

Youth practitioner, strand 1

This approach to 'self-recorded' testimonies achieved higher engagement from youth practitioners than young people but insights from a diverse range of perspectives have informed a number of key conclusions aimed at policy-makers; funders; and youth sector infrastructure organisations.



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Conclusions aimed at policy-makers, funders and infrastructure organisations

1

Open-access, centre-based, holistic youth provision remains critical to supporting young people and needs sustainable investment. Centre-based youth provision, local to young people in their communities, acts as a springboard for other youth development opportunities.

2

Youth practitioners cannot currently meet demand for one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance, and mental health support. **Investment in youth work - alongside statutory mental health services - is critical to ensuring that young people have access to both preventative support that enables them to maintain positive wellbeing and crisis support whenever it is needed.**

3

Young people need support to expand their horizons, particularly for those living with severe financial constraints. **Beyond centre-based provision, young people want fun and novel experiences away from home.** Equally, youth employability support should involve practical work experience opportunities.



4

Youth practitioners want to improve partnership and cross-sector working. They have identified failures in the system around young people that need to be resolved urgently.

5

The need for tailored, inclusive provision is high on youth practitioners' agendas. **The spaces and support that young people engage with should be adapted to meet individual needs, giving them meaningful choice and control about the youth work support they receive.**

6

There are severe pressures on the youth sector workforce, which is negatively impacting the quality and availability of youth provision. **Urgent investment is needed to develop a sustainable pipeline of energised youth practitioners with the right skills to support young people and their organisations.**



7

Youth practitioners do not see digital youth work as a silver bullet, but **technology has an important role to play in staying connected with young people, in times of crisis and in underpinning routine provision. The biggest gains might be made by improving local, regional and national digital infrastructure to support joined up working across sectors.** There may be an opportunity to better engage business and tech companies in doing this.

8

There is a need to invest in youth work as a mechanism for digitally safeguarding young people and promoting young people's democratic participation. The racist riots that swept across England in August 2024 have acted as a reminder of the need to equip and empower young people to navigate misinformation, the risk of online harm and racial tension.

9

Youth voice and leadership should be central to the development of youth policy, youth work practice and the community spaces that young people engage with.



BACKGROUND

In January 2024, The National Citizen Service (NCS) commissioned UK Youth to conduct research into the needs and preferences of youth practitioners and young people (those currently engaged and not engaged in youth provision) across England. The research explored how these stakeholders currently view youth provision, the future of youth provision, how youth provision can be better-supported and the role of digital approaches, tools and solutions in delivering and underpinning youth provision and protecting young people from online harm.

The methodology used an innovative approach by gathering user-recorded qualitative testimonies from these stakeholder groups, which were then transcribed, coded and analysed. A pulse-check question (through UK Youth's monthly *Just One Question* initiative) and focus groups were also conducted during this research.





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This report documents what we found and the implications for how youth work can be underpinned more generally. The insights are presented from the perspectives of young people and youth practitioners. This report also discusses how UK Youth approached the research and how this creative methodology could be used and improved in future.

Research aims

The National Citizen Service (NCS) commissioned UK Youth to conduct research with young people and youth practitioners, to get a better understanding of the views, motivations, and priorities of a diverse and representative range of young people and youth practitioners across England.

The research aimed to:

- 1 Understand the views, motivations and priorities of young people on youth provision in England.
- 2 Understand the views, experiences, and priorities of youth practitioners on youth provision in England.

The insights have informed a set of conclusions rooted in the views of young people and youth practitioners. The conclusions are targeted at policy-makers, funders and youth sector infrastructure organisations with implications for how young people and the youth sector is supported in future.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a variety of participatory, qualitative research methods. The most innovative of these was user-recorded (and submitted) audio testimonies and interviews between young people and trusted adults, with participants responding to structured questions and prompts. This emerging method is outlined in more detail throughout this section and is critiqued in more detail at [Appendix E](#).

The research also employed a specific 'pulse-check' question (through UK Youth's monthly Just One Question initiative), to quickly gather the views of a larger sample of youth practitioners on a specific theme. Finally, a series of seven focus groups captured youth practitioners' views on the role of digital approaches and solutions in delivering and underpinning youth provision and protecting young people from online harm. In order to promote the research opportunity to a diverse sample of youth practitioners and young people in England, across the various strands outlined below, we undertook a mix of targeted and general communications through our networks.

Participation in the research was also incentivised through prize draws and voucher payments in order to maximise engagement.

An expert Advisory Group was formed for this research. The group was convened through two workshops to critique and interpret the findings and implications of this research and support the development of the storyboard for the short, animated film. The Advisory Group brought together four young people with youth sector professionals from: The National Youth Agency (NYA); Children in Need; NCS and UK Youth.

Overview of the research strands and samples

Table 1 (below) breaks down the six strands on this research, with a brief description of each. Table 1 also summarises: the participant group (or target subject), the sample size, key features of the sample and any notable skews, the timing and any additional notes.

Additional detail is provided in other sections of this report on: [the user-recorded audio testimony method](#) (strands 1-4); Appendix E 'learning from Reflecting on the approach to soliciting user-recorded audio testimonies'; and testimony, interview and focus group discussion guides (see Appendices [A](#), [B](#) and [C](#)).



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Table 1. A breakdown of the research strands and description of the sample for each.

Research strand	Overview of method	Participant group	Sample size	Key features of the sample	Timing
Audio-recorded testimony: strand 1	Youth practitioners submitted short audio-recorded testimonies along with some background information about them and their youth organisation	Youth practitioners from across England	Target: 50 Analysed: 51	<p>Broad representation across: 13 common youth work typologies; across rural, coastal and urban settings; across different sized organisations (by number of staff); and across age groups supported (within the remit of this research: 11-17 years).</p> <p>All regions in England were covered, with some skew to the North West (38%). The Midlands, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber were the regions least represented.</p> <p>The majority of practitioners were experienced and only 8% had been working with young people for 2 years or less. Practitioners were qualified to range of levels, although there was some skew towards those who were unqualified/unsure of their qualification level.</p> <p>Practitioners' ethnicities met the sampling frame in all areas apart from 'Asian or Asian British' which was an underrepresented group.</p>	January - February 2024



Research strand	Overview of method	Participant group	Sample size	Key features of the sample	Timing
Audio-recorded testimony: strand 2	Youth practitioners recorded and submitted short structured interviews with a young person they support along with some background information about the young person.	Young people currently engaged in youth provision	Target: 50 Analysed: 20	<p>A good spread of ages (12-17 years), however young people aged 11 years were not represented. There was an even split across genders and an even split between young people identifying as 'white' and racialised or multiracial backgrounds.</p> <p>Several regions in England were not covered, and a high proportion (50%) were from London and the South East. There was a good mix of young people living in urban and rural communities. However, coastal communities were not represented.</p> <p>Young people not currently engaged in provision (strands 3 and 4) were significantly underrepresented, with only one eligible response meeting this criterion. Around half were engaging in provision once a week, and the other half were attending several times a week. The young people were engaging in a range of types of youth provision.</p>	March - May 2024
Audio-recorded testimony: strand 3	Parents/guardians recorded and submitted short structured interviews with their child (who was not currently engaged in youth provision) along with some background information about their child.	Young people not currently engaged in youth provision			
Audio-recorded testimony: strand 4	Young people (13-17) recorded and submitted short audio-recorded testimonies along with some background information about them. This was done with the informed consent of their parent/guardian.	Young people either engaged or not engaged in youth provision			



Research strand	Overview of method	Participant group	Sample size	Key features of the sample	Timing
'Just One Question'	Just One Question is an ongoing UK Youth initiative. Each month, youth practitioners are invited to respond to one, simple question through an online form. Their responses are quickly analysed, interpreted and shared publicly to inform policy, practice and infrastructure support in the youth sector.	Youth practitioners from across the UK	Target: 300 Analysed: 516	<p>As UK Youth's Just One Question initiative is designed to capture instant responses from a large sample of youth practitioners each month, demographic information is not routinely collected.</p> <p>It should be noted that the data analysed for this research was gathered from practitioners across the UK and is not specific to England.</p>	January 2024



Methodology



Overview of the user-recorded audio testimony method

On strands 1-4 of this research, we employed an innovative user-recorded audio testimony method to gather insights from youth practitioners (strand 1) and young people (strands 2-4). This required participants to complete a short online form with some basic demographic information and upload a self-recorded audio file of up to five-minutes in length. The audio file was recorded by the participant (or a responsible adult; strands 2-3) and captured participants' responses to a small number of open-ended questions. These questions related to the participant's perceptions of youth provision and their needs and preferences for support. The questions used on each strand are detailed at [Appendix A](#).

This approach was more successful on strand 1 (where youth practitioners were the subjects) than on strands 2-4 (where young people were the subjects). In order to engage young people in this research (strands 2-4), we attempted to reach a wide demographic of young people by using: multiple communication channels (e.g. social media and online fora, and direct mailouts to youth practitioners who could engage young people themselves); and incentives such as prize draws. Despite high numbers of click-throughs on paid social media advertising, engagement from young people remained low and this appears to be due to user experience of the online form and audio-recording process - the slightly unwieldy process that young people (strand 4) or their trusted adult (strands 2-3) had to go through to record and submit the audio file appears to have been off-putting on strands 2-4. We discuss this method and how it could be improved and used in future at [Appendix E](#).

Analytical approach

Thematic analysis was undertaken across all strands of this research. Only on the Just One Question strand have responses been quantitatively analysed, where the high sample size (n=516) allows for this. On this strand of the research, descriptive analysis identified the most common responses, once all free-text responses had been coded.

Open coding was primarily used across all research strands, with codes developed based on the themes that were identified in the user-recorded audio testimonies, *Just One Question* responses and focus group discussions. These codes were adjusted over time as the data was analysed, to capture new themes emerging and consolidate closely related themes.

Given the quantity of data being analysed, robust testing for inter-rater reliability was not undertaken. However, portions of the primary analyst's coding were revisited and reviewed by the secondary analyst to ensure that coding was consistent across the two analysts. Equally, specific data points were discussed as new themes were identified and where there was doubt about how data should be coded.

SECTION 7

Views on youth provision

Throughout this section, we explore themes relating to how youth provision is currently perceived by youth practitioners and young people, what youth provision should look like and how it should be delivered. These themes have been drawn from various strands of the data collection and the source of evidence is identified throughout.





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Youth practitioners as the trusted adults that young people go to; and what young people value about youth provision

Youth practitioners play a key role in the lives of young people by actively listening to them, supporting and guiding them, and developing their socio-emotional skills.

We asked young people (strands 2-4) about the trusted adults they go to for support (apart from parents or teachers). The vast majority of young people identified youth workers as those trusted adults. However, three young people could not identify trusted adults in their lives apart from parents or teachers. Despite the question indicating 'apart from teachers', two young people pointed out that they would go to teachers as these are adults they may have known for a long time. One young person spoke about how their boyfriend's mother was the key trusted adult in their life. This is a reminder that informal social networks can provide the trusted adult role in young people's lives, outside of youth provision.

Across all responses, the most common type of support offered by these trusted adults was to simply listen. Many respondents referred to the practical support and guidance offered by their trusted adults. They also emphasised the importance of having someone to turn to, who would listen without judgement. Actively making time or space to let the young person share came out strongly in young people's responses.

In general, young people value unstructured social time in a safe environment, the opportunity to learn new skills, and a space where they can get support from youth workers on their own terms. Young people also highlighted opportunities for peer-to-peer support; developing social skills/socialising; and learning about themselves as activities they enjoy and respond well to.



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Should provision be universal-access; targeted or given strict eligibility criteria?

Open-access, universal provision is seen as the priority for supporting young people in their community, particularly amongst more experienced or higher-qualified practitioners. Open-access provision is also seen as providing the foundation for activities more targeted or tailored to young people's individual needs.

Analysing youth practitioners' responses (strand 1) referencing the 'type of access', we considered 'open or universal' access versus more targeted provision or provision with strict eligibility criteria.

“ The kids just need... an alternative place to go to that they know is safe, or that they can also enjoy themselves and make friends and socialise.

Youth practitioner, strand 1

The strongest preference was for open or universal access. A small number of responses pointed more towards targeted access but accessible, inclusive, individualised or tailored provision came out strongly – this is covered [later in this report](#). No practitioners signalled a preference for youth provision with strict eligibility criteria, although some practitioners did reference working with specific groups of young people (e.g. young people with SEND, Autistic young people, etc) where eligibility criteria may apply.

We explored some of the factors that contributed to youth practitioners' strong preference for centre-based, universal or open-access provision. We conducted further analysis to better understand whether this preference was coming from particular groups of youth practitioners. The hypothesis was that those who had more years of experience would have worked in a more flourishing and better-resourced youth sector, would have some nostalgia around centre-based provision, and would be more likely to identify the value of locally-led youth centres in every community.

The important context behind this, as demonstrated by UK Youth's own recent research, is just [how much the youth sector has changed since 2011](#)¹. In the decade to 2021, local authority youth funding in England more than halved and, during a similar period, the number of youth clubs nearly halved. In this context, youth work has changed in a number of ways, including by becoming more targeted.

Our analysis supported the hypothesis. The more qualified and more experienced the youth practitioner, the more likely they were to state a preference

¹ [Youth provision and life outcomes: A study of the local impact of youth clubs](#). SQW, UK Youth, University of Essex, University of Warwick; 2024.



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for universal/open access youth services over targeted provision. However, very few respondents cited targeted provision specifically in response to this question, so caution should be applied when interpreting these findings.

In line with this, youth practitioners with no qualification who have been working with young people for five years or less were more likely to cite targeted provision when compared to more experienced or qualified practitioners. Table 2 (see below) shows this disaggregation by level of qualification and experience in the profession.

Table 2. Youth practitioners’ preferences for open-access, centre-based provision: Disaggregating by level of qualification and years of experience

Youth practitioner grouping	Variable	Count	Youth provision targeting		Youth provision setting	
			% citing open-access provision in their response	% citing targeted provision in their response	% citing centre based provision in their response	% citing any setting in their response
Highly experienced, highly qualified	> 20 years in the profession	17	53%	0%	35%	53%
	JNC Level 6	11	64%	0%	45%	74%
	> 20 years + JNC Level 6	6	67%	0%	33%	50%
Less experienced, unqualified	No youth work qualification	20	25%	5%	25%	55%
	< 5 years in the profession	12	25%	17%	33%	42%
	Whole sample	51	43%	6%	41%	65%

When looking at where provision should take place (discussed in more detail below), practitioners’ preferences were broadly comparable across sub-groups. In other words, when analysing by the youth work setting, rather than the level of targeting of provision, more experienced and more qualified youth practitioners were only slightly more likely to cite a preference for centre-based provision.



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The youth work setting: Where should provision be delivered?

There is a strong preference for centre-based provision, which can act as the platform for detached youth work, work experience opportunities, and experiences away from home and in outdoor spaces like community gardens.

We asked young people (strands 2-4) about where they access youth provision outside of school and several cited centre-based provision or youth clubs, specifically.



“...It’s like a really nice chill area for like, young people who are in secondary and college to just go there and just, you know, socialise, relax, some play games, do what you really want. And there’s like snacks and stuff like that.”

Young person, Strand 2

Linked to youth practitioners’ strong preference for open-access, holistic support offers, as outlined above, centre-based provision came out strongly from youth practitioners (strand 1). This was often referred to as the traditional, open-access, youth centre model providing a one-stop shop for support.

“We are so blessed to have a youth centre in one of our villages. But we have so many other places [where we are] working which are even bigger, have more need more young people. We haven’t got facilities, good facilities for young people.”

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

A number of practitioners noted the importance of young people having ownership over the setting/the building – making it their own, putting their stamp on it, not having to share it with other community groups. This is discussed in more detail [later in this report](#).

Some practitioners also said that outreach or detached youth provision is important and complements centre-based provision. A very small minority also referenced mobile provision, as something that has been largely lost but can be effective in meeting young people ‘where they are’.



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“ There’ll be more detached youth work as well. So actually going out to young people where they are, rather than asking them to come to you.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

We also heard about the need for experiences and adventures away from home, particularly for young people (strands 2-4) who would not otherwise have these opportunities. Some practitioners (strand 1) cited the need to connect young people with nature (e.g. community gardening activities) and a small number of youth practitioners talked about the importance of giving young people practical employment and work experience opportunities with local businesses, to build young people’s aspirations for work and better understand the career options available to them. We discuss the theme of **employability support** later on.

“ I’d like everything to be really interactive. I work with employment and getting them out there and to actually have an opportunity to go into workplaces more often to be organised by the workplaces as well, me helping to do that.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Young people (strands 2-4) expressed a desire to go to new places “because, we go to the same places like every time” and some cited the distance they had to travel to access activities like ice skating. A group of young people in Rotherham specifically asked for “trips and residentials” and “a nice little garden with some things to grow and then you eat [them].”

A small number of youth practitioners’ responses (strand 1) focused on the role that youth provision can play in formal education settings with a particular focus on early intervention and working with teachers to improve referral pathways. We also discuss cross-sector and partnership working [later in this report](#).



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What needs to change in terms of the 'dosage' and frequency of youth provision?

Youth practitioners do not feel able to meet demand from young people or offer the level or accessibility of provision that young people need.

For open-access, holistic support, a clear need was identified to be open for longer. Many practitioners (strand 1) spoke of the fact that they were only providing access to their provision for a few hours each day and that longer opening hours would give young people a safe place to go on their terms and keep them off the street.

Young people's need for 24/7 support from trusted, trained adults also came out as a theme; offering young people someone to speak to at any time, day or night, when they are in crisis. We discuss the theme of mental health support [later in this report](#).



“ [if] it was every night of the week, different things on different nights and maybe different ages. But literally young people knew that the youth centre was open. They could go in there whenever they wanted.

“ Not just like 24 hours a day, like all days of the week, because on the weekends, sometimes we can't help people because nobody's working.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1



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What types of youth provision are seen as most engaging and effective?

Open access, holistic provision is highly valued and acts as the basis for a wide range of other, more targeted youth work services.

Open-access, holistic, wrap-around support -offering a range of support and engaging activities in the community - came out as the strongest preference from youth practitioners. Often linked to that were references to more specific types of youth work provision.



I guess the opportunity for young people to be able to access a service where they can either come along and just enjoy themselves getting involved in music making or whatever, but also access, quality mental health services, and any other support they need.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

1-1 mentoring and mental health support are both highly valued and are seen as more synonymous amongst young people than youth practitioners. Many youth practitioners feel that both 1-1 mentoring and mental health support cannot currently be adequately resourced and some practitioners noted that therapeutic support needs to be delivered by specialists.

1-1 mentoring was referenced by a number of practitioners. They said that it would be part of the ideal, holistic package for many of the young people responding (strand 1). As already discussed, being able to provide more intensive 1-1 support is not currently practical for a lot of youth practitioners. Some mentioned that having just a five or ten minute time-out with a young person can be really beneficial. Clearly, 1-1 mentoring provides opportunities for individualised support – this is covered in more detail later in this report.



[Ideally] there [would] be a number of opportunities for them to try different roles to help them decide which would be best for them; to have weekly meetings with them to discuss how they think they did that week. Was there anything they needed to support them? Did they have any problems?

Youth practitioner, Strand 1



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Young people (strands 2-4) also spoke to the value of 1-1 mentoring. This came out as a real strength of youth provision, providing a safe space to share personal issues and build confidence, particularly for young people experiencing social anxiety and feelings of anger.

“ I think it’d be nice to be able to see [my youth worker] one to one more often. Yeah, I feel like we’ve started to do that less.

And I feel like you can relate to [youth workers] kind of because they’re not there to, like, scold you, or like invalidate what you’re feeling that like just to listen.

Young person, Strand 2

Mental health support, including counselling and therapeutic support came out as a prominent theme. Youth practitioners (strand 1) noted cuts to mental health services, long waiting lists and the pressures on young people as a result of the school system. They also discussed the influences of social media and other factors. Downward trends in young people’s mental health and wellbeing are now well-documented². Within this theme, a number of practitioners spoke to the need for mental health specialists to be embedded within a

youth centre and/or youth practitioners being better trained in therapeutic approaches to be able to deal with the increasingly severe and complex issues young people are experiencing.

“ I’d set up a mental health provision for young people, somewhere for them to drop in, have access to mental health trained people that can support them all throughout the day, seven days of the week.

We would need to be working deeper in partnership with specialist services like counsellors.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

A small number of young people (strands 2-4) referenced the need for ‘mental health support’ specifically. Others spoke of challenges with anxiety and anger that their youth worker was helping them to overcome. For young people, there was a less clear distinction between 1-1 mentoring and mental health support. However, youth practitioners (strand 1) were more aware of their limitations in providing therapeutic mental health support and were much more vocal about the urgent need for more mental health specialists.

² Chollet D, Turner A, Marquez J, O’Neill J, Moore L. [The Good Childhood Report 2024](#). The Children’s Society: London; 2024.



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Closely linked to mentoring, 'advice and guidance' and - to some extent - 'training' were surfaced as specific youth work activities to prioritise. Advice and guidance on sexual health and supporting young people into education, training and employment came up as preferences for future support. A specific need was identified for advice and guidance to be more tailored to young people.

Advice and guidance, as a fairly broad area, was mentioned in some form by a number of practitioners (strand 1). This included the need to signpost young people to general information about the support available to them, as well as references to specialist services like sexual health. Two respondents noted the importance of advice and guidance being tailored to young people – “most times, they’re just not referenced at all”. Advice and guidance focused quite heavily on employability support and support with finding additional education and training opportunities. ‘Academic support’ was mentioned in a small minority of testimonies.

Closely linked to this, we also looked at **training** as a type of youth work activity. It only came out clearly in a small number of responses (strand 1) but there was a good degree of cross-over with responses focusing on advice and guidance.

Employability support was noted as a priority by youth practitioners more than young people. Basic support and upskilling (e.g. CV writing), understanding career pathways and practical work experience opportunities were identified as being key.

Employability support also came through as a specific theme mentioned by youth practitioners (strand 1). They referenced the need for young people to have more basic support with CV writing, preparing for interviews and understanding career pathways. There was a strong focus on offering young people practical and “interactive” employment opportunities such as: work experience placements, entry-level jobs; and opportunities to develop relationships with local employers.



[Effective and engaging youth provision should focus on] learning about people skills, learning, soft or hard skills, and then also learning things like money management. Being able to write CVs; advice on what good and bad decision making looks like; what being a good citizen looks like.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1



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I think it would work as extensive ongoing experiences of different workplaces. Working in a structured basis throughout, you know, the entire adolescence, helping them understand the difference between a role and an industry and make informed decisions and then connect them up to where they want to go.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Employability support came out less strongly from young people (strands 2-4). However, two young people spoke about wanting specific skills development activities that would support their career, such as coding/game design and cooking.

Financial hardship was seen as a major barrier to young people having experiences and adventures away from home, unless youth practitioners had the budget to take them. Reconnecting young people with nature (e.g. through community gardening) may be seen as a lower-cost alternative for 'getting young people out of the house.'

Of the few practitioners who spoke about the importance of **experiences away from home** and outdoor learning (strand 1), the key themes were:

- The importance of getting young people out of the house and socialising
- The need to offer trips and new experiences to young people – for many, money is the key barrier to visiting new places. Practitioners wanted to have a dedicated budget for youth organisations to take young people on trips and residential, akin to NCS's own model.
- Outdoor learning did not come out particularly strongly, but a small number of practitioners referenced growing food, community gardening and cooking as well as re-connecting young people with nature more generally.



Trips, you know, places where they've never been before. They can't afford to go beyond being able to go with a youth organisation instead.

*Youth practitioner,
Strand 1*



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Youth social action, championing the causes young people care about, advocating for other young people, and providing peer-support are seen as important aspects of youth provision for some practitioners. Young people spoke more to the value of peer-mentoring across age groups in giving them a sense of responsibility.

A small proportion of youth practitioners (strand 1) focused in on the role of **youth social action** (campaigning, activism and volunteering). We heard about the importance of young people championing positive mental health and how young people could “become a national and global cause of their own.” Practitioners also spoke about supporting young people to advocate for other young people and raising the profile of young people locally.

“Drawing young people out of an often hyper-individualised sense of themselves or hyper individualised types of provision into collective action for change to offer young people the opportunity to be changemakers and world shapers.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Linked to this, some youth practitioners referenced the role of **peer-support and peer-mentoring** but this came out more strongly in young people’s recordings (strands 2-4). Young people spoke specifically about the value of youth provision welcoming a wide age range. Some

young people were engaged in activities that involved supporting younger children through mentoring, peer support, and by running fun activities. This gave them a sense of responsibility and they were positive about helping others to develop their social skills.

“And it gave them like feeling of as if like, we’re like their older sister type of thing. And it was really nice and talking to them and building that relationship with them.

“I’m doing something for other people, as well as for myself. And it’s helping everyone. So it’s like, this is great.

“Because it is kind of a life skill to have to learn how to like cope with people younger or older than you. So I think like if you have more teamwork games that can teach people that life skill develop without them knowing.

Young people, Strand 2



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“ And you know, even getting those older young people to be peer mentors to the younger people can make a big difference ... They can really be an inspirational role model to the young people that are attending maybe some of the sessions or see them about doing positive things in provision or at the project.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Sport, physical activity and arts-based activities had much more focus from young people than practitioners. Young people spoke positively about the rewarding challenge and social aspects of physical activity, and the therapeutic effect of creative activities and the arts.

Interestingly, sport and physical activity did not come out strongly in youth practitioners’ responses (strand 1) but a small minority specifically referenced the need for spaces and facilities that enable young people to be active, alongside a more holistic offer. Young people (strands 2-4) spoke positively about sport and physical activity that they currently engage with – such as dance sessions, ice skating, football, etc. They talked about how these activities challenge them but also encourage them to speak to people they would not normally talk to and make new friends. A small number of young people spoke specifically about gyms providing a safe space for them to spend time with peers and one respondent spoke about a female-only gym that they enjoyed going to.

Similarly, arts-based and creative activities did not come up a great deal in youth practitioners’ responses (strand 1) but came out much more strongly from young people. One practitioner spoke about the poetry project that their organisation runs and others referenced the role that creative activities can have in improving young people’s mental health outcomes.

However, young people (strands 2-4), were keen to see arts-based and creative activities continue and also suggested new ideas. Dance, drama and music were

all strong themes and young people also spoke to the therapeutic nature of arts-based activities, both in group settings and in quieter, personal settings where the young person could get more absorbed in art and culture.

“ It’s great performing on stage, but I would like a place to practice, possibly record our music, just a free space that young people can go to whenever they want.

“ I go to dance and drama groups. And they’re fun because you get to meet new people and you get pushed out of your comfort zone a bit.

“ More singing, more acting, more dancing, music lessons, piano lessons.

“ I love the culture behind, like, Japanese art because it really brings to life a different world. For me personally, it got me through a lot of dark times when I was growing up.

Young people, Strands 2-4



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How should youth provision be delivered and supported?

Youth provision and spaces should be tailored, inclusive and co-designed with young people. Meeting young people’s basic needs (such as food and shelter) alongside ensuring that the provision is fun are also key to engaging young people.

Tailored, inclusive provision was referenced in around a third of youth practitioners’ testimonies (strand 1). These responses often referenced young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Some responses spoke to matching youth workers with young people and taking a more responsive and flexible approach to delivery. Others mentioned individualised support plans and creating a physical environment that is inclusive.



We heard from one young person who faced a number of barriers to accessing ‘mainstream’ youth provision. These barriers included selective mutism and anxiety. This made it extremely challenging to participate in loud, busy, unstructured activities. The parent and young person talked at length about the need for specialist support from practitioners who understood her conditions, could provide quiet spaces and could build on the activities she enjoys and is most comfortable doing.

Youth-led/youth-owned provision was specifically mentioned by youth practitioners (strand 1). Some referred to youth voice in designing provision whereas others spoke more to physical space having more youth ownership.

“ For people that I work with, who have Autism, so I’d like to help them ‘cause they struggle a lot in school, to be able to help them to reregulate and to help support them.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

“ It shouldn’t be us dictating and choosing what they need. It should be them coming to us and saying, This is what I want. So we provide it.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1



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“ It would look absolutely brilliant because we’d graffiti all around the outside. Yeah, they would design it would be it would be absolutely fantastic. Yeah. And we could talk all night all day.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Practitioners also referenced the need to **meet young people’s basic needs**. “Giving them a hot meal” came up several times and providing safe and secure housing within holistic, open-access youth provision was also mentioned.

“ Lots of young people have issues around housing. Sofa surfing, there’s lots of issues of work and money and paying for the rent and stuff. So I would have a house as well where young people can stay temporarily until they kind of get back on their feet or we can work out the next steps.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

Other less common themes included ensuring that provision is fun and engaging and the need to support young people to navigate social media safely. The negative impact of social media on young people is discussed [later in this report](#).

SECTION 2

Enabling youth provision to thrive

Throughout this section, we explore youth practitioners' perceptions of the biggest challenges they are currently facing: 'what's keeping them up at night?' We also explore how youth provision should be underpinned: the support that youth practitioners are asking for and the systemic change they believe is needed. These themes have emerged from stand 1 of the research and UK Youth's Just One Question for youth practitioners in January 2024





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The importance of joined up thinking, partnership working and cross-sector collaboration

The importance of joined up thinking, partnership working and cross-sector collaboration were key themes raised by youth practitioners. Some cited the negative impact of systemic failures in public services and structural inequalities around race and poverty on young people and practitioners themselves. The importance of partnership working and cross-sector collaboration was seen as vital by many to support delivery, improve referral pathways, enable earlier intervention and influence policy and practice more widely.

Around a third of responses highlighted **systemic failures in public services** as their biggest challenge. Some practitioners stressed the lack of joined up thinking around supporting young people; some spoke about poor quality statutory and wider public services; and some pointed towards wider structural inequalities around race, poverty, and how these have been exacerbated in the recent cost of living crisis. Practitioners referenced not just the negative impact that this was having on young people but to the youth work profession as well. There was considerable frustration that so many systemic issues felt beyond the control of youth practitioners.

Closely related to this, around a third of practitioners referenced the need for more effective and efficient **partnership and cross-sector working**. These responses focused on the need to: build strong partnerships to support delivery (such as having mental health practitioners located within youth centres and by building stronger links with local employers); improve referral pathways (e.g. by working in schools to

deliver earlier intervention); and work across sectors to influence policy and practice (for example to influence education policy and curricula).

“ Part of that is changing school systems. So that it looks like there is a curriculum that’s appropriate for the needs of young people, which often it’s not just an exam factory, and we need to look at how we can alter that and how we can value or the types of qualifications or other types of learning.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

When we asked youth practitioners to tell us the top three things would make it easier for them to support young people (see Figure 1), **better relationships/ways of working with other sectors/agencies** and **the importance of effective information sharing** came



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up as common themes. These responses tended to highlight that better information sharing, at the right times, in combination with improved relationships/ways of working with other agencies supporting a young person, would allow the youth practitioner to intervene and engage with the young person in the safest and most appropriate way.



But it can be challenging in terms of engaging educators and employers to gain their buy in. Educators in my experience, are very, very time poor, they only really communicate via email, they're very, very busy with lesson planning and session delivery themselves.

Youth practitioner, Strand 1

The availability and nature of funding

The availability and nature of funding are practitioners' biggest challenges. This is combined with increases in demand and the complexity of young people's needs and is closely linked to the need for mental health support and protection from online harm.

41% mentioned **funding** as their biggest challenge. 37% of responses mentioned the nature of funding (too small, too short term, too restricted), while 12% mentioned access to funding (competitive, stringent criteria). When we asked youth practitioners to tell us the top three things would make it easier for them to support young people (see Figure 1), the vast majority highlighted the importance of sustainable and adequate funding.

1 in 3 (33%) responses stressed **the growing complexity and scale of young people's needs**. This was mainly driven by the growing scale/severity of mental health challenges facing young people (29%) but with a significant minority (8%) citing the challenges posed by online harms and young people's digital lives.

When we asked youth practitioners to tell us the top three things would make it easier for them to support young people (see Figure 1), **a suitable, varied, and high quality delivery offer** was the second-most prevalent theme. This was often connected to adequate funding and workforce challenges, but in general just focused on giving young people what they need.



the sheer level of need,...Particularly when it comes to anxiety when it comes to overwhelm, when it comes to feeling isolation, when it comes to depression.

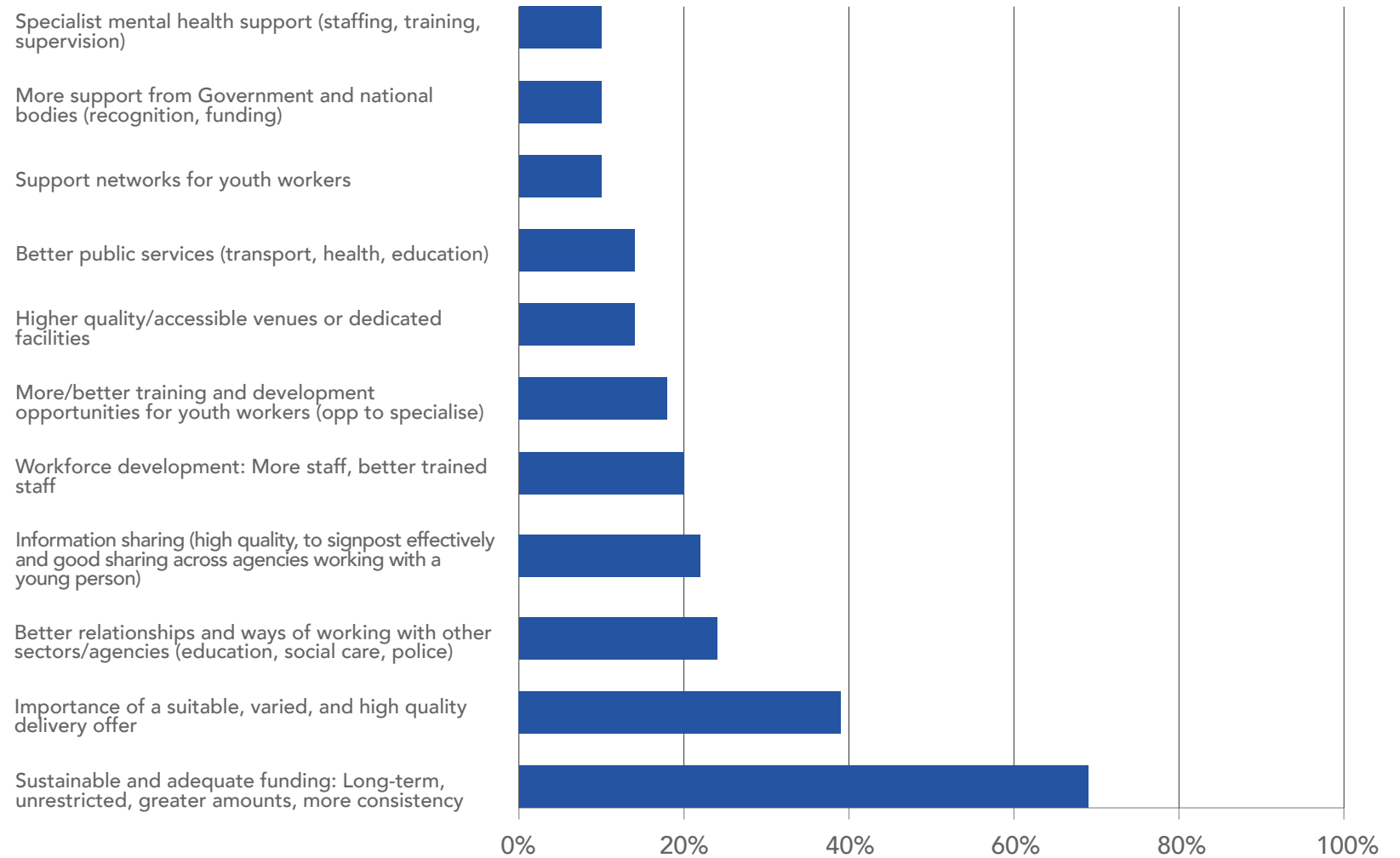
Youth practitioner, Strand 1



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Figure 1. The top three things that would make it easier for youth practitioners to support young people





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Investing in, advocating for and developing the youth sector workforce

It is challenging to attract, recruit, retain and develop skilled youth practitioners. The workforce feels undervalued and burnt out. Practitioners spoke to the need for the government to invest in -and advocate for - youth work and the workforce, alongside solutions like offering youth practitioners more therapeutic support.

Around a third of practitioners (strand 1) referenced **distinct challenges in the youth sector workforce**. This was mainly focussed on challenges with hiring/retaining enough qualified/skilled youth workers; **training and supporting youth practitioners** came up in a number of responses. The need to support youth practitioners' development was identified along with identifying and training the next generation of passionate youth workers.

“ It would have to have a lot of support for whatever staff are working with the young people to make sure that they're continuously supported in terms of their professional development and being able to be the best teachers that they can be for that environment but also further on in their careers.
Youth practitioner, Strand 1 ”

These themes were closely linked to the emotional toll of the work itself, in an already stretched sector. Several practitioners cited factors associated with burnout (high workload, limited capacity and challenging work environments). Some testimonies referenced the need for therapeutic support for staff and bringing more

mental health practitioners in to support them. Others focused on ensuring that the government believes in - and commits to investing in - youth provision and advocating for the workforce.

“ the lack of good youth workers. You know, generally the pay in the sector is quite poor. And people are interested in doing other things. And it's not attractive, it's not seen as a valuable career path is not seen as a valuable thing youth work. And I think it's hugely valuables.
Youth practitioner, Strand 1 ”

In January 2024, 516 youth practitioners responded to UK Youth's Just One Question: **'In this new year, I aim to challenge myself by learning and developing skills in...'** They identified over 20 different learning and development areas they are aiming to build on this year. **Over half (57%) identified skills or learning areas that related specifically to working with young people;** a third (34%) focused on what we categorised as **personal/organisational development;** and around one fifth (19%) identified **soft skills that could apply to both of these areas.**



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Youth practitioners are particularly focused on developing skills that enable them to support young people's mental health, deliver different and specific youth work activities, and better support neurodiverse young people.

We received a wide variety of responses relating to how youth practitioners could develop skills to better support young people. The highest proportion (13%) of youth practitioners wanted to develop skills to better support young people's mental health. This resonates with challenges outlined elsewhere in this report and the wider literature around the decline in young people's mental health, the lack of support available to young people and long waiting lists for statutory mental health services.

Youth practitioners also highlighted a desire to develop skills relating to specific youth work activities and different youth work approaches (8%). The same proportion of practitioners wanted to learn about how to better support neurodiverse young people (8%) and this

was clearly distinct from disabled young people more generally, which also came up but to a lesser extent (2%).

Other slightly less common but still notable themes included: Building skills to support and promote youth leadership, voice and participation (7%); building skills in digital technology and digital youth work (5%); navigating young people's physical and sexual health (5%); and supporting young people who have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences (4%).

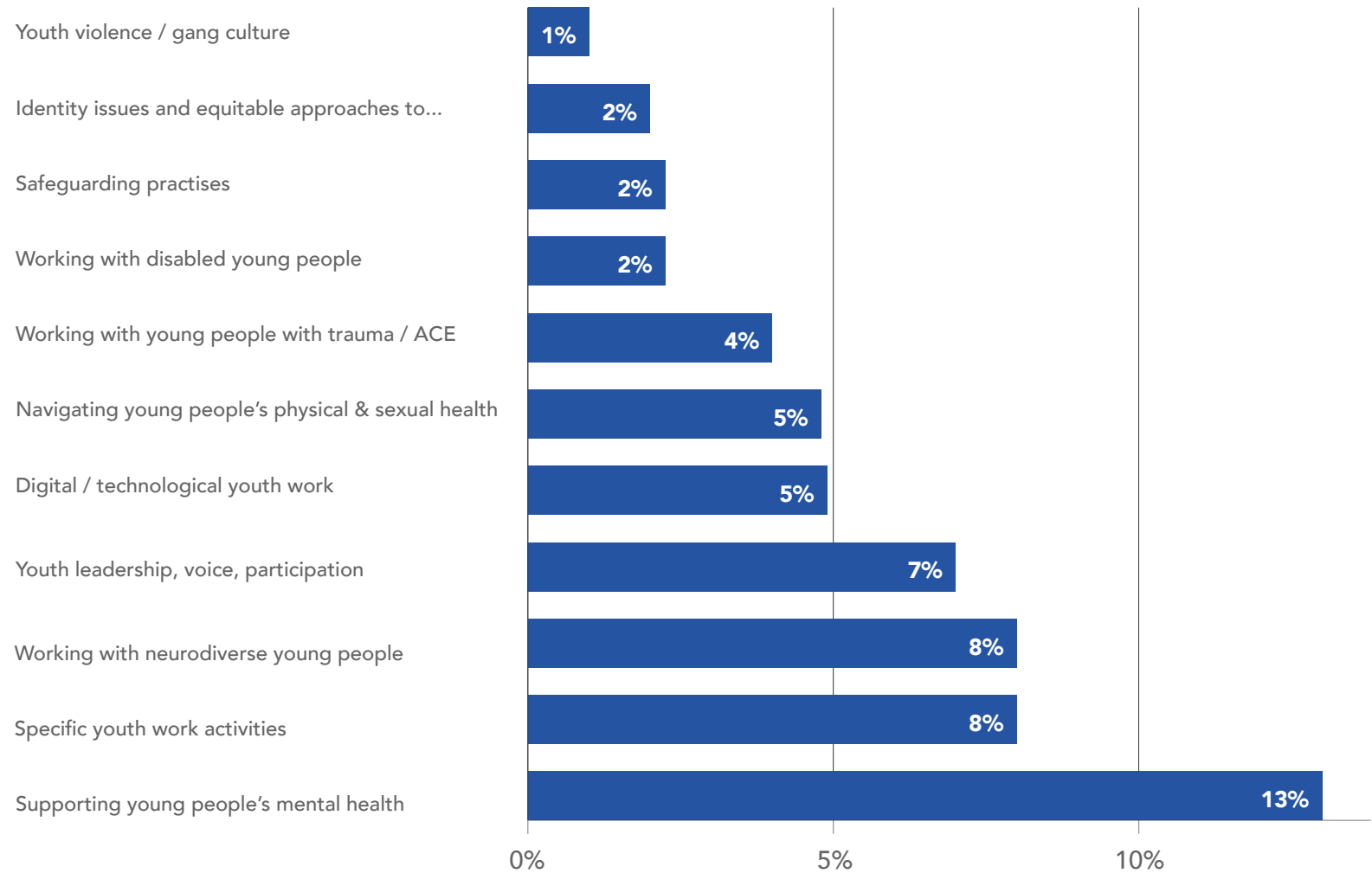
A full breakdown of skills and development areas related to working with young people can be seen in Figure 2 below.



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Figure 2. Youth practitioners' most common skills development areas related to working with young people





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Where youth practitioners identified that they would like to gain skills relating to personal/organisational development, the highest proportion focused on business planning, strategy development, and income generation. However, a number of other related skill development areas were also identified.

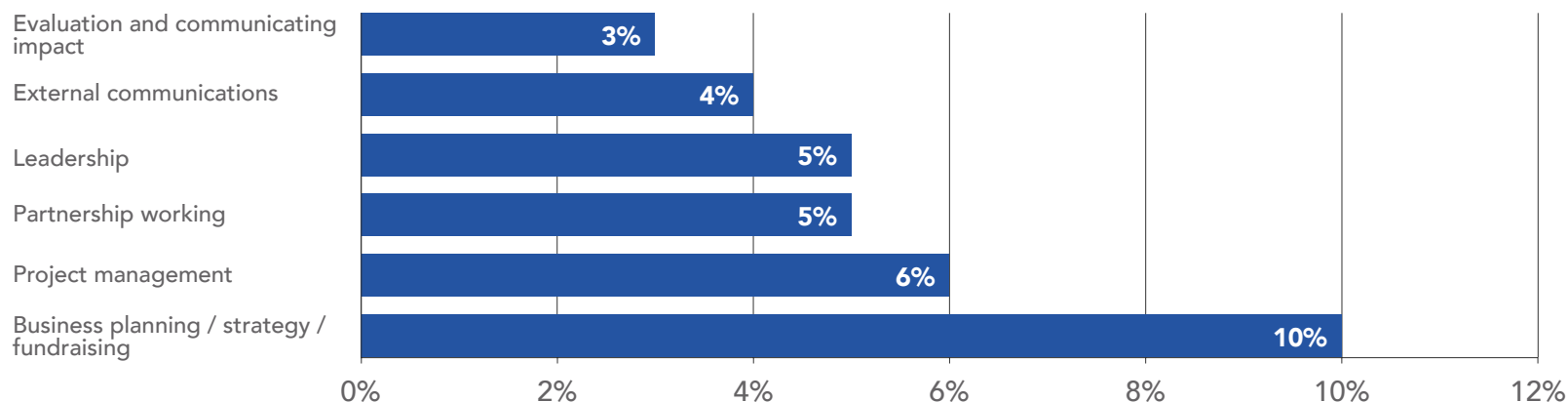
Youth practitioners do not only provide direct support to young people; they manage teams, whole services and aspects of the organisation or partnership they work for (HR processes, budgets, income generation, partnership development, M&E and much more). Underpinning support for youth work and the workforce requires funders, infrastructure organisations and delivery organisations to support youth practitioners' professional development in these areas of operational management and leadership.

The most common area for development identified by youth practitioners was **business planning,**

strategy development and fundraising/income generation (10%). However, we coded this as a fairly broad area and a number of other closely-related skills development areas were identified: project management (6%); partnership working (5%); leadership (5%); external communications (4%) and evaluation and communicating impact (3%).

A full breakdown of skills and development areas related to personal/organisational development can be seen in Figure 3 (see below).

Figure 3. Youth practitioners' most common skills development areas related to personal and organisational development



SECTION 3

The role of digital in youth provision

Throughout this section, we explore how -in a post-pandemic world - digital approaches and technology are being used by youth practitioners to deliver their provision. This includes discussion about how digital approaches, tools and solutions are being used to: engage young people and enhance youth provision; promote young people's online safety; and partner and collaborate with other organisations and sectors.

Given the timing of this research, this section also explores the role of digital, (mis)information online and social media influencing in the racist and Islamophobic rioting and violence that swept across parts of England in August 2024.





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How and why youth practitioners are using digital approaches, tools and solutions to engage young people and enhance provision

Youth practitioners' have a number of drivers for delivering digital youth work or supporting young people in online settings. These include cost and resourcing challenges, the distance young people need to travel to access youth provision, adapting to young people's individual needs, and delivering specific types of intervention (such as trauma-therapy).

Many youth practitioners were 'forced' to take their delivery online during the Covid-19 pandemic and digital youth work or offering alternatives to face-to-face provision was seen largely as a legacy of Covid lockdowns. During the pandemic, practitioners tried out new ways of supporting young people online and ran creative sessions that could work well with young people joining from their home or another safe space (e.g. online cooking and fitness classes).

Now, post-pandemic, the majority of youth practitioners we spoke to expressed a preference for returning to face-to-face provision in almost all cases. They stated that face-to-face delivery is more inclusive, more impactful, and more in line with the fundamental principles of youth work. Several practitioners also noted that young people themselves had a preference for face-to-face contact with them and with other young people.

However, youth practitioners did cite a number of benefits to digital youth work and online delivery.

- Q **Where provision covers a broad geographic area and where young people do not live in close proximity to a youth centre** or physical hub, the ability to engage with young people online can be critical. In rural locations in particular, transport links can be poor, journey times can be long and, if a young person's parents do not drive, it can be almost impossible for them to access face-to-face provision.
- Q **Young people who experience social anxiety and isolation** can benefit greatly from online engagement as a first step towards engaging with face-to-face provision and other young people. For some young people, simply leaving the home can be a daily challenge and youth practitioners are able to build trust and rapport with young people online to the point that they feel able to engage with in-person support.



Section 3: The role of digital in youth provision



- Q Digital provision can allow young people to access interventions, support and advice **on their own terms and at their own pace**. Some youth practitioners discussed the benefits of supporting young people with self-directed learning by providing online resources. Equally, practitioners noted the importance of meeting young people where they were and using social media to share advice and signpost where possible.
- Q A small number of youth practitioners acknowledged that **online delivery is often lower cost, enabling them to reach more young people** and share advice and resources over a larger geographical area. This is particularly relevant given the current strain on the youth sector after over a decade of cuts and the rising cost of living putting pressure on families and youth organisations. Some youth practitioners have been able to use digital delivery to engage young people across England or more widely – this is seen as particularly effective for young people in ‘identity’ or ‘affinity’ groups, to understand and share experiences with minoritised young people living in completely different parts of the country but experiencing similar and relatable daily challenges.
- Q Often, **youth practitioners use online delivery simply to keep in touch with young people**, either one-to-one or in groups. Youth practitioners indicated that this was particularly effective with young people in older age groups and with those who had ‘moved on’ or ‘graduated’ from the physical centre. This included young people who had gone to university or taken up other opportunities away from the local community in which they grew up.
- Q A small number of youth practitioners identified that **online support is particularly effective with young people having trauma-therapy**. The digital ‘box’ (e.g. a Zoom window) appears to bring a sense of ‘containment’ and safety, giving the young person more control over the space and dynamic.
- Q Some youth practitioners shared that **online and digital delivery can work well with other groups of young people with specific needs, including neurodivergence**. However, there was not consensus on this across the focus group participants and this theme is discussed as a challenge with online delivery in the next sub-section.



Section 3: The role of digital in youth provision



In a number of instances, it is considered less effective, engaging, inclusive or practical to support young people in online settings. In some cases, this includes: where the young person is neurodivergent and finds it difficult to follow social cues online; where the primary purpose is to forge new relationships between young people; where the provision has an outdoor learning or natural environment focus; or where those who would benefit from it most are those without the right technology to access it.

A minority of practitioners taking part in this research (5%) did not deliver much or any digital youth work or provision in an online setting. Many of those who were delivering digital youth work referenced situations in which online delivery is less effective, engaging, inclusive or practical than face-to-face delivery.

- Q Where some practitioners felt that online delivery could be engaging, inclusive and effective with young people with neurodivergence (as outlined in the previous sub-section), others had a different view. Some youth practitioners were keen to point out that **neurodivergent young people find it difficult to follow social cues online and there is no substitute for face-to-face delivery where young people have particular access and communication needs.**
- Q Young people spend a lot of time in digital spaces and, when online, are interacting with others in very different ways to how they do in-person (for example, through games and AI-generated content). **Digital delivery often makes it difficult to forge new relationships between young people** and this is easier to do informally in a physical setting.

Equally, some practitioners noted that, when supporting young people online, they can face additional digital distractions – **full engagement is considered easier to achieve face-to-face.**

- Q Similarly, for youth provision with an outdoor learning focus, connecting young people with the natural environment and avoiding the distraction of technology is key to its success. **Outdoor learning, as a youth work approach, was not seen as compatible with online modes of delivery,** although only a small proportion of youth practitioners were in a position to comment on this.
- Q One practitioner noted that digital youth work is often not targeted to the young people who engage with it or benefit from it the most; that **young people with access to the right technology are often the ones prioritised for online engagement.**



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Youth practitioners are delivering a range of activities with young people in online settings, including: providing information and signposting; training; creative sessions and projects; mentoring and group discussion; and counselling and therapeutic support.

Across the seven focus groups, a wide range of provision was identified as being delivered online or with a digital focus. Here, we outline the most common examples alongside some of the more creative and targeted approaches to digital youth work.

Q A number of youth practitioners spoke about **providing online resources, signposting and opportunities for young people to engage in self-help and self-directed learning** (e.g. political education and engagement). Equally, **some youth practitioners shared information online through newsletters and used online tools to consult with young people and solicit feedback** (e.g. through surveys).

Q **Several practitioners gave examples of online workshops and training they run on specific topics (e.g. first aid training).** In some cases, these workshops were more targeted to young people with specific interests – for example, one practitioner had been partnering with an employability tech company to prepare young people for employment in the tech industry. Interestingly, much of this partner’s support had a digital focus but was in fact delivered in-person, illustrating the point that **even the most digitally-focused activities can be more engaging and effective when delivered face-to-face.**

Q Similarly, **creative digital activities - such as youth-led video production and podcasting - were noted as being effective in giving young people a voice**

on a range of issues alongside the skills and agency to engage with wider audiences on topics they care deeply about. One practitioner spoke about supporting young people to develop websites and blogs as a way to be more engaged in their local community – this project employed a blend of online and face-to-face delivery.

Q Group support sessions, peer support and one-to-one check-ins came up as a strong theme across most of the 30 youth practitioners. **The majority of practitioners were delivering some form of online group sessions or one-to-one catch up calls.** These were often used as a way to stay in contact with young people or share experiences and were seen as more effective where relationships had already been built between young people or between the young person(s) and the youth worker.

Q As discussed earlier in this report, **one-to-one counselling and therapeutic support was being delivered online** by a number of youth practitioners (including those who were trained in therapeutic approaches and/or whose organisations only delivered therapeutic interventions), **providing a protected space for young people to share issues and open up on their own terms.**

Q One youth practitioner described how they *only* deliver digital youth work, working delivering through a digital learning platform to provide online sessions and resources.



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Youth practitioners are using a range of platforms and digital tools to support young people online, including video calling and conferencing apps, social media, creative visualisation and planning tools, website builders and much more.

We also asked youth practitioners about the platforms and digital tools they were using to support digital or online provision and whether there were particular benefits to using them.

- Q As we might expect, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom were all common communication platforms highlighted by youth practitioners. Many had considered carefully the cost of each, alongside usability and young people's access requirements. For example, in one of the focus groups, youth practitioners spoke at length about the additional functionality that Zoom offers and where they have used AI to analyse young people's engagement online.
- Q Most youth practitioners were using TikTok and other social media platforms to engage young people and share information. Some also spoke about using Miro, Canva and other platforms to create mood boards and noticeboards where young people could share with each other, whilst also ensuring a level of oversight and moderation.
- Q To deliver visual art and creative activities, one practitioner was using iPads with a stylus whilst others were using platforms like Procreate and CapCut. Website builders like Wix were also used by some practitioners.

“ The nice thing about Zoom is that we can get add-ons, so sometimes when we're working with slightly younger young people, if they're talking about trauma, they can put masks and filters on.

“ [The software identifies what] engagement there's been and what facial expressions and what parts of the conversation was more animated and who was dominating conversations.

Youth practitioners, focus groups



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How youth practitioners are promoting young people's online safety, including through digital solutions

Youth practitioners differ widely in their level of confidence to support young people's online safety. A number of factors influence this, including: the make-up and skills of their team; the skills and awareness of parents and teachers; who young people are drawn to online and influenced by; the quality of the guidance being used in their organisation; and the level of trust they have built with young people.

Some youth practitioners participating in the focus groups felt relatively well-equipped to support young people's online safety where others felt left behind and somewhat helpless. Given the recent wave of racism, Islamophobia, violence and rioting that spread across England in August 2024, youth practitioners were coming to the focus groups with a renewed focus on the need to help young people understand the risks of misinformation and exploitation online.

One practitioner reflected that young people's digital safety is often seen as being completely independent of all other safeguarding risks when, actually, **the risks of exploitation, grooming and misinformation are very similar, just in a different setting.** Others referenced the importance of "common sense", maintaining professional boundaries and accepting technological developments rather than trying to steer young people away from the digital world.



I feel like, unless you're a user of... Telegram or some of these other ones that are a bit more kind of, you know, low key or off the radar a little bit, then you don't really understand some of the inner workings of it and how young people can be groomed into extremism.

Youth practitioner, focus group

Practitioners cited a number of factors that can determine how well they can support young people's online safety:

- Q Having a young, tech-savvy delivery team can ensure that youth organisations keep up with the latest developments and trends in social media use. However, even those practitioners with a media background reported still relying heavily on regular training to keep their finger on the pulse.** While practitioners struggle to stay up-to-speed on how different platforms work, having a broad understanding of the mechanisms behind social media platforms was considered more achievable.



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Q Schools and parents need to play a big role in safeguarding young people online. Several practitioners spoke positively about schools in their area that had been proactive in this area. One example was given of a high school's senior leadership team leading real-time workshops and explainers for parents on how certain apps work and how young people engage with them. Practitioners indicated that schools are more able to engage directly, formally and consistently with parents than they are.

Q There is a sense of helplessness when influencers are seen to be spreading misinformation online. Andrew Tate came up in a number of focus groups as an extremely negative online presence, linked to feelings that companies and social media platforms need to regulate much more heavily and be held responsible for content.

Youth practitioners are helping young people to stay safe online by: delivering media and literacy sessions; using national schemes to upskill young people; responding to individual safeguarding risks; risk assessing, monitoring and putting privacy controls on online content; and ensuring that their staff are informed on the latest technological developments and social media trends.

Youth practitioners discussed a range of reactive and proactive work that was happening to help young people to stay safe online. Here, we discuss the most common themes.

Q Delivering media literacy sessions focusing on the importance and practicalities of setting passwords, navigating safely online and self-protection from

Q Although there is not one single source of truth and advice is not always in 'plain English', **several practitioners noted that there is lots of useful guidance available to youth practitioners.** Newsletters from tech companies, training and legal resources can all build youth practitioners' confidence to support and understand young people where they have the time and capacity to proactively access it.

Q Some practitioners highlighted the importance of learning directly from the young people they support. Where they had built trust with young people, they could respond to what young people were showing them on a case-by-case basis and "what's going on in the room."

cyber bullying. For some, this includes advice on how to approach viral content, how to be a good person online, critical thinking skills, not being quick to accept online content as truth, and political education.

Q Connecting provision to national programmes like that offered by NCS, which includes online safety training.



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Q **Ensuring online safeguarding risks are recognised and reported accordingly.**

Q **Monitoring online content** and the membership of WhatsApp groups, **risk assessing activities that have an online/digital component** and ensuring privacy controls are in place on any technology that young people can access through youth provision.

Q One practitioner referenced the online safety charity, SWGfL, providing **helpful advice and regular newsletter updates that their staff read regularly.**

Young people also respond well to the handouts that they provide, covering topics like how to block people online and change content preferences.

Q **Wider citizenship activities have strong application to young people's presence and behaviour online.** Practitioners outlined that the skills young people need to tackle and process misinformation and harmful content online are the same skills they will need to deal with those things offline; in conversation, in the community and in the workplace, for example.

Youth practitioners had to quickly respond and adapt during the recent wave of racism, Islamophobia, violence and rioting that spread across England in August 2024. They ensured the physical safety of young people and staff, supported young people to avoid harmful and misleading online content and moved to online modes of delivery to stay in touch with young people who could not safely leave their home.

Given the timing of this research, we were interested in whether youth practitioners had changed their approach to helping young people stay safe online during the recent wave of riots.

Many youth organisations paused delivery and tightened up the security of their premises in order to ensure the physical safety of young people, staff and volunteers. Practitioners also discussed how they had briefed - and promoted solidarity amongst - their staff team and worked closely with the police to identify local risk.

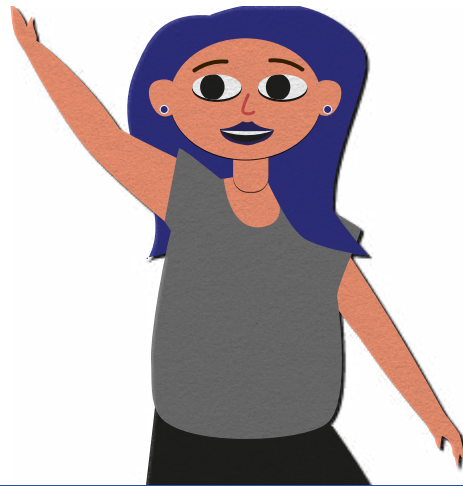
In terms of protecting young people, **some practitioners encouraged young people to block or report harmful content to influence the algorithmically-targeted content they were receiving and others even removed physical access to computers.** Importantly, digital delivery and lessons learned from the pandemic did enable youth practitioners to stay in touch with young people, even when their centre was closed or they could not travel. This speaks to themes outlined earlier in this report: that **digital youth work can be a useful back-up option, even when it is not the preferred mode of delivery, facilitating check-ins with young people who are unable or unwilling to leave their home.**



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When supporting young people to navigate the risk of online harm, there are examples of youth practitioners using digital or online approaches to deliver workshops and upskill young people and solicit safeguarding disclosures. However, even when supporting young people to navigate the digital world, youth practitioners have a strong preference for face-to-face delivery, which they see as more effective, engaging and aligned with the relational nature of youth work principles.



- “ Offline, offline, offline...
- “ I would much rather be working with people in person and showing them in person how to get the skills.
Youth practitioners, focus groups

Youth practitioners did outline ways in which they promote young people’s online safety through digital youth work. For example, through online safety workshops held on Zoom, through specialist multi-media online harm programmes, or by allowing young people to make safeguarding disclosures via an online platform, where they may feel more comfortable doing so. However, few examples were provided and several practitioners stated that this support is much more effective when delivered in-person.



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How youth practitioners are using digital approaches, tools and solutions to collaborate with other organisations and professionals from allied sectors

Youth practitioners use digital and technology to partner and collaborate with other organisations and sectors, where this enables them to better engage young people and deliver provision. This is often simply about being able to communicate, coordinate, share information and plan effectively. More creatively, some youth practitioners use digital approaches to highlight their collaborative impact (through social media), produce video content with young people and gather feedback from young people.

At a basic level, youth practitioners confirmed that they use email, LinkedIn, shared calendars, WhatsApp and video conferencing platforms like Zoom to network, stay in touch with other organisations, professionals and sectors. Some practitioners were using platforms like Miro to plan with other organisations.

One practitioner noted that the loan or donation of tech hardware from other organisations, including the local authority, were helpful for improving connectivity (e.g. internet access dongles).

At the more creative end of the spectrum, practitioners spoke about how social media allowed them to tag partners in their posts to demonstrate the impact of their collaborative work. Others were providing expert tech support to local partners in fields such as video production and one practitioner spoke to their plans to work with the FinTech sector to design and test an app for young people. One practitioner was using video apps and stop-motion animation to get feedback from young people and their organisation had become recognised locally for this creative approach.



Section 3: The role of digital in youth provision



Digital and technology is used by youth practitioners in a range of ways to improve referral pathways and share information with other organisations and sectors. However, there is some frustration that different agencies and sectors are not committed to using the same digital tools and platforms for this and that the full potential of technology is not being realised.

Youth practitioners shared how they were using digital and tech solutions to securely share information relating to young people and cross-refer.

At a fairly basic level, a number of practitioners referenced Google Forms and other survey platforms to take referrals but some were keen to improve how they took referrals. Using QR codes was considered to make referrals easy and accessible for families and other professionals, alongside website plugins.

One practitioner shared that other professionals like social workers can refer using plinth in their area (Islington) during the school holidays, that lots of organisations were using this platform and it was working relatively well.

There was some frustration that different agencies and sectors used a range of different tools and that local and regional joined up working relied on all stakeholders committing to one, effective platform to manage referrals, share information and coordinate. There were some examples of this starting to happen, often led by statutory agencies like the NHS, but **the use of tech in collaborating across sectors was generally not considered to be advanced.**

Less formally, youth practitioners were using Padlet boards to share information and Google Forms (and other survey tools) were being used to consult with users and, in some instances, to take referrals. Issues with data protection, privacy and access were identified in relation to some information-sharing platforms like Google Drive.



Section 3:

The role of digital in youth provision



The biggest gamechangers identified by youth practitioners in how they use digital to collaborate and partner with other organisations and sectors would be: using digital innovations to ensure the security of information sharing; centralised online directories and centralised multi-agency platforms to improve coordination and communication; AI 'coaches' that could provide out-of-hours support to young people in crisis; and digital automation to support grassroots organisations with limited capacity to generate income to more easily bid for funding and statutory contracts.

We asked focus group participants what digital/tech solutions would make the biggest difference to how they partner and collaborate with other organisations and sectors.

- Q **Automatic data sharing agreements and automatic checks when sharing sensitive information** alongside clearer guidance built into platforms around GDPR compliance and what can and cannot be shared with others.
- Q More networks and forums for informal information sharing within the sector and a **centralised directory to make it easier for organisations to find each other.**

- Q An AI personal coach, assistant or youth worker, for young people to chat to in the night if they are in crisis with signposting functionality to support multi-agency working.
- Q A single platform for all multi-agency communications.
- Q A procurement and bid development tool to support with the more time-consuming contracts (e.g. NHS). It would save previous responses and make suggestions based off historic submissions to help level the playing field between bigger organisations with fundraising capacity, and those grassroots organisations who do not.

CONCLUSIONS

Below, we discuss the overall conclusions and implications of this research for policy-makers, funders and youth sector infrastructure organisations.





Conclusion

**IN
OUR
OWN
WORDS**

1

Open-access, centre-based, holistic youth provision remains critical to supporting young people and needs sustainable investment. Centre-based youth provision, local to young people in their communities, acts as a springboard for other youth development opportunities.

Open, universal access, centre-based provision is identified as fundamental to supporting young people. This is in the context of research highlighting the negative impact of funding cuts and youth centre closures over the last 14 years. It is seen as critical to giving young people trusted adults to turn to in their community in a safe, social setting and underpinning other, more targeted youth work typologies. Practitioners have a clearly-stated need for long-term, unrestricted, sustainable funding to support the core work of their organisations.

Regular, higher-dosage provision in the community is key to youth practitioners building trusting relationships with young people. This research highlights that centre-based youth work practice should not be forgotten as policy-makers consider how to increase the reach of detached youth work and how to embed youth workers in other settings such as schools, the secure estate and multi-agency hubs.

2

Youth practitioners cannot currently meet demand for one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance, and mental health support. Investment in youth work - alongside statutory mental health services - is critical to ensuring that young people have access to both preventative support that enables them to maintain positive wellbeing and crisis support whenever it is needed.

Both youth practitioners and young people are identifying a need for more one-to-one mentoring, advice and guidance, and mental health support. Although these youth work typologies can be delivered in other settings, they lend themselves to open-access, centre-based provision, where young people can drop-in for tailored support in familiar surroundings on their terms.



3

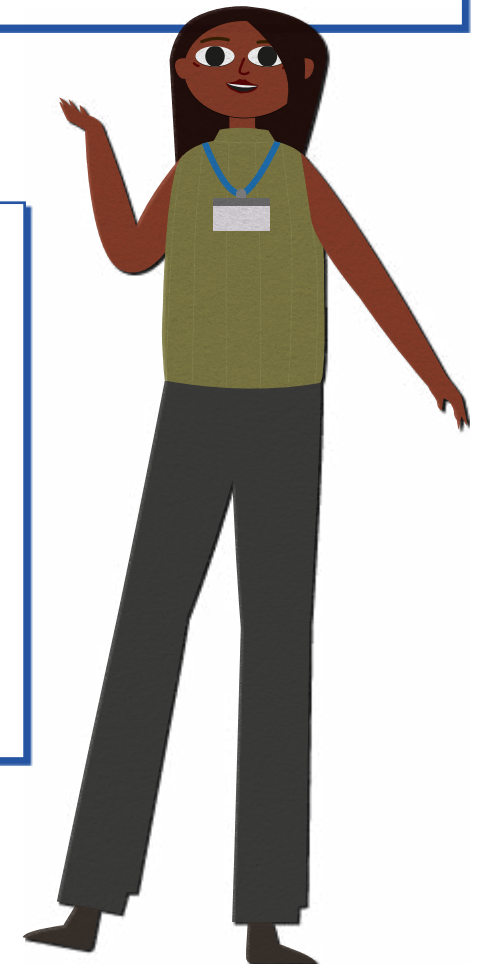
Young people need support to expand their horizons, particularly for those living with severe financial constraints. Alongside the familiarity of centre-based provision, young people want fun and novel experiences away from home. Equally, youth employability support should involve practical work experience opportunities.

Provision delivered away from youth centres should focus on experiences and adventures away from home that challenge young people, build their socio-emotional skills, and expand their horizons. Alongside training, engaging work experience placements are seen as being important for supporting young people's pathways to employment.

4

Youth practitioners want to improve partnership and cross-sector working. They have identified failures in the system around young people that need to be resolved urgently.

Youth practitioners want to have closer links with other sectors (e.g. schools, local employers and mental health professionals) to meet young people's needs. This includes improving referral pathways, information sharing and early intervention approaches. Linked to this, youth practitioners believe systemic failures in public services need to be addressed urgently – such as rethinking local transport links, statutory mental health support, and the impact of examination culture in the education system.





5

The need for tailored, inclusive provision is high on youth practitioners' agendas. The spaces and support that young people engage with should be adapted to meet individual needs, giving them meaningful choice and control about the youth work support they receive.

Tailored, inclusive provision needs to better meet the needs of young people, including those with SEND. This relies on youth practitioners being matched and equipped to support young people with particular access requirements as well as having the right physical spaces (e.g. quiet areas) to cater for all young people.

6

Youth practitioners want to improve partnership and cross-sector working. They have identified failures in the system around young people that need to be resolved urgently.

Youth practitioners want to have closer links with other sectors (e.g. schools, local employers and mental health professionals) to meet young people's needs. This includes improving referral pathways, information sharing and early intervention approaches. Linked to this, youth practitioners believe systemic failures in public services need to be addressed urgently – such as rethinking local transport links, statutory mental health support, and the impact of examination culture in the education system.

7

Youth practitioners do not see digital youth work as a silver bullet, but technology has an important role to play in staying connected with young people, in times of crisis and in underpinning routine provision. The biggest gains might be made by improving local, regional and national digital infrastructure to support joined up working across sectors. There may be an opportunity to better-engage business and tech companies in doing this.

Youth practitioners are working hard to keep young people safe online in an ever-changing digital world. Many are also using digital in creative ways to improve their provision and work more effectively with other sectors. However, the youth sector is held back by a lack of digital infrastructure and joined up thinking on how technology can be used most effectively.



Conclusion

IN
OUR
OWN
WORDS



8

There is a need to invest in youth work as a mechanism for digitally safeguarding young people and promoting young people's democratic participation.

The racist riots that swept across England in August 2024 have acted as a reminder of the need to equip and empower young people to navigate misinformation, the risk of online harm and racial tension.

9

Youth voice and leadership should be central to the development of youth policy, youth work practice and the community spaces that young people engage with.

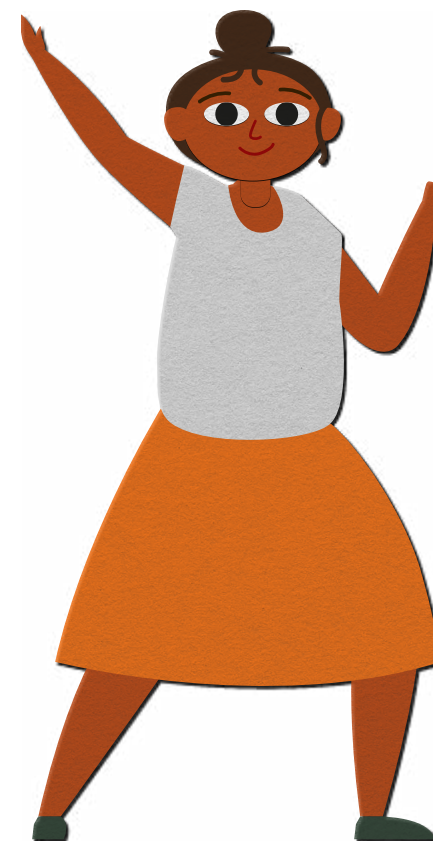
At every opportunity, young people should be involved in shaping policy and provision, supporting other young people, leading on the change they want to see and having more 'ownership' over the spaces and activities they engage with.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UK Youth would like to thank supporters and contributors to this research:

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- ▣ The hundreds of youth practitioners who engaged with UK Youth's Just One Question initiative in January 2024.
- ▣ The 31 youth practitioners who joined focus groups in August 2024 to discuss the role that digital plays in youth work.
- ✉ Jess Mountfield, Animator-Director, for amplifying the voices of young people and youth practitioners through a beautiful, short animated film.
- 📍 Members of the Advisory Group, who were convened through two workshops to critique and interpret the findings and implications of this research and support the development of the storyboard for the short, animated film. The Advisory Group brought together four young people with youth sector professionals from: The National Youth Agency (NYA); Children in Need; NCS and UK Youth.

This report is authored by Oscar Bingham, Assistant Director of Research & Impact at UK Youth. The research and analysis was supported by Solomon Rackham, Research & Data Officer at UK Youth and other members of the UK Youth team.



APPENDICES





Appendix A. Audio-recorded testimony submission guidance

Strand 1: Youth practitioners

Introduction and preliminary questions:

- Introduction to the research and context
- Terms and conditions
- Eligibility checklist
- Data consent and 'how we use your data'

Guidance on recording the audio testimony submission

- You should do your recording in a quiet place, so that your voice can be heard
- Using a voice memo recording app on your phone or any digital device will be the quickest and easiest way to do this
- The audio file must be in one of the following formats: .aac, .mp3, .mp4, .m4a, .wma, .mpeg (most Apple and Android phones use these as standard)
- The audio file must be no larger than 2GB
- The recording must be between 4 and 5 minutes in length
- We're not judging you on your performance! You don't need to rehearse, just speak as though you're having a chat with someone else. You can jot down some notes first, if it helps.

On the recording, please read out each of these questions and respond to them, in turn. You may want to screenshot/ make a note of these so you can refer back to them.

Question 1 "What are the biggest challenges you're facing at the moment, as a youth practitioner? What keeps you up at night?"

Question 2 "What are the top three things that would make it easier for you to support young people?"

Question 3 "If we lived in an ideal world and you could design the perfect support offer or provision for the young people you work with, what would it look like?"



Additional confirmation and permissions

- Confirmation that the audio-recording has been uploaded
- Confirm/deny permission for excerpts from the audio-recording to be used in a short, animated film

'About you' – additional participant profile and demographic information

- Name and contact details
- Ethnicity
- Gender, and whether this is the same as at birth
- Number of years worked with young people
- Role within the organisation
- Level of youth work qualification
- Where you currently deliver youth provision (Region in England)
- Where you currently deliver youth provision (Urban, coastal, rural)
- Age groups you work with
- Youth work typologies you typically use as part of your practice

'About your organisation'

- Number of staff/volunteers at your organisation



Strand 2: Young people currently engaged in youth provision

Introduction and preliminary questions:

- Introduction to the research and context
- Terms and conditions
- Eligibility checklist
- Data consent and ‘how we use your data’

Guidance on recording the audio testimony submission

- You should do your short interview in a quiet place, so that your voices can be heard
- Using a voice memo recording app on your phone or any digital device will be the quickest and easiest way to do this
- The audio file must be in one of the following formats: .aac, .mp3, .mp4, .m4a, .wma, .mpeg (most Apple and Android phones use these as standard)
- The audio file must be no larger than 2GB
- The recording should be between 4 and 5 minutes in length
- We’re not judging you or the young person on your performance! You don’t need to rehearse, just ask the questions and listen to the answers as though you’re having an everyday conversation.

When you’re recording, please read out each of these questions and respond to them, in turn. You may want to screenshot/make a note of these so you can refer back to them.

Question 1

“When you’re not at school, what clubs or opportunities do you take part in? What do you enjoy the most about them?”

Feel free to ask follow up questions to help the young person think about the opportunities they get outside of school and the clubs they attend.

Question 2

“Apart from teachers or your family, who are the adults you trust and can go to for support? How do these adults support you?”

Aside from parents/teachers, we’re interested in the adults they turn to for support and why. This is likely to include you as their youth practitioner – ask them what support you give them.

Question 3

“What would make the clubs and opportunities you take part in better? What other clubs or opportunities would you like to take part in? What other support would be helpful for you?”

Feel free to make this a conversation – we’re interested in what the perfect out-of-school provision would be for this young person.



Additional confirmation and permissions

- Confirmation that the audio-recording has been uploaded
- Confirm/deny permission for excerpts from the audio-recording to be used in a short, animated film

'About the youth practitioner leading the interview'

- Name and contact details of the youth practitioner

'About the young person being interviewed' – additional participant profile and demographic information

- Name
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender, and whether this is the same as at birth
- Whether they are care experienced
- Whether they have caring responsibilities
- Whether they have SEND
- Where the young person is accessing youth provision (Region in England)
- Where the young person is accessing youth provision (Urban, coastal, rural)
- Youth work typologies the young person typically engages with
- How often the young person takes part in youth provision



Strand 3: Young people not currently engaged in youth provision

Introduction and preliminary questions:

- Introduction to the research and context
- Terms and conditions
- Eligibility checklist
- Data consent and 'how we use your data'

Guidance on recording the audio testimony submission

- You should do your short interview in a quiet place, so that your voices can be heard
- Using a voice memo recording app on your phone or any digital device will be the quickest and easiest way to do this
- The audio file must be in one of the following formats: .aac, .mp3, .mp4, .m4a, .wma, .mpeg (most Apple and Android phones use these as standard)
- The audio file must be no larger than 2GB
- The recording should be between 4 and 5 minutes in length
- We're not judging you or your child on your performance! You don't need to rehearse, just ask the questions and listen to the answers as though you're having an everyday conversation.

When you're recording, please read out each of these questions and respond to them, in turn. You may want to screenshot/make a note of these so you can refer back to them.

"When you're not at school, what clubs, support or other opportunities would you like to take part in?"

We are particularly interested in out-of-school youth provision that the young person might like to take part in. Youth provision can include (but is not limited to):

- *Positive activities, programmes and clubs including sports, arts, debating and public speaking, cultural trips and exchanges, outdoor learning and adventures away from home, open access youth clubs and targeted support or mentoring from a trusted adult, volunteering and social action, and life skills and employment training.*
- *Youth provision is often delivered in the community but is sometimes delivered online.*

Question 1

Feel free to use these examples as prompts to help the young person think about what they enjoy and what would be beneficial for them.



Question 2

“Think about what your friends and schoolmates do outside of school. What clubs, support or opportunities do they take part in? What would you enjoy or find difficult if you took part in these?”

If you know of clubs, support or opportunities that other young people get involved in locally, feel free to mention some of these to prompt the young person.

Feel free to remind the young person of any opportunities that they’ve seen and mentioned to you in the past, or anything they’ve said about what their friends and schoolmates are involved in outside of school.

Question 3

“What would make it easier for you to access clubs, support and opportunities outside of school?”

Are there particular spaces in the community where the young person would feel safe or happy? Would the young person prefer to access support online/from your home?

Can the young person think of anything stopping them from accessing these opportunities at the moment?

Additional confirmation and permissions

- Confirmation that the audio-recording has been uploaded
- Confirm/deny permission for excerpts from the audio-recording to be used in a short, animated film

‘About you, the young person’s legal guardian’

- Name and contact details of the legal guardian
- Why do you think your child does not currently engage in youth provision, outside of school?

‘About the young person being interviewed’ – additional participant profile and demographic information

- Name
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender, and whether this is the same as at birth
- Whether they are care experienced
- Whether they have caring responsibilities
- Whether they have SEND
- Where the young person lives (Region in England)
- Where the young person lives (Urban, coastal, rural)



Strand 4: Young people either engaged or not engaged in youth provision

Introduction and preliminary questions:

- Introduction to the research and context
- Terms and conditions
- Eligibility checklist
- Data consent and ‘how we use your data’
- Parental consent and parent’s contact details
- Do you take part in any activities, clubs, support or services that are not provided by your school?

This could be: programmes and clubs including sports, arts, dance or music sessions; debating and public speaking; cultural trips and exchanges; outdoor learning; mentoring from a trusted adult; volunteering; campaigning; or employment training.

Guidance on recording the audio testimony submission

- You should try and do this somewhere quiet if possible
- Using a voice memo recording app on your phone will be the quickest and easiest way to do this
- The recording should be between 4 and 5 minutes in length
- The audio file must be in one of the following formats: .aac, .mp3, .mp4, .m4a, .wma, .mpeg (most Apple and Android phones use these as standard)
- The audio file must be no larger than 2GB
- We’re not judging you on your performance! You don’t need to rehearse, just read out the questions below and share your thoughts. You may want to screenshot these so you can refer back to them.

[Conditional Questioning: For young people who have identified as being engaged in youth provision...]

Question 1 “When you’re not at school, what clubs or activities do you like to take part in?”

Question 2 “Apart from teachers or your family, who are the adults you trust and can go to for support? How do these adults support you?”

Question 3 “What would make the clubs and activities you take part in better? What other support would be helpful for you?”



[Conditional Questioning: For young people who have identified as being engaged in youth provision...]

Question 1 "When you're not at school, what clubs, support or other opportunities would you like to take part in?"

Question 2 "Think about what your friends and schoolmates do outside of school. What clubs, support or opportunities do they take part in? What would you enjoy or find difficult if you took part in these?"

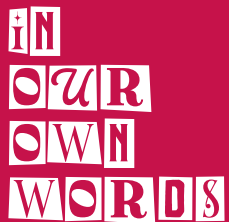
Question 3 "What would make it easier for you to access clubs, support and opportunities outside of school?"

Additional confirmation and permissions

- Confirmation that the audio-recording has been uploaded
- Confirm/deny permission for excerpts from the audio-recording to be used in a short, animated film

'About you, the young person submitting this form'

- Name
- Age
- Contact details – for incentive/prize draw purposes only
- Ethnicity
- Gender, and whether this is the same as at birth
- Whether they are care experienced
- Whether they have caring responsibilities
- Where the young person lives (Region in England)
- Where the young person lives (Urban, coastal, rural)



Appendix B. Just One Question submission form (January 2024)

Open text, sentence completion question

- In this new year, as a youth practitioner, I aim to challenge myself by learning and developing skills in...



Appendix C. Youth practitioner focus group discussion guide

Introduction to the research, the facilitator and context for the research

- Permissions to record, and how we use your data
- Background to the research and why we are running these focus groups
- Data consent, 'how we use your data' and when the final research outputs will be shared publicly
- Rules of engagement in the focus group
- Acknowledging the recent wave of Racism, Islamophobia, violence and rioting that has swept across England; and the severe impact it has had on young people and youth practitioners – we will pick up on this during the focus group

Using digital approaches, tools and solutions to engage young people and enhance youth provision (approximately 15 mins)

Put your hand up if you deliver digital youth work, or work directly with young people online? (Hands up)

What are the main reasons that you deliver digital youth work? And what do you do with young people online?

- Probe: Which activities or areas of your provision work best in a digital/online setting?
- Probe: Are there specific young people who benefit most from this type of engagement?
- Probe: What tools, platforms or approaches are you using?

If you don't deliver digital youth work, or work directly with young people online (Hands up), what are the main reasons for this?



Using digital to promote young people's online safety
(approximately 20 mins)

We know that young people are at high risk of online harm, abuse and exploitation and that this is of real concern for youth workers right now.

How well equipped do you feel to support young people's online safety?

What, if anything, do you or your organisation do to help young people to stay safe online?

Have you used digital or 'met' young people online to help them navigate the risk of online harm? How have you done this?

- Probe: Have you changed your practice at all to respond to the recent civil unrest and how YP could get caught up in it?

Using digital approaches, tools and solutions to partner and collaborate with other organisations/sectors
(approximately 15 mins)

What digital/tech solutions do you/does your organisation use to partner and collaborate with other organisations/sectors?

How do you use digital/tech to improve referral pathways and information sharing with other organisations/sectors?

Where you partner with other organisations to deliver your provision, how do you use tech/digital?

- Probe: What one digital/tech solution would be the biggest gamechanger for your organisation in how you collaborate and partner with other organisations?



Appendix D. Sampling frames

Sampling frame: Audio-recorded testimony - strand 1

What		Count	%
<i>Youth work typologies - could select multiple</i>	Mentoring	28	55%
	Therapy or counselling	13	25%
	Campaigning and activism	19	37%
	Outdoor learning	15	29%
	Volunteering	25	49%
	Sport or physical activity	20	39%
	Teaching or training	20	39%
	Academic support	7	14%
	Peer/near peer support	11	22%
	Advice and guidance	21	41%
	Enterprise	4	8%
	Arts	20	39%
Other	4	8%	

Where		Count	%
<i>Community</i>	Rural (below 10,000)	11	22%
	Urban (over 10,000)	35	69%
	Coastal (under 225,000, near coast)	5	10%



Where		Count	%
<i>Region - could select multiple</i>	South East	8	16%
	London	6	12%
	East England	4	8%
	North West	20	39%
	South West	7	14%
	East Midlands	3	6%
	West Midlands	3	6%
	North East	3	6%
	Yorkshire & Humber	3	6%

Org info		Count	%
<i>Number of staff/volunteers</i>	Very small (0-10)	14	27%
	Small (11-20)	9	18%
	Medium-small (21-30)	6	12%
	Medium-medium (31-40)	9	18%
	Medium-large (41-50)	5	10%
	Large (51+)	6	12%
	Very large (100+)	2	4%

<i>Age groups work with - could select multiple</i>	10-12 years	33	65%
	13-15 years	40	78%
	16-18 years	49	96%



Who		Count	%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White	40	78%
	Black, Black British, Caribbean African	5	10%
	Asian or Asian British	1	2%
	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	2	4%
	Other	2	4%
	Don't know	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	1	2%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	19	37%
	Female	32	63%
	Non-Binary	0	0%
<i>Gender you identify with the same assigned as birth as birth?</i>	Yes	51	100%
	No	0	0%
<i>Highest level of qualification</i>	JNC Level 6	11	22%
	JNC Level 3	1	2%
	JNC Level 2	2	4%
	Other Level 6	6	12%
	Other Level 3	5	10%
	Other Level 2	2	4%



Who		Count	%
<i>Highest level of qualification</i>	Level 1	2	4%
	None	14	27%
	Not sure	7	14%
	Other	1	2%
<i>Years in profession</i>	Early Career (0-2)	3	6%
	Mid-Career (3-5)	8	16%
	Established (6-10)	11	22%
	Experienced (11-20)	12	24%
	Veteran professional (20+)	17	33%
<i>Role in the organisation</i>	Paid - junior youth practitioner	7	14%
	Paid - senior youth practitioner	14	27%
	Volunteer - junior youth practitioners	0	0%
	Volunteer - senior youth practitioner	1	2%
	Paid - youth practitioner with significant management/leadership responsibilities	28	55%
	Volunteer - youth practitioner with significant management/leadership responsibilities	1	2%



Sampling frame: Audio-recorded testimony - strands 2, 3 and 4

One young person who submitted their testimony did not engage in provision. They are excluded from 'what', 'when' and 'where – community' counts and percentages.

What		Count	%
<i>Youth work typologies - could select multiple</i>	Mentoring	6	43%
	Therapy or counselling	1	7%
	Campaigning and activism	1	7%
	Outdoor learning	8	57%
	Volunteering	7	50%
	Sport or physical activity	6	43%
	Teaching or training	3	21%
	Academic support	1	7%
	Peer/near peer support	3	21%
	Advice and guidance	5	36%
	Enterprise	1	7%
	Arts	9	64%
	Other	0	0%
When		Count	%
<i>Frequency</i>	Several times a week	7	50%
	Approximately once a week	6	43%
	Less than once a week	0	0%



Where		Count	%
<i>Community</i>	Rural (below 10,000)	5	36%
	Urban (over 10,000)	8	57%
	Coastal (under 225,000, near coast)	1	7%
<i>Region</i>	South East	2	14%
	London	5	36%
	East England	3	21%
	North West	0	0%
	South West	2	14%
	East Midlands	1	7%
	West Midlands	0	0%
	North East	0	0%
	Yorkshire & Humber	1	7%

Who		Count	%
<i>Age groups</i>	10-12 years	2	14%
	13-15 years	5	36%
	16-18 years	7	50%

<i>Ethnicity</i>	White	6	43%
	Black, Black British, Caribbean African	1	7%
	Asian or Asian British	0	0%
	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	5	36%
	Other	2	14%
	Don't know	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	0	0%



Who		Count	%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	6	43%
	Female	6	43%
	Non-Binary	0	0%
<i>Gender the young person identifies with the same assigned as birth?</i>	Yes	11	79%
	No	1	7%
	Prefer not to say	2	14%
<i>Care experienced</i>	Is care experienced	2	14%
	Is not care experienced	11	79%
	Don't know	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	1	7%
<i>Young carers</i>	Cares for one of more family members	2	14%
	Does not have any caring responsibilities	11	79%
	Don't know	1	7%
	Prefer not to say	0	0%
<i>SEND</i>	Has special educational needs and/or a disability	2	14%
	Does not have special educational needs and/or a disability	10	71%
	Don't know	1	7%
	Prefer not to say	1	7%



Sampling frame: Online focus groups – August 2024

Note that five of the 31 focus group participants did not provide demographic data. Only data relating to the other 26 participants is presented below.

What		Count	%
<i>Youth work typologies - could select multiple</i>	Mentoring	16	62%
	Therapy or counselling	7	27%
	Campaigning and activism	16	62%
	Outdoor learning	8	31%
	Volunteering	16	62%
	Sport or physical activity	9	35%
	Teaching or training	19	73%
	Academic support	9	35%
	Peer/near peer support	11	42%
	Advice and guidance	8	31%
	Enterprise	3	12%
	Arts	18	69%
	Other	4	15%
Where		Count	%
<i>Community</i>	Rural (below 10,000)	4	15%
	Urban (over 10,000)	19	73%
	Coastal (under 225,000, near coast)	3	12%



Where		Count	%
<i>Region - could select multiple</i>	South East	3	12%
	London	9	35%
	East England	8	31%
	North West	7	27%
	South West	3	12%
	East Midlands	3	12%
	West Midlands	3	12%
	North East	0	0%
	Yorkshire & Humber	7	27%

Org info		Count	%
<i>Number of staff/volunteers</i>	Very small (0-10)	11	42%
	Small (11-20)	6	23%
	Medium-small (21-30)	3	12%
	Medium-medium (31-40)	3	12%
	Medium-large (41-50)	1	4%
	Large (51+)	1	4%
	Very large (100+)	1	4%

<i>Age groups work with - could select multiple</i>	10-12 years	23	88%
	13-15 years	23	88%
	16-18 years	26	100%



Appendices



Org info		Count	%
<i>Digital usage - to reach or engage young people in provision</i>	Always	9	35%
	Often	8	31%
	Sometimes	8	31%
	Rarely	0	0%
	Never	1	4%
<i>Digital usage - In service delivery (i.e. digital youth work)</i>	Always	7	27%
	Often	6	23%
	Sometimes	8	31%
	Rarely	5	19%
	Never	0	0%
<i>Digital usage - To promote young people's online safety</i>	Always	5	19%
	Often	3	12%
	Sometimes	12	46%
	Rarely	3	12%
	Never	3	12%
<i>Digital usage - To partner and collaborate with other organisations/ professionals</i>	Always	6	23%
	Often	12	46%
	Sometimes	3	12%
	Rarely	4	15%
	Never	1	4%



Who		Count	%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	White	18	69%
	Black, Black British, Caribbean African	3	12%
	Asian or Asian British	2	8%
	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1	4%
	Other	1	4%
	Don't know	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	1	4%
<i>Gender</i>	Male	9	35%
	Female	16	62%
	Non-Binary	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	1	4%
<i>Gender you identify with the same assigned as birth as birth?</i>	Yes	26	100%
	No	0	0%
<i>Highest level of qualification</i>	JNC Level 6	4	15%
	JNC Level 3	3	12%
	JNC Level 2	0	0%
	Other Level 6	2	8%
	Other Level 3	1	4%



Appendices



Who		Count	%
<i>Highest level of qualification</i>	Other Level 2	0	0%
	Level 1	1	4%
	None related to young people	7	27%
	Not sure	4	15%
	Other	4	15%
<i>Years in profession</i>	Early Career	2	8%
	Mid-Career	1	4%
	Established	6	23%
	Experienced	8	31%
	Veteran professional	9	35%
<i>Paid - junior youth practitioner</i>	2	8	14%
	Paid - senior youth practitioner	3	12%
	Volunteer - junior youth practitioners	1	4%
	Volunteer - senior youth practitioner	1	4%
	Paid - youth practitioner with significant management/leadership responsibilities	15	58%
	Volunteer - youth practitioner with significant management/leadership responsibilities	4	15%



Appendix E. Learning from the approach to soliciting user-recorded audio testimonies

This research employed a creative methodology that has a lot of potential to be used across participatory social research and evaluation in future. The method would be particularly efficient where the research is trying to cover a broad geographical area and cover a range of contexts, youth work typologies and fairly broad research aims.

The methodology has a number of strengths:

- It can be relatively low-burden for research participants and researchers, once it is set-up, and this could enable research to be delivered in short timeframes in future. For example, strand 1 of this research was delivered (and all 51 responses were analysed) in a period of approximately 5 weeks. However, later in this section, we have identified some changes that should be made in order to maximise engagement and simplify the submission process.
- The method can target and reach diverse groups of young people or adults/professionals and they can respond in their own words, in their own time and in a space that is familiar to them.

- The methodology is highly participatory – it has people’s voices at its heart and lends itself to creative outputs and dissemination, such as the animated film that has been developed as part of this research project.
- The methodology has the potential to reduce interviewer bias as the participant is not speaking directly with the person(s) conducting the research. However, youth practitioners and parents/guardians are likely to have unintentionally influenced young people’s responses on strands 2 and 3.

These strengths aside, the strands involving young people did not achieve their engagement targets. Despite high levels of interest (including thousands of click-throughs on our paid social media ads), very few young people submitted a recording as well as completing the form in full. We believe that this is primarily due to user experience issues rather than our approach to promoting engagement. There are a number of ways in which user experience could be improved in future.



Appendices



Rather than using a survey/form platform like Typeform or MS Forms, it would be beneficial to use a more interactive platform like Willo – this is a one-way interactive video-interviewing platform. Platforms like this are designed to support recruitment but could also be used to deliver this research methodology. For example:

- The researchers can record an introductory interview at the start, making the research feel more personal, more engaging and more interactive. This would create a sense of reciprocity and build the research participants' comfort with the tool and methodology.
- Participants can easily access the platform on any laptop or mobile device. There is no need to download an app or create a login and the interview can all be completed through a browser.
- All of the participants' recorded and typed answers would be saved and stored through the platform as they go. There is no need to use other apps, upload files or have multiple pages open simultaneously.

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