



Back Youth Alliance rapid evidence review

Insights to inform the National Youth Strategy – February 2025

Executive Summary

The Back Youth Alliance (BYA), a coalition of leading youth organisations, has conducted a rapid evidence review to inform the development of the National Youth Strategy. The review analysed 99 sources of evidence produced by BYA members over the past five years, focusing on:

1. Young people's needs and preferences for support
2. The current landscape of youth work provision
3. The impact of youth work on young people's outcomes

Young People's Needs and Preferences for Support

Young people face growing challenges that impact their wellbeing, skills development, and hope for the future. The review identifies six critical areas where young people require greater support:

- **Mental health and wellbeing** – Young people are increasingly struggling with their mental health and wellbeing. One in five teenagers are now experiencing a mental health problem. They are seeking trusted adults, shorter waiting lists of specialist services, and non-clinical support (such as outdoor learning and creative activities) to improve their wellbeing.
- **Social connection and cohesion** – Young people are more likely to feel lonely than older people. Digital connections are not as meaningful and can expose young people to harm. Instead, young people want safe, affordable spaces to socialise and build friendships in-person – including with people who are from different backgrounds.
- **Financial concerns** – Over 50% of young people worry about their financial future, with many struggling to afford social and extracurricular activities that support their development and wellbeing. The most deprived communities have some of the lowest access to youth work.
- **Employability and career support** – Many young people believe the job market is inaccessible. They cite lack of confidence, work experience, and mental health concerns as major barriers. They need mentorship, practical career guidance, and access to a diverse range of paid work experiences and apprenticeships.
- **Crime and community safety** – Over half of young people feel unsafe in their local area, with particular concern about knife crime, gang involvement, and sexual harassment. They call for investment in youth services to provide positive alternative activities and increased trust building activities with the police.
- **Social action and political engagement** – Many young people feel excluded from decision-making, with only 22% believing politicians listen to them. They want meaningful opportunities to influence policy and engage in social action to improve their own lives and communities.



Across all the challenges they face, young people consistently seek support that provides:

- Safe spaces and trusted relationships
- Meaningful choice and control
- Respect and empowerment
- No financial barriers to access
- Opportunities for fun and joy

Current Landscape of Youth Work Provision

Despite its proven effectiveness, youth work is in crisis due to significant underfunding. Since 2010, local authority spending on youth services has fallen by 73% in England, leading half of youth centres to close and the loss of a third of the workforce.

Other key trends in youth work provision include:

- A shift from universal youth services to targeted interventions, limiting access for many young people.
- Increased reliance on voluntary sector organisations, which often operate with fragmented, short-term funding.
- A workforce crisis, with over 4,500 youth workers lost, declining qualifications, insecure career pathways, and an increasing reliance on under-resourced volunteers.
- Challenges in cross-sector collaboration, where youth work remains undervalued and misunderstood by other professionals despite its critical role in early intervention and prevention.

To sustain youth work, urgent investment in workforce development, long-term funding models, and better integration with allied professions (such as education, healthcare, and criminal justice) is needed.

Impact of Youth Work on Young People's Outcomes

Extensive evidence proves that youth work delivers significant social and economic benefits in the short and long term.

For every £1 invested in youth work, there is a return of between £3.20 and £6.40 in public sector savings. Many of these impacts align directly with the government's five missions:

- **Economic growth:** Youth work plays a crucial role in preparing young people for the workforce by developing transferable skills, building confidence, and increasing pathways to sustainable employment.
- **Safer streets:** Investment in youth work is linked to lower crime rates (including violent crime) and fewer young people entering the criminal justice system.
- **NHS fit for the future:** Youth work reduces demand on mental health services by providing early intervention and resilience-building support.
- **Break down barriers to opportunity:** Youth work fosters personal growth, leadership skills, and raises aspirations – particularly among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Youth work also helps prevent school exclusions



and enhances participation, behaviour, and attainment through tailored support, mentoring and enrichment activities.

- **Net Zero and sustainability:** Environmental education and outdoor learning initiatives help young people develop an understanding of sustainability and improve engagement with nature. Youth work can also help to close the green skills gap, which currently threatens the Net Zero transition.

Conclusion

The findings of this review highlight the urgent need for sustained investment in youth services. Young people consistently call for safe spaces, trusted adults, and opportunities to shape their own futures. However, funding cuts, workforce shortages, and fragmented policymaking are severely limiting the sector's ability to meet these growing needs.

The government's National Youth Strategy presents a crucial opportunity to embed youth work within national policy. To achieve this, policymakers must:

- Commit to long-term, sustainable funding for both open-access and targeted youth services.
- Strengthen workforce development for both the professional and voluntary workforce, ensuring youth workers are adequately trained and resourced.
- Enhance cross-sector collaboration between youth services, education, healthcare, and criminal justice.
- Embed youth voices in decision-making to ensure policies and services reflect young people's real experiences and aspirations.

By investing in youth work, the government can help ensure that all young people – regardless of background or location – have access to the support, opportunities, and safe spaces they need to thrive. However, without decisive government action, the decline of the youth sector could become irreversible.



Introduction

The Back Youth Alliance (BYA) brings together the nation's leading youth organisations to collaborate with young people and champion solutions to society's pressing challenges.

BYA members include: The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Girlguiding, The King's Trust, NCS Trust, OnSide, National Youth Agency, Scouts, UK Youth, YMCA England & Wales, and Youth United Foundation.

This briefing has been prepared to inform the development of the government's National Youth Strategy. It provides a summary of insights from 99 pieces of evidence produced by members of the Back Youth Alliance in the last five years. The rapid evidence review has focused on three research questions:

1. What are young people's needs and preferences for support?
2. What is the current landscape of youth work provision?
3. What is the impact of youth work on young people's outcomes?

Methodology

The rapid evidence review was conducted by UK Youth and NCS Trust, on behalf of the Back Youth Alliance. Whilst the review was conducted and funded independently of government, civil servants working on the development of the National Youth Strategy were consulted on the research design to ensure that it was relevant and timely to their policy work.

All BYA members were invited to submit evidence, published and unpublished, that met the following criteria:

- A BYA member was directly involved in producing the evidence (i.e. commissioning, conducting, and/ or publishing the evidence).
- Evidence was produced in last 5 years.
- Evidence was published in English.

Each source was reviewed by at least two members of the research team and findings were coded thematically using the Framework Approach¹. An annotated bibliography of all the sources reviewed is included as an appendix to this summary paper.

As the review was limited to evidence produced by BYA members, the insights reflect their areas of focus and do not necessarily capture the full range of young people's needs or all the positive impacts of youth work. For example, BYA members work extensively on topics relating to young people's mental health and wellbeing, employability, and youth social action. Sources reviewed relating to these topics are more extensive than areas which are only a focus for a few members, such as violence affecting young people.

¹ <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol26/iss6/21/>



Young People's Needs and Preferences for Support

Young people face a wide range of challenges that impact their wellbeing, development, and hope for the future. The evidence reviewed highlights six key areas where young people require greater support:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social connection
- Financial concerns
- Employability and career support
- Crime, anti-social behaviour, and community safety
- Social action and political engagement

These issues are interrelated and cannot be addressed in isolation. For example, financial insecurity contributes to poor mental health; social isolation affects confidence and career prospects; and opportunities to take part in positive social action can reduce vulnerability to crime and anti-social behaviour.

Despite the challenges they face, young people are eager to engage in meaningful activities, build their skills, and contribute to their communities. They seek accessible, inclusive, and empowering support with a strong emphasis on safe spaces, trusted relationships, and opportunities to feel joy and hope.

Mental health and wellbeing

Young people's mental health needs are growing rapidly but the support they need is not keeping pace with demand. One in five young people now have a diagnosable mental health problem and this is twice as common as a decade ago (NCS, Forthcoming B).

Some groups of young people are more severely affected by mental health problems – especially girls, young people living in poverty, and LGBTQ+ young people (YMCA, 2024a). Young people from global majority ethnicities report that mental health services are often not culturally competent and can even make their mental health problems worse (Centre for Mental Health & UK Youth, 2024; UK Youth, 2022e).

40% of young people feel anxious about their future, while 21% have missed school or work due to mental health problems (Prince's Trust, 2024). Young people also report that concerns about money have a negative impact on their mental health (DofE, 2024b). Many – particularly those not in education, employment, or training (NEET) – fear that poor mental health will limit their career prospects for the rest of their lives (Princes Trust, 2023c).

Young people want safe, non-judgmental spaces to talk openly about mental health but there are often long waiting lists for support. Many prefer seeking support from youth workers, who will treat them as a whole person not a problem (Young Minds & UK Youth, 2023). Non-clinical approaches to boost wellbeing are popular amongst young people. These include outdoor learning, sports, and creative programmes (NCS and Duke of Edinburgh Award, 2025). There is also strong evidence for the benefits of nature-based and peer-led mental health support (UK Youth 2023d).



Young people still want timely access to specialist mental health services (e.g. CAMHS) but they also want trusted adults – such as youth workers and teachers – to provide early support (YMCA, 2024d). 77% of youth workers already support young people with diagnosable conditions but do not feel adequately resourced to meet this need (NYA, 2024c).

Beyond individual support, young people want mental health support integrated into education and employment. Mental health problems can lead to disengagement from school and work (Princes Trust, 2023c). Young people are asking for confidence-building and resilience training to be better integrated with employability programmes (UK Youth 2024a). The King's Trust has demonstrated the effectiveness of embedding stress management and self-care workshops into education and employment pathways (Princes Trust, 2023b).

Social connection and cohesion

Loneliness is a growing concern among young people, with 44% of young people regularly feeling lonely (OnSide, 2024). Social isolation has a direct impact on mental health, with disconnected young people more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and lower life satisfaction (UK Youth, 2022d). This problem has worsened due to the pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, and increasing amounts of time young people spend online (YMCA, 2020a).

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly affected as they often lack safe, accessible spaces outside home and school for social interaction (NCS, Forthcoming C). Many young people are limiting their social life to save money, and this has a negative impact on loneliness and wellbeing (Scouts, 2022; Onside, 2024).

In rural areas, young people have fewer opportunities for in-person engagement, leading to greater reliance on digital interaction that does not always provide meaningful social connection (UK Youth, 2020a; UK Youth, 2024c). Online spaces can help young people to access valuable social support networks, particularly if they are part of a minority community in their local area – e.g. LGBTQ+ young people (OnSide, 2024). However, young people generally report that online relationships are less fulfilling and can make them vulnerable to exploitation (BYA, Forthcoming A). Many young women have experienced negative comments, misogyny, and harassment online that makes them feel even more isolated (Girlguiding, 2024). This is an increasing risk as the development of digital technology, social media, and artificial intelligence outpaces the development of digital safeguarding measures.

Youth work has an important role to play in strengthening social cohesion, which is essential for creating inclusive and resilient communities. Improved social cohesion reduces social division, enhances trust between different groups, and fosters a sense of belonging. Youth work enables young people from diverse backgrounds to interact meaningfully by providing experiences that develop life skills, boost employability, and provide opportunities for social action and volunteering (NCS, 2023b).

Young people want more safe, accessible places to socialise outside of school and home, where they can build friendships and develop confidence (DofE, 2024b). 73% would like more youth clubs in their area and recognise these spaces as essential for reducing



loneliness, improving mental wellbeing, and fostering a sense of belonging (BYA, Forthcoming A).

Financial concerns

Young people are increasingly worried about their financial future, with over 50% feeling anxious about rising living costs (Prince's Trust, 2024). Money-related stress is at record levels, with 63% of youth workers reporting an increase in financial stress-related mental health problems among young people (NYA, 2024c).

49% of young people have said that the cost-of-living crisis has had a greater impact on their lives than the pandemic, with nearly one in three forced to cut down on social activities (Princes Trust, 2024). In 2021, 45% of young women and girls were worried about not having a secure income or being able to afford a home in the future. This had increased to 57% by 2024 (Girlguiding, 2024).

Financial stress is a growing issue, and many young people feel unprepared to navigate economic challenges. Young people want better financial education – particularly budgeting skills, financial planning, and debt management (Demos & Scouts, 2024; NYA, 2025b). However, financial literacy is not widely covered in youth programmes, leading to gaps in practical knowledge (UK Youth, 2024c).

Many young people believe that extracurricular activities could help build confidence and employability skills, but financial barriers can prevent them from accessing these opportunities (BYA, Forthcoming A). This is increasing the inequity of outcomes between young people and limiting social mobility (NCS, 2023b).

Nearly half (49%) of young people do not have a youth club nearby, and those in rural areas often struggle with transport costs that limit their access to support services (YMCA, 2024e). Young people want youth services and social spaces to be accessible and affordable, regardless of location.

Employability and career support

Young people are increasingly worried about their future job prospects and often feel unprepared and unsupported to navigate the world of work (Prince's Trust, 2023c). They cite a lack of confidence, work experience, and mental health concerns as major barriers (UK Youth, 2023b).

The number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training has now reached almost 1 million and the cost-of-living crisis has also forced many into unstable, low-paid jobs, preventing them from securing long-term career stability (Demos & Scouts, 2024).

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face additional challenges due to fewer networking opportunities and limited access to high-quality careers advice (UK Youth, 2024a). Young women, people from global majority ethnicities, and disabled young people encounter structural inequalities in securing meaningful employment (Prince's Trust, 2023b).



Nearly 40% of young people lack the confidence to apply for jobs, underlining the need for mentorship and career coaching (Prince's Trust, 2024). Meaningful work experience is highly valued but difficult to access, especially outside major cities (UK Youth, 2023b). Financial barriers, such as transport costs, training fees, and lack of necessary equipment, prevent many young people from engaging in skills development programmes (NCS, 2024a; UK Youth, 2024c).

Young people want practical, hands-on learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, paid internships, and industry placements (Demos & Scouts, 2024). Vocational and technical education pathways are in high demand but remain underfunded and undervalued. The rise of automation and AI is further increasing uncertainty about which skills will be valuable in the future (Prince's Trust, 2023a). There is growing interest in green jobs and sustainability careers, but clear pathways into these industries are lacking (Prince's Trust, 2023b).

Young people want stronger alignment between schools, employers, and training providers. They also want more targeted support from youth workers for marginalised groups – such as young carers, care leavers, and those with disabilities (UK Youth, 2024a). Youth workers can help young people build essential skills that are in high demand from employers – such as team-work, time management, and presentation skills (Prince's Trust, 2023c; UK Youth, Forthcoming D). There is evidence that targeted youth work employment programmes are engaging for young people and achieve good long-term outcomes (UK Youth, 2022c; SQW & UK Youth, 2024e).

Investing in accessible career guidance, financial assistance, and structured employment support is crucial to ensuring young people can build stable, fulfilling careers. The government's Youth Guarantee aims to meet these needs and there are good opportunities to integrate the proven employment support role played by youth workers into this important new policy initiative.

Crime, anti-social behaviour, and community safety

Young people are increasingly worried about crime, anti-social behaviour, and personal safety. The closure of so many youth services and safe spaces leaves them more vulnerable (SQW & UK Youth, 2024c). As well as impacting perceptions of safety, the reduction in youth work has been causally linked to higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, including violent crime (NYA, 2023b). Knife crime and gang-related violence are particular concerns, with some young people feeling pressured to carry weapons for self-defence (UK Youth, 2020c).

Girls and young women report high levels of harassment – both online and in person – and they do not feel adequately protected by online platforms (Girlguiding, 2024). Youth social action, supported by youth workers, can provide powerful peer support opportunities and empower young women and girls to tackle these issues in their communities (UK Youth, 2024e; Pro Bono Economics & UK Youth, Forthcoming).

Young people are often frustrated that there is more focus on young people as perpetrators rather than victims of crime and anti-social behaviour (which is much more common). There is also resentment that young people spending time together in public can be perceived as



anti-social behaviour even when they are not causing harm and have nowhere else to go (UK Youth, 2024b).

Many young people also feel unfairly targeted by stop-and-search policies, with disproportionate policing of young people in general – and especially those from global majority ethnicities. This is a major driver of low trust in law enforcement (NYA, 2023b).

Young people want safe, accessible spaces where they can spend time without fear of harassment or violence. They are calling for investment in youth services, mentoring programmes, and structured enrichment activities to provide positive alternatives to crime and gang involvement (Ending Youth Violence Lab & UK Youth, Forthcoming). Community-led initiatives that engage young people in shaping solutions have been particularly effective in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour (UK Youth, 2020c).

Social action and political engagement

Young people feel excluded from political decision-making, with only 22% believing that politicians listen to them (DofE, 2024b). While many support lowering the voting age, they also feel underprepared for political participation, highlighting a lack of accessible opportunities to engage in civic life (UK Youth, 2022a). Many young people – especially those from marginalised communities – face financial barriers, tokenistic engagement, and a lack of representation that prevent them from fully participating in youth social action initiatives (NCS, 2021a; UK Youth, 2023c).

Despite these challenges, young people are eager to contribute to social change, with almost 5 million volunteering hours last year by Duke of Edinburgh participants alone (DofE, 2024a). Young women demonstrate high levels of commitment to social action (Pro Bono Economics & UK Youth, Forthcoming). There is clear evidence that youth-led participation programmes help young people develop confidence, leadership skills, and a greater sense of belonging (NCS, 2023b; UK Youth, 2021e).

Young people want more meaningful opportunities to shape decisions that impact their futures – not just issues affecting youth services. They are calling for better education on politics, leadership, and activism. They also want accessible and inclusive platforms that allow them to engage with policymakers (NCS, 2024c).

To rebuild trust in political institutions, young people want greater transparency from decision-makers, with youth-led advisory boards and direct consultations with policymakers to ensure that their voices lead to real change (Centre for Mental Health & UK Youth, 2024; DofE, 2024b).

Characteristics of support

Regardless of the specific challenges they are facing, young people consistently seek support that meets five characteristics:



<p>Safe spaces and trusted relationships</p>	<p>Young people want safe, welcoming spaces outside of home and school where they can socialise, learn, and grow without fear or judgement. They need places where they feel valued, included, and supported – especially if home or school environments are challenging. They want youth clubs, safe spaces, and structured programmes that offer stable relationships and fun experiences. Most importantly, young people want trusted adults who listen, respect them, and provide guidance without judgement. They value the role of youth workers who help them navigate challenges and key life transitions, build resilience, and support their ambitions, ensuring they have someone to turn to when needed.</p>
<p>Meaningful choice and control</p>	<p>Young people want meaningful choice and control over youth work support because their needs, interests, and circumstances vary widely. They value flexibility in services – such as mental health support, employability programmes, and enrichment activities (such as sport or creative activities) – to suit their individual goals. Many young people prefer informal, youth-led spaces that offer non-judgmental support and autonomy in decision-making. They particularly value that engagement with youth work is always voluntary for young people and contrast this to other forms of support where they have less control. Choice also enhances engagement and effectiveness, ensuring services are relevant, inclusive, and accessible. Young people want youth work to be shaped by their voices, giving them ownership over what support looks like and how it is delivered.</p>
<p>Respectful and empowering</p>	<p>Young people want support services to treat them with respect. They want to be recognised as individuals with strengths, ambitions, and potential, rather than simply as problems to be fixed. Being empowered means having their voices heard, being given choices and opportunities, and being supported to develop confidence and independence. They want services that focus on their aspirations, rather than just addressing challenges. They also value support to build skills and learn from mistakes whilst still ensuring they feel confident and capable.</p>
<p>No financial barriers to access</p>	<p>Young people want low financial barriers to accessing support services. Many cannot afford transport, activity fees, or essential resources (e.g. uniforms; sporting equipment, etc). However, many youth services have introduced small fees for their activities in response to large cuts to statutory funding. This can limit participation in youth work, extracurricular activities, and employment support for those who need it most. Improving equity and stability of youth work funding between areas is crucial to ensure that those who need it most can access safe spaces, career opportunities, and mental health support without financial stress.</p>



Opportunities for fun and joy

The evidence suggests that fun and joy are not just 'nice-to-haves' – they are essential for young people's development, mental health, and sense of belonging. However, the decline in youth services and access to safe, inclusive spaces is limiting opportunities for many young people to relax, have fun, and develop strong social connections. Investing in youth centres, creative arts, outdoor learning, sports, and social action programmes will help to ensure that young people can have fun, feel valued, and grow into confident, happy adults.



The Current Landscape of Youth Work Provision

Despite being in high demand from young people and having strong evidence of its positive impact, youth work is in crisis. Since 2010, local authority spending on youth services has fallen by 73% in England and 27% in Wales, amounting to a £1.2bn real term cut in England and £16.6m in Wales (YMCA, 2025).

This funding cut has led to closure of over half of the country's local authority-run youth centres and a third of youth workers leaving the sector since 2012 (YMCA, 2025). Youth work funding remains under threat, with tens of millions of pounds cut in the last Budget and increases in operating costs, such as employer National Insurance contributions (BYA, Forthcoming B). The largest recent central government investment (Youth Investment Fund) has been focused on capital not revenue funding, which has added further pressure to youth organisations' operating budgets.

The youth work sector faces significant financial and workforce challenges, limiting its ability to support young people effectively. Long-term funding, workforce development, and cross-sector collaboration are crucial to ensuring that youth work remains a valuable resource for young people.

Key stats

It is challenging to collect timely, consistent national data on youth work provision, workforce size, and reach to young people. Youth work operates through a diverse network of providers – including local authorities, charities, voluntary organisations, and faith groups – each with different reporting practices and funding structures.

Many youth services – particularly smaller, community-led organisations – lack the capacity or expertise to track and report high quality data. Additionally, there is no standardised national system for measuring workforce numbers or the number of young people engaging in youth work.

However, BYA members have worked hard to try to fill this gap with initiatives such as National Youth Agency's Youth Sector Census and Workforce Register; YMCA's freedom of information requests on youth work funding; and UK Youth's economic analysis (incl. detailed reviews of charity accounts and large national data sets, such as the Understanding Society study). These efforts have produced some useful statistics on the current landscape of youth work provision:

- 80% of youth work services are run by the voluntary sector (NYA, 2024b).
- There are 21,150 paid, full-time equivalent youth workers (NYA, 2024b).
- There are around 180,000 volunteers in the youth sector. Only 14,500 of these volunteers are outside the uniformed youth sector (such as Scouts & Guides) and these numbers are also declining (NYA, 2025a; SQW & UK Youth, 2024a).
- Around a third of young people (4.4 million) access youth work at least once a month (UK Youth, 2022c).
- Local authorities are the largest funder of youth work (£447.5m in 2023/24). Central government is also a large funder (e.g. DCMS with Youth Investment Fund and NCS Trust; Department for Education with Holiday Activities Fund). The rest of the



sector's funding comes from philanthropic organisations (e.g. The National Lottery Community Fund; Children in Need) and commercial income (e.g. venue hire; paid-for school activities; fees charged to young people's families) (UK Youth, 2022c).

How has youth work provision changed?

Over the past decade, the landscape of youth work provision has undergone significant change. One of the most notable shifts has been the decline in youth clubs, with their numbers having since 2010, and many more reducing the number of hours or range of provision that they offer (SQW & UK Youth, 2024d). The reduction has been driven by a dramatic cut to local authority funding rather than a decline in demand (NYA, 2022).

At the same time, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has assumed a central role in both the strategic direction and delivery of youth services, stepping in to fill gaps left by local authority cuts (SQW & UK Youth, 2024d). Despite its increasing dominance in providing youth services, the VCS remains heavily reliant on funding from local authorities as contracts or grants. As well as the reduction in overall funding, many youth organisations rely on multiple short-term funding streams, which rarely cover core operating costs, training, or development (NYA, 2023a).

As the scale of youth work funding has reduced, there has been a move away from universal youth services towards more targeted interventions. These focus on specific groups of young people rather than offering open-access provision (NYA, 2024b). The shift to more targeted provision is a response to reduced resources, ensuring that the most vulnerable young people still receive support. However, it means that millions who could benefit from youth work are now missing out. Additionally, the emphasis on targeted provision limits social mixing and risks stigmatising youth work, potentially discouraging young people from engaging in services altogether (NCS, 2023a).

Young people are diverse and so the types of activities that young people will find engaging – and the youth workers that they will want to connect with – will be equally varied. The power of youth work is that it meets young people where they are, physically and emotionally. This could include centre-based youth clubs, detached youth work, outdoor learning adventures away from home, uniformed youth club settings, or embedded in other settings (such as schools, social housing providers, etc). With the reduction in funding and the increased targeting of youth work provision, young people have a much more limited choice of provision which can lead to worse engagement and outcomes (UK Youth, 2022f).

Another significant shift has been the growing reliance on volunteers to sustain youth services. Many youth work organisations have been designed to be volunteer led – especially uniformed youth organisations, such as The Scouts. However, as the number of professional youth workers has declined, many other youth organisations have turned to volunteers to fill the gap. Whilst this has enabled some continuity in provision, the reduction in the number of paid, qualified youth workers to supervise practice has raised issues about service quality and consistency. There is evidence that fewer volunteers have the training and long-term commitment needed for effective youth work (SQW & UK Youth, 2024d).

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide sufficient youth provision and DCMS updated their local authority guidance on the Statutory Duty in 2023. However, there is still



no legally enshrined minimum standard of provision, and this has left youth work services vulnerable to large cuts when local authorities experience financial pressure (NYA, 2022).

The impact of more than a decade of under-investment has been severe: reduced training, job insecurity, and weakened organisational capacity have led to issues with quality and sustainability of organisations (UK Youth, Forthcoming B). This has been compounded by the limited availability of infrastructure support for the sector.

There is some excellent infrastructure support being provided locally, regionally, and nationally. However, this work is fragmented, under-resourced, and struggling to keep pace with the evolving needs of the sector. The recent closure of major youth sector infrastructure organisations – including British Youth Council, National Citizen Service, and YMCA George Williams College – highlights the fragility of the infrastructure support available. The closures have also placed additional strain on the infrastructure that remains.

Workforce challenges

The youth sector has a severe workforce crisis. Over the past decade, more than 4,500 youth workers have been lost. Only one in five of youth workers remaining in the sector hold a Level 6 qualification or higher – and just 4,200 are trained to Level 2 or 3 – highlighting a critical skills gap (NYA, 2025a).

Recruitment and retention have reached breaking point. Vacancies go unfilled, forcing employers to readvertise roles with lowered criteria due to a shrinking pool of qualified candidates (NYA, 2023a). Low salaries, job insecurity, and a large decline in training opportunities have made youth work a less viable and fulfilling career path (NYA, 2024c).

The number of youth work degree programmes has collapsed from 37 in 2013 to just six in 2024, with enrolments hitting record lows. In 2023/24, only 55 students enrolled on undergraduate youth work degree courses, down from almost 1,000 places a year in 2010 (NYA, 2025a). Without urgent intervention, there will soon be too few skilled professionals left to meet young people's needs.

Salary constraints make matters worse. The average youth worker earns between £19,918 and £21,068, and senior managers make just £33,366 – a stark contrast to the high costs of obtaining a professional qualification (NYA, 2025a). These salaries are also much lower than equivalent professional roles working with young people, such as teachers and social workers. This financial barrier discourages new entrants and undermines workforce sustainability (UK Youth, Forthcoming C).

As a result of the reduced jobs, limited qualifications, and low pay youth workers are under a lot of strain. Many report high workloads, burnout, and isolation (NYA, 2024c). They also report the stress caused by being unable to meet young people's rising needs with dwindling resources making it harder to provide consistent, high-quality support (UK Youth, 2024g).

Another key challenge is the lack of diversity in leadership roles. Leadership within the youth sector does not always reflect the communities it serves, with marginalised and underrepresented groups often facing barriers to advancement. Ensuring greater diversity in



leadership is crucial for creating more inclusive, representative, and effective youth services (CfEY & UK Youth, 2025; UK Youth Forthcoming C).

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for growth and long-term sustainability. Investing in workforce training and professional development is essential to rebuilding skills and capacity. The National Youth Agency is currently leading reform of the qualifications framework for the youth sector (NYA, 2025a). UK Youth has been developing a new approach to leadership development for the sector – including the Joined Up Institute, Youth First, and support for the TRIUMPH Network (UK Youth, Forthcoming C). These initiatives can help create a more diverse, skilled, and representative sector. However, reform will not be successful with the long-term funding needed to ensure youth work remains a viable, well-supported profession.

Cross-sector working

Effective youth work does not operate in isolation – it thrives when professionals across education, social care, mental health, and the criminal justice system work together to support young people holistically (UK Youth, 2024d).

Youth workers often build trusted relationships with young people outside formal settings and gain valuable insights into their challenges, strengths, and aspirations. By collaborating with professionals in other sectors, youth workers can help ensure that young people receive coordinated, wraparound support rather than falling through the cracks (CfEY & UK Youth, 2025). For example, partnering with mental health professionals allows youth workers to identify early signs of distress and signpost young people to appropriate services before crises escalate and this reduces pressure on CAMHS waiting lists (Centre for Mental Health & UK Youth, 2024; Young Minds & UK Youth, 2023).

At a local level, strong cross-sector collaboration depends on mutual understanding and trust between professionals. Too often, youth work is undervalued compared to statutory services, despite its crucial role in early intervention and prevention (Institute for Government & UK Youth, 2024a). For collaboration to be truly effective, youth workers must be recognised as equal partners in supporting young people’s wellbeing (NCS & DofE, 2025). This requires open communication, shared training opportunities, and formal structures for joint working, ensuring that all professionals understand each other’s roles and contributions. When youth workers are embedded within multi-agency teams, their expertise in relationship-building and informal education can complement the work of other professionals, leading to better outcomes for young people (NYA, 2024a).

However, local collaboration alone is not enough; national strategy, funding, and policy must also be aligned to enable a joined-up approach to supporting young people. Currently, different sectors operate within separate funding streams and policy frameworks, making it difficult to coordinate efforts (Institute for Government & UK Youth, 2024). A cohesive National Youth Strategy should ensure that youth work is properly resourced and integrated into wider systems of support, with clear pathways for partnership working across sectors (such as the government’s Young Futures Hubs and Prevention Partnerships). By breaking down silos and ensuring that youth work is fully embedded in national policy and investment, we can create a more effective, coordinated system that meets young people’s needs in a holistic, sustained way.



Impact of Youth Work on Young People's Outcomes

Young people are growing up in a complex and increasingly challenging world. There are severe pressures on their mental health, employment prospects, and even physical safety. The increasing scale and severity of young people's needs requires a major response from national and local government.

Youth work is an essential tool to help young people navigate these difficulties and set them up with skills for life. It is proven to have positive outcomes for young people in the short term – including improved mental health, educational attainment, and reduced crime and anti-social behaviour (SQW & UK Youth, 2024e).

In addition to strong short-term outcomes, youth work is proven to have a sustained impact over the long term (Berrie et al., 2023). People who engage in youth work as teenagers are more likely to become happier, healthier, and wealthier adults than those from similar backgrounds who did not have access to youth work (SQW & UK Youth, 2024c). As well as the positive impacts, the closure of youth work also has detrimental effects with increased crime (incl. violent crime) and worse educational attainment (NYA, 2023b).

Research suggests that for every £1 invested in youth work, there is a return of between £3.20 and £6.40 in savings across the criminal justice system, healthcare, and employment sectors (UK Youth, 2022c).

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the value of youth work and its positive impact on young people's outcomes. Many of these impacts align directly with the government's five missions:

<p>Economic growth</p>	<p>Youth work plays a crucial role in preparing young people for the workforce by developing transferable skills, confidence, and employability. Through work experience, training, and mentoring, youth services help bridge the gap between education and employment. This is particularly beneficial for those who face barriers to work – such as young people with mental health problems, care leavers, or people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Safer streets</p>	<p>Youth clubs, mentoring programmes, and early intervention services help to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. They provide young people with positive alternative activities and safe spaces to go. Evidence suggests that targeted youth interventions can significantly reduce reoffending rates and prevent young people from becoming involved in the criminal justice system.</p>
<p>NHS fit for the future</p>	<p>Youth work offers preventative mental health support, reducing the burden on crisis services and promoting early intervention. Youth workers play a key role in identifying and</p>



	addressing mental health concerns before they escalate, improving overall wellbeing and resilience.
Break down barriers to opportunity	Youth work fosters personal growth, leadership skills, and aspirations, particularly among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Educational enrichment, mentoring, and skills development programmes help boost confidence and educational attainment, supporting long-term social mobility.
Net Zero and sustainability	Environmental education and outdoor learning initiatives help young people develop an understanding of sustainability and improve engagement with nature. Youth organisations play a role in encouraging environmentally responsible behaviours and fostering awareness of climate change, as well as promoting the opportunity of green careers. This is key to addressing the existing green skills gap that threatens the net zero transition. Environmental youth social action can also tackle eco-anxiety.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Youth work provides vital preventative mental health support that helps young people manage anxiety, depression, and other challenges before they escalate (NCS, Forthcoming B; UK Youth, 2022b). This work is already saving the tax payer over a billion pounds each year from avoided mental health treatment costs (UK Youth, 2022c).

Relationships with trusted adults in youth services improve young people’s social and emotional development – with better emotional resilience, self-confidence, and overall wellbeing (NCS, 2023a; UK Youth, 2022d; YMCA, 2024a). It can also mitigate the effects of trauma and social isolation (Young Minds & UK Youth, 2023).

Evaluations of programmes – such as EmpowHER and Adventures Away From Home – show that youth work boosts self-esteem and sense of agency (Pro Bono Economics & UK Youth, Forthcoming; UK Youth, 2024h). There is also good evidence to show that youth work can increase young people’s sense of belonging and broader social cohesion (NCS, 2023b; UK Youth 2021c; YMCA, 2024d). This improves individual and community wellbeing.

Youth workers can effectively identify young people’s needs and efficiently connect them to other specialist support services – reducing the burden on young people to navigate complex systems and reducing ‘did not attend’ rates for mental health services (NCS, Forthcoming A).

The Young Changemakers programme underscores the need for culturally sensitive mental health support, particularly for young people from global majority ethnicities (Centre for Mental Health & UK Youth, 2024).



Educational Engagement & Attainment

Youth services play a crucial role in preventing school exclusions and enhancing participation by offering tailored support, mentoring, and educational enrichment activities (NYA, 2024a; Youth Endowment Fund & YMCA George Williams College, 2024).

Enrichment activities delivered through youth work – such as arts and outdoor learning – provide alternative learning pathways that complement formal education (SQW & UK Youth, 2024b). These activities help develop important socio-emotional skills, build confidence, and increase motivation. This has been shown to improve attendance and academic performance (NCS & DofE, 2025).

Youth work support integrated with schools, such as that provided by Football Beyond Borders, has been shown to support students at risk of exclusion to reduce behavioural issues and stay engaged in education (NYA, 2024a).

Employability and Skills Development

Youth work plays a crucial role in preparing young people for employment by developing essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and conflict management (Prince's Trust, 2023c; YMCA George Williams College, 2021b). It has also been shown to be an effective method for improving young people's financial literacy (NYA, 2025b).

Social action programmes – such as volunteering and civic engagement initiatives like #iwill – help young people develop empathy, problem-solving abilities, and deepen their commitment to their communities (UK Youth, 2022a).

Structured employability programmes run by youth workers increase confidence in job applications and workplace readiness (UK Youth, 2023b). Youth workers can provide effective support to help people access and sustainably benefit from structured work experience, mentoring, and leadership opportunities (Ending Youth Violence Lab & UK Youth, Forthcoming). This is proven to improve optimism about work and boost employment prospects, particularly for disadvantaged young people who face additional barriers (Prince's Trust, 2023c).

Community Safety and Crime Prevention

Youth services help prevent crime, improve perceived safety, and reduce the likelihood of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour. Research shows that youth centre closures correlate with rising youth crime rates, while investment in youth work saves the public sector millions by reducing criminal justice costs (NYA, 2023b; SQW & UK Youth, 2024d).

Evidence from hospital-based youth interventions, detached youth work, and gang diversion schemes highlight youth work's effectiveness in steering young people away from violence and criminal activity (UK Youth, 2020c; UK Youth, 2022f; Ending Youth Violence Lab & UK Youth, Forthcoming).



Evidence Gaps and Areas for Further Research

Despite the strong case for youth work, there are gaps in the evidence base that require further exploration.

Marginalised groups – especially rural youth, young people from global majority ethnicities, and disabled young people – remain underrepresented in research. More inclusive and representative studies are needed to ensure that policy and youth work provision address the full diversity of young people's experiences and needs.

Although the 2024 research by SQW and UK Youth was a landmark study, more longitudinal research is needed to track young people's needs over time and evaluate the long-term impact of youth interventions (SQW & UK Youth, 2024c). Almost all current research focuses on short-term outcomes, meaning that policymakers lack a comprehensive understanding of how youth work contributes to sustained life improvements (Institute for Government & UK Youth, 2024b).

Young people's needs and opportunities change over time and youth work research needs to keep pace. However, there are currently limited insights into how digitalisation, AI, and automation are shaping young people's employment prospects and mental health. Understanding the implications of these technological shifts for young people's lives and the support they need from youth workers is critical (UK Youth, Forthcoming A).

It is challenging to collect timely, consistent national data on youth work provision, workforce size, and reach to young people. Youth work operates through a diverse network of providers – including local authorities, charities, voluntary organisations, and faith groups – each with different reporting practices and funding structures. Many youth services – particularly smaller or community-led organisations – lack the capacity or resources to track and report comprehensive data. Additionally, there is no standardised national system for measuring workforce numbers or the number of young people engaging in youth work.

To strengthen the evidence base, we recommend:

- **Expanding research with marginalised groups** – Fund and conduct more inclusive studies that capture the experiences of underrepresented young people, ensuring policies address their specific needs.
- **Investing in more longitudinal research** – Support more long-term studies to track the sustained impact of youth work interventions and better inform policy decisions.
- **Assessing the impact of technological change** – Commission research on how changes in young people's digital lives and introduction of AI are affecting young people's employment prospects and mental health.
- **Standardising national data collection** – Invest in a national framework for tracking youth work provision, workforce, and engagement to improve sector-wide visibility and funding decisions.
- **Supporting community and volunteer-led services** – Provide funding and tools to help all youth work organisations – especially smaller, grassroots charities – engage in research and evaluate their own services, ensuring their contributions to youth work are recognised and sustained.



Conclusion

The findings of this rapid evidence review underscore the essential role of youth work in enhancing young people's mental health, employability, social connection, and overall wellbeing.

Young people consistently call for accessible, inclusive, and empowering youth services that reflect their diverse experiences and needs. They seek safe spaces, trusted relationships, and meaningful opportunities to shape their futures.

However, persistent financial and structural barriers – including funding cuts, workforce shortages, and fragmented policymaking – are limiting the reach and impact of youth services at a time when young people's needs are rapidly increasing.

The evidence overwhelmingly supports sustained investment in both open-access and targeted youth provision. The long-term economic and social benefits – from improved mental health outcomes to reduced crime rates, better social cohesion, and enhanced employability – demonstrate the need for a more sustainable funding model. Without action, the decline of the youth sector could become irreversible.

Young people are clear about what they need:

- Safe spaces to connect with peers
- Trusted adults to guide them through life's challenges
- Opportunities that inspire hope for the future
- A greater say in shaping the policies and services that affect them

To build a robust and sustainable youth sector, the government must commit to long-term investment rather than short-term funding cycles. A stable financial framework will enable youth services to deliver consistent, high-quality support that evolves with young people's changing needs.

Strengthening collaboration between youth work providers, education, health, criminal justice, and employment sectors will create a more integrated approach to supporting young people. This should be reinforced by joined-up policymaking at both national and local levels.

Crucially, young people do not want to be passive recipients of support. They want agency, choice, and control over the services they engage with. They seek youth work that is empowering, strengths-based, and reflective of their aspirations not just their challenges. By listening to young people and embedding their voices in decision-making, we can ensure that youth services become more than just a safety net – they can be a springboard for success, wellbeing, and social change.

The National Youth Strategy presents a major opportunity to embed the value of youth work within government policy. A commitment to long-term funding, cross-sector collaboration, and youth-led solutions will empower all young people – regardless of background or location – to access the opportunities and support they need to lead fulfilling, successful lives.



Appendix

Annotated reference list

- **Back Youth Alliance. (Forthcoming A). *Youth strategy polling*. Unpublished.**
 - This report presents survey findings from Autumn 2024 on young people's experiences of youth services and preferences for future support. The results highlight a strong demand for accessible, enjoyable, and skills-focused activities whilst also identifying key barriers to participation. Young people voiced concerns about mental health, social media pressures, and other digital challenges. They emphasised the need for greater government investment in safe spaces, life skills development, and opportunities for youth participation in decision-making.
- **Back Youth Alliance. (Forthcoming B). *Youth work funding analysis*. Unpublished.**
 - Analysis of central government youth work funding allocations in 2025 that highlights a further reduction in funding, uncertainties around the future of major youth programmes (such as Violence Reduction Units), and potential impact on youth services already under strain.
- **Berrie, L., et al. (2023). *Youth organisations, social mobility and health in middle age: Evidence from a Scottish 1950s prospective cohort study*. *European Journal of Public Health*, 33(1), 6–12.**
<https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckac144>
 - Study investigating the long-term impact of participation in youth development organisations, such as the Scouts and Guides, on individuals' self-reported health and socioeconomic status in mid-life. It finds that youth work involvement is associated with better health outcomes and increased social mobility.
- **Centre for Mental Health & UK Youth. (2024). *A space to be me*. Retrieved from https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CentreforMH_ASpaceToBeMe.pdf**
 - Presents findings from the Young Changemakers programme, which empowered young Black individuals to lead social action projects addressing the intersection of racial injustice and mental health disparities, and advocates for systemic changes to improve mental health support for young Black people.
- **CfEY & UK Youth. (2024). *Education and enrichment Research for NCS and Duke of Edinburgh Award*. Retrieved from https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2024-04/UKY_NCS_DofE_Education_Enrichment_Research_Report_V5.pdf**
 - Examines how partnerships between the education and youth sectors can enhance the accessibility, quality, and impact of enrichment activities for young people.
- **CfEY & UK Youth. (2025). *Design research to inform Joined Up Institute*. Unpublished.**
 - Review to inform the development of UK Youth's Joined Up Institute by analysing existing cross-sector workforce development programmes. The research highlights the critical role of alumni networks in sustaining impact, the effectiveness of hybrid learning models in improving accessibility, the need for flexible partnerships to enhance programme resilience, and the importance of designing leadership training that fosters cross-sector collaboration and systemic change.



- **Demos & Scouts. (2024). *The employability badge: Skills for life, work, and a stronger society*. Retrieved from <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-employability-badge-skills-for-life-work-and-a-stronger-society/>**
 - Examines the dual skills gap – technical and transferable – hindering youth employment in the UK and advocates for enhancing access to extracurricular activities, such as those offered by the Scouts, to equip young people with essential skills for the evolving job market.
- **Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. (2024a). *Duke of Edinburgh Award 2024 Impact Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.dofe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/DofE-2024-Impact-Report.pdf>**
 - Analysis of data from 40,880 Duke of Edinburgh Award participants, revealing that involvement in the programme leads to significant improvements in young people's wellbeing, skill development, community engagement, and physical activity levels.
- **Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. (2024b). *Youth voices 2024*. Retrieved from <https://www.dofe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Youth-Voices-Report-2024-2.pdf>**
 - Presents findings from a survey of over 3,000 UK young people aged 14-24, highlighting their primary concerns – such as mental health, housing costs, the economy, and the NHS – and emphasises their feelings of being unheard by politicians, advocating for increased youth representation in policy-making.
- **Ending Youth Violence Lab & UK Youth. (Forthcoming). *Summer Jobs Programme Feasibility Study*. Unpublished.**
 - Study exploring the initial implementation of a Summer Youth Employment Programme in England and Wales, designed to provide vulnerable young people aged 16-24 with short-term paid employment and youth work support to reduce their risk of involvement in violence. The research finds strong demand for the programme, successful recruitment and retention of participants, high levels of stakeholder acceptability, and recommends expanding the programme into a full Randomised Control Trial.
- **Girlguiding. (2020). *Girls' attitudes survey 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2020.pdf>**
 - Examines the needs and preferences of over 2,000 girls and young women aged 7 to 21 across the UK, highlighting challenges they face in areas such as self-confidence, community involvement, leadership, skills development, access to play and sports, and their feelings about the environment and future.
- **Girlguiding. (2021). *Girls' attitudes survey 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2021-report.pdf>**
 - Review of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on over 2,000 girls and young women aged 7 to 21 in the UK. Report highlights declines in happiness and mental health, increased experiences of online harms, and the need for enhanced support in education and well-being as society recovers.
- **Girlguiding. (2023). *Girls' attitudes survey 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2023.pdf>**
 - Reveals a significant decline in happiness among girls and young women over the past 15 years, with only 17% now describing themselves as very happy



compared to 40% in 2009. The report highlights increased pressures from appearance expectations, online harms, and sexual harassment.

- **Girlguiding. (2024). *Girls' attitudes survey 2024*. Retrieved from <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2024.pdf>**
 - Highlights that girls and young women in the UK are experiencing a significant crisis of confidence, exacerbated by pervasive sexism, appearance-related pressures, and online harms. This leads to increased feelings of vulnerability and anxiety about their futures.
- **Institute for Government & UK Youth. (2024a). *A preventative approach to public services*. Retrieved from https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/preventative-approach-public-services_0.pdf**
 - Explores policy options to help the UK government to prioritise early interventions across various sectors – such as health, social care, criminal justice, and youth work – to improve wellbeing and reduce long-term costs associated with acute services.
- **Institute for Government & UK Youth. (2024b). *Youth work and prevention briefing: The benefits of youth work*. Retrieved from <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/youth-work-prevention>**
 - Highlights the significant preventative impact of youth work – with proven impacts on mental health, educational attainment, and reduced crime. The report also highlights a substantial decrease in government funding on preventative services since 2010, whilst spending on acute services (e.g. looked after children) have increased dramatically.
- **National Youth Agency. (2022). *Delivering youth work in England*. Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Census-second-report-oct22-1.pdf>**
 - Provides a detailed analysis of youth work delivery in England, highlighting the current landscape, financial context, and the challenges faced by local authorities and youth organisations in providing equitable access to youth services.
- **National Youth Agency. (2023a). *Joining the Dots: Supporting grassroots youth organisations to make great youth work happen*. Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYA-Joining-the-Dots-Report-ovt23-update-1.pdf>**
 - Presents findings from a comprehensive consultation aimed at understanding the needs of grassroots youth organisations – such as limited funding, staffing shortages, and inconsistent access to training and resources.
- **National Youth Agency. (2023b). *The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work*. Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYA-Report-The-social-cost-of-youth-work-cuts-%E2%80%93-Preventing-youth-offending-through-youth-work.pdf>**
 - Highlights the significant economic and social benefits of investing in youth work as a preventative measure to reduce youth offending. Includes Warwick University analysis that youth centre closures are associated with increased crime and anti-social behaviour.
- **National Youth Agency. (2024a). *Better together: Youth work with schools*.**



Retrieved from https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NYA_Publications-2023_Youth-Work-With-Schools.pdf for upload REV-1-1.pdf

- MP-led inquiry demonstrating how integrating youth work into educational settings enhances student wellbeing, engagement, and attendance, and recommends strategies for effective collaboration between youth workers and schools to support young people's holistic development.
- **National Youth Agency. (2024b). *National youth sector census snapshot: Summer 2024*.** Retrieved from https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/1712-NYA-Census-Snapshot-Report_P3_DIGITAL.pdf
 - Highlights the growing demand for youth services, financial instability, and workforce challenges faced by youth work providers. The report advocates for increased funding, workforce development, and strategic collaboration with other professions to strengthen the sector's sustainability and impact.
- **National Youth Agency. (2024c). *Youth sector workforce survey report 2024*.** Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NYA-Youth-Sector-Workforce-Survey-Report-2024.pdf>
 - Reveals a critical shortage of qualified youth workers in England, emphasising the need for targeted recruitment, professional recognition, and a long-term workforce strategy to meet growing demand for youth services.
- **National Youth Agency. (2024d). *Youth survey 2024*.** Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NYA-Youth-Survey-2024-Report.pdf>
 - Presents findings from a survey of 1,170 young people aged 16-19, highlighting their desire for more engaging youth work activities that offer enjoyment and foster a sense of community belonging.
- **National Youth Agency. (2025a). *Supporting and Growing the Youth Work Workforce: The Critical Challenge*.** Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/NYA-Supporting-and-Growing-the-Youth-Work-Workforce-%E2%80%93-The-Critical-Challenge-January-2025.pdf>
 - Overview of the significant workforce shortages and training gaps in the youth work sector, emphasising the urgent need for a skilled and sustainable workforce to meet the increasing needs of young people across England.
- **National Youth Agency. (2025b). *Insights from Cohort One: An overview of clubs' and young people's participation in the NatWest Thrive programme*.** Retrieved from <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Thrive-Cohort-1-slide-deck-v5-1.pdf>
 - Evaluation of the NatWest Thrive programme, delivered in partnership with NYA. It finds that a significant majority of young people gained increased confidence in their futures, improved financial management skills, and a clearer plan for achieving their goals.
- **NCS. (2021a). *Empowering the next greatest generation through social action and volunteering*.** Retrieved from <https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2021-04/Youth%20Social%20Action%20Report%20March%202021.pdf>
 - Examines the significant role of youth social action and volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how these activities have benefited both communities and the personal development of young people.



- **NCS. (2021b). *NCS 2020: Programme evaluation summary report*. Retrieved from <https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2021-03/NCS%202020%20Programme%20Evaluation%20Summary%20Report%20March%202021.pdf>**
 - Highlights the positive impact of the National Citizen Service's adapted 2020 programmes - 'Staying Connected', 'Keep Doing Good', and 'Moving Forward' – which provided crucial support to young people and educational institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, helping participants build resilience, develop key skills, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.
- **NCS. (2023a). *Five year impact report*. Retrieved from <https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2023-08/5%20Year%20Impact%20Report%202018-2022.pdf>**
 - Evaluates the organisation's effectiveness in fostering social cohesion, enhancing life skills, and promoting community engagement among young people, demonstrating significant positive outcomes in these areas.
- **NCS. (2023b). *Independent review for social cohesion and resilience*. Retrieved from https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2023-11/23_13_011_Social%20Cohesion%20Review_v3.pdf**
 - Explores the multifaceted nature of social cohesion, identifies key factors influencing it – such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, and technology use – and evaluates NCS's role in promoting social cohesion through diverse experiences that enhance life skills, social mobility, and community engagement among young people.
- **NCS. (2024a). *Young insights polling - February 24. Unpublished*.**
 - Presents findings from the February 2024 wave of NCS Youth Insights survey, highlighting young people's growing concerns about academic stress, mental health problems, and financial instability. The research shows that barriers such as cost, limited choice of activities, and safety concerns prevent full engagement of young people in support services. Young people prioritise opportunities for personal growth, social connection, and career preparation but feel that current provisions are insufficient.
- **NCS. (2024b). *Youth insights polling - March 24. Unpublished*.**
 - Presents findings from the March 2024 wave of NCS Youth Insights survey, highlighting young people's preferences for residential experiences, digital engagement, employability support, and wellbeing. The research emphasises a strong interest in short video content and more up-to-date career development guidance that reflects the rapidly changing nature of employer needs.
- **NCS. (2024c). *Youth insights polling - August 24. Unpublished*.**
 - Presents findings from August 2024 wave of NCS Youth Insights survey, revealing that young people predominantly consume news via social media, have mixed trust in digital sources, prioritise mental health and life skills, and many feeling unprepared for voting and civic participation.
- **NCS and Duke of Edinburgh Award. (2025). *Beyond the classroom: the role of enrichment in tackling the school absence crisis*. Retrieved from <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/news-centre/new-research-reveals-positive-link-between-enrichment-and-tackling-the-school-attendance-crisis>**
 - Literature review examining the link between enrichment activities and school attendance in English secondary schools. It highlights enrichment's role in



supporting personal development, school engagement, and academic attainment. This is particularly important in the post-pandemic context where absenteeism has risen, especially among disadvantaged students. The report calls for further research into how enrichment activities can be best integrated into the formal education system.

- **NCS. (Forthcoming A). *Social prescribing pilot outline*. Unpublished.**
 - The report highlights the urgent need for better mental health support for young people, emphasising gaps in existing services and the role of youth provision in addressing issues like social isolation, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It proposes a social prescribing pilot that directly responds to these needs by integrating youth services with mental health support through awareness campaigns, education initiatives, and youth workers acting as social prescribing link workers.
- **NCS. (Forthcoming B). *The impact of youth sector provision on mental health outcomes: A systematic literature review*. Unpublished.**
 - Systemic review highlights the significant impact of youth sector provision on young people's mental health. It finds that activities like mentoring, volunteering, residential, and sports clubs can support emotional wellbeing, resilience, and social connection. Evidence suggests that consistent, engaging, and community-based youth work initiatives can help reduce anxiety, depression, and emotional difficulties. The research also emphasises how programme factors – such as duration, location, and whether they are universal or targeted – can have a significant impact on outcomes.
- **NCS. (Forthcoming C). *Understanding young people*. Unpublished.**
 - Findings from eight focus groups with young people in early 2024, exploring young people's motivations, priorities for support, and barriers to engaging in youth activities. The findings highlighting a strong desire for diverse, accessible, and flexible opportunities that support social connection, skill development, and mental wellbeing.
- **OnSide Youth Zones. (2022). *Generation isolation 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/content/uploads/2022/11/Generation-Isolation-OnSide-Youth-Research-081122-FINAL.pdf>**
 - Explores how 11–18-year-olds in England spend their free time outside of school, revealing most engagement with screen-based activities, high levels of loneliness and anxiety, and a desire for more affordable, safe, and enjoyable places to socialise and learn new skills.
- **OnSide Youth Zones. (2023). *Generation isolation 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Generation-Isolation-Report-FINAL.pdf>**
 - Investigates the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on 11–18-year-olds in England, revealing that 26% have ceased participating in out-of-school activities due to financial constraints, leading to increased screen time, heightened anxiety, and a lack of safe, affordable spaces for socialising and skill development.
- **OnSide Youth Zones. (2024). *Generation isolation 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.onsideyouthzones.org/content/uploads/2024/11/OnSide-Generation-Isolation-Report-2024_FINAL.pdf**
 - Explores how 11–18-year-olds in England spend their free time outside of school, revealing that 76% primarily engage in screen-based activities, with 52% desiring to reduce their usage but 46% unsure how. The report also highlights high levels of anxiety (51%) and loneliness (44%) among young people, and



emphasises the need for more affordable, safe, and enjoyable places for them to socialise and learn new skills.

- **Prince's Trust. (2023a). *Decoding the digital skills gap report*.** Retrieved from <https://www.kingstrust.org.uk/about-us/news-views/decoding-digital-skills-gap-report>
 - Summarises the barriers preventing young people from pursuing digitally enabled training and jobs, highlighting the significant economic impact of the digital skills gap on the UK economy.
- **Prince's Trust. (2023b). *Generation green jobs report*.** Retrieved from <https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/2LyIxyPZwCb7aEaPrL9NH6/6065a0c558ba48a8b1b9c43b4924a0d7/Generation-Green-Jobs-Report-Nov-2023-1.pdf>
 - Explores young people's understanding of the green economy and their perceptions of future job opportunities, revealing a limited awareness of the roles and skills required for the UK's Net Zero transition and highlighting the need for targeted education and engagement to prepare the next generation for emerging green careers.
- **Prince's Trust. (2023c). *The power of potential: Supporting the future of NEET young people*.** Retrieved from <https://www.kingstrust.org.uk/about-us/our-research/the-power-of-potential-supporting-the-future-of-young-people>
 - Demonstrates how nearly 484,000 young individuals in the UK who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) could enter the workforce if provided with appropriate support and opportunities.
- **Prince's Trust. (2024). *Prince's Trust youth index 2024*.** Retrieved from <https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/1dwzhtDnn0c2fMyH7AGZTC/d7466a75712c8333545d79ebb6e0880e/DSN6204 Princes Trust Youth Index 2024 Final.pdf>
 - Tracks wellbeing of 16–25-year-olds in the UK, revealing that the cost-of-living crisis has significantly impacted their mental health, financial confidence, and career aspirations, with half reporting it has had a worse effect on their lives than the pandemic.
- **Pro Bono Economics & UK Youth. (Forthcoming). *EmpowHER (Social Action) Economic Evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - This economic analysis of the impact of EmpowHER (a youth worker supported social action programme for young women and girls) found that the programme generates at least £4 of wellbeing benefit per £1 invested. This represents around 0.5 life satisfaction years (WELLBYs) per completed participant – a very good return on investment and relatively higher impact than other forms of wellbeing interventions.
- **Scouts. (2022). *Extra-curricular activities & the cost of living*. Unpublished.**
 - Highlights the significant impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people's participation in extracurricular activities. It reveals that affordability challenges disproportionately affect lower-income families and force many to reduce or stop activities altogether. It spotlights how Scout groups and volunteers struggle are finding creative ways to support participation through initiatives like uniform recycling and equipment lending.
- **Scouts. (2023). *Ages 14-24 redesign discovery report*.** Retrieved from <https://prod-cms.scouts.org.uk/media/wubfyuib/discovery-phase-report-full-47-page-report-final.pdf>



- Explores the history, current state, and future needs of Scouts programmes for young people aged 14–24, aiming to modernise and enhance the experience for participants.
- **SQW & UK Youth. (2024a). *Volunteering in the youth sector*. DCMS. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6723950e01ee25b06c4f99db/Volunteering_in_the_Youth_Sector_-_Final_Report-FINAL_SIGNED_OFF_accessible_1_.pdf**
 - Research into the challenges youth organisations face in recruiting and retaining volunteers, highlighting issues such as insufficient volunteer numbers leading to scaled-back activities, and emphasises the need for effective recruitment strategies and support systems to enhance volunteer engagement.
- **SQW & UK Youth. (2024b). *Youth enrichment: Discovery phase*. DCMS. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6723985dbce643d1194f99e1/Youth_Enrichment_Report_-_DCMS_Final-accessible_1.pdf**
 - Investigates how educational enrichment activities – both in and out of school – can be improved to better support young people's socio-emotional development. It highlights the need for greater accessibility – particularly for disadvantaged young people – through increased funding, stronger partnerships between schools and youth work organisations, and a more diverse range of opportunities that align with young people's interests and future aspirations.
- **SQW & UK Youth. (2024c). *Youth provision and life outcomes: A study of longitudinal research*. DCMS. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fac3c3703c42001158f03f/Strand_1_Report_-_Youth_Evidence_Base_SQW_v13-accessible.pdf**
 - Analyses longitudinal data to assess how participation in youth work influences various life outcomes into adulthood – showing that teenagers who engage with youth work are happier, healthier, and wealthier as adults compared to peers from the same background who did not have access to youth work.
- **SQW & UK Youth. (2024d). *Youth provision and life outcomes: A study of the local impact of youth clubs*. DCMS. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ce41c3423931001bb7b8b7/Local_Areas_-_Report- Youth_Evidence_Base-accessible.pdf**
 - Uses case studies to explore how youth work provision and funding is changing at a local level and analyses the impact of youth centre closures on young people's outcomes. It finds that closures are strongly associated with increased crime and anti-social behaviour.
- **SQW & UK Youth. (2024e). *Youth provision and life outcomes: Systematic literature review*. DCMS. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ce4180e1bdec0011322215/Literature_Review_-_Report- Youth_Evidence_Base-accessible.pdf**
 - Systematically examines over 25,000 studies to assess the impact of various youth work activities on personal, social, educational, and economic outcomes. The review provides evidence that well-designed youth work programs can significantly benefit young people across these areas.
- **UK Youth. (2020a). *Be Internet Citizens evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - Evaluation of a digital literacy program, run by UK Youth and funded by Google.org, that successfully trained over 5,700 young people to critically



navigate online spaces, combat misinformation, and foster positive digital citizenship.

- **UK Youth. (2020b). *Future Proof evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - Evaluation of a UK Youth initiative aimed at upskilling youth workers to support young people's changing needs. The programme successfully improved the skills and confidence of youth workers to support young people with challenges such as mental health, social inequality, and employment readiness.
- **UK Youth. (2020c). *Harnessing lived experience: A youth-led consultation on the causes and solutions to serious violence against young people*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Serious-Violence-NLCF-Report-final-version-1.pdf>**
 - Findings from a youth-led consultation exploring the root causes of serious violence affecting young people and developing youth-led solutions. The report highlights key factors contributing to youth violence, including: poverty; lack of safe spaces; mental health challenges; and negative experiences with law enforcement. It emphasises the need for early intervention, community-led support, and investment in youth work to provide safe spaces and positive role models. The findings stress the importance of amplifying young people's voices in decision-making processes to ensure policies and interventions are relevant, effective, and responsive to their lived experiences.
- **UK Youth. (2021a). *Belong Collective evaluation: Why youth organisations are essential to tackling youth loneliness (2019-2021)*. Retrieved from https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Belong_Collective_Report_Final.pdf**
 - Demonstrates the critical role youth organisations play in addressing youth loneliness, highlighting how youth workers provide safe spaces, foster social connections, and support young people's mental health.
- **UK Youth. (2021b). *EmpowHER (Social Action) evaluation - Final report*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EmpowHer-final-report-.pdf>**
 - Research showing the transformative impact of a programme designed to empower young women and girls across the UK. EmpowHER successfully boosted participants' confidence, wellbeing, and leadership skills by engaging them in meaningful social action projects. The programme created a supportive environment where young women felt heard, valued, and equipped to drive positive change in their communities. The report presents the programme's lasting impact, demonstrating how it helped participants develop resilience, self-belief, and sustained improvements in wellbeing.
- **UK Youth. (2021c). *Outdoor Activators evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - Evaluation of a UK Youth initiative, funded by Sport England, that empowered young people aged 12-20 to lead outdoor social action projects, fostering leadership, community engagement, and long-term participation in physical activity.
- **UK Youth. (2021d). *UK Youth Fund Covid relief grants*. Retrieved from https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UK-Youth-Fund-Report_1.pdf**
 - Summarises the significant challenges faced by youth organisations in England during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report details the adverse effects on young people's mental health, employment prospects, and personal development, while



highlighting the financial and operational difficulties youth organisations encountered whilst continuing to provide essential services.

- **UK Youth. (2021e). *Youth review for Children in Need. Unpublished.***
 - Research to inform BBC Children in Need's strategy, emphasising the importance of a trusted adult in a young person's development – especially for those who have experienced disadvantage. The research highlights the need to improve equity of access to youth work, celebrate the impact of youth work to improve public support, and create more meaningful opportunities for youth leadership.
- **UK Youth. (2021f). *Youth support survey (2021). Unpublished.***
 - A survey of UK adults found that most believe youth services are under-funded and essential for improving young people's mental health, employment prospects, and community safety.
- **UK Youth. (2022a). *Leaders of the future: Youth social action and its role in youth work.* Retrieved from <https://spiritof2012.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-02-04-Empower-final-report-design-3.pdf>**
 - Research exploring the long-term benefits of young women and girls participating in youth social action: it strengthens their relationships with the local community; grows their confidence, leadership and wellbeing; and gives them transferable skills to boost their education and future employment. The report also finds that youth work organisations taking part in youth social action programmes feel more confident sharing power with young people and deepening their involvement in service design and organisational governance.
- **UK Youth. (2022b). *UK Youth's response to the mental health and wellbeing plan.* Retrieved from https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/UK-Youth-mental-health-consultation-response_140722.pdf**
 - Summarises the positive impact of youth work on mental health by offering early intervention, creating supportive environments for young people to explore their identity, and fostering positive relationships. It showcases how youth services can empower young people to improve their wellbeing, build resilience, and access vital mental health support.
- **UK Youth. (2022c). *Untapped: The economic value of youth work.* Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Economic-Value-of-Youth-Work-Full-Report.pdf>**
 - Detailed analysis of the economic value of youth work in England, highlighting both the direct and indirect benefits, including: reductions in crime; improvements in health (especially mental health); and increased employment and education. The research demonstrates that there is a high return on investment for government funding in youth services (between £3.20 and £6.40 of benefits for every £1 of government investment).
- **UK Youth. (2022d). *We choose to be here: Why youth organisations are essential in tackling youth loneliness.* Retrieved from https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Belong_Collective_Report_Final.pdf**
 - Co-produced research with young people, showing how youth work plays a crucial role in tackling youth loneliness, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research recommends integrating more peer support into youth work programmes, enhancing digital engagement to reach marginalised and geographically remote young people, and improving join up between



professionals across sectors to provide a holistic approach to tackling loneliness.

- **UK Youth. (2022e). *Young & Black Grants 2021/22 evaluation. Unpublished.***
 - An evaluation of the UK Youth #YoungandBlack grants programme, which funded youth organisations to support young Black people through mentoring, enterprise workshops, and social action projects. The evaluation found increased confidence and leadership skills among participants which were achieved through tailored, culturally competent provision.
- **UK Youth. (2022f). *Your Space (Detached Youth Work) evaluation. Unpublished.***
 - An evaluation of a street-based, detached youth work programme aimed at engaging vulnerable young people in high-risk areas, addressing issues such as gang involvement, violence, and social isolation.
- **UK Youth. (2023a). *Dream It Real evaluation. Unpublished.***
 - Evaluation of a youth development program, delivered by UK Youth in partnership with Coach Foundation, that provided essential skills training and scholarships for 141 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Highlighted the positive impacts on young people's self-confidence and employability.
- **UK Youth. (2023b). *Hatch Employability Programme Evaluation (Year 2). Unpublished.***
 - Evaluation of a youth employability program, delivered in partnership with KFC, equipping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with job-readiness skills, industry connections, and workplace experience.
- **UK Youth. (2023c). *Inspire (Social Action) 2022 evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/2023/03/celebrating-an-incredible-year-of-inspire-2022-events-and-youth-led-social-action/>***
 - Evaluation of the Inspire 2022 program, which empowered young people across the UK to lead social action events that positively impacted their communities. The programme successfully fostered self-confidence, supported essential skills development (such as timekeeping and team-work), and gave young people a stronger sense of belonging and hope for the future by supporting collaboration on important social issues such as mental health, climate change, and equality.
- **UK Youth. (2023d). *Outdoor Learning Policy Report. Retrieved from https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Outdoor-Learning-Policy-Report-4_compressed.pdf***
 - Report demonstrates the significant positive impact of outdoor learning on young people's social and emotional development. It shows how outdoor learning improves young people's mental and physical health, boosts their confidence, and enhances teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- **UK Youth. (2023e). *UK Youth Adventures Away from Home. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Adventures-Away-from-Home-2023-Evaluation-FinalUKY.pdf>***
 - Report evaluating the DCMS-funded Adventures Away from Home Fund, highlighting its success in providing outdoor learning opportunities to disadvantaged young people, which resulted in improved self-confidence, life skills, and wellbeing.
- **UK Youth. (2023f). *Unlocking Physical Literacy. Unpublished.***
 - A study by UK Youth, in partnership with Sport England, exploring barriers to youth participation in physical activity and proposing systemic changes to improve access and engagement in physical activity through youth work.



- **UK Youth. (2024a). *Building Connections (Employability Programme) evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - Review of a youth employability initiative that connected young people with mentoring, work experience, and skills development opportunities. Highlights the important role youth workers can play in helping connect young people to local employment placements and support them to make the most of these rewarding, but often challenging, opportunities.
- **UK Youth. (2024b). *Can You See Us? Understanding public perceptions of young people and youth social action*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/11/can-you-see-us-report-challenges-public-perceptions-of-young-people/>**
 - Findings from three years of polling that has tracked public perceptions of young people. Findings highlight the disconnect between adults' negative views of young people ("lazy, naïve, rude, selfish") and the positive contributions they make to society. The research shows that adults who are aware of young people taking part in social action have much more positive attitudes.
- **UK Youth. (2024c). *Cost of Living Grants Year 1*. Pears Foundation. Retrieved from [https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/UK Youth Cost of Living Fund Pears Foundation Y1Report v2.pdf](https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/UK_Youth_Cost_of_Living_Fund_Pears_Foundation_Y1Report_v2.pdf)**
 - Evaluation of the UK Youth Cost of Living Fund, showing how the grants helped youth organisations to address the increased financial strain on young people and improved access to essential services and support. The report also emphasises the challenges faced by youth organisations in adapting to the crisis, including navigating increased operating costs whilst trying to respond to a rise in demand for services.
- **UK Youth. (2024d). *Cross Sector Case Studies*. Unpublished.**
 - A study of cross-sector partnerships in youth work, highlighting key enablers, challenges, and best practices from nine case studies involving sectors such as mental health, employment, and sports.
- **UK Youth. (2024e). *EmpowHER (Social Action) Legacy Evaluation*. Retrieved from [https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EmpowHER-Legacy-Evaluation-Report FINAL.pdf](https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EmpowHER-Legacy-Evaluation-Report_FINAL.pdf)**
 - Highlights key learnings from the EmpowHER programme that used youth social action to empower young women and girls. It demonstrates the positive outcomes for participants, including enhanced confidence and leadership skills, while also identifying challenges in sustaining such initiatives without dedicated funding.
- **UK Youth. (2024f). *Harmful Stereotypes of Young People*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/11/harmful-stereotypes-of-young-people-fuelling-record-numbers-to-fall-out-of-work/>**
 - This research shows how harmful stereotypes and age discrimination against young people in the workplace are contributing to large numbers of young people out of work. It advocates for more inclusive hiring practices, campaigns to change adult attitudes, and greater access to youth work support to help young people overcome these barriers.
- **UK Youth. (2024g). *Thriving Minds (Mental Health) evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - An interim evaluation of the Thriving Minds Fund, which provides grants and training to youth organisations supporting young people's mental health. It



highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration between youth work and mental health professionals and also emphasises the time and skills that this partnership working requires.

- **UK Youth. (2024h). *UK Youth Adventures Away from Home 2*. Retrieved from [https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/UK Youth Adventures Away from Home 2 AAF H2 FULL Report V4.pdf](https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/UK_Youth_Adventures_Away_from_Home_2_AAf_H2_FULL_Report_V4.pdf)**
 - Evaluation of the second round of the DCMS-funded Adventures Away from Home Fund, showing significant positive impact on young people. Outdoor learning experiences build self-confidence, resilience, and essential life skills (such as teamwork, time management, and leadership) with lasting impacts on wellbeing.
- **UK Youth. (2025). *Just One Question insight papers*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukyouth.org/what-we-do/just-one-question/#msdyntrid=XMx0S9tIIB14X0c9wzpzO9zenOoYE17nMAEJWInPprk>**
 - The 'Just One Question' initiative tracks trends experienced by youth workers by gathering their insights monthly through a single question (e.g. most common evaluation practices; provision during festive period; youth worker responses to Summer Riots; etc).
- **UK Youth. (Forthcoming A). *Digital Inclusion Fund evaluation*. Unpublished.**
 - Evaluation of the UK Youth and Osborne Clarke Digital Inclusion Fund, which has a positive impact on over 15,000 young people by expanding their access to digital technology, improving digital literacy, and fostering youth leadership opportunities. The report emphasises the rapidly changing nature of young people's digital lives and highlights need for sustained funding, specialised training, and cross-sector collaboration (including with tech companies) to ensure long-term digital inclusion.
- **UK Youth. (Forthcoming B). *Network Survey 2024*. Unpublished.**
 - Insights from an annual survey of UK Youth's network of youth work organisations. The research highlights the significant challenges that the sector is facing with 94% citing funding and sustainability as their top concern, alongside workforce recruitment and retention issues (55%) and difficulties in demonstrating impact (44%).
- **UK Youth. (Forthcoming C). *Towards a sustainable and equitable future for the youth sector workforce: Insights from the UK Youth Network*. Unpublished.**
 - A summary of insights into the workforce development challenges facing the youth sector from across UK Youth's activities. The report highlights the severe challenges facing the youth sector workforce, including: the difficulty attracting and retaining skilled staff; limited access to Continuing Professional Development opportunities; workforce stress; and a lack of diversity in leadership. The report advocates for increased long-term investment, more join-up of workforce strategies across professions working with young people; introducing accelerated training programmes for new youth workers; inclusive leadership programmes; and deeper cross-sector collaboration. These changes will create a more resilient and impactful sector that can better support young people across the UK.
- **UK Youth. (Forthcoming D). *In our own words: Exploring the needs and preferences of young people and youth practitioners in England*. Unpublished.**



- Research, conducted for NCS Trust, exploring the needs and preferences of young people and youth workers across England, highlighting the demand for open-access, centre-based provision, tailored mental health support, more accessible employability pathways, and stronger cross-sector collaboration. The research also examines the rapidly changing role of digital technology in youth work and the urgent need to address workforce skills and sustainability.
- **YMCA George Williams College. (2021a). *Youth Investment Fund Economic Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/YIF%20Economic%20Report.pdf>**
 - Models the economic benefits of investing in open access youth services through the Youth Investment Fund, demonstrating that improving social and emotional skills in young people can lead to significant long-term financial returns for both individuals and society. It estimates that, over a 25-year period, the government may receive between £3 and £13 for every £1 invested in youth services.
- **YMCA George Williams College. (2021b). *Youth Investment Fund Insight Paper Seven*. Retrieved from <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/The%20Youth%20Investment%20Fund%20Learning%20and%20Insight%20Paper%20Seven.pdf>**
 - Evaluation of the impact of the Youth Investment Fund on young people, showing how open-access youth services significantly boost young people's confidence, wellbeing, and employability.
- **YMCA. (2020a). *Back on track*. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ymca-back-on-track-.pdf>**
 - Research into the impact of the COVID-19 disruption and lockdowns on young people. The findings reveal how isolation, digital fatigue, and strain on mental health exacerbated loneliness. The report also highlights the importance of face-to-face interactions and supportive youth services in helping young people recover and rebuild their wellbeing.
- **YMCA. (2020b). *YMCA Out of Service Report*. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>**
 - First in an annual series of research reports tracking local authority youth work spending. Finds a severe reduction in local authority spending on youth services across England and Wales since 2010, highlighting a 71% decrease in funding with significant regional disparities.
- **YMCA. (2021). *YMCA Out of Service II*. Retrieved from https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Out-of-Service-2_Youth-Services-Report_YMCA.pdf**
 - Second report that highlights the continuing decline in local authority funding for youth services, with a nearly £1 billion drop in real-term expenditure over the last decade.
- **YMCA. (2022). *YMCA Devalued 2022*. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ymca-devalued-2022-1.pdf>**
 - Third in an annual series of research reports tracking local authority youth work spending. This report finds a significant decline in youth services funding over the past decade, with a real terms decrease of 74% in England and 32% in Wales,



with highly detrimental impacts on young people.

- **YMCA. (2023). *Generation cut***. Retrieved from https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/YS-2023-Report-17-02-2023_FINAL-1-compressed.pdf
 - Fourth report tracking local authority youth work spending in England and Wales. Finds that youth work spending has reduced by 73% in England since 2010/11.
- **YMCA. (2024a). *Preventing crises: Effective interventions to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing***. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ymca-wellbeing-report-2024-4.pdf>
 - Evaluating the impact of YMCA's initiatives to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. The report shows how programs like "Y's Girls" increase self-esteem and help young people build resilience. These youth work activities help young people navigate challenges in their lives, build self-confidence, and promote positive emotional wellbeing.
- **YMCA. (2024b). *YMCA On the Ropes Report***. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ymca-on-the-ropes-report-A4.pdf>
 - Fifth report tracking local authority youth work cuts, which has resulted in the closure of youth centres and a dramatic decrease in the number of youth workers.
- **YMCA. (2024d). *YMCA Safe Space: A report examining young people's experiences of youth services***. Retrieved from https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ymca-safe-space-report_FINAL.pdf
 - This report highlights the importance of safe spaces for young people, focusing on how youth work environments foster trust, acceptance, and emotional security. These spaces are essential for helping youth feel supported, express themselves freely, and access mental health resources.
- **YMCA. (2024e). *Youth-friendly communities: Making your area the best place to grow up***. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Youth-Friendly-Communities-Guide.pdf>
 - Report outlines six key steps for local stakeholders and elected officials to create supportive local communities where young people feel they belong, are confident to contribute, and thrive. It emphasises the importance of quality youth services, secure housing, accessible employment and training, community safety, mental and physical wellbeing, and inclusive community engagement.
- **YMCA. (2025b). *YMCA Youth services beyond the brink***. Retrieved from <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ymca-youth-services-beyond-the-brink.pdf>
 - Latest report into changes in local authority youth work spending. This report details the ongoing decline in youth services funding despite increasing scale and complexity of young people's needs, with a 73% reduction in spending England and 27% reduction in Wales since 2010/11,
- **Young Minds & UK Youth. (2023). *Someone to turn to: Being a trusted adult for young people***. Retrieved from <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/by3o0aru/someone-to-turn-to-report.pdf>
 - Explores what young people are seeking in trusted adults, such as youth workers. They want adults who are non-judgmental, empathetic, and consistent.



They value adults who listen attentively, understand their struggles, and treat them as a whole person and not a problem. Additionally, young people desire adults who are relatable and sensitive to their unique experiences, especially regarding cultural backgrounds.

- **Youth Endowment Fund & YMCA George Williams College. (2024). *Multi-Site Trial: Short-Term Mentoring*. Retrieved from <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/YEF.-MST-Mentoring.-Efficacy-Trial.-October-2024.pdf>**
 - Evaluation of the impact of a short-term mentoring programme delivered by small community organisations. The research does not detect a significant effect on reducing behavioural and emotional problems in at-risk young people during the period studied, but highlights positive changes in secondary outcomes like self-confidence, decision-making, and emotional regulation.