



UK Youth Submission to the Chancellor for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)

Introduction

UK Youth is a charity that exists to ensure all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. With an open network of over 8,000 youth organisations and nation partners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are focused on unlocking youth work as the catalyst of change that young people need now, more than ever. Through our new 2025 strategyⁱ, we have a bold ambition to impact young lives by unlocking youth work as a catalyst for change. We will work in partnership to build a cross-sector movement, creating a society that understands, champions, and delivers effective youth work for all.

At UK Youth, we believe the Spending Review should recognise the transformational impact youth services and trusted relationshipsⁱⁱ have on young people, their skills for life, their communities and society at largeⁱⁱⁱ as well as respond to the impact the pandemic and underfunding of youth services has had on young people and the state of the youth sector. As a consequence, we have identified a set of recommendations for government ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review this autumn, that we feel strongly would ensure that young people have the best chance of emerging from this pandemic in a way that speaks to the vision of the governments leveling up agenda, benefitting themselves and their communities into the future.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on young people's lives including their education, employment prospects and mental health. As many reports have shown, without significant intervention, these issues could have long term scarring effects on a generation of young people, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds^{iv}. It is therefore vital that meeting the needs of young people is a significant, if not the main priority for the upcoming spending review.

Our report^v earlier this year revealed that the pandemic has left young people more vulnerable to issues such as poverty and poor mental health, and they are more likely to be exposed to negative and risky activities such as gang activity. Moreover, young people are experiencing challenges in accessing safe and reliable employment and are suffering from the financial consequences of this. Youth organisations that play a key role in addressing these issues report that due to lack of long-term funding they are unable to respond to increasing demands from young people in their communities. At UK Youth we strongly believe that funding safe spaces, trusted adults and structured positive activities is essential to enable young people to navigate the challenges they face and ensure they are supported to prosper, with the tools they need into adulthood. As well as funding, we believe that better collaboration between policy makers and practitioners from a range of youth services and policy areas is crucial to improve outcomes for young people.

In a nutshell, this means we would like to see a bold government commitment to young people through:

- a) **Long term funding and a strategy for young people** that includes the importance of youth work and outdoor learning activities so that every young person, regardless of their location or background has access to these often transformational opportunities.

- b) Ensure better **connection and collaborative working** across Government and other sectors to better support young people and **improve long term outcomes**.
- c) **Greater commitment to young people's involvement** in policy making and evaluation of services.

Full recommendations for government:

a) **Provide long-term funding and a strategy for young people that includes youth work and outdoor learning activities for every young person in their communities**

This means government should:

1. Reverse the **£1bn in annual funding** for youth work and recognise the increased levels of need caused by the pandemic^{vi} and work closely with local authorities to understand the long term funding requirements to ensure all young people have access to youth work in their community going into the future. Target funding at those areas which have greatest needs.
2. **Immediately release the £500 million Youth Investment Fund** promised in their manifesto^{vii}, this money is needed right now to respond to emergency needs of the sector.
3. Commit to **develop a long-term, cross-departmental strategy for young people** which sets out the support that young people can expect from government across all areas of their lives (education, employment, youth services, mental health services, housing etc) for the coming years. Following publication of this strategy, government should provide an annual statement, outlining progress against objectives, to parliament.
4. Support the **development and funding of digital innovations** that can connect young people to opportunities in their local area and beyond. A good example of this is Youth Card, a free app that connects young people to opportunities and enables providers to target specific demographics of young people in order to increase reach and social mobility.
5. **Update the statutory guidance for LAs** on youth provision to make clear the duty to ensure that all young people have access to youth services in their area, including access to outdoor learning opportunities. For this statutory guidance and duty to be implemented effectively, close collaboration between central and local government will be required to identify and fill gaps in provision and infrastructure that have emerged as a result of cuts and to create long term budgets that enable LAs to fulfil their duties to young people in all circumstances. As well as tightening the requirements on LAs to provide clarity on their responsibilities to deliver these youth services, there needs to be funding to match that requirement to ensure that the broad array of services that LAs provide are able to be funded concurrently and one service is not de-prioritised in times of financial difficulty. Guidance from the Department for Education to schools should also be updated to recommend schools provide outdoor learning opportunities for all students, recognising and addressing the financial barriers some families face.
6. **Fund activities and programmes that take a youth work approach and support open access, universal youth provision** i.e. those which offer informal learning opportunities, empower young people to develop their skills, confidence and voice, and enable young people from all backgrounds to become leaders in their own learning. We have been hearing from youth workers and young people that activities linked to the following themes are particular priorities:
 - Outdoor learning and physical activity
 - Skills and employability
 - Digital – inclusion and skills
 - Environment – climate change and sustainability

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- Relationships and conflict - particularly grief and loss from this year – trauma informed approaches etc.
- Mental health and wellbeing - particularly tackling loneliness and isolation
- Access to culture and arts

At UK Youth, we have spent considerable resource exploring and defining what good youth work looks like, and the *Social Development Journey Framework*^{viii} sets out a progressive approach to working with young people which supports and empowers them to uncover, acknowledge and build on their strengths so they can develop life skills and access opportunities to support their transition to adulthood. Our skills development programmes for young people are therefore designed around four key focus areas set out in framework; get involved, grow and learn, give back and gain independence. We support the National Curriculum for Youth work^{ix}, which makes clear that youth work is a form of education with aims around empowerment, equality and participation for young people.

b) Ensure better connection and collaborative working between the government departments and other sectors to better support young people and improve long term outcomes

7. **Appoint a Cabinet level minister who sits across government departments with oversight of youth policy across government.** They should draw together and monitor the work done to support young people to draw links and raise issues of concern to young people in every cabinet meeting.
8. Develop a **cross-sector and cross-department taskforce**, driven by the needs of young people. This would enable experts from different sectors that involve young people including housing, health, education, youth work can come together with policy leads across government departments with young people to discuss the emergent issues that they are facing; the policies, funding and support in place and lead to greater collaboration and clearer outputs and outcomes. Also, to provide feedback on how programmes and policies are delivering impact. This taskforce would seek to **improve cross-sector collaboration** and monitor and hold government to account for achieving its goals.

c) Ensure greater commitment to young people's involvement and leadership in policy making and evaluation.

9. **Involve young people in all policy decisions** that are made at local and national level that impact them and ensure there are mechanisms in place so that young people's views, experience and ideas are fed in at all stages of the policy development process. There should be ongoing and iterative engagement throughout the process. This also means building in trust and accountability into processes, and developing strong feedback mechanisms to ensure young people are engaged throughout all policy development processes.
10. As per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the rights attached to that, we recommend that **every government policy undergoes a child rights impact assessment**^x (CRIA) so that it is clear how that policy will protect, advance or violate a child's right.
 - o In particular it is essential that the right outlined in Article 12 of the convention - all children under the age of 18 have the right to be listened to and taken seriously – is fulfilled so that young people's views are considered in decisions that affect them.

11. **Create the conditions for meaningful youth social action and volunteering** and support and fund local infrastructure to enable this to happen. Encourage all government departments to sign the **#iwill Power of Youth Charter**^{xi} and create an accompanying action plan to demonstrate how they are embedding and upholding the power of youth charter.
12. Ensure that the Minister with responsibility/oversight of youth policies has regular engagements with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, geographies and needs. We know that young people feel overlooked by government at the moment^{xii} and they are best placed to understand what they need to thrive. The Youth review from DCMS has highlighted young people's desire for open access youth services in all communities, experiences outside of their normal environment (which are often limited), and that outdoor learning provides and also the wish to volunteer and take part in social action. It is **vital that young people know how these recommendations they've made are being implemented**. We would welcome the opportunity to work with government to make this a reality.

ⁱ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/UKYouthStrategyPaperFINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Trusted adult relationships are often associated with good educational or health outcomes for young people. DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that young people with trusted adults are more likely to be in education or employed: DuBois, D. L., & Silverthorn, N. (2005) "Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study" American Journal of Public Health, 95, pp 518-524.

ⁱⁱⁱ As highlighted by NPC's findings from a shared evaluation of open access youth provision this year, young people receiving this support made greater improvements in social and emotional learning, social connectedness and wellbeing than young people who did not access this provision, see [link here](#)

^{iv}

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1003977/State_of_the_nation_2021_-_Social_mobility_and_the_pandemic.pdf

^v https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UK-Youth-Fund-Report_1.pdf

^{vi} Recent analysis by the YMCA ([link here](#)) shows that local authority expenditure on youth services dropped from £1.4bn in 2010-11 to just under £429m in 2018-19, resulting in the loss of 750 youth centres and over 4,500 youth workers.

^{vii} [https://assets-global.website-](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf)

files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

^{viii} Pages 14 and 15 <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UK-YOUTH-Annual-Review-WebSMALL.pdf>

^{ix} <https://backend.nya2.joltrouter.net/wp-content/uploads/5.3.1-0923-NYA-Youth-Work-Curriculum-DIGITAL1.pdf>

^x https://lgiu.org/how-a-child-rights-impact-assessment-can-deliver-better-decision-making-for-children/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=how-a-child-rights-impact-assessment-can-deliver-better-decision-making-for-children

^{xi} <https://www.iwill.org.uk/poy-charter>

^{xii} 75% of 14-24 year olds feel politicians rarely listen to the views of young people if at all: https://www.dofe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/DofE_Manifesto.pdf