

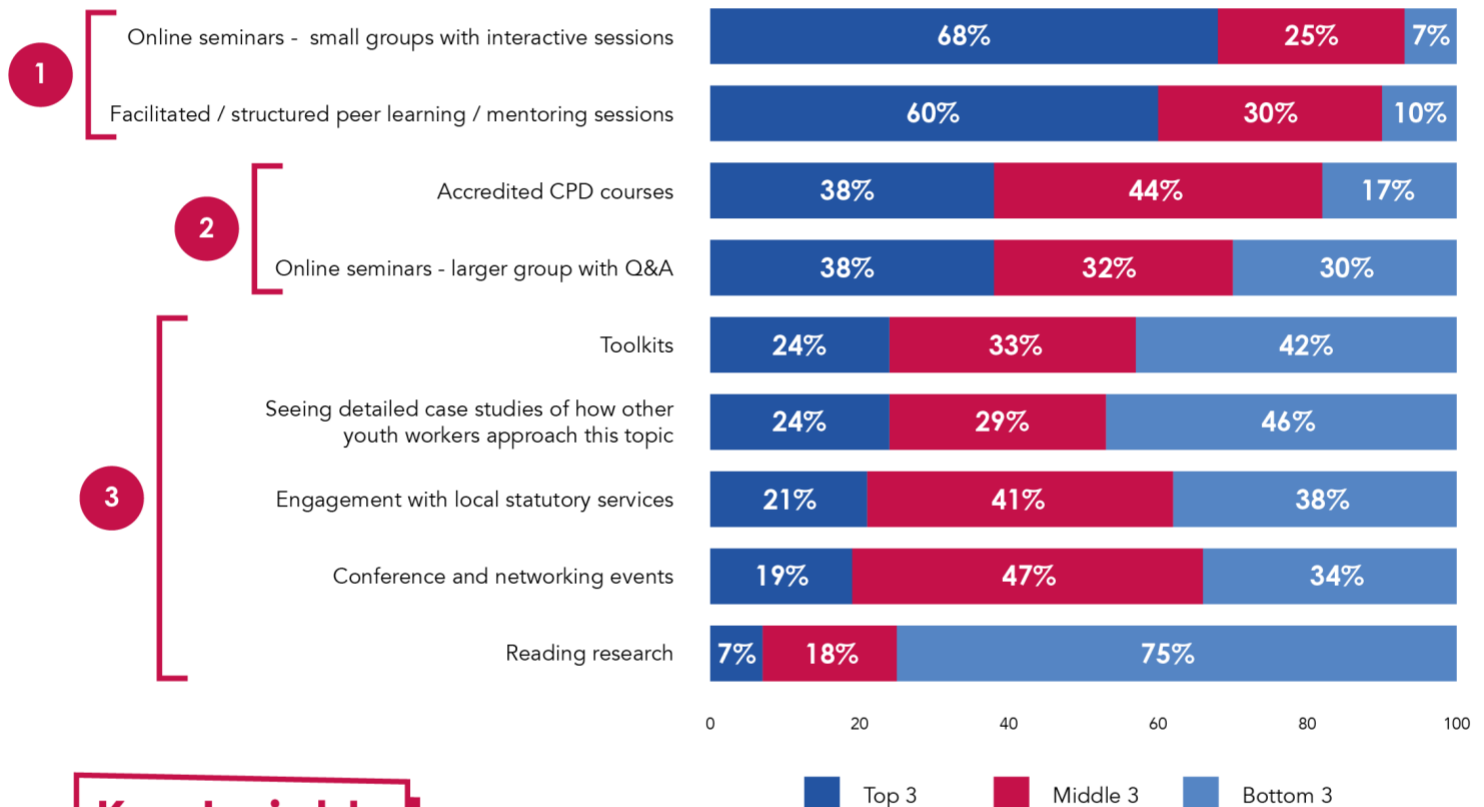
March Insights at a glance

We asked:

How do you want to learn/develop skills around supporting young people's mental health?

We had **299** responses

Breakdown of respondents preferred learning method around mental health



Key Insights

- 1 Interactive and practical learning methods were the most popular option - The top two highest ranked options demonstrate a clear preference for interactive learning environments where youth practitioners have the opportunity to learn from and with each other. Interactive online seminars with small groups was the most popular option, with 36% of respondents putting this as their first choice and 68% had it in their top 3.
- 2 The next two most popular options are more traditional learning methods, with online webinars and accredited CPD courses.
- 3 The least popular option was for more formal and self-directed learning mechanisms - Youth practitioners have less appetite for making use of practical tools and resources such as case studies and toolkits, and for self-directed learning. Either through engagement with statutory services, attending events (in person), or reading research (which was the least popular option by far!)

Exploring the insights

Back in 2020/21, UK Youth was seeing that poor mental health was the third most common challenge (after low income and educational attainment) experienced by young people across our programmes. More recently, the latest [National Youth Agency Census \(2023\)](#) showed that '84% of youth work organisations provided targeted activities to support mental health and well-being'. In response to our [January Just One Question](#), youth practitioners themselves identified that developing skills in supporting young people's mental health is a high priority for them in 2024. With this in mind, our March Just One Question explored how they would like to be supported to do this.

68% ranked online seminars (small groups with interactive sessions) in their top 3 and 60% ranked facilitated/structure peer learning and mentoring in their top 3

Youth practitioners are stretched and have limited capacity which may explain the strong preference for online seminars with interactive sessions around mental health-focussed provision. These environments are accessible, interactive and give the opportunity for youth practitioners to learn from one another. This is particularly important when learning about how to support young people with their mental health. This is because it's a huge issue facing young people right now, but addressing this need can take a toll on youth practitioners. Learning from one another creates opportunities for peer support. For example, when we launched our mental health focused grant programme ([Thriving Minds, see here](#)) in 2022, over half of the funding applications cited staff burnout as a key challenge for their organisation.

It's likely that small online groups and facilitated mentoring sessions / peer learning are the most popular with youth practitioners because they are / offer:

- **Accessible** – no geographical barriers which removes time constraints / care responsibilities that can stop people from travelling to in-person events. It also allows youth practitioners from more remote locations to participate in these professional development opportunities
- **Cheap** – this eliminates expenses associated with travel and accommodation. Online seminars are more affordable and accessible for youth practitioners
- **Engaging with technology** – Online seminars leverage digital platforms to deliver engaging learning experiences, which allows youth practitioners to gain more familiarity with digital tools and online collaboration platforms.
- **Shared experiences** – Youth practitioners often find value in learning from the experiences of their peers. Facilitated peer learning provides the platform to share challenges, good practice, strategies and creating a supportive learning community.
- **Solidarity and support** – Coming together to learn with and from each other on how to best support young people with their mental health creates opportunities for solidarity and mutual support. This particularly relevant to the more emotionally charged issue of mental health, where people want to learn and grow in a safe space where they can feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their own experiences.

A mixed view of traditional learning methods

The picture was a bit more mixed when considering more traditional learning methods like accredited CPD courses and larger online sessions (akin to online lectures and webinars). Nevertheless, around 2 out of 5

respondents ranked these in their top 3, which indicates that they are worth exploring in supporting youth practitioners to develop their practice.

Accredited CPD courses (e.g. MHFA Training) stood out as particularly popular, with fewer respondents placing this in their bottom three.

If you are interested in engaging with these learning methods, check the resources below:

- Accredited CPD courses:
 - o [Range of courses from NYA](#)
 - o [Range of accredited course providers](#)
 - o [Youth Mental Health First Aider training](#)
- Larger online sessions
 - o [YoundMinds schedule](#)
 - o [Anna Freud training offer](#)
 - o [Maudsley Learning, range of webinars freely available](#)

Less appetite for self-directed learning

Formal and self-directed learning

While toolkits and case studies are broadly thought of as useful resources for youth practitioners to draw on in support of their professional development, there was less appetite for these in developing skills to support young people's mental health. Around half of respondents placed these in their bottom three. This is likely to be as a result of respondents showing a clear preference for learning with and from each other, together in small groups, rather than more solo self-directed time – where it can be overwhelming knowing where to start with a topic as broad and complex as mental health!

Youth workers have different learning styles and preferences with the majority preferring hands-on engaging learning methods over reading and abstract thinking, which was reflected in the responses

This is evidenced most clearly by the fact that 75% of respondents placed reading research in their bottom 3. A third of practitioners stated that it was their least preferred learning method.

Cross sector and event based training – a need to learn more!

While the data is clear that developing knowledge and skills around youth mental health via engaging with local statutory services or conferences/networking events is not a top ranked choice for respondents, further investigation is needed to get to the bottom of this.

Is this about the time commitment? The potential costs? Another thing to try and fit into a busy calendar?

Or is this about the expected return on that investment of time? Perhaps respondents have had poor experiences and relationships with stretched local statutory services? Perhaps there have been conferences/events that were costly and didn't provide practitioners with what they needed?

While there's more to learn here, there is lots we do know on the challenges facing youth organisations who are trying to support young people with their mental health. UK Youth's recent research, funded by DCMS, and delivered by SQW, found that:

1. **During the period 2011 to 2021, local authority youth funding in England more than halved and that, during a similar period, the number of youth clubs nearly halved.**

2. The research shows stark reductions in funding - at least 64.2% cut overall from £1,058.2m in 2011 to £408.5m to 2021 and some local areas reducing funding by as much as 75%.
3. In this context, youth work has had to change. Specifically, it has become more targeted, with a growing reliance on volunteers who increasingly fill gaps left by a lack of professional youth workers.
4. **This research shows that youth workers are providing vital support to help young people navigate these challenges. When this preventative support is taken away, young people are more vulnerable to crime and other anti-social behaviour.**

Together, we need to keep learning about the youth sector can work with cross-sector partners to best support young people with their mental health, which will be captured in our upcoming annual network survey.