

Just One Question Insights – March 2025

This month we asked: What is the most important message you want us to share with government Ministers as they develop the upcoming National Youth Strategy?

We had: 210 responses

Key Message:

Youth work is a vital, preventative service that must be sustainably funded and locally driven. Practitioners call for urgent government action to reverse cuts, protect current provision, and co-create a long-term national strategy that reflects the real needs of young people and the expertise of grassroots, voluntary sector youth workers.

Key Findings

- Most dominant theme: calls for long-term, stable, and sufficient funding across all youth work types (open access, preventative, targeted).
- Warnings against funnelling all funding back into local authorities, many of whom have lost youth work capacity or mismanage funds.
- Youth work seen as a key protective factor, especially through trusted relationships and informal education.
- A truly national Youth Strategy must provide equitable access to youth provision – regardless of geography – and recognise that rural disadvantage is real and deeply felt. Fair investment means acknowledging that reaching fewer young people in rural areas may cost more, but the positive impact can be profound.

Youth worker input to the National Youth Strategy.

Sustainable and Increased Funding

“Our sector has been decimated... We don’t want grand, time-limited, centrally administered schemes. We want consistent, reliable investment tailored locally.”

- Requests for revenue funding (not just capital) to pay for salaried staff, core operations, and program delivery.
- Opposition to short-term, competitive, or project-only grants, which create instability.
- Repeated argument that investment in youth work saves money in the long run (e.g. reduced crime, improved mental health, better employment outcomes).

Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

"When investing in the youth sector please invest in existing VCS organisations that have consistently and successfully provided youth work over decades."

- Requests for direct funding to VCS, recognition of their innovation and resilience, and protection from being "crowded out" by larger or statutory bodies.
- Strong emphasis on the vital role of grassroots and community-based organisations.

Recognition of Youth Work as a Profession

"Why can't the government recognise the crucial work that Youth Workers do, and make sure that they, like teachers, have a salary worthy of their commitment and dedication to their chosen career?"

- Youth work should be seen as a skilled, valued, and essential profession.
- Calls for improved training routes, protected qualifications, career progression, and fair pay.
- Some propose creating titles like "Senior Youth Practitioner" to enhance professional status.

Prevention and Early Intervention

"Investing in children from early years saves money later on more expensive remedial and custodial approaches to problems."

- Strong consensus on the need for early, universal, and preventative youth provision, not just crisis support or targeted work.
- Youth work's long-term relationships are seen as central to preventing future problems (mental health issues, crime, unemployment, etc).

Access and Inclusion

"We must show care for ALL young people – including and especially those who are marginalised or devalued because they are refugees, trans+, disabled, Black, Muslim, and so on."

- Emphasis on improving access to youth services, especially in:
 - Rural communities
 - Marginalised groups (LGBTQ+, disabled, neurodiverse, global majority communities, refugees)
 - Low-income areas
- Repeated calls to avoid "cherry-picking" and instead provide open access and needs-led support.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

"Young people's mental health is in crisis... They are in need of better, more timely support including the opportunity to attend well-funded youth provision where they can be with each other and with safe, supportive adults – this is invaluable."

- Youth workers identify youth mental health as a crisis area.
- Suggestions to integrate localised mental health support within youth work settings.

Safe, Local Spaces

"Youth Centres are the heart of good provision for young people in their communities. It's where they grow, learn, laugh and belong. Build more youth centres, replace all the ones that have gone."

- Rebuilding or sustaining youth centres, youth clubs, and safe places is seen as critical.
- These spaces are described as anchors for youth work, community building, and belonging.

Joined-up Policy and Cross-Government Coordination

"Please join up your thinking with other government ministers... it can seem from outside that you work in silos and that is not how young people work."

- Pleas for coordinated thinking across departments (education, health, transport, justice, welfare).
- Young people's needs span multiple systems and require a joined-up response, not siloed policies.

Need for Equal Provision Across Rural and Urban Areas

"Please don't forget about young people living in rural communities... just because they are less in number, it may look like a nice place to live, but being poor in a rural community is very, very tough... it is incredibly isolating."

- Rural young people face distinct challenges: lack of transport, limited local services, and digital exclusion. Despite this, they are often overlooked in funding and policy decisions that prioritise densely populated urban areas.
- A truly national Youth Strategy must provide equitable access to youth provision – regardless of geography – and recognise that rural disadvantage is real and deeply felt. Fair investment means acknowledging that reaching fewer young people in rural areas may cost more, but the positive impact can be profound.

Education Reform and Skills Development

"We need a complete review of the current KS4 framework to expand the offer of qualifications beyond GCSEs... Not all young people are inspired, motivated or able to achieve 4s and above in Maths and English. But all young people want to learn and earn – we are not giving them enough meaningful choice."

- Significant support for curriculum reform to include life skills, vocational training, and entrepreneurship.
- Schools should work in partnership with youth organisations, not in competition.

Youth Voice and Participation

"Empowering youth by involving them directly in decision-making processes will ensure that policies and initiatives are genuinely reflective of their needs and aspirations... They must be key architects of the society they envision."

- Young people must be empowered and involved in shaping the Strategy and decisions that affect them.
- Youth-led approaches, participatory governance, and meaningful consultation are strongly advocated.

What UK Youth is doing in this area

UK Youth has shared the responses to this survey to the government who will draw on this insight as they continue to develop the upcoming National Youth Strategy. Youth workers have shared a strong and united message. They want action, not just warm words – and a long-term commitment to properly



fund, recognise and involve youth work in supporting young people's lives. *"Youth Centres are the heart of good provision for young people in their communities. It's where they grow, learn, laugh and belong. Build more youth centres, replace all the ones that have gone."*