



UK Youth Representation to the Autumn Budget 2025

About UK Youth

UK Youth is a leading national charity committed to ensuring all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. With a network of more than 9,000 youth work organisations reaching more than four million young people across the UK, we will not stop until all young people have access to high quality youth work.

We are working closely with the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to support the development of the upcoming National Youth Strategy, both as a commissioned partner delivering the young consultation for the strategy and as Secretariat for the Back Youth Alliance (BYA).

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Executive Summary

The Autumn Budget is an important opportunity to support young people growing up in an increasingly challenging world.

Treasury investment in youth services is a necessary and high-value intervention that will deliver long-term economic growth and community renewal.

UK Youth's key recommendations to HM Treasury:

- 1.) **Provide sustainable, long-term investment in youth work with a commitment to increasing revenue and capital funding for youth work and enrichment services** to reduce regionally disparate youth unemployment and address the skills gap.
 - 2.) **Ringfence specific budget within each department to integrate youth voice into policymaking** to develop stronger, future-proofed policies.
 - 3.) **Support young people through rising costs of living**, particularly for low-income households, young people with disabilities and disadvantaged regions.
 - 4.) **Invest in Outdoor Learning by extending the Adventures Away from Home Fund** to increase access to transformative experiences for underrepresented young people.
 - 5.) **Allocate targeted resources to tackle gender inequalities in services for young people** to strengthen community cohesion, wellbeing and reduce systemic barriers.
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Provide sustainable, long-term investment in youth work to combat youth unemployment

Youth clubs and youth workers have been deeply affected by austerity, with local authority youth service funding cut by 73% in England since 2010.¹

¹ <https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ymca-youth-services-beyond-the-brink.pdf>

As UK Youth highlighted earlier this year in our Spending Review submission, without investment in young people, future economic growth is unattainable.² **Youth work is already saving the Government £3.2bn a year** through improved education and employment outcomes and positive impacts on mental health. It is also contributing **£5.7bn** annually to the wider economy through jobs, volunteering, and local suppliers. This is return on investment of at least **£3.20** for every **£1** of government spending.³

Youth unemployment is a core challenge facing this Government, with 948,000 young people classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET) across the UK.⁴ Committed policy focus on this challenge is essential to ensure the Government can deliver on its growth and opportunity missions.

Analysis from the Youth Futures Foundation highlights that if the UK were able to reduce our NEET rate to that of the Netherlands, approximately **500,000** more young people across the UK would be in work or education, which would provide a long-term boost to the UK's economy of **£69bn**.⁵

To do so, Government must recognise the role of youth work as a preventative intervention and an effective solution to the challenges facing young people entering the workplace, as outlined in UK Youth's joint 2024 report with the Institute for Government.⁶ A youth work approach is essential to support young people being categorised as NEET. UK Youth and Frontier Economics' Untapped report highlights that targeted youth work employment programmes are engaging for young people and achieve good long-term outcomes. On this basis, UK Youth recommends to integrate the proven employment support role played by a trained and trusted youth worker into the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) delivery of the Youth Guarantee.

Successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee will require funding for youth work alongside employment support and health services that can shape a strong, joined-up local work, health and skills offer, enabling future growth.

UK Youth delivers high-impact employability programmes, including the Summer Jobs programme offering young people aged 16-20 who are at risk of violence,⁷ a six-week paid work placement in partnership with major employers like Burger King, Timpson and Veolia. When starting UK Youth's Hatch Employability programme (delivered in partnership with KFC), only 18% of participants were in education, employment or training (EET). This rose to 66% in EET 3 months after finishing the

² <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/UK-Youth-Spending-Review-submission-Feb-2025-2.pdf>

³ <https://www.ukyouth.org/untapped/>

⁴ [Thousands more young people to get training and work support as Government extends £45 million scheme - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-young-people-to-get-training-and-work-support-as-government-extends-45-million-scheme)

⁵ <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/blog/2024-autumn-budget/>

⁶ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Youth-work-and-prevention.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ukyouth.org/what-we-do/our-programmes/summer-jobs-programme/>

programme. These programmes are particularly important because meaningful work experience is highly valued but difficult to access, especially outside major cities.⁸

These employability programmes highlight that youth work is an effective solution to the challenges facing young people entering the workplace. They create pathways into work and act as a bridge between young people and employers. This leads to a more robust economy and stronger communities where young people feel a sense of contribution and belonging. However, long-term and sustainable funding is required to reverse damaging cuts. There is a need for an investment of **£1.6bn** across England and Wales to begin rebuilding this essential youth infrastructure and address regional disparities in spending. UK Youth is calling on the government to ensure **£150** is spent on youth services per head for every 5-17 year old (drawing on ONS census population estimates published in November 2023.) - matching the current per-head spend in the local authorities that have maintained the highest youth work spending.⁹ This would amount to an additional £324 million spent each year for five years on essential preventative youth services.

When considering that youth work is already saving the Government **£3.2bn** a year through improved education and employment outcomes and positive impacts on mental health and UK Youth's research that identified for every **£1** Government invests in youth work, the benefit to the taxpayer is between **£3.20 and £6.40**, this investment would support future growth and have positive macroeconomic implications for future generations, reducing future costs for social services, policing, and welfare.

Ringfence specific budget within each department to integrate youth voice into policymaking

It is essential that Government involves 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. A specific funding pot should be ringfenced of **£300,000** in each department to facilitate and co-ordinate a youth engagement process, drawing on the example of the National Youth Strategy Deliver You Consultation, as outlined in the Civil Society Covenant.¹⁰ DCMS also worked with the Behavioural Insights Team in 2023 on a Youth Engagement Impact Study, providing guidance for other government departments on best practice to enable effective youth engagement and participation, influence government policy development and facilitate positive outcomes for participating young people.¹¹

⁸ <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BYA-Rapid-Evidence-Review-Thematic-Summary-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2023>

¹⁰ [Civil Society Covenant: National Youth Strategy - Case study - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/civil-society-covenant)

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64ac03a6c933c10012f9dffa/Youth_Engagement_Impact_Study_DCMS_-_final_report_2.0.pdf

There should also 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.

In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UK Youth recommends that every government policy undergoes a child rights impact assessment so that it is clear how that policy will protect, advance or violate a child's rights. 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.

Embedding youth voice within policymaking across Government departments leads to stronger and future-proofed policymaking and ensures that young people do not feel neglected by a political system where policies are done 'to' them not 'for' them.

Invest in Outdoor Learning by extending the Adventures Away from Home Fund

The Government should commit to increased, multi-year investment for the DCMS-led Adventures Away from Home Fund, delivered in partnership with UK Youth, to ensure continuity, sustain progress and increase access for underrepresented young people.

Outdoor learning remains inaccessible for many. It is often perceived as something only certain demographics can engage in, and many young people lack a say in shaping their own experiences. 55% of youth groups cite financial costs as a barrier to Outdoor Learning. UK Youth is seeking to remove barriers to outdoor learning so all young people have the opportunity to experience its positive impacts.

UK Youth's 'Experience, Learn, Develop' model of delivery, developed at our specialised centre in Avon Tyrell in the New Forest, underpinned by a 'challenge by choice' mechanism, improves young people's team-working, confidence and decision-making skills. UK Youth's Adventures Away from Home programme this year successfully provided 9,750 young people from 500 youth groups, working with 69 Outdoor Learning Providers in different parts of England with outdoor learning opportunities. Over half of participating young people faced more than two barriers to accessing outdoor learning opportunities, such as a physical disability, learning disability or difficulty, or experience of the care system. Youth practitioners observed a positive increase in socio-emotional skills in **91%** of young people, including emotion management; initiative; teamwork; problem-solving; empathy and responsibility.

However, demand has far outstripped available funding. Based on the high quality applications received in September 2025, more than 5,000 additional young people could have attended the programme if an additional **£1.63m** funding had been available.

By intentionally bringing youth work and outdoor learning together, their combination can help support a young person's personal, social, and educational development. The interaction between a young person and the outdoor practitioner or youth worker as a trusted adult, maximises the potential for learning and has significant benefits for the young person in having someone to talk to.

DCMS should build on the success of the Adventures Away from Home Fund by providing extended funding for outdoor learning experiences for young people, in partnership with the youth sector. Moreover, there needs to be further cross-departmental government support for and

investment into Outdoor Learning, recognising its benefits and life changing impact for young people, including its contribution to improved physical and mental wellbeing.¹² £100m of funding allocated over three years would secure and expand access to outdoor learning youth work for young people, tackling inequalities in access to the improved physical and wellbeing benefits of Outdoor Learning.

Support young people through rising costs of living

Consultation with young people to inform the Government's upcoming National Youth Strategy has highlighted that job security and employment are a source of anxiety for young people. These anxieties are particularly acute for disabled young people, who already face systemic barriers impacting on their employment opportunities.

It is important that young people receive adequate support as cost of living continues to exacerbate everyday challenges. The ten local authority areas with the highest NEET challenges also include both urban areas and coastal towns, underlining a geographically uneven playing field.¹³ Planned interventions and welfare reform must avoid entrenching further inequality and instead should, like the upcoming Timms Review, be co-produced with young people and organisations representing them.

As UK Youth's response to the Government vote on the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Bill highlighted,¹⁴ the opportunities available to future generations of young people with disabilities should not be compromised in the name of minimal public finance savings.

Through embedding the role of youth work within the Youth Guarantee and the Young Futures Programme as a partner for employment support for young people, including young people with disabilities, Government can leverage the critical role of the youth sector to help close the disability employment gap.

Youth services bridge skills gaps, support young people with disabilities that are able to work to find and sustain employment, and work closely with other sectors like business to create mutually beneficial opportunities for young people with disabilities to provide pathways into work. With the Government now committed to further co-production with people with disabilities, it must recognise and seek to mitigate the financial barriers young people with disabilities face to ensure that welfare reform is not a false economy.

Allocate targeted resources to tackle gender inequalities in services for young people

Much government and media attention relating to young people has centred on young men and boys, with the formation of the Lost Boys Taskforce and the focus on the 2025 Netflix show *Adolescence*. Young men and boys must receive support – but it is important that this framing does not overlook the systemic barriers young women and girls continue to face, both online and offline.

It is imperative that investment in young people is equitably distributed, with dedicated well-resourced programmes for young women and girls as a clear priority. The upcoming Violence Against

¹² [Outdoor Learning Policy Report](#)

¹³ [Impetus Youth Jobs Gap - Exploring compound disadvantage](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.ukyouth.org/2025/07/our-view-on-the-government-vote-on-welfare-reforms-bill-2/>

Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy must reflect this to ensure all women and girls are included without discrimination, as outlined by the End Violence Against Women Coalition.¹⁵

UK Youth's EmpowerHER Model exemplifies effective, evidence-based investment in young women and girls. It was designed to address low wellbeing amongst young women and girls through supporting their involvement in inclusive, meaningful social action.¹⁶ Participants saw their limiting perceptions of themselves and their gender reduced and the programme generated **£5 in wellbeing benefits for every £1 spent**.¹⁷ This model highlights that investment in young women and girls benefits community cohesion, wellbeing and also leadership and social capital.

There is a growing body of evidence that the crucial 'trusted and trained adult' role that youth workers play with young people, combined with physical activity, can achieve transformational wellbeing benefits. In 2024, Football Beyond Borders (FBB) worked with Pro Bono Economics to understand this in financial terms.¹⁸ FBB's project to provide a trusted adult for young people in secondary schools resulted in wellbeing benefits to society worth more than **£5.5 million**. The typical trusted adult practitioner delivered almost £150,000 of benefits or £109,000 of benefits per school.

Girls face increasing exclusion from physical activity and its benefits as they age. Girlguiding data has identified that girls say their choices in sport and PE at school decrease relative to boys as they get older: nine in ten (91%) aged 7 to 10 reported that they have the same choices as boys, as compared with half (51%) aged 11 to 16, and less than half (40%) aged 17 to 21.¹⁹ It is important that both young men and young women who feel excluded from traditional sports environments have the choice to shape their own experiences when it comes to physical activity.

Many youth services have been forced to introduce 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. To remove these barriers to access, Treasury must prioritise equitable, stable and sustained funding for youth work across all regions, avoiding a postcode lottery and ensuring that those young men and women who need it most can access a sport offer in a safe and inclusive way through youth work.

Conclusion

Investment in youth work is an essential investment in the UK's economic growth, community cohesion and wellbeing of future generations. Whether tackling youth unemployment, addressing the skills gap, supporting disabled young people, or ensuring gender equity, youth work is already delivering significant returns to society and the economy. By embedding youth work into a prevention-first approach, the Government can deliver to address the specific needs of all young people, regardless of background.

¹⁵ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/60-orgs-set-out-expectations-for-the-vawg-strategy/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/03/celebrating-the-impact-and-legacy-of-uk-youths-empower-model/>

¹⁷ [Helping-Funders-To-Measure-What-Matters_Pages_Fin.pdf](#)

¹⁸ [PBE | Investing in trusted relationships: The economic value of Football Beyond Borders' impact on children's wellbeing | PBE](#)

¹⁹ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2023.pdf>



Treasury must recognise that failing to fund youth services in the Autumn Budget will result in higher long-term costs for welfare, healthcare, and criminal justice, ultimately failing young people. Sustainable, long-term funding that is distributed equally across communities and regions can build stronger communities, improve productivity and ensure every young person has the start they need to succeed in life.