

UK Youth submission to the Department for Work and Pensions Call for Evidence: Young People and Work Report

About UK Youth

UK Youth is the UK-wide infrastructure body for youth work. We support a network of more than 9,000 youth organisations reaching over four million young people. Our mission is to widen the reach and deepen the impact of youth work and outdoor learning.

This response draws on evidence from our national network and our research and evaluation of employability support for young people aged 11–25 delivered through a youth work approach.

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Key Insights

Young people face multiple, intersecting barriers to participation in employment, education and training (EET), including:

- poor mental health and low confidence
- financial and transport barriers
- lack of access to work experience
- discrimination and negative early work experiences
- digital exclusion and rapid technological change
- loss of statutory support at age 18
- long-term underinvestment in youth services

Young people from under-served communities are twice as likely to become NEET, and early inactivity has long-term “scarring” effects on employment, wellbeing and earnings. Mental health difficulties and negative experiences of the workplace significantly undermine confidence and motivation, despite high aspirations.

Evidence from delivery shows that youth work plays a distinctive and effective role in supporting young people furthest from the labour market by providing:

- trusted, long-term relationships
- tailored, asset-based support

- help navigating transitions into work and training
- a bridge between young people, employers and statutory systems.

Targeted youth work-led employability programmes achieve positive outcomes, including sustained employment and improved wellbeing, when combined with employer partnerships and wraparound support.

Recommendations

To support more young people into long-term education, employment and training pathways, the Department for Work and Pensions should:

1. **Embed youth work within employment support systems to support skills development and wellbeing for young people**

Ensure youth workers are recognised and funded as essential delivery partners within the Youth Guarantee and Young Futures Programme, particularly for young people furthest from the labour market. This should build on evidence from existing employability programmes such as UK Youth's Summer Jobs, Hatch and EmpowHER programmes that demonstrate improved confidence, wellbeing and sustained employment outcomes.

2. **Invest in a 'getting ahead' prevention and early intervention strategy through community-based youth services**

Work with Department for Education, the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, and the Department for Health and Social Care to prioritise funding for relational, community-based support that builds confidence, wellbeing and employability skills before young people disengage from education or work.

3. **Incentivise and expand access to paid, supported work experience**

Scale models with additional targeted funding that combine meaningful employer placements with youth worker support, especially for young people facing multiple barriers.

4. **Address structural and cultural barriers impacting on young people's participation in EET alongside employability support**

Integrate transport, digital literacy, housing, and financial planning support into employment pathways to prevent practical barriers from undermining participation (particularly from young people from under-represented backgrounds) and focus on telling a more positive story around the fulfilling benefits of EET.

5. **Strengthen cross-system coordination through an Office for Government Improvement and Learning to facilitate joint accountability between the DWP, DfE, and DHSC.**

A Shared Learning System for Government Improvement should be established to streamline cross-departmental collaboration to support young people who are NEET. The Department for Work and Pensions, the

Department for Education and local government should improve data sharing and joint accountability to avoid young people falling through gaps between services.

1. What is stopping more young people from participating in employment, education or training?

Young people face many intersecting barriers that can impact on their participation in employment, education or training. Issues of increasing mental health difficulties and social isolation amongst young people, as well as limited employment opportunities, have been widely reported for several years and these issues have been worsened by real time funding cuts to youth services and the legacy of the global pandemic. As highlighted in PwC's 2025 Youth Employment Index, the UK is continuing to underperform relative to its peers in the proportion of young people classified as NEET.¹ Consultation with young people to inform the Government's National Youth Strategy highlighted that job security and employment are a source of anxiety for young people.² Young people taking part in UK Youth's Hatch employability programme in partnership with KFC highlighted barriers impacting on their future job prospects, including a lack of confidence, work experience and mental health concerns. Financial barriers, such as transport costs, training fees, and lack of necessary equipment, also prevent many young people from engaging in skills development programmes.³

Young people also face disproportionately high rates of unemployment and this is a growing issue facing this Government, as recognised by this call for evidence. Latest ONS statistics have highlighted that around 1 in 5 (19.3%) young people not in full-time education are economically inactive, and an estimated 798,000 16-24 year-olds not in full-time education are neither in work, nor actively seeking it.⁴ Young people from under-served communities are twice as likely to not be in employment,

¹ PwC UK (2025). *Youth Employment Index 2025*. PwC UK. <https://www.pwc.co.uk/youth-employment-index-2025>

² UK Government (2025). *Youth Matters: State of the Nation*. Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-state-of-the-nation/youth-matters-state-of-the-nation>

³ UK Youth & Pears Foundation (2024). *Cost of Living Fund: Year 1 Report*. UK Youth. https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/UK_Youth_Cost_of_Living_Fund_Pears_Foundation_Y1Report_v2.pdf

⁴ ONS – Office for National Statistics (2025). *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), November 2025*. ONS. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/november2025>

education, or training (NEET) than their better-supported peers, and 75% of young people who are NEET for 3 months become NEET for 12 months.⁵ This has significant long-term "scarring" effects where NEET young people are at risk of repeated periods of unemployment.⁶ The economic impact of this is forecast to be £14.4 billion over the next seven years.⁷ Young people need urgent support to access and stay in work. Committed policy focus on this challenge is essential to ensure the Government can deliver on its growth agenda and commitment made to young people in the National Youth Strategy and this review by the Department for Work and Pensions is a welcome and important progression.

Mental Health Barriers

Young people face a wide range of challenges that impact their mental health, wellbeing, development, and hope for the future, including economic uncertainty and higher levels of loneliness. Mental health challenges can significantly affect young people's education and career prospects, with 21% of young people missing school or work due to mental health issues.⁸ Young people classified as NEET fear lifelong career limitations due to poor mental health. Understanding and support measures are required to help young people develop resilience on their education and employment journeys, whilst seeking to mitigate the barriers they face along the way.

Youth work has a distinct role in supporting young people with their mental health. Young people want timely access to specialist mental health services (like Children and Adult Mental Health Services), but they also want trusted adults – such as youth workers and teachers – to provide early support. The recently published Future Minds Roadmap strongly recommends funding and expansion of the role of youth work as part of prevention and early intervention for young people experiencing mental health problems.⁹ This ensures young people are getting help and

⁵ **Impetus** (2019) *Youth Jobs Gap: The Long-Term NEET Population*.

<https://impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Youth-Jobs-Gap-The-Long-Term-NEET-Population.pdf>

⁶ **Impetus & NIESR** (2019). *Youth Jobs Gap: The Long-Term NEET Population*. Impetus.

<https://impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Youth-Jobs-Gap-The-Long-Term-NEET-Population.pdf>

⁷ **The King's Trust & Ipsos MORI** (2024). *Youth Index 2024: Facing the Future*.

https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/1dwzhtDnn0c2fMyH7AGZTC/d7466a75712c8333545d79ebb6e0880e/DSN6204_Princes_Trust_Youth_Index_2024_Final.pdf

⁸ **Learning & Work Institute** (2021) *Facing the Future – Full Report*.

https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/1dwzhtDnn0c2fMyH7AGZTC/d7466a75712c8333545d79ebb6e0880e/DSN6204_Princes_Trust_Youth_Index_2024_Final.pdf

⁹ **Future Minds Coalition** (2025)

<https://media.licdn.com/dms/document/media/v2/D4E1FAQEgQgjiJoawqQ/feedshare-document->

developing trusted relationships in settings where they already are. Young people also require mental health support tailored to their individual characteristics, including culture, ethnicity, neurodiversity, gender identity, disability, personal history of trauma, and whether they live in rural or urban settings.¹⁰ These criteria need to be taken into account for a young person to be able to navigate education and employment journeys.

Discrimination against young people and negative perceptions of the world of work

Many young people have harmful experiences at work, facing discrimination, exclusion and being denied their employment rights, according to a 2023 report from the Resolution Foundation.¹¹ UK Youth's research in partnership with KFC highlighted that 93% of young people have experienced negative treatment at work due to their age.¹² 48% of ethnically minoritised young people also say they experienced prejudice or discrimination when seeking to enter the workplace.¹³ These experiences can have long-term effects, with this research revealing that more than 1 in 4 young people are feeling worried about working again following age discrimination. These negative perceptions of the workplace can lead to a snowball effect, where young people are sharing these experiences with their peers, including via social media which can lead to wider implications culturally where work is viewed as "depressing".¹⁴

Young people today have also grown up heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, impacting early developmental socialisation and their experience of the security of the world of work and faith in once stable societal structures that were

[pdf-analyzed/B4EZwDT8KMJgAY-/0/1769582089410?e=1770249600&v=beta&t=BETtY8sVG5tV9-tlzuJ28LBYeKrlsta8hfGKvWUHupA](https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/11/harmful-stereotypes-of-young-people-fuelling-record-numbers-to-fall-out-of-work/)

¹⁰ UK Youth (2024). *Harmful stereotypes of young people fuelling record numbers to fall out of work.* <https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/11/harmful-stereotypes-of-young-people-fuelling-record-numbers-to-fall-out-of-work/>

¹¹ Resolution Foundation (2023). *Enforce for Good: Effectively enforcing labour market rights in the 2020s and beyond.* <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2023/04/Enforce-for-good.pdf>

¹² UK Youth (2024). *Harmful stereotypes of young people fuelling record numbers to fall out of work.* <https://www.ukyouth.org/2024/11/harmful-stereotypes-of-young-people-fuelling-record-numbers-to-fall-out-of-work/>

¹³ Youth Futures Foundation (2024). *Discrimination and work: breaking down the barriers faced by ethnically minoritised young people.* <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/publication/discrimination-and-work/>

¹⁴ New York Times (2025). *Opinion: Gen Z Work Perspectives.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/05/opinion/gen-z-work.html>

shaken, defining the cultural narrative of their adolescence and early adulthood. Young people's aspirations in themselves have not lowered: the King's Trust Youth Index in 2025 highlighted that 70% of young people feel determined to achieve their goals in life and 77% connected having a job to feeling an increased sense of stability.¹⁵ However, their confidence that education and employment systems will work for them has been impacted by the challenges they are facing.

Digital exclusion, the changing world of work and the impact of AI

Digital exclusion is an important barrier to consider that impacts on young people's access to education and employment pathways. Previous studies have highlighted that young people classified as NEET reported feeling less confident in their digital skills.¹⁶ Digital exclusion can also inhibit social mobility, with a UK Youth and Osborne Clark research project on the Digital Inclusion Fund highlighting that social mobility is increasingly depending on an individual's digital skills.¹⁷ Bridging this digital divide is key, particularly as the future landscape of the world of work continues to evolve.

The Digital Inclusion Fund reached 14,000 young people, supporting young people's use of digital technology and engagement with digital provision. 17 out of 18 youth organisations involved in the Digital Inclusion Fund said digital investment helped them reach more young people or work with them for longer. Young people were able to improve their digital literacy, including through the usage of AI. Projects like these are necessary to support young people adapt to the changing demands of the world of work, where AI is increasingly embedded.¹⁸

Young people need to be supported to adapt to rising technological change with the proliferation in digital tools and AI disrupting future job pathways and causing further safety and online harms concerns. However, technology can also offer opportunities that can support young people classified or at risk of becoming NEET. Young people from low-income backgrounds can even potentially leverage AI to

¹⁵ **The King's Trust** (2025). *Youth Index Report 2025*. https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/3a3xDEQ3pi5mHhYLIFPUhZ/d59554e38cf4884d61e2135fd7a63f6/5652 - KT - youth_index_report_Final_accessible.pdf

¹⁶ **LSE** (2016). *Methodology Report: DiSTO NEETs*. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/disto/Methodology-report-DiSTO-NEETs.pdf>

¹⁷ **UK Youth** (2023). *Celebrating a year of tackling digital poverty through UK Youth's partnership with Osborne Clarke*. [Celebrating a year of tackling digital poverty through UK Youth's partnership with Osborne Clarke - UK Youth](#)

¹⁸ **University of Essex** (2026). *AI Policy Observatory for the World of Work*. <https://www.essex.ac.uk/research-projects/ai-policy-observatory-for-the-world-of-work>

navigate an increasingly technology-led recruitment landscape when they are empowered with the knowledge and tools to do so.¹⁹ Nevertheless, without access to the relevant digital infrastructure to support their skills base, digital exclusion can continue to act as a barrier preventing their access to employment. Programmes like the TechFirst programme announced by Government to prepare young people for careers across the digital and technology sector will play an important role in supporting young people to upskill and reducing barriers to digital access.

Weak support system

Young people face significant challenges in transitional stages of their lives. Key statutory support stops at 18. This withdrawal can leave many without adequate guidance, financial or interpersonal support at a critical juncture in their education or employment journey. Young adults from 18 to 25 are less likely to receive support to access education and employment opportunities. This cohort missing out undermines what initiatives like the Youth Guarantee are trying to do in supporting young people to transition effectively from school into post-16 education and training. It is important for age eligibility for youth programmes to be extended to reflect the realities of modern transitions to adulthood, recognising that many young people require support beyond the age of 18.

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. The link between the National Youth Strategy's commitments and the Youth Guarantee shows a welcome indication that Government is taking youth employment seriously.

The Youth Guarantee must be extended to wider groups of young people and embed youth services alongside employment support, education, and health services. Investing in accessible career guidance, financial assistance, and structured employment support is crucial to ensuring young people can build stable, fulfilling careers. The 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 policy initiative to help young people who are NEET.

Economic inequality (lack of access to transport, work experience and local services)

¹⁹ EY Foundation (2025). *Unlocking potential: AI and recruitment*.
https://www.eyfoundation.com/en_uk/news/blog/unlocking-potential-ai-recruitment

Half of the young people surveyed in the King's Trust 2025 Youth Index say the longer they are unemployed, the harder it is to find work, and over four in ten (44 per cent) say that being out of work means they have lost confidence in their skills.²⁰ This can lead to a vicious cycle where young people experience low wellbeing and confidence in the future, negatively impacting their mental health. Many NEET young people are facing a complex combination of challenges which prevent them from moving into work with poor mental health, difficult personal and financial circumstances and low self-esteem among the factors holding them back.

Many young people believe that extracurricular activities could help build their confidence and employability skills, but financial barriers can prevent them from accessing these opportunities, as identified in Back Youth Alliance polling.²¹ In particular, young people have repeatedly raised the alarm about the limited and unequal availability of work experience opportunities.²² Almost 1 in 2 young people feel that a lack of work experience is a barrier to employment.²³ Financial stress is also a growing issue, and many young people feel unprepared to navigate economic challenges. Young people are seeking better financial education, yet financial literacy is not sufficiently covered in existing youth programmes, leading to gaps in practical knowledge. This impacts on young people seeking to further their education and employment opportunities.

Nearly 49% of young people do not have a youth club nearby in their local area, and those situated in rural areas often struggle with transport costs that limit their access to support services. Young people want youth services that are accessible and affordable to help them in their future education and employment journeys. Recent declines in income mobility, low rates of home ownership and the cost of living crisis has amplified young people's sense that they are powerless over their future economic wellbeing.²⁴

²⁰ **The King's Trust** (2025). *Youth Index Report 2025*. <https://www.kingstrust.org.uk/about-us/news-views/youthindex2025>

²¹ **UK Youth** (2025). *BYA Youth Strategy Polling Results*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BYA-Youth-Strategy-Survey-Results-03-12-24.ppt>

²² **UK Youth** (2023). *Hatch Employability Programme Evaluation (Year 2)*. Unpublished.

²³ **Youth Employment UK** (2025). *YVC25 Results Report*. <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/dev/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/YVC25-Results-Report-1.pdf>

²⁴ **Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)** (2025). *Intergenerational Mobility in the UK*. <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/intergenerational-mobility-in-the-uk/>

It is important that young people receive adequate support as the cost of living continues to impact on their lives. The ten local authority areas with the highest NEET challenges also include both urban areas and coastal towns, underlining a geographically uneven playing field.²⁵ Planned interventions and welfare reform must avoid entrenching further inequality and instead should, like the Timms Review, be co-produced with young people and organisations representing them.

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 as the Timms Review progresses, 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.

Local and central government have a key role to play in supporting NEET young people have access to the opportunities that they need for a more secure future. However, there is a need for a cross-government shared learning system to enable accountability and review progress. UK Youth and the Institute for Government have recommended the establishment of an Office for Government Improvement and Learning, improving collaboration between local and national government.²⁶

Local authorities have a duty to track young people's activity to identify those not participating and support them to do so, whilst central government departments including the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions oversee specific policy areas that aim to upskill people who are NEET. Sharing information and cross-promoting existing programmes would allow for more NEET young people to receive the targeted support that they need. This is particularly important as the National Youth Strategy has highlighted the intention to shift from national to local funding and decision-making, relying heavily on local delivery.

²⁵ **Impetus** (2025). *Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring Compound Disadvantage*. https://impetus-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/publications/Report/Impetus_YouthJobsGap_ExploringCompoundDisadvantage.pdf?dm=1747140359

²⁶ **Institute for Government and UK Youth** (2024). *A preventative approach to public services*. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/preventative-approach-public-services>

However, the Strategy has not set out uniform expectations for local authorities on youth provision, or clear duties, standards or benchmarks for youth services. Ensuring young people have sufficient access to services locally is essential to support both their skills development and remove logistical barriers to support them to interact with education, employment and training opportunities.

2. What would make the biggest difference to support more young people to participate?

Youth work is a bridge between educators, employers and young people

Youth work is a bridge between educators, employers and young people. UK Youth supports a nationwide network of youth organisations that provide informal and non-formal education, helping young people gain skills not always taught in school - like leadership, emotional resilience, and communication. A trusted and trained youth worker can address the underlying issues that may be behind a young person becoming classified as NEET, such as a lack of confidence or a long-term mental health condition. Youth work is a key practice to engage young people who face multiple barriers and forms of disadvantage, who are most likely to be furthest from the job market.

When youth workers are supported with adequate funding, training and employer engagement strategies, they are able to help young people effectively navigate the challenges of in-work placements. Youth workers are their supporters, advocates, guides and mentors – this is critical additional support to young people and ensures that work is both accessible and sustainable for them.

An evaluation of UK Youth's EmpowHER programme, which uses social action to raise confidence and overall wellbeing of young women, found positive impacts on school performance. This highlights the positive relationship between youth work and supporting educational attainment. Youth work therefore can play a critical role in supporting NEET young people. 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.

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.²⁷ Youth work treats a young person as a person, rather than a problem. Youth workers can provide effective support to help people access and sustainably benefit from structured work experience, mentoring, and leadership opportunities. This is proven to improve optimism about work and boost employment prospects, particularly for disadvantaged young people who face additional barriers.²⁸ Ultimately, a youth work approach is essential to successful employment support for young people.²⁹ This is because it involves:

- long-term relationships with trusted adults to rely on during periods of uncertainty and change;
- asset-based approach, building on the young person's strengths;
- encouraging young people's agency;
- wrap-around support rather than stand-alone programmes.

Better integration between professions supporting young people

There needs to be better integration between allied professions like educators, employers, local government and charities to support young people who are categorised as NEET and help them to enter education, training or employment. The King's Trust 2023 report on supporting the future of NEET young people demonstrates that 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.³⁰

To bridge the gap between education and employment, young people want stronger alignment between schools, employers, and training providers, along with targeted support from youth workers for marginalised groups (such as young carers, ethnically minoritised young people, care leavers, and those with disabilities). This can support them to become more prepared for transitioning into education, employment and training by providing more opportunities to engage with employers and provide them with access to development opportunities.

²⁷ **Frontier Economics & UK Youth** (2022). *The Economic Value of Youth Work*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Economic-Value-of-Youth-Work-Full-Report.pdf>

²⁸ **The King's Trust & Learning and Work Institute** (2022). *The Power of Potential: Supporting the future of 'NEET' young people in the labour market*. <https://www.kingstrust.org.uk/about-us/our-research/the-power-of-potential-supporting-the-future-of-young-people>

²⁹ **National Youth Agency** (2021). *Written Evidence (YUN0016) – Youth Unemployment Committee Inquiry*. UK Parliament. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/35475/pdf/>

³⁰ **The King's Trust** (2025). *Youth Index Report 2025*. <https://www.kingstrust.org.uk/about-us/our-research/the-power-of-potential-supporting-the-future-of-young-people>

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. Programmes like UK Youth's Summer Jobs programme develop direct relationships between youth organisations and employers, which builds capacity within the programme by combining employers' and youth workers' different skillsets. These relationships also support young people who are currently NEET to gain valuable work experience.

UK Youth's Building Aspirations Programme, funded by Intact Insurance, was designed to bring localised solutions to NEET young people most at need through a curriculum-based programme, connecting local youth organisations to RSA delivery partners. The programme focuses on building the skills, confidence and aspirations of young people, including the opportunity to apply for micro-grants to cover the costs of training or equipment to improve their career chances.

Ensuring that partnership programmes are locally-led means that they meet the needs of specific communities. However, programmes require support and committed long-term funding from national partners to provide sustainable pathways into work and education. 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.

Young people are asking for confidence-building and resilience training to be better integrated with employability programmes.³¹ The King's Trust has demonstrated the effectiveness of embedding stress management and self-care workshops into education and employment pathways.³² It is the responsibility of schools, employers and the youth organisations too-often excluded from this conversation, to support NEET young people to enter the workforce through tailored and supportive programmes.

Re-positioning the role of education and employment in a young person's life through specific programmes

Young people often feel like they are being forced to enter into a system that is not designed for them. It is the responsibility of allied professions to create an enabling

³¹ UK Youth (2024). *Building Connections (Employability Programme) evaluation*. Unpublished.

³² Public First (2023). *Generation Green Jobs Report: November 2023*.

<https://assets.ctfassets.net/qq0roodynp09/2LylyxPZwCb7aEaPrL9NH6/6065a0c558ba48a8b1b9c43b4924a0d7/Generation-Green-Jobs-Report-Nov-2023-1.pdf>

environment that shows young people that entering education, work or training does not have to be “scary” or a “punishment.” Instead, policymakers, employers, schools, training providers and youth workers should position education, employment and training as being a component of a fulfilling pathway designed to celebrate and complement a young person’s existing strengths and help them develop additional skills. Employability programmes are an effective mechanism to enable this. Youth workers are able to facilitate a uniquely low-pressure, supportive space to develop young people's employability that differs from sanctions-based government employment support. Telling a more positive story around EET through a government-led communications campaign could also incentivise young people to participate and would seek to dismantle the negativity bias they may be experiencing through content shared online, as highlighted in the response to question one.

UK Youth manages skills development programmes designed to improve young people’s employability and skills development. UK Youth’s innovative Summer Jobs Programme offers young people, aged 16-20 who are at risk of violence, a six-week paid work placement alongside youth worker support. The programme aims to improve the young person’s wellbeing and mental health while supporting them with employability skills and self-confidence. The young person is also supported by a dedicated youth worker as part of their placement. The programme, inspired by successful US initiatives, first started in 2024 with over 400 young people taking part across Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and London. It provided placements with leading employers such as Timpson, Burger King and Veolia.³³ After taking on 21 young people from the programme in their restaurants, Burger King permanently hired 11 of them. Many other young people were also hired by their placement provider. The programme is also running again in 2026, offering more placement opportunities to young people across the UK. UK Youth’s previous youth employability programme Hatch, developed in partnership with KFC, equipped young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with job-readiness skills, industry connections and workplace experience.³⁴

³³ UK Youth (2025). *Summer Jobs Programme*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/what-we-do/our-programmes/summer-jobs-programme/>

³⁴ UK Youth (2022). *Hatch Employability Programme*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/what-we-do/our-programmes/hatch/>

These programmes are particularly important because meaningful work experience is highly valued but difficult to access, especially outside major cities.³⁵ Structured employability programmes like these run by youth workers increase confidence in job applications and workplace readiness. Young people have identified the need for practical hands-on learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, paid internships and industry placements.³⁶

It is important to support young people as they navigate these challenges and move into the world of work. Youth work is an effective solution to the challenges facing young people entering the workplace, creating fulfilling pathways into education, employment and training.

A prevention-based approach

Reducing rates of those not in education, employment and training (NEET) is central to opening up future opportunities, but paying particular attention to groups most at risk of being NEET will also help in reducing inequality overall. Policy should not just focus on merely trying to level the field, but going beyond equality to ensure more equitable outcomes for future generations. This means being both proactive and responsive to have a sustained long-term positive impact on young people's outcomes. UK Youth and the Institute for Government's 2024 report on youth work and prevention highlights youth work as a quintessential example of a preventative intervention.³⁷ UK Youth recommends the development of a 'getting ahead' prevention strategy based around youth work investment to reform public services.

Connecting youth services to other essential services, such as mental health support for young people, should be at the heart of any strategy designed to reduce the amounts of young people classified as NEET. Timely psychosocial support for mental health treatment for young people protects young people's participation in education and employment and balances their future earnings trajectories.³⁸

It is imperative to ensure that the focus of government is not just about getting young people into work to improve the statistics of young people classified as

³⁵ **Back Youth Alliance** (2025). *BYA Rapid Evidence Review: Thematic Summary and Annotated Bibliography*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BYA-Rapid-Evidence-Review-Thematic-Summary-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf>

³⁶ **Demos** (2023). *The Employability Badge: Skills for life, work and a stronger society*. <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-employability-badge-skills-for-life-work-and-a-stronger-society/>

³⁷ **Institute for Government and UK Youth** (2024). *Youth work and prevention*.

³⁸ **Prudon, R.** (2025). *Is delayed mental health treatment detrimental to employment? The Review of Economics and Statistics*. [Is Delayed Mental Health Treatment Detrimental to Employment? | The Review of Economics and Statistics | MIT Press](https://www.mit.edu/economics-and-statistics/review-of-economics-and-statistics)

NEET, but to take a long-term approach and ensure young people want to stay in education, employment and training. Creating more sustainable career pathways keep young people engaged and skilled.

Community Cohesion

If younger people feel more connected to their communities with stronger positive, in-person relationships, they gain a stronger sense of belonging which can increase their feelings of agency and optimism in relation to their future. The National Youth Strategy highlights that trained and trusted adults such as youth workers are identified in the National Youth Strategy as essential to helping young people engage with their communities and feel a sense of belonging. The Strategy emphasises that simply having a trusted adult who listens can be transformative for a young person's future prospects.

Youth clubs are essential to the fabric of a community as a strategic building block for social belonging, intergenerational connection and long-term civic resilience.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

³⁹ Demos and UCL (2025). *A Nation of Neighbours: Rebuilding Britain from the Ground Up*. [A-nation-of-neighbours_2025_Final.pdf](#)

⁴⁰ Back Youth Alliance (2025). *BYA Rapid Evidence Review: Thematic Summary and Annotated Bibliography*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/BYA-Rapid-Evidence-Review-Thematic-Summary-Annotated-Bibliography.pdf>