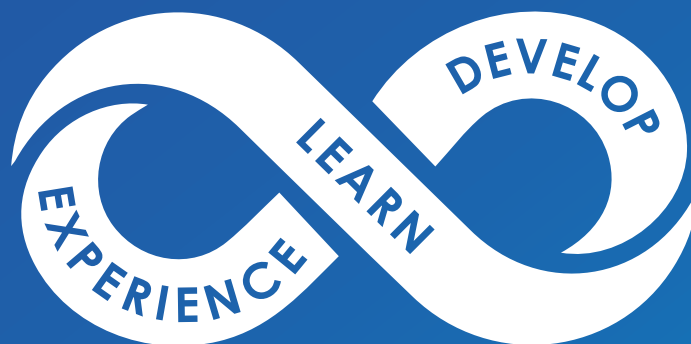




Adventures Away from Home



2025/26

Interim Evaluation Report

August 2026



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Executive Summary

Since 2022, UK Youth has been funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver and evaluate the Adventures Away from Home Fund (AAfH). AAfH offers short-term, outdoor learning experiences to young people aged 11-18 (up to 25 for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)) across England who face barriers to accessing these opportunities. The latest round included one-day, one-night and two-night experiences, with a wide variety of outdoor learning activities on offer to young people, in a range of outdoor settings across the nation.

Over the first three years of AAfH (2022/23 to 2024/25), [evaluations have highlighted](#) the positive association between outdoor learning experiences and improvements in young people's social and emotional skills. Social and emotional skills provide the foundation for a range of positive outcomes in later life across education, employment, and health (YMCA George Williams College, [2023](#)).

This interim report presents emerging findings from AAfH 2025/26; the last and most recent round of the programme, delivered between October 2025 and April 2026. It draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative data collected during and after the delivery window, discussing initial findings and implications for investment in outdoor learning, programme design and delivery, and future evidence building. AAfH 2025/26 was evaluated directly by UK Youth, in line with an evaluation framework agreed with DCMS ahead of the delivery window. Previous evaluations explored the relationship between outdoor learning and young people's social and emotional skills, while this latest evaluation explored a closely linked but distinct outcome area: young people's wellbeing. Building the evidence base around impactful and cost-effective interventions to support improvements in young people's wellbeing is critical given the concerning decreases in young people's wellbeing and rising prevalence of mental health conditions (Children's Society, [2025](#); Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, [2026](#)).

These interim findings provide early evidence of the programme's reach, impact, effectiveness, and value for money. AAfH 2025/26 has successfully scaled delivery compared to previous years. The first three years of AAfH engaged over 26,000 young people through a £3.9m investment from DCMS. Following the rollover of another round of funding to align with the one-year Spending Review in 2025/26 as well as significant scale up of delivery, AAfH 2025/26 engaged over 31,000 young people through a £4.7m investment, over a six-month period. The programme continues to demonstrate strong demand for outdoor learning opportunities, at an average of £151 per young person participating in the programme. The final evaluation report will include a value for money assessment by monetising young people's wellbeing outcomes.

£151
**average investment per
young person**

**AAfH 2025/26 engaged over 31,000 young
people through a £4.7m investment.**

The interim findings demonstrate that AAfH 2025/26 has combined scaled-up delivery with meaningful impact. AAfH 2025/26 has:



Widened access to outdoor learning for young people from a range of traditionally underserved backgrounds from all 9 regions of England. Of the young people who attended, 46% were from the 30% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas in England, 44% had SEND, 33% were from minority ethnic backgrounds and 64% had little or no prior outdoor learning experience. There was slightly higher representation of young people from the most deprived areas accessing two-night provision, suggesting that longer residential experiences may have been targeted to young people who are more likely to face the greatest financial barriers to accessing outdoor learning opportunities..

Supported measurable improvements in wellbeing and social and emotional skills. 60% (N=3,721) of participating young people demonstrated short-term improvements in their 'personal wellbeing', particularly under the domains of happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of worthwhileness. Over 90% (N=152) of young people referenced developing social and emotional skills through their AAfH experience and nearly half (49%, N=3,721) reported increased confidence to try new challenges.



Strengthened youth work practice and relationships. 96% of group leaders reported improved relationships with the young people they took on an adventure away from home, over 80% reported developing new skills applicable to their professional practice (N=158) and group leaders indicated that they were very satisfied with the programme (Net Promoter Score: +94).¹

Enabled outdoor learning providers (OLPs) to increase their reach and build sustainable partnerships. 889% of OLPs reported that AAfH 2025/26 had supported relationship-building with new youth groups and 67% felt the programme was supporting their organisation to adopt new ways of working (N=95). A Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +81 amongst OLPs is considered 'excellent' across industry standards and indicates extremely high satisfaction with the programme. OLPs also fed back on areas for further improvement relating to: funding timings and duration, data collection requirements, and evaluation and reporting systems.



Begun generating insight into some of the less-well-understood financial, practical, and personal barriers that young people face in accessing outdoor learning opportunities. Removing these barriers can widen engagement with, and access, to outdoor learning opportunities even further.

There is an emerging case for continued investment in inclusive outdoor learning as a scalable and potentially cost-effective approach to improving outcomes for young people. The next phase of this evaluation, with the final report due to be published in December 2026, will explore: the sustainability of young people's wellbeing outcomes over the medium term; deeper exploration of inequity in access and impact in an outdoor learning context; and the economic value of AAfH 2025/26.

¹Net Promoter Score is a standardised metric for measuring customer experience. It indicates whether a 'customer' is likely to promote a service or good to another potential customer – the higher the score the more likely customers are to recommend the service to others ([SurveyMonkey](#)).

Introduction

What is the Adventures Away from Home Fund (AAfH)?

UK Youth has been funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver and evaluate AAfH over the past four years (2022/23 to 2025/26). The 2025/26 programme offered short-term, outdoor learning experiences to young people aged 11-18 (up to 25 for those with SEND) across England who face barriers to accessing these opportunities. Barriers to accessing these opportunities are complex and multi-faceted. They are often some combination of financial (for both families and participating organisations), practical (location, lack of transport and equipment), and personal (lack of confidence and fear of the unknown). Importantly, these barriers are not faced by young people in isolation, but sit across their family environment, youth organisation or school environment, and wider community. The 2025/26 programme includes one-day, one-night and two-night experiences, while previous iterations of AAfH offered one-day and two-night experiences only. Across all iterations, a wide variety of outdoor learning activities were on offer to young people, in a range of outdoor settings across the nation.

Project management, support and quality assurance were provided by UK Youth's dedicated Outdoor Learning team, with further cross-organisational support for specific areas such as evaluation, marketing and communications, and IT support. The latest round of AAfH was launched on the 15th September 2025, and applications were open to established charities or not-for-profits in England that directly deliver outdoor learning opportunities, referred to as outdoor learning providers (OLPs). Funds were awarded to 103 OLPs across England, who delivered 1,845 outdoor learning experiences to 31,160 young people between October 2025 and April 2026.

The scope of this interim evaluation report versus the final evaluation report

This interim report outlines key insights and learning under the evaluation and sub-evaluation questions by outcome area. These outcome areas and evaluation questions are summarised below, agreed with DCMS and built on previous evaluations of AAfH (UK Youth, [2023](#), [2024](#), [2025](#)).

Programme Outcome	Associated evaluation question
1 Increased access for under-represented young people (aged 11-18 (or up to 25 for those with SEND)) to inclusive outdoor learning experiences.	Has AAfH 25/26 increased access for young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning experiences?
2 Young people (aged 11-18 (or up to 25 for those with SEND)) improve their wellbeing and social and emotional skills, fostering their lifelong personal growth.	How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support young people facing barriers to participation to improve their wellbeing and social and emotional skills?
3 Youth practitioners develop stronger relationships with young people and gain new skills through their group's outdoor learning experience	How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support youth practitioners to develop stronger relationships with young people, gain new skills and contribute to their professional development?
4 Outdoor Learning Providers have a positive experience delivering AAfH; build new relationships with youth groups; and develop new ways of working that they can sustain longer-term	What is the experience of outdoor learning providers in delivering AAfH? How effectively have they delivered on their role in the programme; What new relationships have they built with youth groups that they can sustain longer term; what new ways of working have they adopted that they can sustain longer-term?
5 There is a better understanding of the 'hidden barriers' that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning	What are the 'hidden barriers' that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning? Who is not engaging in AAfH and why?

This report provides contextual background, emerging insights, and begins to discuss implications for policy and practice across Government, and the youth and outdoor learning sectors. Where possible, and where data is directly comparable, this report makes comparisons to findings from AAfH 2024/25. The evaluation continues throughout 2026, as we explore the areas below further. Findings relating to these areas will be published in the final evaluation report in Winter 2026/27:

- Exploration of the medium-term impacts of short-term outdoor learning experiences on young people's wellbeing, captured through six-month follow up survey data.
- Economic evaluation of AAfH, delivered in collaboration with PBE (formerly Pro Bono Economics), exploring the monetary value of the programme in terms of wellbeing benefits.
- Further research delivered in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University, including secondary analysis of social and emotional skills and wellbeing data collected across AAfH 2024/25 and 2025/26 and further, primary, qualitative research into how wellbeing outcomes are understood and achieved for young people.
- Qualitative exploration of the 'hidden' or less-well-understood barriers to young people's participation in opportunities like AAfH with OLP staff and group leaders who took part in AAfH 2025/26, building on evaluation question 5 in this report.



The context for AAfH 2025/26

The previous round of AAfH (AAfH 2024/25) successfully provided engaging, developmental outdoor learning experiences to 9,750 young people through a £1.5m investment. AAfH 2025/26 represented a significant scaling of the programme, aiming to reach 30,000 young people through a £4.7m investment from DCMS.

Last year, UK Youth [made a series of recommendations to DCMS](#) on how to improve the delivery and evaluation of AAfH and ultimately improve outcomes and the overall experience of the programme for OLPs, group leaders, and young people alike. Six out of seven of these recommendations were taken forward. Taking forward these recommendations meant that:

- ✔ Increased investment was provided by DCMS in 2025/26 to increase access to outdoor learning opportunities through the programme, albeit not on a multi-year basis as recommended.
- ✔ There were slightly longer lead-in times to better allow OLPs to recruit and deliver to a range of young people.
- ✔ The latest round of AAfH offered one-night residentials alongside one-day and two-night experiences to create more pathways to deeper and potentially more impactful experiences.
- ✔ Evaluation requirements, tools and data collection processes were streamlined and digitalised whilst focusing more on less-well-understood outcomes areas such as personal wellbeing and the medium-term outcomes that young people experience through AAfH.
- ✔ The programme was able to provide more opportunities for peer learning and connection amongst OLPs.

Despite putting a number of measures in place to ensure OLPs were able to engage groups earlier on in the delivery window, England had one of the wettest winters on record. This is significant on a programme that depends on delivery in the outdoors between October and April: OLPs often had to quickly adapt the outdoor learning experiences they had planned and some youth groups experienced travel disruption. As a response, the delivery window was extended further into April, to include the Easter bank holiday weekend, although many OLPs could not take full advantage due to delivery timings.

UK Youth is conducting a mixed-methods outcomes evaluation, with elements of a process evaluation, economic evaluation and further qualitative research, through collaborations with PBE (formerly Pro Bono Economics) and Liverpool John Moores University. UK Youth used the following tools to collect data from young people, group leaders, and OLPs across the delivery window. Apart from the interviews, focus groups, and quality assurance visits, all data was collected through UpShot. [UpShot](#) is an online monitoring and evaluation system, originally designed primarily for delivery that takes place in outdoor settings.

Table 1 – Outline of each evaluation tool, description, and sample size.

Evaluation Tool	Description	Sample size
Young person survey: pre/post/6-month follow up	A short online form that young people completed with the support of group leaders. Scaled questions covered the ONS-4 'Personal Wellbeing' measure, physical literacy, 'challenge by choice', and enjoyment of the outdoors.	3,721 (matched pre/post)
Young person's change story (YPCS)	A template provided by UK Youth, submitted online via UpShot. The template includes a series of open-ended questions on the young person's experience of AAFH, and which aspects of their experience were most significant to them.	561
Group leader survey	An online form with a mix of open/closed questions exploring impact on young people, impact on group leaders' skills/relationships, and wider feedback. The survey was disseminated to all attending group leaders towards the end of the delivery window.	158
Group leader interview	10 online, 45-minute, semi-structured interviews, exploring group leaders' experience of AAFH and the barriers that young people face in accessing and participating in outdoor learning.	10
OLP's survey	An online form with a mix of open/closed questions, linked to OLPs' final payment. Questions explored OLPs' experience of delivery, evaluation, and the impact of AAFH on their ways of working and wider partnerships development.	95
OLP's focus group	Four online, 1-hour focus groups, exploring a series of open-ended questions on OLPs' experience of delivering AAFH and the barriers young people face in accessing and participating in outdoor learning	20
UK Youth led quality assurance visits	In person visits to OLP's settings where the UK Youth delivery team assured the quality of provision through observations and conversations with key OLP staff.	20 visits

Interim findings

Outcome 1: Increased access for under-represented young people (aged 11-18 (or up to 25 for those with SEND)) to inclusive outdoor learning experiences.

Evaluation question 1: Has AAFH 2025/26 increased access for young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning experiences?

AAfH 2025/26 specifically aims to increase access for young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning experiences. At the start of the programme, UK Youth and DCMS agreed to focus the evaluation on understanding the degree to which (and how) AAFH had removed barriers to access for:



These barriers to access are interconnected and experienced differently by young people. However, they are shown to correlate with reduced access to green spaces, nature connectedness, physical literacy and wellbeing. For example, various research highlights that girls face barriers to engaging in outdoor learning from an early age that continue into adolescence and adulthood. These barriers are not experienced by young men and boys to the same extent. An illustrative example of this is that young women and girls often experience a “Careful, Clean Girl” expectation (Donnelly and Bridle, 2024). The final report will include a review of the available literature to articulate the barriers that certain groups of young people face in accessing outdoor learning opportunities.

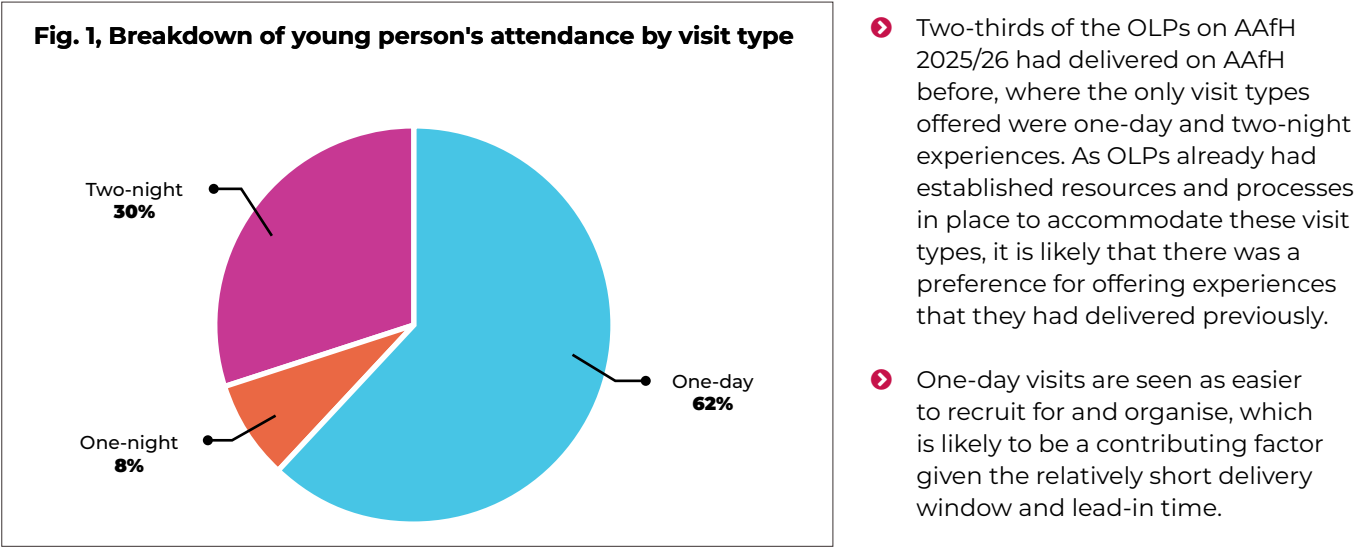
Overall, AAFH 2025/26 increased and sustained access for young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning experiences. The programme engaged over 31,160 young people, which represents a significant increase in overall reach from the previous year, by over three times, reflecting the continued growth of the programme and effective, scaled delivery. There was strong representation from key target groups, including those from the most deprived areas of England (46%), young people with SEND (43%), and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds (33%). Most attendees had very limited prior outdoor learning experience (64%).

Sub-Evaluation Question 1a: Who engaged via two-night, one-night, and one-day outdoor learning experiences? How does this compare with original targets?

UK Youth was contracted to deliver outdoor learning experiences to 30,662 young people, split by visit type.

Table 2 – Delivery targets vs actual number of young people attended per visit type			
Visit	Target	Actual	Actual/Target (%)
One-day	17,220	19,280	112%
One-night	5,908	2,350	40%
Two-night	7,534	9,530	126%
Total	30,662	31,160	102%

One-day visits remained the most common form of provision, followed by two-night residential experiences. These visit types exceeded delivery targets. Conversely, one-night provision was introduced this year as a new offer and had the least uptake (8%). Approximately one in four OLPs opted to deliver one-night visits when they applied for AAfH 2025/26 funding. There are likely to be a number of reasons for this which will be explored further in the final report. For example:



In 2024/25, delivery was split between one-day (57%) and two-night (43%) experiences. The 2025/26 programme shows a similar overall pattern, with one-day provision being the primary route of engagement (62%), alongside one-night (8%) and two-night (30%) residential opportunities.

Sub-Evaluation Question 1b: How does reach vary by age, gender, ethnicity, SEND status, disability, previous experience of outdoor learning, and Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) per visit type?

Overall, AAfH 2025/26 demonstrates increased and sustained access for under-represented young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning. The programme had strong representation from key target groups, including those from the most deprived areas (46%), young people with SEND (44%), and minoritised ethnic backgrounds (33%), with the majority of attendees having very limited prior outdoor learning experience (64%). A smaller proportion of young people (6%) reported having a physical disability.

There was some variation in reach by visit type, with one-night and two-night provision tending to engage higher proportions of minority ethnic groups and older young people, while one-day visits mainly engaging younger participants.

Table 3 – Count/percentage breakdown of young people indicating a demographic barrier to participation		
Barrier to participation	% of attendees who experienced this barrier (excluding prefer not to say/not provided)	Count of attendees who experienced this barrier
 Gender (young women and girls)	45%	13,045
 Minoritised ethnicity	33%	8,216
 SEND = Yes	44%	11,972
 Physical disability = Yes	6%	1,501
 Previous experience of outdoor learning = once / never	64%	11,493
 Top three most deprived IMD deciles	46%	12,397

Gender

Programme participants were 54% male, 45% female and 1% gender diverse, showing a broadly balanced cohort with a slight male majority. This pattern is generally consistent across visit types, although one-day visits had a marginally higher proportion of male participants. Gender diverse participation is small but present across all visit types, accounting for 0.7% of one-day visits, 0.3% of one-night visits, and 0.5% of two-night visits. This is broadly in line with available national population data (ONS, [2023](#)). There has been some research to suggest that young women and girls are underrepresented in accessing outdoor learning experiences (e.g., Natural England, [2023](#)). Overall, AAfH 2025/26 appears to have successfully reached female participants, with young women and girls well-represented across both one-night and two-night experiences. This indicates that AAfH effectively engaged female participants in residential outdoor learning and supported inclusive access.

Fig 2. Overall gender breakdown in AAfH participation

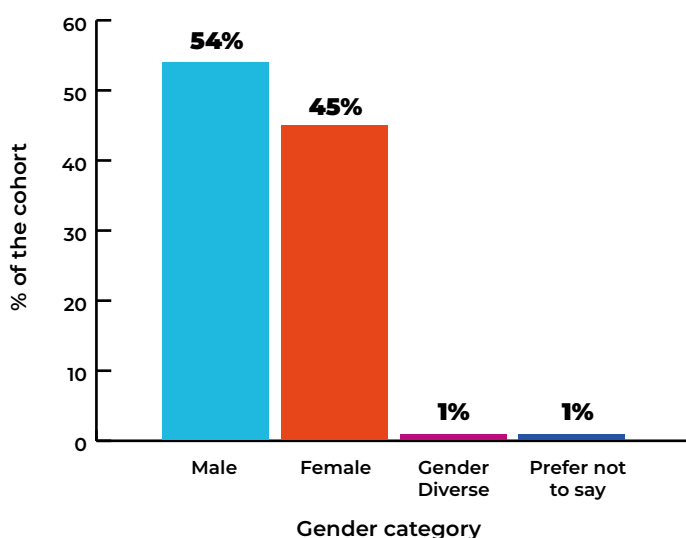
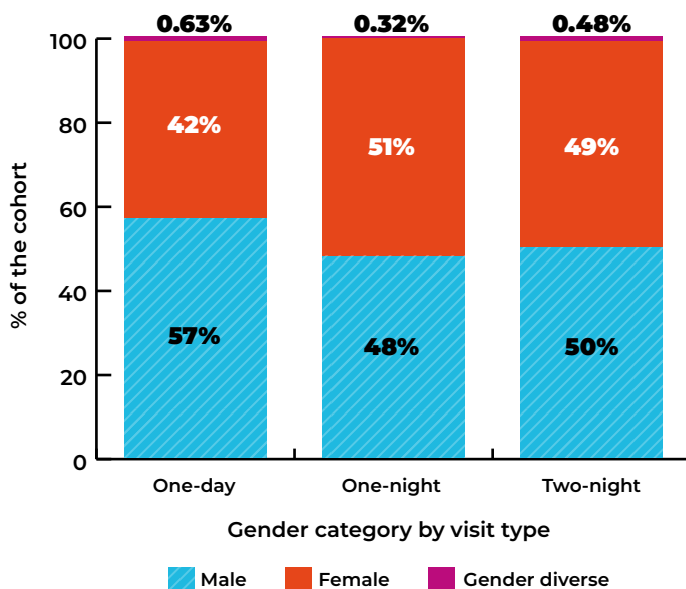


Fig 3. Gender breakdown in AAfH participation by visit type



Ethnicity

Overall, 67% of participants were white and 33% from minority ethnic backgrounds. One-day visits showed lower representation of minority ethnic groups (25%), with a higher proportion attending one-night (39%) and two-night visits (44%). There are likely to be a range of contextual factors behind this that will be explored more fully in the final evaluation report.

Fig 4. Overall ethnicity breakdown in AAFH participation (white vs minoritised ethnicities)

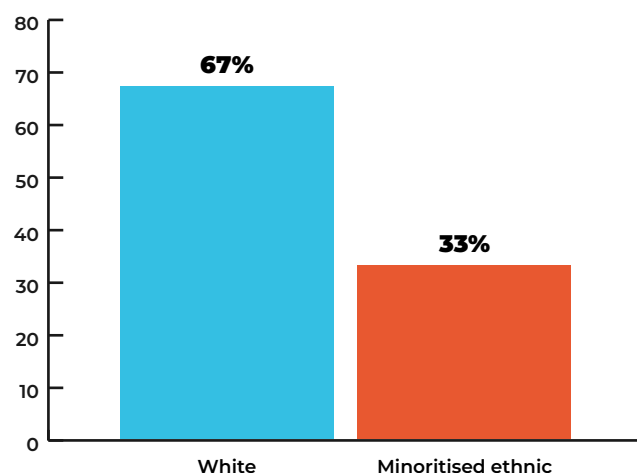
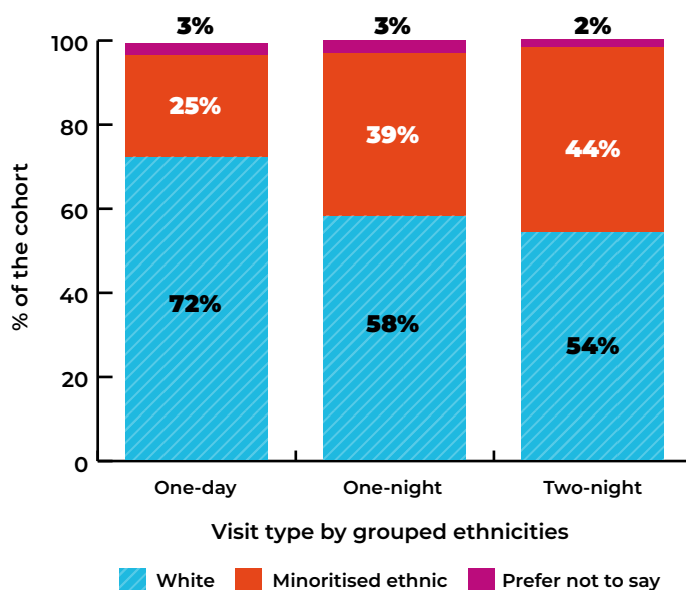


Fig 5. Overall ethnicity breakdown in AAFH participation by visit type



Age

AAfH 2025/26 engaged young people aged 11–18, with eligibility extended up to 25 for young people with SEND. The mean average age of participants was 13.8 years. Over half of participants were aged 11–13 (53%), and about a third (33%) aged 14–16. Older age groups were less represented, with 12% aged 17–19 and 2% aged 20 and over. This is roughly in line with UK Youth's expectations, given that young people aged over 18 must have SEND to be eligible.

One-day visits had the highest proportion of younger participants aged 11–13 (56%), while one-night visits showed a higher proportion of 14–16-year-olds (45%). Two-night visits show slightly higher representation of older young people aged 17–19 (14%) compared with one-day provision (10%). This suggests that one-day experiences may act as an entry point for younger participants, while residential programmes may be better suited to sustaining engagement as young people get older. Rather than highlighting accessibility issues, these differences likely reflect variations in programme intensity, the level of independence needed to engage in overnight stays, and school or youth group referral pathways.

Fig 6. Overall age breakdown in AAFH participation

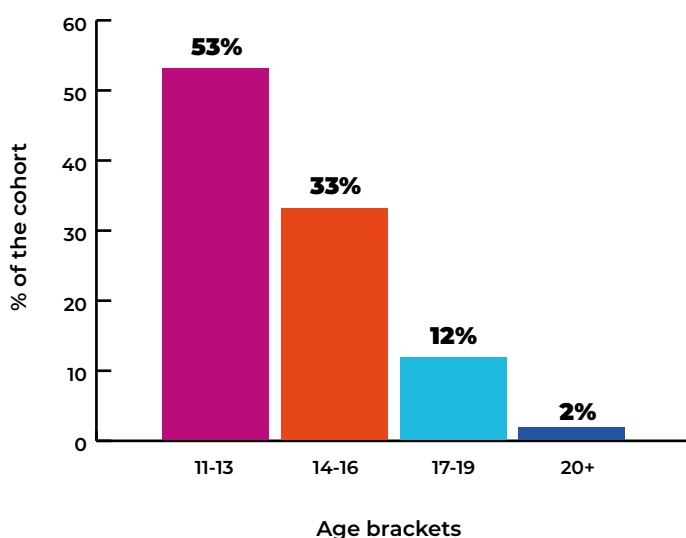
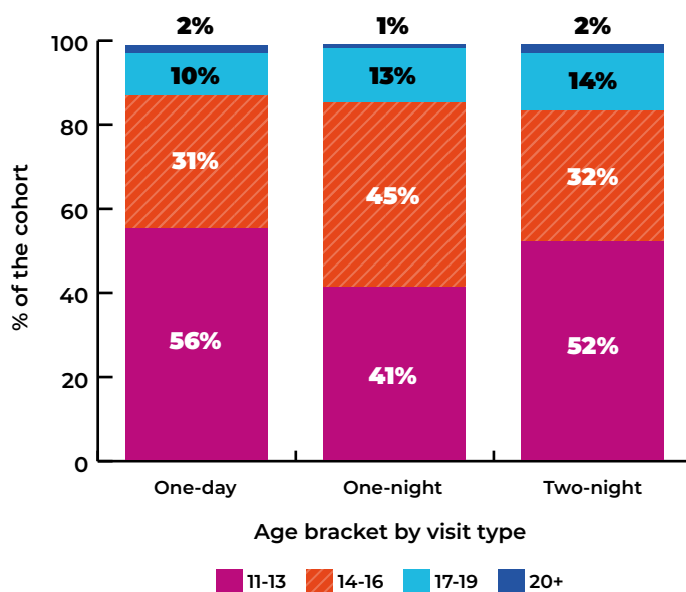


Fig 7. Overall age breakdown in AAFH participation by visit type



SEND status

Overall, 54% of participants reported no identified SEND and 44% reported SEND, with a small proportion (2%) preferring not to say. One-day visits show a near-even split between SEND and non-SEND participants, while one-night and two-night visits show higher proportions of non-SEND participants (60% and 65% respectively). SEND representation is slightly lower within residential experiences compared with one-day visits, indicating that young people with SEND status are less likely to access residential provision. This likely reflects a range of practical and structural barriers, including the additional planning, staffing, and logistical requirements of residential settings as well as the sensory and routine-based challenges that unfamiliar overnight environments can present for some young people with additional needs. Despite this, SEND engagement remains significant across all provision types, indicating that the programme successfully engaged young people with additional needs.

Fig 8. Overall SEND status breakdown in AAfH participation

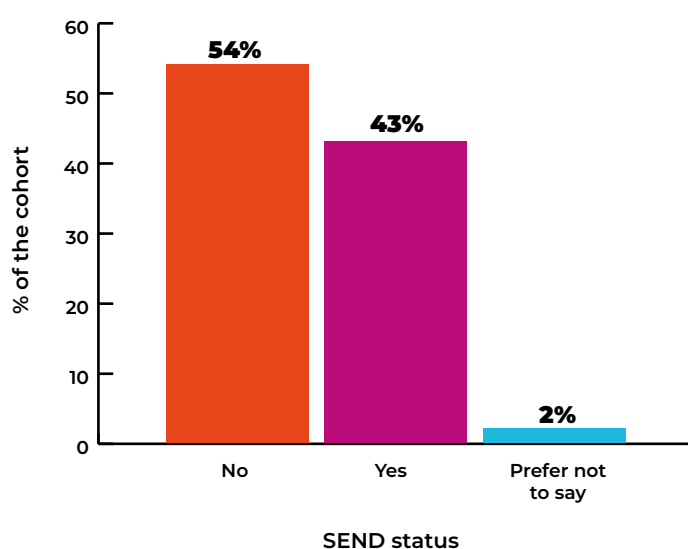
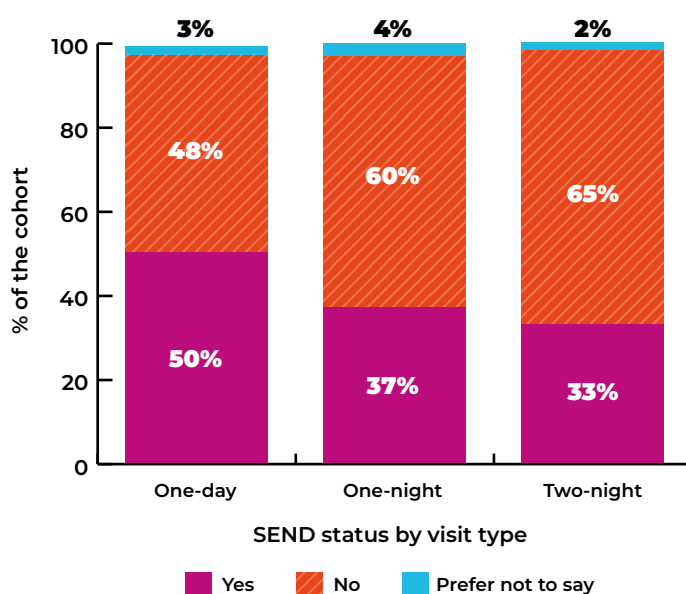
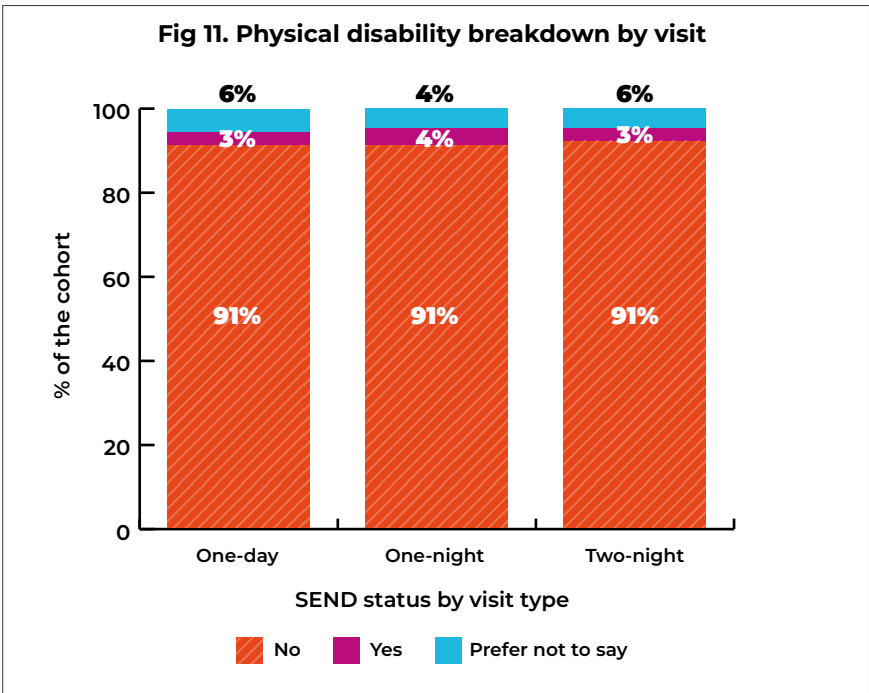
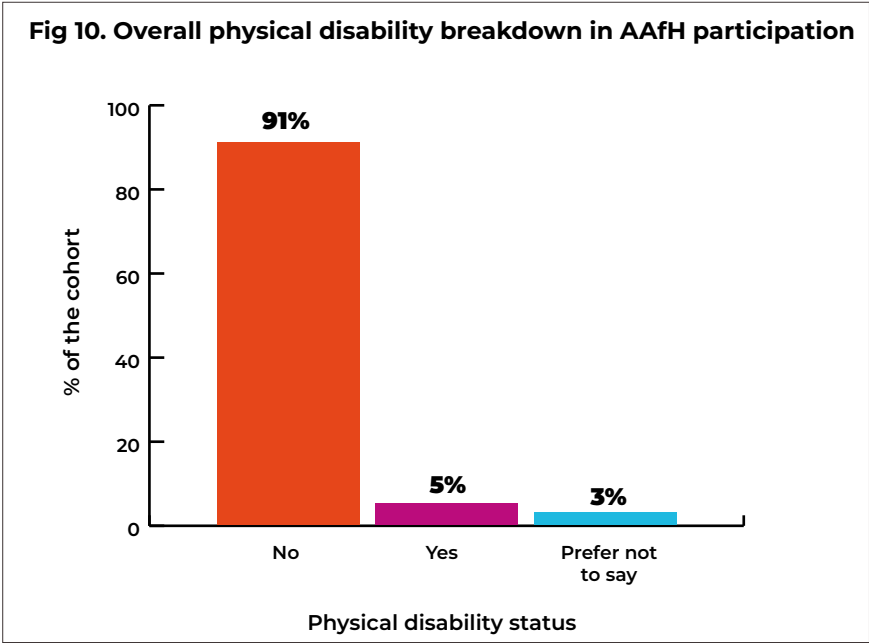


Fig 9. SEND status breakdown in AAfH participation by visit type



Physical disability

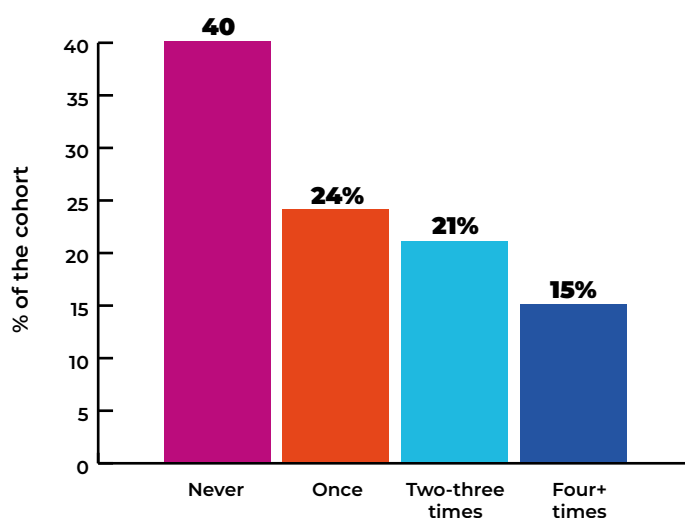
Overall, 91% of participants reported no physical disability, 6% reported a disability, and 3% preferred not to say. There is little variation across visit types, with consistent patterns observed in one-day, one-night, and two-night provision. Despite the adjustments made by many OLPs, young people with disabilities are more likely to be underrepresented in outdoor learning experiences. Planning, physical access, adjustments to accommodation and organising accessible transport can all be challenging for OLPs and youth group leaders. The physical nature of some outdoor learning activities can make adjustments difficult and there is often an added cost associated with ensuring that the correct young person-to-staff ratios are in place to support young people with a physical disability. This will be explored further in the final report as we consider what barriers to accessing outdoor learning still exist.



Previous experience of outdoor learning

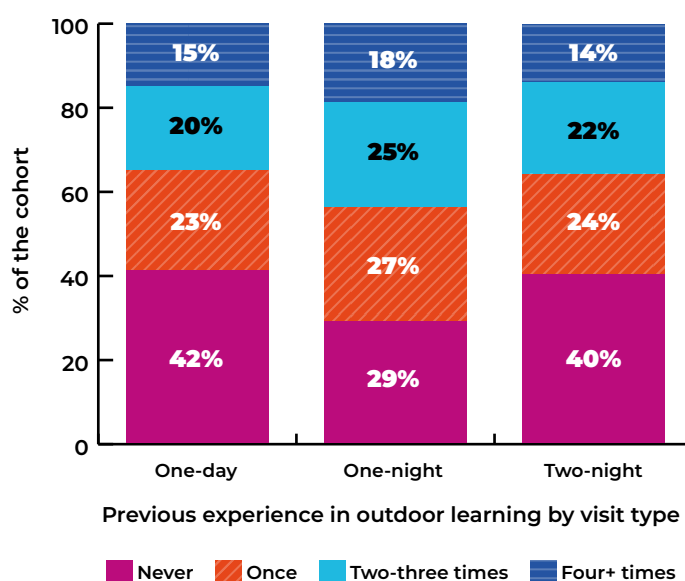
Overall, 40% of participants reported having no previous outdoor learning experience, 24% had one prior experience, 21% had two to three experiences, and 15% had four or more. One-day and two-night visits show a higher proportion of participants with no prior experience (42% and 40% respectively), while one-night visits show a slightly more even distribution across experience levels (Never=29%, Once=27%, Two-Three times=25%, Four or more times=18%). This suggests that a lack of prior outdoor learning experience is not a barrier to participating in longer residential experiences, with two-night provision successfully engaging significant numbers of young people who are new to structured outdoor learning. This may indicate that young people who are eager to maximise their first experience are drawn to longer residential opportunities. Overall, AAfH 2025/26 was effective in making outdoor learning more accessible to young people with no previous outdoor learning experience, rather than only engaging those with prior experience. This emphasises the programme's role in widening access to outdoor learning by reducing participation barriers and increasing first-time engagement.

Fig 12. Overall breakdown of young people's participation in AAfH by the frequency of their prior experience in outdoor learning



Number of times young people accessed structured outdoor learning experiences

Fig 13. Previous outdoor learning experience breakdown by visit type



Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) provides a measure of relative deprivation based on where young people live. The IMD breakdown on AAFH 2025/26 shows that, overall, there was strong representation of young people from the most deprived areas, with 19% of participants living in the most deprived decile, 16% in the second most deprived decile, and 12% in the third most deprived decile. Therefore, almost half (47%) of AAFH 2025/26 participants lived within the 30% most deprived areas nationally – rising to 63% if we consider the top 50% of most deprived areas nationally. This is particularly significant given that young people from the most deprived areas are more likely to face financial barriers in accessing outdoor learning, residential opportunities, and related activities. This highlights that AAFH is successfully engaging a significant proportion of young people from some of England's most socio-economically deprived communities. While 54% of attendees came from areas that rank in the least 7 deprived deciles, relative socio-economic deprivation was only one of the eligibility criteria used by OLPs to determine whether young people faced barriers to accessing outdoor learning.

This pattern is consistent across all visit types. One-day and one-night visits each show 18% of participants coming from the most deprived decile, while two-night visits show slightly higher representation at 21%. Across all visit types, participation was skewed towards the more deprived deciles. The slightly higher representation of young people from the most deprived areas engaged through two-night experiences suggests that longer residential experiences are also reaching those who may face the greatest barriers to accessing outdoor learning opportunities. It is not immediately clear why two-night experiences were more popular, however it could be that OLPs were deliberately prioritising longer visits for those young people whom they felt would benefit the most.

Fig 14. Overall IMD decile breakdown in AAFH participation

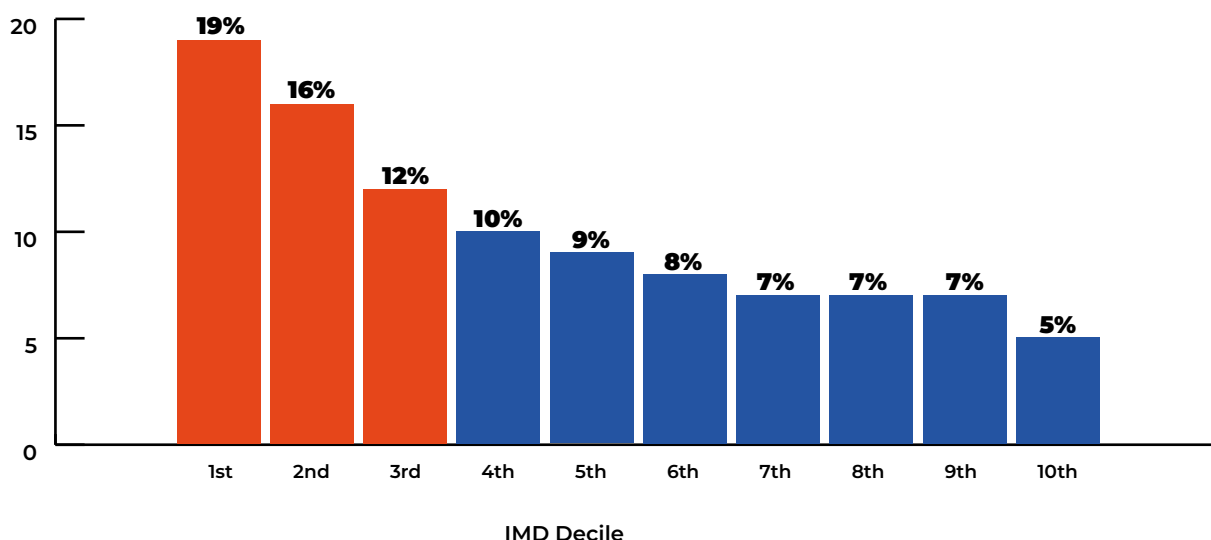
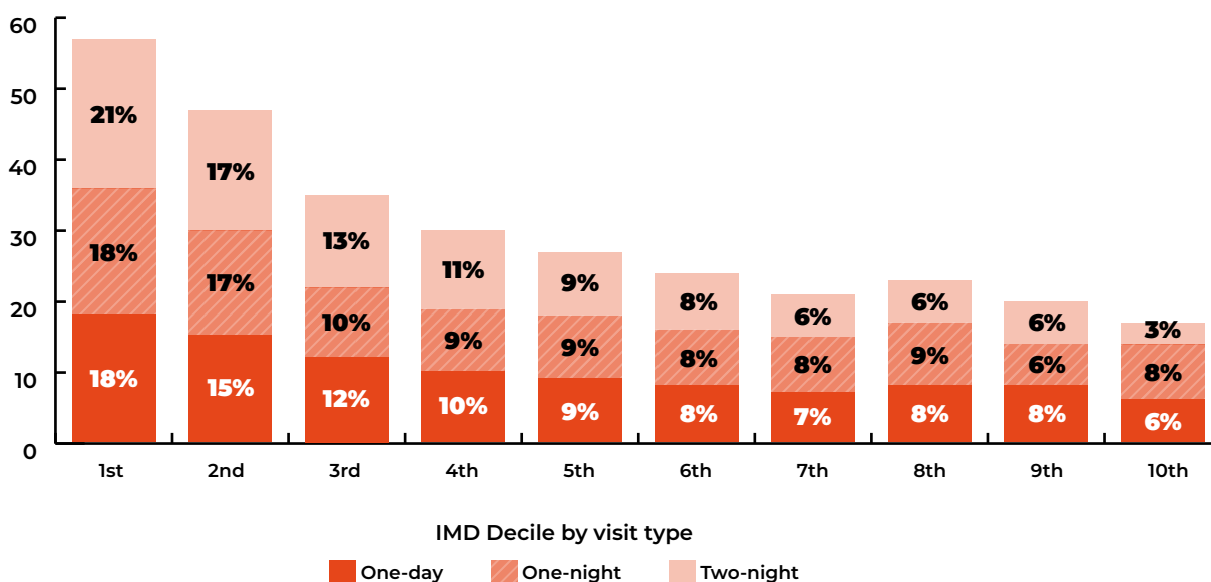


Fig 15. Overall IMD decile breakdown in AAFH participation by visit type



Looking ahead to the final report

The final evaluation report will include a deeper analysis of who engaged in AAFH through the analysis of the open text 'other' barriers listed by group leaders and via comparisons to national averages across different groups of young people, geographic delivery areas, delivery period, and outdoor learning provider size.



Outcome 2: Young people (aged 11-18 (or up to 25 for those with SEND)) improve their wellbeing and social and emotional skills, fostering their lifelong personal growth.

Evaluation question 2: How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support young people facing barriers to participation to improve their wellbeing and social and emotional skills?

Overall, data from AAFH 2025/26 indicates that short-term outdoor learning experiences are associated with positive improvements in young people's wellbeing and social and emotional skills, particularly for those facing barriers to participation. Wellbeing increased across all [ONS-4 measures](#) by +0.52 out of 10, on average, across the cohort. 60% of young people reported an overall improvement in wellbeing, with the highest rates of improvement in happiness, life satisfaction, and worthwhileness.

Almost half of young people (49%) reported increased confidence to try new challenges, alongside smaller gains in engagement with outdoor activity and physical activity. The vast majority (90%) of Young People's Change Stories referenced social and emotional skills development, most commonly under the domains of emotion management, initiative, and teamwork. Overall, interim analysis of young people's pre- and -post survey data and young person's change stories indicate that the programme supports young people to build confidence, manage their emotions, and engage more positively with challenges and new experiences.



"I can do more than I think."
Young person via their change story

Sub-evaluation question 2a: What were the average pre/post changes in wellbeing scores across the cohort?

The table below presents changes in young people's wellbeing using the ONS-4 'Personal Wellbeing' measure, which covers four domains: worthwhileness, life satisfaction, happiness, and anxiousness. Each item is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10, where higher scores on worthwhileness, life satisfaction and happiness and lower scores on the anxiety item indicate positive wellbeing. Overall wellbeing increased by an average of +0.52 points across the cohort, suggesting a positive overall shift in self-reported wellbeing following participation in the programme.

Across individual domains, the largest average improvement was seen in happiness (+0.73), followed by worthwhileness (+0.58) and life satisfaction (+0.57). Anxiousness showed a smaller but still positive improvement (+0.18, reverse scored), indicating a slight reduction in reported anxiety following participation. This more modest change may reflect the nature of the experiences involved within AAfH, which can include new, unfamiliar and challenging situations for some young people and lead to heightened levels of anxiousness in the short-term. The final evaluation report will explore this further; in particular, how levels of anxiousness change in the six months following participation in AAfH.

Table 4 – Average pre, post, and change in young people's wellbeing scores (ONS-4)

Tool	 Worthwhileness	 Life Satisfaction	 Happiness	 Anxiousness	 Overall Wellbeing
Average pre-survey score <i>(within two weeks prior to the visit)</i>	7.25	7.36	7.16	6.33	7.02
Average post-survey score <i>(within two weeks of the visit ending)</i>	7.83	7.93	7.89	6.51	7.54
Average change	↑ 0.58	↑ 0.57	↑ 0.73	↑ 0.19	↑ 0.52

Sub-evaluation question 2b: What proportion of young people demonstrated an improvement in their wellbeing scores via the pre/post young person's survey?

Overall, the findings show a positive shift in wellbeing scores, with 60% of young people reporting an overall, average improvement across the four wellbeing indicators, compared with 11% reporting no change and 29% reporting a negative change (see Fig. 16 below).

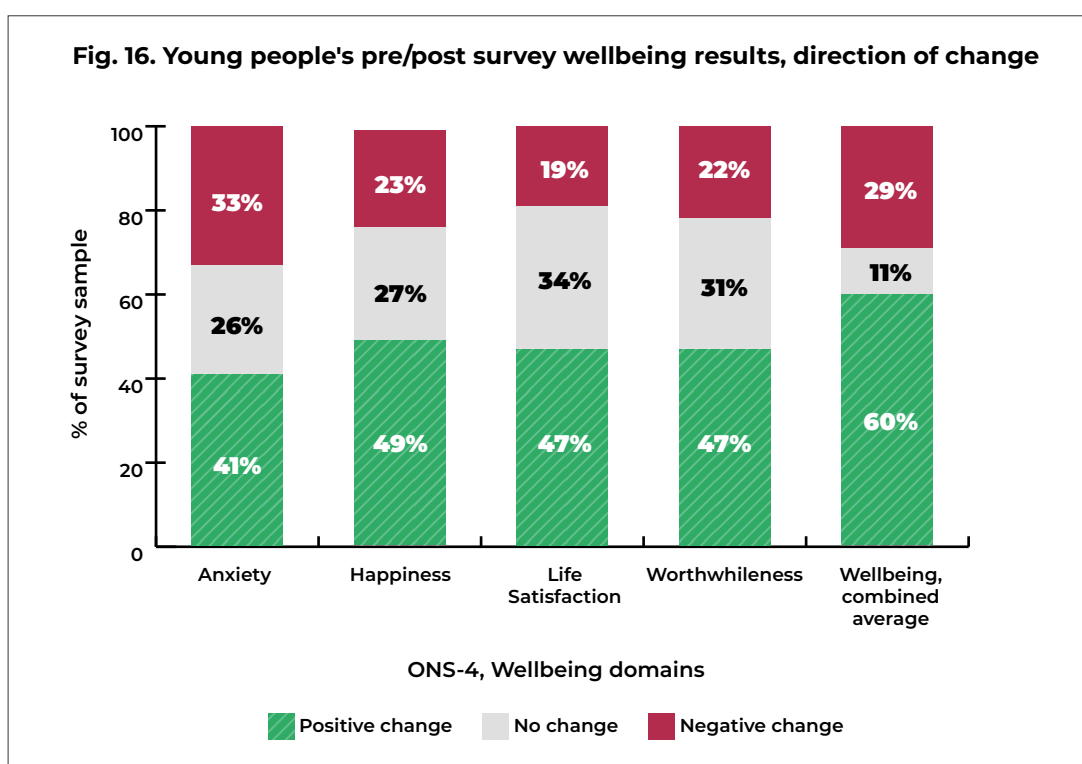
The highest proportion of young people that experienced positive change was under 'happiness', where half of young people (50%) reported an improved state of happiness following participation. While wellbeing outcomes are influenced by a range of factors beyond programme participation, such as individual starting points and personal circumstances, this finding is nonetheless notable and reflects the positive impact of engaging in a structured outdoor learning experience. A similar proportion of young people experienced a positive change under 'feelings of worthwhileness' (47%) and 'life satisfaction' (47%), indicating broadly consistent improvements across these three domains.

That said, a notable minority experienced negative change across their worthwhileness (22%), life satisfaction (19%), and happiness (23%) scores. There are a range of possible explanations for why a young person might report a drop in wellbeing in the short-term. For example, a short-term outdoor learning experience may not always be able to positively shift a young person's overall sense of worthwhileness, life satisfaction, or happiness; home sickness, the unfamiliar environment and the challenging nature of outdoor learning activities may in fact



negatively impact wellbeing in the short-term, for some young people. This may be felt particularly by young people who experienced inclement weather conditions during their visit: with AAFH 2025/26 delivered over a particularly wet Winter, from October to April, many young people would have been soaked through, cold and windswept during their visit and this can be a challenging experience for those who do not regularly access the outdoors. It is also possible that some young people's pre visit (or baseline) survey scores were positively influenced by the excitement and anticipation of an upcoming AAFH experience and that simply being given the opportunity improved their pre-visit wellbeing scores. Where this applies, a young person would be less likely to show a positive improvement in wellbeing immediately post-visit. These factors and potential limitations of the evaluation methodology will be explored in the final report. Critically, the final report will also explore whether young people who experienced short-term, negative changes in wellbeing continue to show a negative change in the six months after the visit.

Anxiousness showed a slightly more mixed pattern than the other wellbeing domains, with 41% of young people reporting improvements (a reduction in levels of anxiousness), 26% reporting no change, and 33% reporting higher levels of anxiousness following participation. This variation is considered consistent with the nature of residential and outdoor learning experiences, which often involve unfamiliar environments, time away from home, and physical or emotional challenges. For some young people, these experiences may contribute to temporary increases in anxiousness, particularly where activities involve stepping outside their comfort zone; for others, the same experiences may help build confidence, resilience, and coping strategies, leading to more positive, immediate wellbeing outcomes. This helps to explain why changes in anxiousness are often more varied than changes seen across the other wellbeing domains.



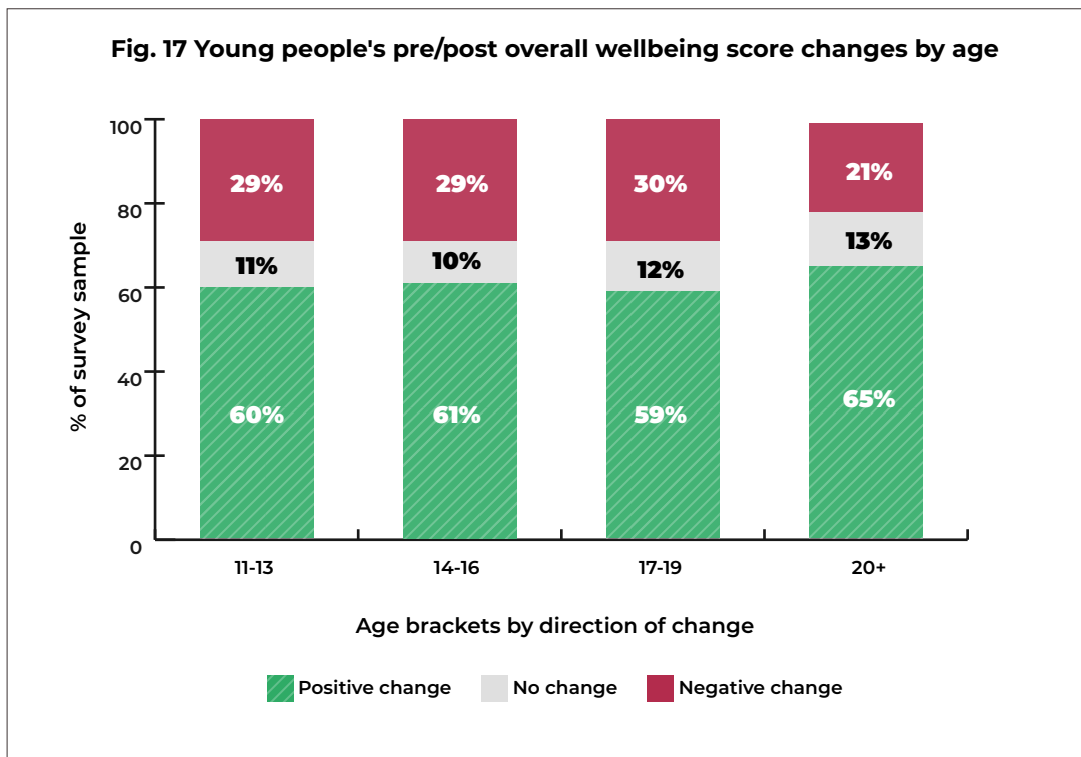
Sub-evaluation question 2c: Do wellbeing scores vary by age, gender, or ethnicity?

Wellbeing outcomes were broadly consistent across age, gender, and ethnicity, with only small differences in the levels of reported positive change and no clear evidence of differential impact between groups (Figs. 18-20, below).

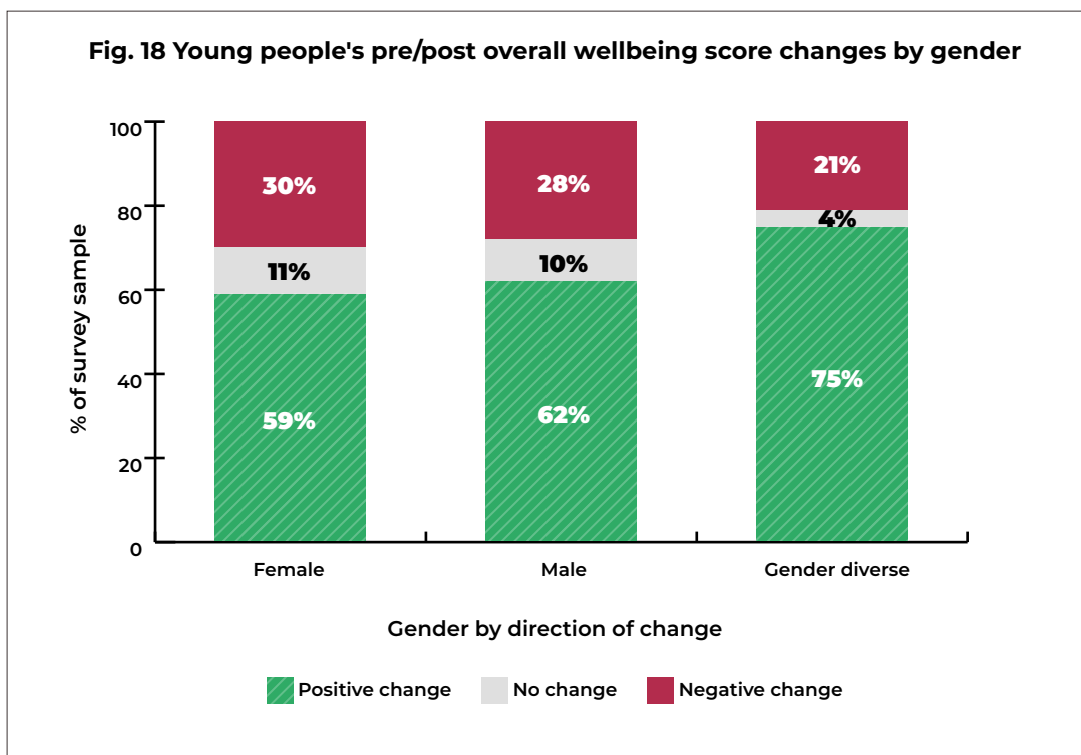
By gender, a slightly higher proportion of males reported positive change (62%) compared with females (59%), while more gender diverse participants showed positive changes (75%), although these young people represent a very small proportion of the sample (n=28). Despite this, the result is notable as it suggests the programme provides an inclusive and supportive environment, where gender diverse young people experience positive wellbeing outcomes alongside their peers. By age, results were consistent, with positive changes ranging narrowly from 60% (11-13), 61% (14-16), 59% (17-19), to 65% (20+), suggesting similar wellbeing benefits across age groups. Participants aged 20+ also reported the lowest levels of negative change. As this age group consists of young people with SEND, these findings suggest that the programme supports positive wellbeing outcomes for older participants with additional needs.

By ethnicity, a slightly higher proportion of white participants reported a positive change (60%), compared with minority ethnic participants (57%). A slightly higher proportion of minority ethnic participants (31% compared to 29%) reported a negative change to their wellbeing. However, the difference is small, indicating that wellbeing benefits were experienced at broadly similar levels across ethnic groups and suggesting the programme is supporting positive outcomes for young people across a wide range of backgrounds. The final evaluation report will consider whether differences in wellbeing scores by gender, age, and ethnicity are statistically significant.

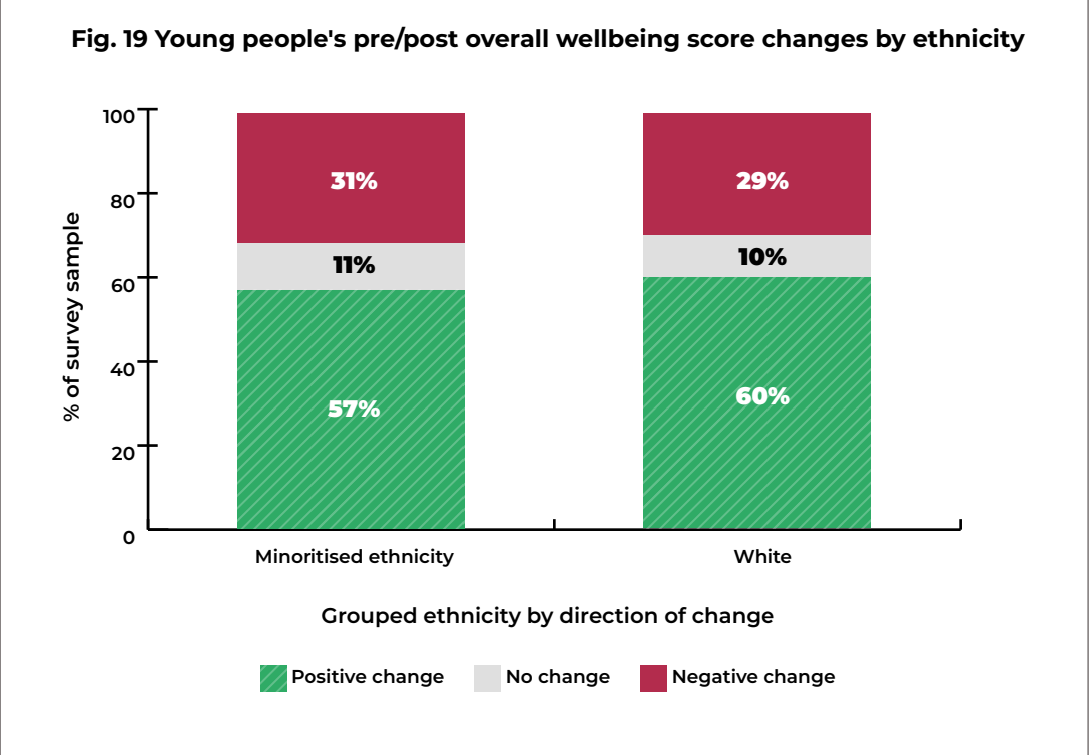
Age



Gender



Ethnicity



Sub-evaluation question 2d: What are the average changes in young people's responses to feeling more positive about physical activity, spending time outdoors, or trying new challenges after their experience?

Table 5 below presents average changes in young people's responses to indicators relating to physical literacy, enjoyment of spending time outdoors, and willingness to take on new challenges following participation in AAFH. Each indicator is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10, where higher scores indicate more positive responses. Improvements are calculated through mean change between pre- and post-programme averages.

Table 5 - Average pre, post, and change in new challenge, physical literacy, and time outdoors indicators			
Tool	 New Challenges	 Physical Literacy	 Time Outdoors
Average pre-survey score	7.17	7.74	7.63
Average post-survey score	7.96	8.25	8.25
Average change	↑ 0.79	↑ 0.51	↑ 0.63

Overall, young people reported positive average changes across all three indicators, suggesting that participation improved attitudes towards tackling new challenges, their physical literacy, and spending time outdoors. The largest improvement was observed in confidence to try new challenges (+0.79), which follows given that most attendees had limited experience of outdoor learning prior to attending. There were slightly smaller, but still positive, changes across young people's perception of their physical literacy (+0.51) and enjoyment of spending time outdoors (+0.63). The final report will explore the extent to which these are sustained and vary across different demographic groups.

Sub-evaluation question 2e; What proportion of young people demonstrated an improvement across indicators related to feeling more positive about physical activity, spending time outdoors, or trying new challenges after their experience?

Overall, the data indicates that, at the end of their AAFH visit, a notable proportion of young people experienced positive improvements across indicators related to feeling more positive about physical activity, spending time outdoors, or trying new challenges.

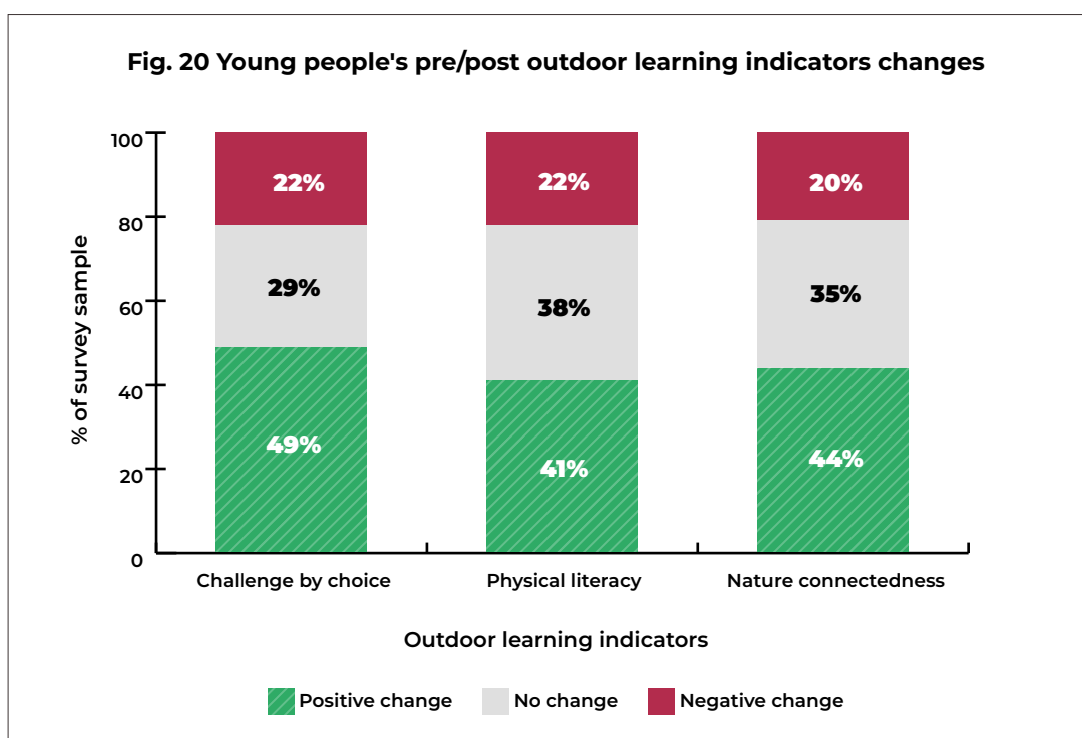
Improvements were most evident in young people's confidence to try new challenges, with 49% reporting a positive change following participation (Fig. 21, below). Similarly to the wellbeing findings, these outcomes are shaped by a range of individual and wider contextual factors. Despite this, the proportion reporting a positive change likely reflects the established positive impact of taking part in structured outdoor learning experiences that place young people in unfamiliar situations, where they are encouraged to draw on and develop their own capabilities.



"I can do things that surprise people and I don't have to continue being the same"
Young person via their change story

Attitudes towards physical literacy produced a more distributed result, with 41% of young people reporting improvements, 38% reporting no change, and 22% reporting a decline. A similar pattern appeared in attitudes towards spending time outdoors, where 44% reported a positive change but 35% reported no change and 21% reported a decline. Across both of these measures, the proportion reporting no change is notably higher than on 'confidence to try new challenges', which may reflect that attitudes towards physical activity and time outdoors are often shaped by longer-term habits and experiences, rather than short-term interventions. This rationale likely applies to the one in five that saw negative change across these indicators too. For some young people, participation may reinforce rather than change existing behaviours and perceptions of outdoor learning, resulting in a neutral or negative response.

This pattern may also be influenced by contextual factors such as seasonal and weather variation, as different cohorts took part in AAFH at different points in the year, with some experiencing more favourable or more challenging weather conditions than others. These differences are likely to have influenced enjoyment, attitudes towards engagement in physical activity, and attitudes towards nature and the outdoors. In addition, for some participants these experiences were entirely new or less familiar, and responses may reflect young people's initial adjustment to unfamiliar outdoor environments rather than longer-term shifts in attitude.





Sub-evaluation question 2f: What are the most common themes expressed by young people in their change stories under 'the biggest thing they learned about themselves'?

The responses to question 5 in the Young Person's Change Stories varied in detail and depth². Many young people responded directly to the question and, across these responses, there is a clear focus on self-discovery, with many reflecting on what they were capable of when faced with new or unfamiliar situations. However, it is important to note that many young people responded less directly to this question, focussing instead on the practical or social and emotional skills that they had developed. This section discusses these themes together as, for many young people, the development of skills sits closely with self-reflection and confidence in one's own ability. Overall, responses show that young people experienced the outdoor learning opportunity as engaging, challenging, and personally meaningful.

Taking a thematic approach, the most prominent theme was social and emotional skills development, followed by resilience and perseverance, and then personal development and independence. These themes were strongly interconnected and often appeared together within individual responses. Many young people described becoming more confident in themselves, improving their ability to communicate and work with others, and learning they could try new things and handle situations that they initially found difficult. A recurring theme

across the responses was increased self-belief, with participants frequently expressing that they were "more capable than they thought" or that they could "do things if they try".



Resilience and perseverance featured very strongly throughout the responses. Young people often reflected on pushing through fear, nervousness, or physical and social challenges. Rather than avoiding these challenges, many described continuing with activities and feeling proud of themselves for doing so. A recurring theme across the responses was growing confidence in their ability to overcome difficulties, with participants frequently reflecting that "if I push myself, I can achieve anything", that they could "keep on persevering", and that they were "resilient". This suggests that challenge acted as an important mechanism for learning, with personal growth often emerging through navigating unfamiliar situations, overcoming fears, and persisting through difficulties.

²Young people were asked a series of open-ended questions about the experience of AAFH. Question 5, the analysis of which is presented here, asked: "What is the one biggest thing you have learned about yourself through this experience?"

Alongside these core themes, there were also consistent references to novel experiences, outdoor and practical skills, and nature connectedness. Young people described discovering that they enjoy new and adventurous activities, learning practical skills such as using equipment, including “how to use a compass”, or completing outdoor tasks, and engaging positively with natural environments. Participants frequently reflected on learning “independent skills like making a fire”, discovering things such as “I can steer and sail a boat”, or recognising that “I’m really good at water activities”. Others reflected on their connection with the outdoor environment, commenting that “I like nature” and “I love being outdoors and free”. These experiences were closely linked to wider reflections on confidence, resilience, and independence, suggesting that the outdoor environment itself played an important role in enabling growth. Rather than separate outcomes, practical outdoor experiences often acted as a catalyst for broader self-learning about capability, independence, and perseverance.

While the majority of responses identified clear areas of learning, a small number of young people (1%) responded with answers such as “I don’t know” or “not sure”. Given the reflective nature of the question, this may partly reflect difficulty identifying or articulating personal learning rather than an absence of personal growth. As reflections were captured through conversations with youth group leaders, and often shortly after the visit, some young people may have required more time to process and reflect on their experience or may have been less comfortable expressing personal reflections. Despite this, these responses represented a small minority of the overall sample.

Overall, these findings highlight the value of short-term outdoor learning experiences in facilitating self-reflection, emotional growth, and self-confidence amongst young people. The combination of structured outdoor challenge, new experiences, and social interaction appears to have supported young people in developing a stronger sense of their own capabilities and potential.

Sub-evaluation question 2g: What proportion of Young People’s Change Stories mention emotions and experiences linked to social and emotional skills development?

Young People’s Change Stories (YPCS) are qualitative post-visit reflections completed by group leaders with young people, based on a structured set of open text questions exploring their feelings before the visit, what they enjoyed most, their biggest challenge, what they learned about themselves, any new skills developed, and future activity interests.

For the purposes of this analysis, coding focused specifically on responses to Q4 (biggest personal challenge during the visit), Q5 (what young people learned about themselves), and Q6 (new skills developed), as these questions most directly captured emotional, behavioural, and interpersonal change. Responses were thematically analysed using a deductive coding approach with [YMCA George Williams’ College’s social and emotional skills framework](#) as the basis. This framework specifies six domains of social and emotional skills: Responsibility; Empathy; Problem solving; Initiative; Teamwork; and Emotion management

Analysis of YPCS indicates that short-term outdoor learning experiences support the development of social and emotional skills for young people, including those from under-represented backgrounds. Overall, 91% of YPCS contained at least one reference linked to one or more of the six social and emotional skills domains (emotion management, initiative, teamwork, responsibility, empathy, and problem solving), highlighting that the vast majority of young people reflected on emotional, social, or personal development outcomes as part of their experience.

A small proportion of stories (9%) did not reference any social and emotional skills domains; however, some of these instead focused on outdoor and practical skill development and nature connectedness, demonstrating that the benefit of participation in AAFH extends beyond the social and emotional skills framework. Overall, these

91%
of change stories
highlighted social and
emotional development

Across six areas including teamwork, initiative, empathy and problem solving.



findings suggest that short-term outdoor learning experiences can support a broad range of developmental outcomes, with social and emotional development forming a central but not exclusive part of young people's experiences.

Sub-evaluation question 2h: Which domains of social and emotional skills development are mostly commonly cited in YPCS?

2 in 3
young people reflected
on managing their
emotions

Making emotion management the
most commonly cited social and
emotional skill

Deductive thematic analysis of 151 YPCS identified several recurring domains of social and emotional skills development in responses. 'Emotion management' was by far the most frequently cited domain, appearing in 98 stories (64%). This was followed by 'initiative', which was referenced in 65 stories (43%), and 'teamwork', which appeared in 36 stories (24%). 'Responsibility' was identified in 23 stories (15%), while 'empathy' (13 stories; 9%) and 'problem solving' (10 stories; 7%) were less commonly referenced.

Overall, young people most frequently reflected on experiences relating to managing emotions and taking the initiative. This suggests that the programme was particularly effective in supporting young people's emotional development, confidence building, and ability to engage with challenge. AAFH engages young people through structured outdoor learning environments that create situations where young people are required to regulate emotions, adapt to unfamiliar contexts, and take personal responsibility for their actions and decisions.

References to teamwork were slightly less common but would describe socialising, making new friends, and having positive interactions with peers. The empathy and problem-solving domains were only referenced in a small minority of Young Person's Change Stories. This does not necessarily indicate weaker impact in these areas but may reflect the way that young people interpret and report their experiences, with emotional and action-based outcomes being more immediately evident than more cognitive or reflective skill development. It may also suggest that these domains are developed more implicitly through engagement, rather than being explicitly recognised or expressed in young people's narratives.



Sub-evaluation question 2i: To what extent is the young person's survey sample representative of the wider AAFH cohort?

Overall, the survey sample is representative of the wider cohort. The distribution of gender is very similar across both groups, and most differences across characteristics are relatively small. There is slight overrepresentation of young people with SEND and those reporting a physical disability, and a small underrepresentation of minority ethnic participants. This is unlikely to have impacted on the survey findings presented above, but fuller consideration of the sample and statistical analysis will be included in the final report.

Table 6 – Comparison between overall sample of participants and survey sample			
Demographic category	Overall cohort (c. 30,000)	Survey sample (c. 3,700)	% point difference
 Gender (young women and girls)	45%	44%	-1
 Gender (gender diverse)	1%	1%	0
 Minoritised ethnicity	33%	29%	-4
 SEND = Yes	44%	49%	+5
 Physical disability = Yes	6%	7%	+1

Looking ahead to the final report:

Over the remainder of the evaluation period, UK Youth is conducting further analysis and evaluation activity, disaggregating data by a range of variables (e.g. demographic characteristics, visit type, weather conditions) and conducting further statistical analysis across the outcome areas outlined above. The evaluation team is also collaborating with PBE (formerly Pro Bono Economics) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to further explore AAFH data in two key ways.

- 01.** PBE will assess the improvement in life satisfaction experienced by participants between pre- and 6-month follow up survey measures. They will compare those changes in life satisfaction scores as a proxy for overall wellbeing outcomes with a matched comparison group of young people with similar backgrounds from the Understanding Society youth survey. This analysis will differentiate between changes that can be attributed to the programme versus changes that are likely to have occurred regardless due to other factors in a young person's life. Furthermore, this analysis will place a monetary value on these wellbeing benefits using HM Treasury guidance and therefore provide an overall assessment of the programme's economic value.
- 02.** LJMU will conduct secondary analysis of both quantitative social and emotional skills data from AAFH 2024/25 and wellbeing data from AAFH 2025/26 to explore the relationship between outdoor learning experiences and these outcome areas, and whether visit type or demographic variables moderate changes in outcomes for young people.

The final report will also offer a deeper exploration of the Young Person's Change Stories, identifying which aspects of a young person's AAFH experience are described as the most engaging or positive, and compare this analysis to previous years' themes.



Outcome 3: Youth practitioners develop stronger relationships with young people and gain new skills through their group's outdoor learning experience

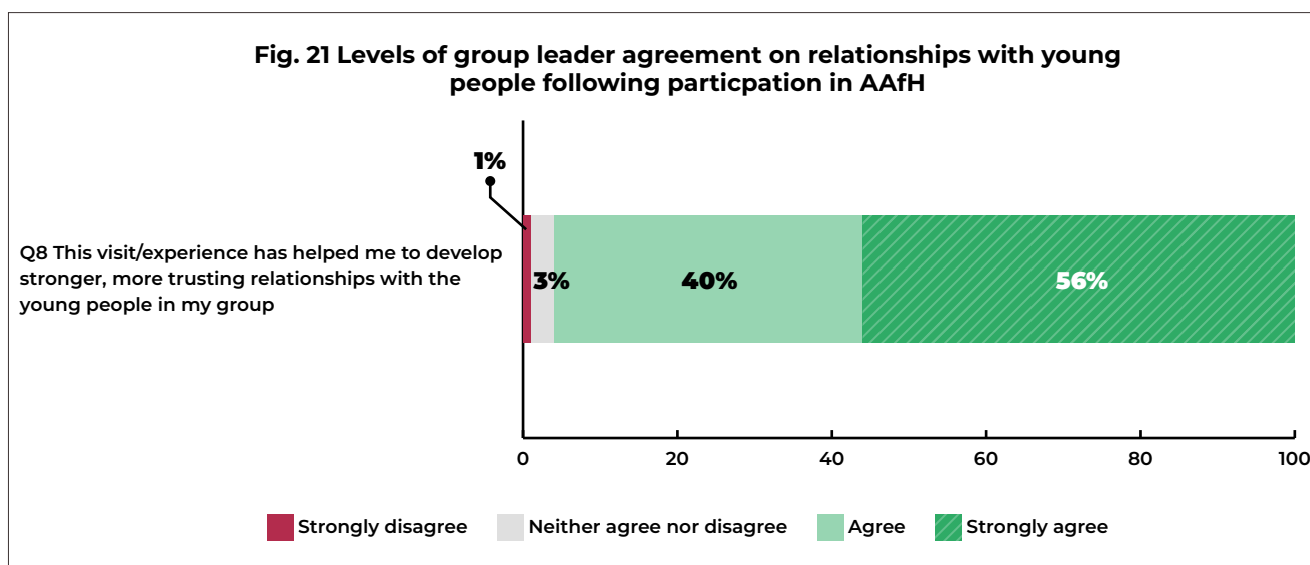
Evaluation question 3: How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support youth practitioners to develop stronger relationships with young people, gain new skills and contribute to their professional development?

The data indicates strong levels of agreement that attending youth practitioners developed stronger relationships with young people and gained new skills through their group's outdoor learning experience. Together, practitioners gave a positive Net Promoter Score of +95, which means they are almost unanimous in recommending this experience to others. They also made use of the survey's open text field to highlight the positive impact the experience had on them and the young people attending.

NPS is a standardised metric for measuring customer experience. It indicates whether a 'customer' is likely to promote a service to another potential customer – the higher the score the more likely customers are to recommend the service to others. This NPS of +95 out of 100 can be considered 'excellent' by general benchmarks as an industry benchmark specifically for Outdoor Learning is not available. ([SurveyMonkey](#))

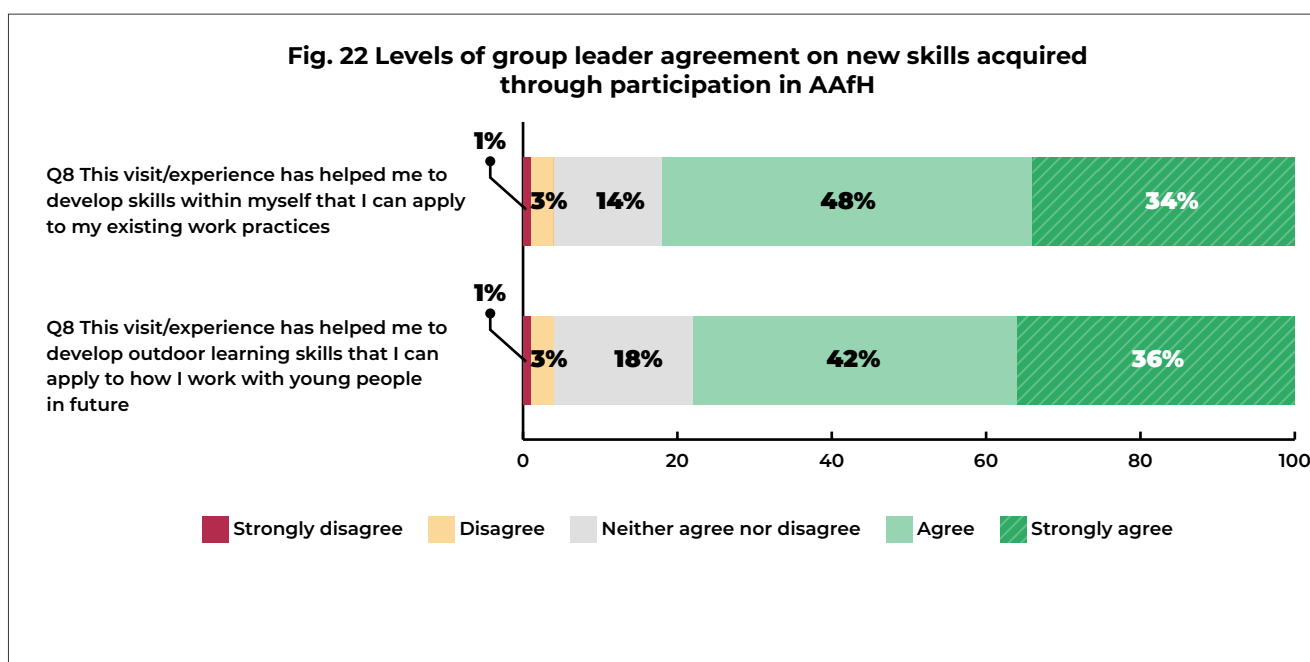
Sub-evaluation question 3a: To what extent do group leaders agree that they developed stronger relationships with young people through their outdoor learning experience?

There was near unanimous agreement (96% agree/strongly agree) amongst group leaders that their AAFH experience had supported them to develop stronger, more trusting relationships with the young people in their group. This is consistent with the previous round of AAFH in 2024/25.



Sub-evaluation question 3b: To what extent do group leaders agree that they developed new outdoor learning skills that they can apply to their practice?

There were similarly high levels of agreement from group leaders that AAFH helped them develop new skills that they can apply to their own practice (82% agree/strongly agree, in line with AAFH 2024/25) and specific outdoor learning skills which could be utilised in future (78% agree/strongly agree; 6%pts lower than on AAFH 2024/25). This small reduction may be because, given the increased scale of AAFH 2025/26, a higher proportion of group leaders may have taken part in AAFH before than in previous years. This would suggest that a proportion were building on existing outdoor learning skills in this most recent round of AAFH, rather than developing new skills. Further analysis will explore open text responses and content from interviews to identify examples of what these skills are, and what the intended impact might be for both young people and group leaders themselves.



Sub-evaluation question 3c: How likely are group leaders to recommend participating in AAfH to another group leader?

Group leaders were extremely likely to recommend participating in AAfH, giving a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +95. This is 10pts higher than on AAfH 2024/25.



“This day has been a truly worthwhile, and invaluable experience. We are so grateful for the opportunity, and very much hope to access similar activities with our children and young people in the future.”

Group Leader

Sub-evaluation question 3d: What are the key thematic areas identified in the feedback group leaders provided on the delivery and evaluation of AAfH?

The below thematic areas were derived from data captured through open text survey questions covering group leaders’ observations on the impact the experience had for the young people in their group and general feedback on AAfH.



01 Delivery – positive outcomes for young people

Many of the positive impacts outlined by group leaders reflect themes articulated by young people themselves through their Change stories. Group leaders described how the experience had helped young people to gain independence and confidence. They often mentioned young people getting to know peers and adults outside of their usual routines, creating lasting memories, and bonding as a group as key positive outcomes for young people.

Group leaders were also asked to rate how much they agreed with a series of outdoor learning specific indicators. The proportion of group leaders who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement is shown below, alongside data from the previous round of AAfH for comparison. Agreement was almost unanimous for indicators relating to enjoyment and confidence in outdoor activities, and a large majority also agreed that young people were better able to assess risk and plan how to stay safe. Improvements can be seen across all three indicators compared with last year (AAfH 2024/25). Again, we suspect this is likely due to OLPs repeated engagement in AAfH, with planning and delivery likely to have improved year-on-year

Table 7 – Comparison between AAfH 2025/25 and 2026/26 responses to Likert statements on group leader’s perceptions of impact on young people

Likert Statement	AAfH 2024/25	AAfH 2025/26	% pt difference
The young people became more able to assess risk and make plans to keep themselves safe when faced with new situations	83%	85%	+2%
The young people showed increased enjoyment of new outdoor-learning activities	93%	99%	+6%
The young people showed increased confidence in outdoor learning activities	93%	99%	+6%

- ✓ **AAfH was a positive experience that group leaders are keen to do again:** The vast majority (140/157, 89%) of group leaders' responses were overwhelmingly positive about AAfH 2025/26. They often used this open text space as an opportunity to both thank specific instructors or staff that had supported the young people to have a positive experience and to highlight that these trips would not have been possible without the AAfH funding. Another common feature in group leaders' comments was questions asking how/if/when they could go back to the OLPs to give young people another opportunity to benefit from AAfH. .
- ✓ **Specific positive impacts on young people in their groups:** Other responses tended to highlight their perception of the impact it had on the young people in their group, often highlighting increases in young people's confidence, sense of achievement, and deepened social bonds between attendees.



"We had four young Ukrainians as part of our group. This was their first ever experience of this kind of opportunity and they absolutely loved it. They have previously tended to detach themselves from the rest of the group at activities, but this really helped them to integrate and to make new social connections. The feedback from one was that 'this has been the best weekend of my life.' All of their parents contacted me to say what an excellent experience it had been for them and to share their gratitude."

- ✓ **OLP's staff providing inclusive and accessible experiences:** Some responses highlighted how OLP's staff had gone above and beyond to ensure that young people with specific needs were well catered for.
- ✓ **Quality of experience:** The vast majority of responses showed high levels of satisfaction regarding the quality of the experience. A small number (4/157, 2.5%) of responses highlighted an aspect of the experience that could have been of slightly higher quality. These mostly related to food and cleanliness at the OLPs' site and some who found last minute changes to activities challenging to manage with young people.
- ✓ **Challenges and concerns relating to meeting the evaluation and data collection requirements:** A small number of survey responses (2/157, 1.3%) flagged concerns around the demographic data requirements and the suitability of the survey items – especially for younger attendees and/or those with SEND. This was also flagged by group leaders and OLPs to the AAfH inbox. They recommended adapting the survey items to either have a pictorial scale or more accessible language which UK Youth will explore in its delivery and evaluation of future programmes.

Looking ahead to the final report:

This interim report has largely focused on analysis of closed question responses and a select number of open text questions that relate to group leaders' relationships with young people, new outdoor learning skills, their overall experience of AAfH and any recommendations they have for future delivery. The final report will explore further the open text data and disaggregate quantitative data to explore the following questions:

Developing stronger relationships:

- How do group leaders describe how the outdoor learning experiences impacted group dynamics and their relationships with the young people?
- Do these descriptions vary by visit type and/or group type?



Developing new outdoor learning skills:

- What specific skills and knowledge did group leaders develop?
- Are these skills being applied within their organisations following the programme and/or do they expect to use these skills in their future practice?
- Do these descriptions vary by visit type and/or group type?

Group leader experience and satisfaction:

- How do levels of group leader satisfaction and likelihood to recommend AAFH to others vary across OLPs, visit types, and delivery contexts?
- What elements of AAFH and the support provided by OLPs and UK Youth drove a positive experience for group leaders?
- Are there any structural or process issues that consistently impacted group leader satisfaction, and how could the programme be adapted to address these in future?



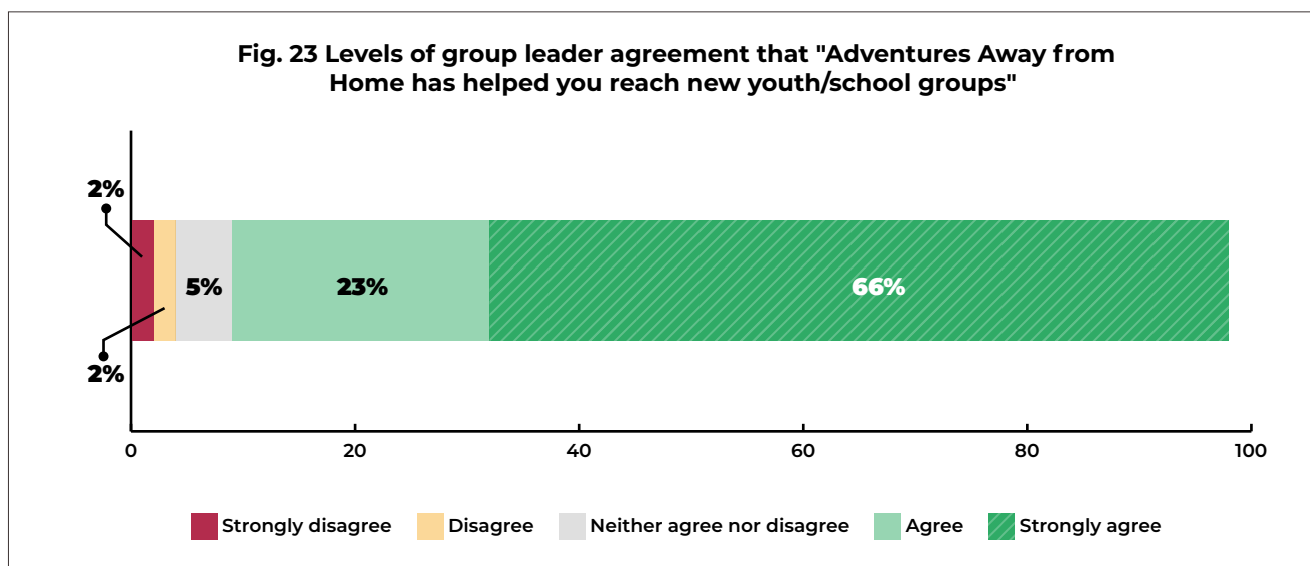
Outcome 4: Outdoor Learning Providers have a positive experience delivering AAFH; build new relationships with youth groups; and develop new ways of working that they can sustain longer-term

Evaluation question 4: What is the experience of outdoor learning providers in delivering AAFH? How effectively have they delivered on their role in the programme; what new relationships have they built with youth groups that they can sustain longer term; and what new ways of working have they adopted that they can sustain longer-term?

Overall, feedback provided by Outdoor Learning Providers (OLPs) highlighted a positive experience of delivering AAFH 2025/26. By building on the learning and successes of delivery in previous years, AAFH has maintained and improved levels of agreement on all indicators relating to OLPs: developing new relationships, developing new ways of working, and having a positive experience of the application process, delivery, and evaluation requirements on AAFH. This resulted in an 'excellent' Net Promoter Score of +81, demonstrating that OLPs are highly likely to recommend AAFH to others.

Sub-evaluation question 4a: To what extent do OLPs agree that AAFH supported them to build or develop relationships with youth groups or schools that they can sustain longer term?

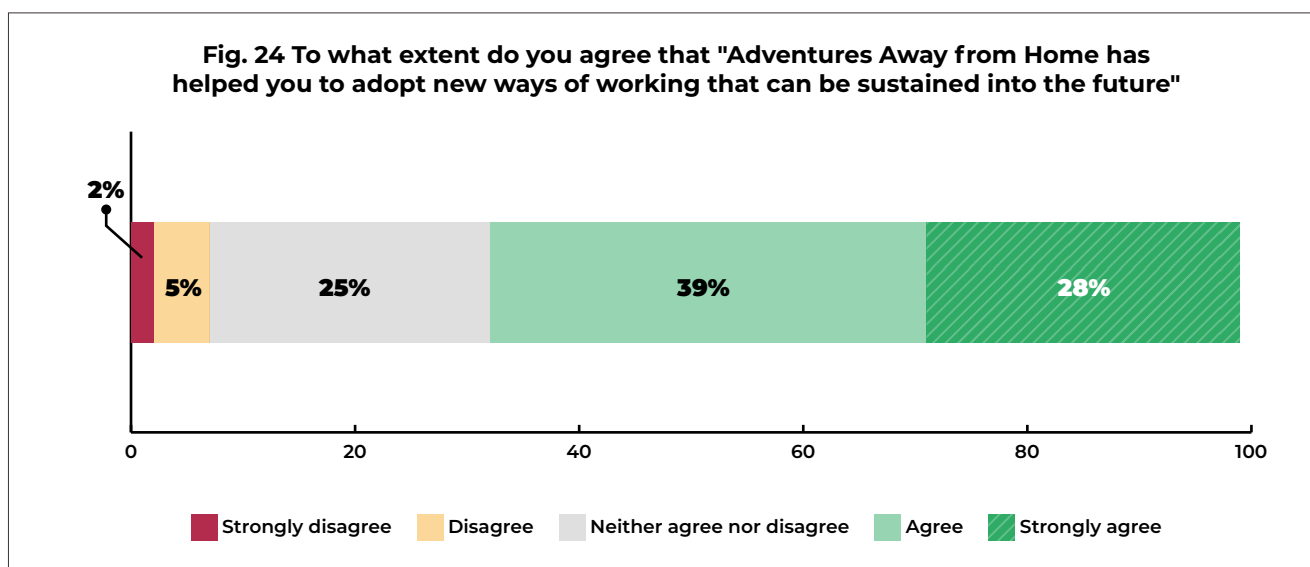
A key ambition of AAFH is to support OLPs to build or develop relationships with youth groups and schools that they may not ordinarily work with. There were very high levels of agreement amongst OLPs that AAFH supports them to build or develop relationships with new youth or school groups: 89% of OLPs either agreed (23%) or strongly agreed (66%). This is consistent with last year's evaluation (90% agreed/strongly agreed).



Sub-evaluation question 4b: To what extent do OLPs agree that AAFH supported them to build or develop new ways of working that they can sustain longer term?

A secondary outcome of AAFH is to support OLPs to build or develop new ways of working that they can sustain longer-term. There were high levels of agreement that AAFH supported with this, with 67% of OLPs either agreeing (39%) or strongly agreeing (28%). Again, this is consistent with AAFH 2024/25, with 67% agreeing or strongly agreeing that AAFH supported this outcome last year.

There were lower levels of strong agreement and higher rates of neutral responses compared to the previous indicator on building or developing relationships with youth groups and schools. From this we can infer that AAFH had a more positive impact on OLPs' relationships with new groups than on their organisation's ways of working. This is likely due to OLPs already having established ways of working, being selected for their commitment to inclusive and accessible outdoor learning practice, and 68% having already delivered AAFH before.



Sub-evaluation question 4c: How likely are OLPs to recommend participating in AAFH to another outdoor learning organisation?

OLP’s were highly likely to recommend participating in AAFH 2025/26 to another outdoor learning organisation, with an overall Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +82. This is in line with the NPS we saw on AAFH 2024/25, which was +81.

Sub-evaluation question 4d: What are the key thematic areas identified in the feedback OLPs provided on the delivery and evaluation of AAFH 2025/26?

We asked OLPs the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with a series of statements that related to their experience of the delivery and evaluation of AAFH 2025/26. On average, across all statements, 75% agreed/strongly agreed, indicating an overall positive experience.



“In my experience, over 20 years of working with young people across various national projects, UK Youth have managed to strike the best balance of informed distribution, in-person communication and strict quality control”
OLP, Endline Survey

The highest levels of agreement (94%) were seen on the statement covering the application process, supporting FAQs, and UK Youth-led webinars. Last year, we had statements on each of those areas individually, with respondents giving an average agree/strongly agree score of 90% (see table 7, below). Together, this indicates that AAFH has shown year-on-year improvements in ensuring that OLPs have access to the right information in a clear, accessible, and timely way.

This year, 68% agreed/strongly agreed that the evaluation and reporting requirements were clear and straightforward. This is a notable improvement on last year, when 43% agreed/strongly agreed with this statement. While broadly positive, and a marked improvement from last year, the evaluation and reporting requirements statement still received the most negative responses this year. Initial triangulation between anecdotal feedback from OLPs and wider open text survey responses indicate that much of this is likely driven by the time taken to collect, input, and update data, the user experience of the UpShot platform for this use-case, some initial hesitancy or uncertainty around the extent of young people’s demographic data that was required, and the nature of the questions asked in the young person’s survey and its accessibility for those with additional needs. Further detail on OLP’s experience of the UpShot platform is detailed below.

We also saw improvements year-on-year (+8% pts) in levels of agreement that the data that OLPs collected has helped them to better understand their work and impact, with 65% agreeing/strongly agreeing. This accords with the open text responses around UpShot, which some users praised for providing a single source of truth on their delivery and evaluation data.

Table 8 - Comparison between AAFH 2025/25 and 2026/26, OLPs levels of agreement with Likert statements on their experience of AAFH			
Likert Statement	2024/25	2025/26	%ppt diff
Supported them to build/develop relationships with youth groups/schools that they can sustain longer term	90%	89%	-1%
Supported to build/develop new ways of working that they can sustain longer term	66%	67%	+1%
Application process, webinar, and FAQs were clear and covered the right information*	90%	94%	+4%
Evaluation reporting requirements were clear and straightforward	43%	68%	+25%
Data collected has helped us better understand our work and impact	57%	65%	+8%

**In the previous iteration of AAfH, these three elements were asked as separate Likert statements. This year they were combined to reduce the overall number of statements OLPs were being asked to respond to.*

We also asked OLPs open text questions on different, but related, aspects of their AAfH experience. These covered the following areas, with the emerging themes highlighted below.

- 01.** Feedback on how UK Youth distributed the funding, the support OLPs received, and how this could be improved in future
- 02.** The benefits of the funding for their organisation
- 03.** Challenges encountered when trying to recruit youth groups
- 04.** The UpShot system: What worked well and what could be improved

01. Feedback on how UK Youth distributed the funding, the support OLPs received, and how this could be improved in future

When asked for feedback on how UK Youth distributed the funding and the support OLPs received, most respondents (71%) were positive about their experience. These responses tended to highlight some combination of the smooth application and onboarding process, as well as the clear and transparent financial payments, underpinned by supportive and responsive communication from the project team and UpShot. Responses that were more mixed tended to highlight:

- Issues in using UpShot (explored in more depth below)
- Lead in and turnaround times being too short
- Bearing the risk for under-delivering on places, and then needing to supplement the costs if over-delivering on places
- The funding not being sufficient to cover all associated costs

71%
**of respondents were
positive about their
funding experience**

**Feedback highlighted a smooth
application and onboarding process,
clear financial payments, and
supportive communication.**



However, views were mixed on these last two points. For example, several OLPs highlighted that the funding was generous for places, and further investigation identified that some OLPs reporting that the funding was insufficient had not applied for discretionary funding to support other delivery and accessibility costs.

OLPs' suggestions on future programmatic improvements largely mirrored the four areas identified above. OLPs suggested improvements in: how technology is used to collect and manage young people's data; increasing lead-in time to support planning; improving how delivery against pre-agreed targets is managed by UK Youth and revisiting the budget allocated to OLPs to deliver places (considering inflation and the adjustments needed to support young people with complex needs). Fuller analysis of these responses, and what implications they have for any future delivery of the AAfH model, will be included in the final report.

02. The benefits of the funding for their organisation

OLPs self-identified a number of key areas in which AAFH funding has benefitted their organisation. The five most prevalent themes, in order of prevalence, were:

- **Widening the reach of their provision during the funding period:** Providing access to outdoor learning experiences to under-served young people who would not have otherwise had access to an experience like this.
- **Partnership consolidation and development:** OLPs highlighted how the funding, targets, and timeline had prompted them to both develop new relationships with a diverse range of groups and schools but also consolidate and nurture existing ones.
- **Supporting organisational sustainability:** The funding supplemented income during the off-season and allowed OLP's to retain staff over the winter, which in turn supports continuing professional development and service continuity.
- **Developing and refining their delivery offer.** Delivering to a diverse range of historically underserved young people ensured OLPs worked with attending groups to ensure their provision was engaging, inclusive and accessible. These ways of working can then be built into their standard offer, long term.
- **Boosting their profile locally.** A smaller number of OLPs reflected that their participation in AAFH 2025/26 had improved the visibility and profile of their centre, supporting them to engage groups beyond the context of AAFH should these groups be able to fund the places independently in future.



“This funding has been AMAZING! It has enabled us to deliver sessions in the winter, so it has been massive for us in what is usually our quieter period. We have also had a number of trainee staff who would usually only get a small amount of hands-on training in a real-life session situations until the warmer months. Due to the AAFH sessions they had several opportunities to deliver (or assist with) all the services/activities we offer and got a chance to practice their skills!

It has also strengthened our community connections as we have had a lot of children in our local area (high proportion of pupil premium students) use this offer as it's not something they could have afforded before. We have had some schools/groups (alternative provisions & SEND) that used this funding as a chance to “test the water” as they have never used this type of service before. It has made a massive difference to how they look at residential for children that are usually excluded from these types of trip”

OLP Endline Survey

03. Challenges encountered when trying to recruit youth groups

Around a quarter of OLPs reported issues with recruiting youth groups. Conversely, a small number had the opposite challenge, where they had many young people eligible and willing to attend, but not enough places. Those that did encounter challenges, highlighted the following:

Managing dropout rates

- Some OLPs had enough places booked to meet their delivery target, but lower than expected attendance on the day meant there were often reduced numbers of young people attending, in practice
- Linked to the above, last-minute cancellations sometimes left limited time to recruit or onboard new groups. A number of OLPs noted that there can be a weaker commitment from attending groups when places are free or fully funded

Timings: lead in time and time of year

- Many OLPs welcomed the extended delivery window to the April bank holiday weekend but identified that more flexibility around timings would have allowed them to reach their targets at the end of the delivery window, across April. Others referenced the short lead-in time and the challenges this presents with planning.
- Linked to the above, a number of OLPs cited challenges relating to the cold or wet weather, clashes with Ramadan, and insufficient lead in time to align with specific school holidays and other events.

Logistical and practical barriers experienced by attending groups

- OLPs identified that schools were sometimes struggling to release staff to support visits. Other OLPs described that groups were not always strictly applying eligibility criteria when selecting young people for AAFH and tried to send a whole class or year group, which required further negotiation and communication before a visit could be finalised.
- OLPs also noted that attending groups were sometimes struggling with accessing affordable transport and long journey times were not always proportionate with the duration of the visit, particularly for the shorter, one-night and one-day visits.
- One response highlighted that SEND providers were hesitant to submit the necessary data to attend, as they feared individual young people would be identifiable (despite guarantees that their data is anonymised).

04. The UpShot system: What worked well and what could be improved

A key recommendation taken forward from AAFH 2024/25 was to implement a smoother data input and evaluation approach using a digital system. UK Youth invested in UpShot to meet this recommendation and, as a result, data completeness and quality improved significantly this year. Equally, OLPs were 25%pts more likely to agree/strongly agree that the evaluation and reporting requirements were clear and straightforward than in the previous year. However, for some OLPs, it was still a point of friction.

What worked well:

UpShot training sessions; real time, responsive support; the ease of registering and tracking attendees; having multiple data input options; the function of a central administrative tool; the ease of administering surveys and tracking completion rates; and overall, positive user experience.

What could be improved:

More streamlined and bespoke workflows; specific workflow issues; more refresher training throughout the delivery period; more automation of key tasks and processes; and high administrative burden.

UK Youth have worked with UpShot's product team to explore these successes and challenges at greater length and what improvements could be made to support user experience in future.

Looking ahead to the final evaluation report

While this interim report has highlighted strong levels of agreement that AAFH has supported OLP's relationships, ways of working, and overall positive experience, there are several further questions to be explored in the final report.

Building and developing relationships:

- ❓ How did these relationships develop? What factors support or hindered this process?
- ❓ What are some examples of built or developing relationships?
- ❓ What are the potential impacts of such relationships?

Building and developing new ways of working:

- ? What are the new skills that OLPs are developing? What factors support or hinder the acquisition and then implementation of these skills?
- ? What are some examples of these new skills in practice?

Overall experience:

- ? What type of OLP was more likely to have a positive experience of delivering AAFH and what are the implications for future iterations of the programme (considering geography, organisation size and contract value)?
- ? How did AAFH 2025/26 build on the previous round in 2024/25 to improve OLPs' experience? What improved and what still requires improvement?



Outcome 5: There is a better understanding of the 'hidden barriers' that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning

Evaluation question 5: What are the 'hidden barriers' that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning? Who is not engaging in AAFH and why?

Previous evaluations of AAFH have largely explored the reach and outcomes achieved by and for attending young people. This year, the evaluation included an outcome area that called attention to those who, despite targeted funding, are still facing barriers to participation in outdoor learning opportunities like AAFH. This area of the evaluation aims to understand some of the reasons behind this and generate specific recommendations for policy and practice in designing, delivering and evaluating fully inclusive and accessible short-term outdoor learning interventions like AAFH.

Method and sample

We are exploring this topic through qualitative research, inviting OLPs and group leaders to participate in this research through their endline surveys, interviews and focus groups. The evaluation team took a purposive approach to sampling OLPs' and group leaders' survey responses, focussing on responses to questions exploring the barriers facing young people, delivery team knowledge, and wider information about their organisation to ensure diverse views and perspectives were considered. The evaluation team conducted four online focus groups with 20 OLP staff and ten, online, semi-structured interviews with group leaders between 17th June and 8th July 2026.

Emerging themes from interim analysis

The below thematic areas were principally derived from OLPs and group leaders' surveys, with more comprehensive coding and analysis of the focus groups and interviews to follow in the final report in December 2026. The most frequently cited barriers to participation in AAFH were:

Cost and affordability	Transport and travel	Young people's anxieties, lack of confidence, and fear of the unknown	Peer pressure and social dynamics amongst young people	Young people having the necessary equipment: suitable clothing, footwear, a rucksack and toiletries
The AAFH eligibility criteria, particularly restrictions on age	OLPs' ability to cater for all young people with additional needs, health conditions, SEND and other, more complex accessibility needs	Parental or family concerns about how a young person would experience the outdoor learning experience	Concerns about whether suitable adjustments would be made for young people from particular cultural or religious backgrounds	Adequate staffing from attending groups, especially schools or groups with high adult to young person ratios

Looking ahead to the final evaluation report

- ? There are several research questions that we will be exploring through the analysis of interview and focus group data in the final report. These are, but not limited to, the following:
- ? What are the 'hidden' barriers that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning and how can they be overcome?
- ? What lessons and recommendations can be drawn to inform policy and practice in support of inclusive outdoor learning youth work?
- ? Do these barriers primarily sit 'within' young people, their families, or wider communities?
- ? What resources, support, or advice could be provided to better reassure OLPs, group leaders and parents around delivery and data collection?
- ? How do group leaders advocate on behalf of young people to ensure that families and communities feel that outdoor learning experiences are 'safe' and fully inclusive?
- ? To what extent do the AAFH eligibility criteria inadvertently prevent some young people from attending, if they prevented their peers from participating?
- ? How can groups working with underserved communities be better connected with OLPs?
- ? What additional work is being undertaken by OLPs and group leaders to ensure young people can attend?

Interim conclusions and implications

AAfH 2025/26 has successfully and substantially scaled delivery compared to previous years, whilst continuing to achieve demonstrable, positive outcomes for young people, group leaders and outdoor learning providers (OLPs). The previous three rounds of the programme that were delivered across 2023-2025 engaged 26,000 young people through a £3.9m investment from DCMS. AAfH 2025/26 engaged over 31,000 young people through a £4.7m investment, in a six-month timeframe. The programme continued to demonstrate strong demand for outdoor learning opportunities and effective delivery across one-day, one-night, and two-night visits, costing an average of £151 per young person participating.

Evaluation question 1: Has AAfH 2025/26 increased access for young people facing barriers to inclusive outdoor learning experiences?

AAfH has successfully expanded and sustained access to outdoor learning for under-represented groups.

- Participants include high proportions of young people from deprived areas (46%), those with SEND (44%), and those from minority ethnic backgrounds (33%), with 64% of the young people participating reporting little or no prior outdoor learning experience.
- There is evidence of differentiated engagement by provision type, with residential experiences more likely to engage older young people and those from minority backgrounds, while one-day provision reaches a higher proportion of younger cohorts and more often serves as an entry point.
- There was slightly higher representation of young people from the most deprived areas accessing two-night provision, suggesting that longer residential experiences may have been targeted to those young people who are most likely to face the greatest financial barriers to accessing outdoor learning opportunities.
- Collectively, these findings further demonstrate the programme's effectiveness in reducing access barriers and broadening participation in short-term outdoor learning experiences.

Evaluation question 2: How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support young people facing barriers to participation to improve their wellbeing and social and emotional skills?

AAfH participation is associated with positive short-term improvements in wellbeing, social and emotional skills development and other outcome areas.

- Overall wellbeing increased across all ONS-4 'personal wellbeing' measures, with around 60% of participants reporting improvements, particularly under the domains of happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of worthwhileness.
- Qualitative evidence reinforces these findings, with over 90% of young people's reflections referencing their social and emotional skills development.
- Nearly half of participants also reported increased confidence to try new challenges, suggesting that structured outdoor learning experiences support personal growth and engagement with new experiences, in line with its 'challenge by choice' ethos.
- Some young people reported no change or a negative change across wellbeing and outdoor learning specific indicators. These are likely to be linked to negative experiences on AAfH caused by home-sickness, unfamiliar environments, challenging activities and inclement weather. Some young people may have had high 'starting points' on some indicators, with limited room for growth through a short-term intervention. The timing of survey completion (e.g. the day after the visit versus a week after the visit) may also be a factor. The final report will explore these themes in more depth, through analysis of six-month follow-up survey data and qualitative insights and discussion on the limitations of the evaluation methodology.

Evaluation question 3: How do short-term outdoor learning experiences support youth practitioners to develop stronger relationships with young people, gain new skills and contribute to their professional development?

Interim evaluation findings demonstrate that AAfH strengthens youth work practice alongside delivering outcomes for young people. AAfH is contributing strongly to group leaders' development.

- 📌 Survey data shows that 96% of group leaders reported improved relationships with the young people they took on an adventure away from home, highlighting the role of shared outdoor experiences in building trust and connection.
- 📌 Over 80% reported developing new skills applicable to their professional practice that they can apply to their day-to-day and future work with young people.
- 📌 The vast majority would highly recommend AAfH to other practitioners (NPS: +94), indicating that practitioners value the programme and perceive meaningful benefits for both themselves and the young people they support.

Evaluation question 4: What is the experience of outdoor learning providers in delivering AAfH?

- 📌 OLPs report a consistently positive experience of delivering AAfH, with an 'excellent' Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +81 and high levels of agreement across key indicators relating to the 'acceptability' of the programme.
- 📌 AAfH has been particularly effective in supporting relationship-building with new youth groups (89% agree/strongly agree), helping OLPs to extend their reach to underserved communities.
- 📌 In comparison, fewer OLPs reported that AAfH was supporting their organisation to adopt new ways of working (67% agree/strongly agree), however many identified benefits related to organisational sustainability, delivery refinement, and local profile. It should be noted that OLPs are selected to deliver AAfH because they already have established and effective ways of working and are committed to delivering inclusive and accessible outdoor learning practice. 68% of the OLPs on AAfH 2025/26 had delivered AAfH before.
- 📌 Programmatic improvements such as clearer guidance to OLPs and improved data systems have enhanced OLPs' perceptions of the 'deliverability' and 'acceptability' of the programme compared to AAfH 2024/25, though some challenges remain around the programme's administrative burden and logistics.

Evaluation question 5: What are the 'hidden barriers' that prevent young people from accessing outdoor learning?

AAfH 2025/26 successfully removed the main financial barrier to young people's participation in outdoor learning experiences. However, some less-well-understood, less common or persistent and structural barriers remain.

- 📌 These include transport challenges, young people lacking appropriate equipment, and structural issues such as staff availability and eligibility criteria.
- 📌 In addition, social and psychological barriers, including anxiety, low confidence, parental concerns, and cultural factors continue to influence participation.
- 📌 Ongoing qualitative research (focus groups and interviews with OLPs and group leaders) will provide deeper insight into these barriers, helping to distinguish which can be addressed through programme design and which require broader systemic responses. These findings will be included in the final evaluation report, due to be published in December 2026.

Implications for future investment in inclusive, short-term outdoor learning experiences

The interim findings indicate a strong case for continued investment in inclusive outdoor learning as a mechanism for improving outcomes for young people facing barriers to participation. AAfH 2025/26 successfully engaged over 31,000 young people from under-served backgrounds at an average cost of approximately £151 per participant. This is consistent with previous rounds of delivery despite significant programme scale-up. The programme reached high proportions of young people from deprived communities, those with SEND, and those with limited prior experience of outdoor learning, demonstrating that targeted funding can effectively widen participation amongst groups who are often under-represented in such opportunities.

Targeted funding can widen participation

AAfH reached high proportions of young people from deprived communities, those with SEND, and those with limited prior experience of outdoor learning.

The findings also provide promising evidence that short-term outdoor learning experiences can contribute to improvements in young people's wellbeing, confidence, social and emotional skills, and willingness to engage with new challenges. At a time when concerns around young people's wellbeing and mental health remain high, these findings suggest that outdoor learning has a vital role to play within a broader portfolio of preventative and early-intervention approaches available to Government and public services.



Importantly, the programme was able to scale substantially while maintaining positive outcomes and high satisfaction amongst both practitioners and OLPs. This suggests that there is capacity within the outdoor learning sector to deliver larger-scale programmes when appropriate funding and support mechanisms are in place. The final evaluation report, including a forthcoming economic evaluation, will provide further evidence to inform policy decisions about the scale, duration, and design of future investment.

Implications for future programme design and delivery

The findings reinforce the importance of maintaining a diverse offer of outdoor learning opportunities, including one-day, one-night, and two-night experiences. The evidence suggests that different provision types engage different groups of young people, with one-day visits often acting as an accessible entry point and one- and two-night experiences providing opportunities for deeper engagement, challenge, and personal development. Maintaining multiple pathways into outdoor learning is therefore likely to remain important for maximising both reach and impact. However, one-night experiences (which were a new addition to this latest round of AAfH) saw lower than expected take-up and were less favourable amongst OLPs and youth groups. The final evaluation report will consider the value of this third offer, considering additional feedback from OLPs and youth groups.

This interim evaluation report also starts to identify the barriers that continue to affect participation, including transport costs, staffing capacity, equipment and clothing requirements, parental concerns, and anxieties amongst young people themselves. While programmes such as AAfH can help to reduce some of these barriers through targeted funding and support, further exploration is needed to understand how participation is influenced by a wider ecosystem of family, organisational, community, and structural factors. All of these factors will be explored in more depth in the final evaluation report.

Future programme design should continue to prioritise flexibility, accessibility, and support for both attending groups and families. There are also opportunities to further build on improvements made to programme administration and evaluation processes. While feedback from OLPs was overwhelmingly positive, findings suggest that further simplification of data collection processes, improvements to digital systems, and additional support around reporting requirements could enhance provider experience and reduce administrative burden.

Implications for future evaluation design and evidence building in an outdoor learning context

**6 months
of follow-up data
will explore whether
positive changes last**

**The next phase of the evaluation will
examine the durability of outcomes
beyond the immediate post-visit
period.**

The interim findings provide encouraging evidence of programme impact, but they also highlight the importance of continuing to build the evidence base around outdoor learning and young people's wellbeing. The next phase of the evaluation will focus on understanding whether the positive changes observed immediately after participation are sustained over time through analysis of six-month follow-up data. This will provide valuable evidence of the durability of outcomes and the extent to which outdoor learning contributes to wellbeing improvements beyond the short-term.

The evaluation is also generating valuable learning about the barriers that continue to prevent some young people from accessing outdoor learning opportunities. Early findings suggest that these barriers are complex and interrelated, extending beyond financial constraints alone. Deeper exploration of these themes will help to identify which barriers can be addressed through programme design and delivery and which may require broader policy or system-level responses. This learning has potential relevance beyond AAfH and will contribute to wider discussions about equity, inclusion, and access within youth work and outdoor learning.

Finally, UK Youth's collaborations with PBE (formerly Pro Bono Economics) and Liverpool John Moores University represents an important opportunity to strengthen the evidence base further. Together, the remaining analyses will provide a more robust assessment of attribution, longer-term outcomes and monetisation of wellbeing outcomes. These findings will help inform future policy decisions and contribute to a growing body of evidence on the vital role that outdoor learning can play in achieving positive outcomes for young people.

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