

Ambitious for Young People

A new era of support and opportunities

CENTRE
FOR
YOUNG
LIVES

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR YOUNG LIVES

The Centre for Young Lives, founded by former Children's Commissioner for England, Baroness Anne Longfield CBE, is a think tank and delivery unit dedicated to improving the lives of children, young people, and families in the UK. Our focus spans from cradle to career. We promote the benefits of early help and intervention to break the cycle of disadvantage and support vulnerable children, young people and their families to flourish. We address systemic issues, such as poverty, mental health, and education disparities, advocating for reform where it's needed and a new social contract to help all children and young people to succeed.

FOREWORD BY BARONESS ANNE LONGFIELD CBE, EXECUTIVE CHAIR OF THE CENTRE FOR YOUNG LIVES

There is no greater measure of a nation's health than how it treats its young people. Their hopes, wellbeing, and opportunity to fulfil their potential are determined at least in part by where they sit in our list of priorities. Yet for too long they have sat near the bottom.

Many young people have missed out on the support and help they need because systems are stretched thin and services have been stripped back. Too many vulnerable young lives have been scarred by violence, ill-health, and poor life chances.

The Government has made some welcome commitments to move young people back up the agenda, including putting children and young people at the heart of its Opportunity Mission, which aims to break the link between a child's background and their future success, as well as bringing new focus and funding through its upcoming youth strategy.

Building from this, embedding youth voices and experiences in policy must remain a priority. Young people must be meaningfully involved in the design, development and delivery of national and local plans about their lives.

Young people have told policymakers, researchers, and experts time and again that they need somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to. This is not surprising – they are the core seeds of safety, belonging, and opportunity.

Our proposals provide a simple, costed model for youth provision. We are not re-inventing the wheel, merely recognising the urgent investment that youth services need, and the extensive benefits that this will bring to children and young people's life chances.

We show that for every £1 spent on youth provision, at least £2.40 is returned: a statistic that has the potential to be transformative for our economy, our public services and, most importantly, the lives and futures of young people themselves.

This report is a reminder of the scale of the growing challenges facing young people as well as a blueprint for action. It should also serve as a source of encouragement that these problems, serious though they are, are not insurmountable. In fact, the solutions are already known.

The challenge now is for the Government, through its renewed focus on youth provision, and using the mechanisms of its Opportunity Mission, to deliver the change children and young people need. The rewards for doing so will be a generation growing up with more of the support they need, and less exposure to the harms and disadvantages that can hold back their lives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There can be no greater ambition for the country than to see our young people thrive, investing in their skills and talents and breaking down the barriers to opportunity for all. This runs through the Government's missions, to support a close-knit society where young people feel safe, with a sense of belonging and being connected to others. The challenge was made clear by the Prime Minister, on his first day in government:

"If I asked you now, whether you believe that Britain will be better for your children, I know too many of you would say: no. And so my government will fight, every day, until you believe again." [Sir Keir Starmer MP, Prime Minister, 4 July 2024]¹

When young people have a sense of belonging, communities are stronger. Yet today, young people are facing growing and increasingly complex challenges, including rising levels of school absence, suspension, and exclusions, an alarming mental health crisis, and unacceptably high numbers of young people becoming involved in serious violence. Too often, it is young people growing up poor, growing up Black, growing up in parts of the country where there are fewer resources – who are held back the most.

But these are not tricky or complex challenges – the answers lie with simple, real things. It is no secret what young people need because they frequently tell us: they just need somewhere safe to be in their community, something fun to do in their spare time, someone to talk to who gets what they're going through.

This is why the Centre for Young Lives has put forward a costed and ambitious vision for youth provision which can realise this future. With a commissioned analysis produced by Alma Economics, we show that this ambition would not only deliver benefits to young people themselves, but would reap at least £2.40 in financial, economic, and social benefits for every £1 invested.

We know what is possible if we invest in the life chances of young people, because it has been done before. Recent analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows youth centres had a significant impact on youth crime and education outcomes; evaluations of enrichment programmes, music, arts and sports activities, show that having something fun and engaging to do can boost a young person's confidence, skills, and development; in turn the transformative role of a positive adult relationship in a young person's life has been well-evidenced for many years. Those positive relationships can happen in centres or on the streets with detached youth workers, meeting young people where they are both emotionally and physically.

But this sector has been stripped away after more than a decade of austerity-related cuts to provision. Our costed youth offer, set out in detail in this report, shows how this vital provision can be restored. This includes the government's upcoming Young Futures

¹ Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. [Keir Starmer's first speech as Prime Minister: 5 July 2024](#). Accessed: 19.05.25

programme, which has the potential to be transformative for the life chances of vulnerable young people, giving them opportunities and a safe hub in every community that needs it.

Our model brings together the three separate ‘building blocks’ of youth provision: somewhere to go; something to do; and someone to talk to. These costs, over three, five, and ten years, represent the investment required to provide a universal youth offer for all young people in England.

Somewhere to go

- 1,000 new or refurbished youth centres, including 210 Young Futures Hubs over the first three years.
- These can be delivered initially by refitting and extending existing centres and facilities, making the most of what’s there in the community.

Something to do

- Year-round regular activities outside of the school day; including youth work, holiday activities and after-school clubs, sports, arts and culture.
- Young Futures Hubs and early help and prevention partnerships to connect young people to other services, support and opportunities.

Someone to talk to

- 10,000 additional trained youth practitioners, including 1,600 practitioners fast-tracked to staff Young Futures Hubs.
- Mobilisation of adult and near-to-peer volunteers, as well as paid placements for young people within employment programmes.

A critical ask of the government is for greater long term investment and stability to secure this youth provision. Our costings estimate that the government would need to invest £1.46 billion (nominal) over the next three years to deliver this ambitious but achievable model of support. Stable funding will help plan, deliver, and sustain support services, which is essential to the continuity and established relationships for young people.

The benefits are clear – analysis of this model, conducted by Alma Economics, shows that each individual building block delivers a positive return. From benefits to productivity alone, investing in youth centres would deliver £590 million per annum in 2031, rising to £2.6 billion per annum in 2035. Similarly, delivering our recommended programme of out of school activities for secondary-school aged children would return £560 million in 2026 in benefits to mental health and wellbeing, rising substantially over the first four years to over £2.4 billion in 2030. Finally, our recommended investment in youth practitioners would return £60 million from benefits to youth crime alone, rising to £250 million by 2030.

Combined, this model would return at least £2.40 in financial, economic, and social benefits for every £1 invested, demonstrating the immense value – and need for –

sustainable, open access youth services which build alongside the infrastructure of the Young Futures programme to provide support to every young person who needs it.

Alma Economics' model shows that our recommended investment would pay for itself: they estimate that it would break even after 15-20 years, with substantial social benefits on top of this financial return.

INTRODUCTION

We know all too well that the opportunities and challenges facing young people today are not shared equally. Some have the necessary assets and support to achieve and thrive, and are able to picture a positive future for themselves. Others face significant and often interconnected barriers, including poverty, adverse childhood experiences, discrimination, lack of access to support, and societal imbalances. This can unfairly hold them back, make them vulnerable, and make it hard for them to see how they can secure the future they want and deserve.

The Government has rightly committed to breaking down these barriers to opportunity, as well as addressing many of the symptoms of these inequalities which young people are forced to live with, from worsening mental health to rising levels of knife crime.

A thriving and sustainable youth sector is integral to the success of these missions.

To date, too many vulnerable young people have been allowed to fall through the gaps, betrayed by years of austerity hollowing out the networks of support which once existed to intervene before problems escalated. From education to health, services are unable to meet growing and increasingly complex levels of need among young people, while vital youth provision has at the same time been axed, with spending on the sector falling by nearly three-quarters since 2010.

“The result is a society that frequently fails to proactively prevent teenagers from becoming caught up in serious violence, exploitation, and crime, and is then left to deal with crisis.” [Commission on Young Lives]

It is this youth work – taking place in youth centres or wherever else young people are – that will form the roots of recovery. By investing in youth centres, youth workers, and positive activities for young people to do, we can ensure young people get support at the right time, before problems escalate into crisis.

How we define youth work

Youth work is inherently flexible and versatile; when effective it responds to the needs of young people and local communities. However, there is evidence of several essential components of high-quality youth work which form the basis of the definition which we will use throughout this report.

“youth clubs, positive activities and trusted adults, especially when merged effectively, can and should be at the centre of how we support young people”
[Ciaran Thapar, Youth Endowment Fund]

²We therefore define youth work as ‘positive relationships and positive activities’ in community settings with planned and intended outcomes to improve a young person’s wellbeing and agency.

This definition is underpinned by the statutory basis of youth work, which is to improve young people’s wellbeing in their educational and recreational leisure time (outside the school day).³

The three core components of youth work, identified by the Youth Endowment Fund and others, are clear within this definition:

- A safe place, or ‘somewhere to go’ in a community setting;
- Positive activities, or ‘something to do’; and
- Positive relationships, or ‘someone to talk to’.

We know that the benefits of universal, open access provision are far-reaching, for young people themselves and the wider community. The presence of youth centres has been linked to lower crime and better educational outcomes, and having access to engaging free or affordable activities is shown to improve young people’s confidence, skills, and development. While investment is required to restore this vital provision, the costs of not doing so are even greater.

This report sets out the current challenges facing young people, from an escalating mental health crisis to concerning levels of serious violence. It then explores the role of youth services – and the evidence to support this – in overcoming these challenges.

While there is a strong and growing body of evidence to show the importance of youth services, we then set out how the sector is being held back by a patchwork of limited funding streams on a local and national level.

The report then sets out our model of youth provision; how we can ensure all young people have the support they need, through sufficient places to go, things to do, and trusted adults to support them – the ‘building blocks’ of youth provision. We are grateful to Alma Economics, who we commissioned to produce an independent costing of this model, demonstrating where new investment is required and where it can draw on existing funds.

Finally, we set out the return on this investment. Drawing on existing studies and research, Alma Economics also developed a Cost-Benefit Analysis model, to show the benefits of these building blocks. This analysis focused on different, specific outcomes for each of the three components where the evidence base is particularly strong. This is

² Ciaran Thapar, Youth Endowment Fund. [Blog: Youth Clubs as Lifelines for Vulnerable Young People](#). Accessed: 16.04.25

³ Department for Culture, Media & Sport. [Statutory guidance for local authorities on services to improve young people’s well-being](#). Accessed: 25.03.25

therefore likely to be a conservative estimate of the benefits of our model, given there is evidence of a number of benefits which were not included in the model.

THE CHALLENGE

The scale of the challenge was set out by the Prime Minister on his first day in office on the 5th July 2024, to make Britain a better place for our children, putting them at the heart of a mission-led government:

“If I asked you now, whether you believe that Britain will be better for your children, I know too many of you would say: no. And so my government will fight, every day, until you believe again.” [Sir Keir Starmer MP, Prime Minister, 4 July 2024]⁴

This followed more than a decade of cuts and under-investment that has left public services and community organisations ill-equipped to deal with growing levels of need among young people, which include record levels of poor mental health, a crisis in school attendance, rising rates of knife crime and anti-social behaviour, growing feelings of loneliness, and increasing levels of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

While the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated many of these trends, the seeds of these explosions in need were sown over the last 15 years of cuts, hollowing out essential services in communities and withdrawing vital support for children and young people. This has created barriers to opportunity across the country, where young people are disconnected and disengaged from services. All too often this opportunity is determined by a person’s socio-economic background – their household’s income or their parents’ education – but sometimes it is a matter of geography: life chances, communities, and the economy are all being held back in a postcode lottery of opportunity. The Sutton Trust’s Opportunity Index finds that a young person’s postcode has an equal impact on their life chances as their socio-economic background.⁵

Young people are missing precious education

School absence has sky-rocketed since the pandemic and is yet to recover. One-in-five pupils are now persistently absent, missing 10% or more of school. This figure rises to over a third (34.8%) for pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM),⁶ which is often used as a proxy measure for child poverty.⁷ Research published by the Centre for Young Lives in 2024 found that children living in poverty have been particularly adversely affected by the rise in absence since the Covid-19 pandemic, with rates of persistent absence for FSM-eligible pupils since the pandemic having risen by more than double the percentage points compared to the rise among those not eligible for FSM at

⁴ Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street. [Keir Starmer’s first speech as Prime Minister: 5 July 2024](#). Accessed: 19.05.25

⁵ The Sutton Trust (2025) [The Opportunity Index: The geography of opportunity and social mobility in England](#)

⁶ Department for Education. [Pupil absence in schools in England](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

⁷ It should be noted that there are some 900,000 children living in poverty who are not eligible for FSM. CPAG (2024), [The number of children in poverty not eligible for free school meals, by nation and region](#).

the time of the report's publication.⁸ The report also found that families often cited material deprivation and uniform costs as some of the reasons why poverty is a barrier to school attendance.⁹

School suspensions and exclusions follow an equally concerning trend. The rate of suspensions per 100 pupils was 2.17 before the pandemic. It is now 4.13. Children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be missing school; the suspension rate among FSM-eligible pupils is 9.98, more than four times the rate of those not eligible.¹⁰

The gap among pupils being permanently excluded from school is even starker. Pupils eligible for FSM are permanently excluded at a rate of 0.13 per 100, more than six times the rate of non-eligible pupils which stands at 0.02.¹¹

School absence has significant repercussions for children's attainment and future life chances, and is a key and growing driver of the disadvantage gap. Disadvantaged pupils are now 18.6 months behind their peers on average by age 16, a figure which would be over 4 months less if levels of absence were equal across the board.¹²

Suspension and exclusions are also closely linked to children's likelihood of becoming involved in serious violence and the criminal justice system: 71% of all children who had been cautioned or sentenced for an offence had ever received a suspension.¹³ Research carried out by the Department for Education and Ministry of Justice in 2022 found that 88% of children cautioned or sentenced for a serious violence offence who have received a suspension received their first suspension before the offence, and 64% of those who received a permanent exclusion received their first before their offence.¹⁴

The Commission on Young Lives – the precursor to the Centre for Young Lives – highlighted the heightened risk of children out of school 'falling through the gaps' and becoming disengaged from support systems.¹⁵

"there is no doubt that those in the criminal justice system are more likely than not to have been excluded from school at some point" [Commission on Young Lives, 2022]¹⁶

Violence and crime blights too many young lives

Crime – and all too real fears of being victims of crime – is holding back the life chances of too many young people. So many systems and services with a role in preventing

⁸ Centre for Young Lives (2024) [Too Skint for School: Breaking the link between poverty and attendance](#)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Department for Education. [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England: Autumn term 2023/24](#). Accessed: 02.04.25

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Education Policy Institute (2025) [Breaking down the gap: The role of school absence and pupil characteristics](#)

¹³ Department for Education & Ministry of Justice (2022) [Education, children's social care and offending](#)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Commission on Young Lives (2022) [Hidden in Plain Sight](#)

¹⁶ Ibid.

young people reaching the criminal justice system aren't trusted by young people, are overstretched, or are simply unable to meet the needs of a generation facing unprecedented challenges.

High-quality youth work and the trusted relationships it is built upon are vital in preventing young people from falling through these widening gaps. Without it, more young people are being drawn into anti-social behaviour and, tragically, serious violence. This does not just touch the lives of the perpetrators or victims but a majority of young people who are now growing up in a climate of fear.

Sixteen percent of 13 to 17-year-olds report perpetrating violence, a figure which doubles for young people with any form of special educational needs (31%) or who have been persistently absent from school (32%).¹⁷ A shocking 74% of children who have been excluded from school have been a perpetrator of violence.¹⁸ When these young people do commit acts of violence, very rarely do they receive support afterwards to support them to change their behaviour.¹⁹

Young people are gripped in a growing climate of fear. Shockingly, more than two-thirds of young people fear becoming a victim of violence from their peers. This figure (67%) is even higher for Black young people (74%). These young people's lives are being damaged even by the fear of violence; they are experiencing poorer mental health, disrupted sleep, reduced appetites, and difficulties concentrating in school.²⁰

As many as 5% of young people now carry a weapon, with almost half saying they do so for self-protection. These weapons include screwdrivers, clubs, knives, and machetes.²¹

Tragically, this level of violence and weapon-carrying has led to far too many young lives being lost. 53 young people aged 13 to 19 were killed by a knife or sharp object in the year ending March 2024. That is a 240% increase from ten years earlier, when 22 teenagers were killed.

Britain is the European leader for youth unhappiness

Children and young people's mental health is in crisis. One in five children aged between eight and 25 have a probable mental health condition, rising to nearly one-in-four (23.3%) of those aged 17-19.²² This alarming trend is not unique to the UK, but it is an outlier in the scale of the challenge it faces; the Children's Society found that, in 2022, the UK had the lowest overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds out of 27 European countries.²³ What's more, teenagers from low-income backgrounds are

¹⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2024) [Children, violence and vulnerability 2024: Report 1, Who is affected by violence?](#)

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² NHS England. [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 – wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

²³ The Children's Society (2024) [The Good Childhood Report 2024](#)

disproportionately likely to be suffering: the UK had the largest gap in overall life satisfaction between the most and least disadvantaged 15-year-olds out of 27 European countries.²⁴

There is a well-evidenced link between poverty and poor mental health; children growing up in the 20% of households with the lowest income are four times more likely to experience mental health problems than their peers in the wealthiest 20% of households.²⁵ The Children's Society also found that 16% of children in households under financial strain report low wellbeing, compared to 8% of those in households without such pressures.²⁶

The scale of the crisis has overwhelmed mental health services, leaving many young people without help and with their problems growing more severe. At the end of March 2024, over 958,200 children in England had an active referral to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS), with 320,000 of these still waiting for treatment at this time.²⁷ Of those who did receive two direct contacts, they waited a median average of 45 days.²⁸

At the point of crisis, a third of young people do not know who to even contact and, when they do, more than a third believe this crisis care does not provide the necessary support.²⁹

The impacts of poor mental health during childhood and adolescence are far-reaching, affecting relationships, education, and employment, as well as mental health during adulthood. This is compounded when, as is too often the case, mental health needs go unmet and are allowed to escalate by insufficient support.

Adults who suffered with poor mental health during their childhood are more likely to work fewer hours and earn less money, losing out on more than £300,000 on average during their life. This costs the UK £550 billion in lost earnings.³⁰ Across a generation, the impact of mental health problems during childhood leads to £1 trillion in lost earnings.³¹

A NEET generation

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Centre for Mental Health (2015) [Children of the new century: Mental health findings from the Millenium Cohort Study](#)

²⁶ The Children's Society (2023) [Feeling the Strain](#)

²⁷ Children's Commissioner (2025) [Children's mental health services 2023-24](#)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Care Quality Commission. [High demand, long waits, and insufficient support, mean people with mental health issues still not getting the support they need.](#) Accessed: 04.04.24

³⁰ UCL Institute of Education, Institute for Fiscal Studies & Rand Corporation. [Counting the true cost of childhood psychological problems in adult life.](#) Accessed: 01.04.25

³¹ Future Minds (2025) [Why investing in children's mental health will unlock economic growth](#)

The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) remains stubbornly high at nearly 1 million - that's one in eight young people.³² To achieve the lowest rate of NEETs for an OECD country, that number needs to be halved. The government's Youth Guarantee for 18–21-year-olds will play its part, but more needs to be done and at an earlier age to give young people the resources they need to engage in employment.

Recent research from Impetus found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to be NEET than their peers from higher-income backgrounds.³³

The most common reason given for being NEET is long-term or temporary sickness, with one in six young people who are NEET specifically citing mental health problems.³⁴

Many young people risk being trapped in a downward spiral: spending time NEET has been shown to have a detrimental impact on physical and mental health in the future, with more significant impacts when someone is NEET for longer or when they are younger.³⁵

Beyond mental health, a complex web of factors is contributing to the current level of young people who are NEET, including low levels of school attendance and a disrupted education, care-experience, SEND, low-income, and belonging to some ethnic minority groups.³⁶

The latest NEET statistics also reveal a gender divide: the percentage of young men NEET increased by 2.2 percentage points to 14.5%, while for young women it increased by 0.7 percentage points to 12.6%.³⁷

Nowhere to go, nothing to do

Across the year, young people spend 85% of their waking hours outside of the school day, presenting a major opportunity to provide support and interventions to vulnerable young people. It is also a significant amount of time during which children could socialise and develop skills and interests while being safe and active. Instead, they are too often deprived of anywhere to go and anything to do during this time.

Local authority expenditure on youth services in England totalled £446.5m in 2023/24, which amounts to a 73% decline since 2010/11. In real terms, this is the equivalent to a

³² Office for National Statistics. [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK: February 2025](#). Accessed: 20.05.25

³³ Impetus (2025) [Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring compound disadvantage](#)

³⁴ Department for Education. [NEET age 16 to 24](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

³⁵ Public Health England (2014) [Local action on health inequalities: Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training \(NEET\)](#)

³⁶ Department for Education (2025) [Identify and support young people at risk of being NEET](#)

³⁷ Department for Education. [NEET age 16 to 24](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

£1.2bn cut in funding over this period.³⁸ Increasingly services have been forced to shift from offering universal support to a narrower offer of targeted provision.³⁹

Between 2010 and 2023, 1,243 council-run youth centres closed, leaving just 581 in operation in March 2023.⁴⁰ While local authorities have been left with little choice but to cut provision, these closures make little financial sense in the long-run: half of any initial savings from cuts to youth clubs will be offset by lower tax revenues – a consequence of reduced educational attainment – and higher spending on criminal justice.⁴¹ The closure of youth clubs, coupled with the broader privatisation of public space, has left too many young people with nowhere to go.

Youth centres are not only safe spaces in communities for young people to go, they are a vital source of enrichment in their lives, providing opportunities for them to be creative, learn new skills, and socialise. Inevitably, such widespread closure of youth clubs has reduced engagement in these types of positive activities, with young people 44% less likely to engage in organised after-school activities as a result.⁴² Youth clubs are unique in their provision and for many these opportunities cannot be found elsewhere: survey data shows that the time young people would previously have spent at a youth club is now spent on “cheap leisure, such as videogames, TV and social media”.⁴³

Universal, open access activities are vital if all young people are to be able to enjoy experiences which would otherwise be the preserve of those from privileged backgrounds. Just 11% of the lowest income-households participate in musical activities, compared to 32% of the highest-income households, and this gap extends to other activities such as sport, for which the proportion of young people participating from low-income households is 46%, while 64% from high-income households take part in sport.⁴⁴ More than half of parents (57%) cite the cost of enrichment activities as the main barrier to their child doing more, highlighting the need for more affordable or free provision.⁴⁵

Nobody to talk to

While trusted adults can be teachers, relatives, or others, youth workers are a vital source of trusting relationships for many young people. A recent study estimated that

³⁸ YMCA (2025) [Beyond the Brink? The state of funding for youth services](#)

³⁹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2024) [Youth provision and life outcomes](#)

⁴⁰ UNISON. [Closure of more than a thousand youth centres could have lasting impact on society.](#)

Accessed: 01.04.25

⁴¹ Institute for Fiscal Studies. [How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education.](#) Accessed: 31.03.25

⁴² Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility](#)

⁴⁵ National Centre for Family Learning. [Almost half of children missing out on trips and outings outside of school due to cost of living pressures.](#) Accessed: 07.04.25

more than 800,000 secondary school aged children in the United Kingdom are without a trusted adult, which means one in five are missing those vital relationships which will help them to navigate adversity.⁴⁶

Yet the availability of qualified youth workers has diminished. The National Youth Agency's (NYA) 2025 *Workforce Survey Report* highlights a "critical shortage" of trained workers, leading to failures to intervene early in young people's lives at the expense of costlier interventions further down the line.⁴⁷ 4,500 practitioners have left the youth sector since 2021, and the scale of unfilled vacancies has led many employers to recruit without requiring a formal qualification.⁴⁸

Despite the impact of this important work, youth work is increasingly low-paid and insecure: a quarter of youth work jobs pay below the national living wage, with the average salary amounting to a little over £21,000, far below the national average. 29% of jobs also only offer temporary or zero-hour contracts.⁴⁹

In turn, this also presents a barrier to volunteers entering the sector, as qualified or trained youth workers aren't available to provide as much support. This is a particular concern given heightened concerns for safeguarding.

It is of little surprise then that the sector is reliant upon youth workers who are motivated by their personal enjoyment of the work and desire to work with young people.⁵⁰ While a dedicated workforce committed to giving back to their community – over half of respondents to the NYA survey had been youth workers for ten years or more⁵¹ – is undoubtedly beneficial to those they do support, this is not a sustainable model and far too many needs are going unmet as a result.

The insecurity of employment within the sector, coupled with the falling demand for formal qualifications, has seen undergraduate courses in England all but disappear, falling to just 16 courses and 55 new undergraduate students in 2023/24.⁵²

This is the cost of the £1.2bn cut to the sector's funding. Young people are being left with nowhere to go, nothing to do, and nobody to talk to. Opportunities to intervene in young people's lives are being missed, with costs attached to worse outcomes and later interventions likely to far exceed £1.2bn.

⁴⁶ Pro Bono Economics (2024) [Investing in trusted relationships: The economic value of Football Beyond Borders' impact on children's wellbeing](#)

⁴⁷ National Youth Agency. [Youth Work Workforce Crisis: Urgent Action Needed](#). Accessed: 02.04.25

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ National Youth Agency (2025) [Youth Sector Workforce Survey Report 2025](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² National Youth Agency (n.d) [Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24](#)

THE OPPORTUNITY

Despite the £1.2bn cuts to funding for youth services, over a third of young people aged 11 to 19 still engage with a youth work organisation at least once a week.⁵³ Expanding access to youth provision to every community would bring substantial benefits to young people themselves, their communities, and the economy. When youth work is broken down into its three core components – somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to – a wealth of evidence already exists to show what the impact can be on young people's lives.

Youth provision is not the only solution to the challenges set out above. Young people's life chances will not be improved while so many continue to grow up in poverty, in unsuitable and sometimes dangerous housing, or experiencing adverse childhood experiences without the appropriate support. However, high-quality, open access youth provision is central to ensuring young people have the safe places, positive activities, and positive relationships which we know are key to improving outcomes across health, education, and crime.

Somewhere to go

The importance of safe, open access spaces for young people to go cannot be understated. This does not just include youth centres, but also parks, leisure centres, and community facilities – anywhere where young people go and feel comfortable.

BBC Children in Need and McDonalds

In 2021, BBC Children in Need and McDonald's UK launched a transformative five-year partnership aimed at raising £10 million to support youth work across the UK. This collaboration - the "Makin' It" initiative - seeks to address the growing challenges faced by young people by funding youth projects and creating safe spaces for engagement and development.

In Brixton, the programme has been brought to life through a partnership with Spiral Skills, a local youth organisation, which has transformed McDonald's Brixton restaurant into a hub for youth engagement every Monday afternoon. The initiative has not only provided a safe space for young people but has also fostered community connections by collaborating with local organisations such as The Women and Girls Network, Esports Youth Club, and The Baytree Centre. These partnerships have expanded the range of services and opportunities available to participants, including workshops, mental health resources, and career development support. As well as becoming a more positive and welcoming space for young people to meet, security incidents in the restaurant have also reduced by around 50%.⁵⁴

⁵³ National Youth Agency (2023) [Better together: Youth work with schools](#)

⁵⁴ Spiral Skills. [Makin' It - Supporting Young People, Creating Safer Spaces](#). Accessed: 19.05.25

Youth clubs provide a safe space in communities, hosting positive activities and providing a space where trusting relationships with peers and adults can blossom. As a result, outcomes for young people in education, health, and the criminal justice system all improve.

Health Spot: Tower Hamlets

Health Spot is an integrated service designed specifically for young people, operating out of the Spotlight Youth Centre in Tower Hamlets, London. At its core is a GP clinic embedded within a youth-friendly environment, offering health care in a space young people already know and trust. The initiative, now being replicated across other boroughs in North East London, ensures that health services are easy to access and shaped around young people's rights and needs. Spotlight and its team of youth workers provide a safe, supportive setting for 11–19-year-olds, as well as young adults up to 25 with special educational needs or care experience.

The on-site GP clinic functions as a fully equipped surgery, where young people receive holistic health support in collaboration with youth workers. Services include regular health appointments, mental health and emotional wellbeing support, sexual health and substance misuse services, speech and language therapy, social prescribing, and health education workshops. GPs also signpost young people to a range of youth centre activities—such as boxing, music, mentoring, and employability programmes—creating a seamless connection between health and youth development.

Feedback from young people has been overwhelmingly positive, with all users saying they would recommend Health Spot to a friend. A review of 800 consultations shows the service is effectively reaching a demographically representative group in the borough. Over two-thirds of young people presented with mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges, more than half of whom were not receiving any other support. Notably, 65% had involvement with children's social care, and 19% were not in education, employment or training (NEET), highlighting the service's success in reaching some of the most vulnerable young people in the community.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies' (IFS) analysis of the effects of youth clubs on education and crime outcomes found that closures of centres worsened educational attainment and increased youth offending. Crucially, in the few places where youth clubs have opened the effects were found to be reversed, strengthening confidence in the conclusions.⁵⁵

Youth club closures were found to result in “large decreases in performance” at GCSE level among young people living nearby to a closed youth centre.^{56,57} This amounted to a

⁵⁵ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ In the IFS study, nearby is taken to mean within a 40-minute walk

3.5% fall in performance on average, with the impact negatively affecting young people up to six years after the closure. These negative effects were even greater for young people from low-income backgrounds; exam results were 11.5% lower for pupils eligible for FSM, compared to 2.4% among those not eligible. This is likely to be a result of young people from low-income backgrounds having fewer alternative spaces which offer a safe study environment and learning support.⁵⁸

The impact on youth crime has been equally significant: young people aged 10 to 17 became 14% more likely to commit crime and, as was also the case with the educational outcomes, the impact could still be felt up to six years after the closure.⁵⁹ SQW's report for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport reached similar conclusions: it estimates that for every 1% fall in expenditure on youth provision, the number of children cautioned or sentenced increases in the local authority by 1.03.⁶⁰

"The number of crimes committed by youths increased by about 3 crimes per 1,000 young population [after a youth club closure] ... These are very large increases in offending rates" [IFS]

Offending increases were found across all the main types of crime, including relating to drugs and violence. Research published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime and Violence Reduction in 2020, based on Freedom of Information requests submitted to local authorities, found a strong link between cuts to youth services and rises in knife crime.⁶¹

Taken together, the societal benefits of youth clubs arising from increased educational attainment and reduced crime alone amount to nearly £3 for every £1 spent on youth clubs.⁶² Of course, the benefits extend beyond education and crime, with positive impacts also evidenced on young people's health and development.

Regular attendees to youth clubs have been found to score higher across five indicators of prosocial behaviour, as well as score lower on a measure of symptoms of mental challenges - this means they are "less likely to feel unhappy or miserable".⁶³ Attendees are also more likely to be in good physical health. There is strong evidence that outcomes relating to health, pro-social behaviours, and education are all sustained in the long-term.⁶⁴

Sure Start

Sure Start was a pioneering programme of the previous Labour Government which provided holistic support to families with children under the age of five. Initially, the

⁵⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2024) [Youth provision and life outcomes](#)

⁶¹ APPG on knife Crime & Violence Reduction (2020) [Securing a Brighter Future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime](#)

⁶² Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁶³ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2024) [Youth provision and life outcomes](#)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

programme set out to deliver 250 Sure Start Local Programmes in the 20% most deprived wards in England, targeting the cycle of intergenerational poverty and social exclusion. By 2009, children's centres had been placed on a statutory footing and, by 2010, there were 3,632 in total – reaching every community.⁶⁵

While the scheme was designed to provide support in the early years, many of the benefits Sure Start centres brought to children and young people's lives have been observable in the long term. The IFS has demonstrated the short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start centres, with benefits for children's health, education, and likelihood to be pulled into the criminal justice system.

Regarding school attainment, children who lived within a short distance of a centre during the first five years of their life performed 0.8 grades better in their GCSEs, which is comparable to the impact of youth clubs.^{66,67} The impact on those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds was even greater: the impact was six times greater for those eligible for free school meals, often used as a proxy for child poverty.⁶⁸

During infancy, access to an extra centre actually increased the probability of hospitalisation, however, by age five, this increase is vastly outnumbered by the number of hospitalisations prevented by access to a centre. For those aged 11 to 15, 13,150 hospitalisations were prevented each year.⁶⁹ The financial benefits arising from improved health outcomes alone offset almost a third of the cost of Sure Start provision, and the actual figure is likely to be even higher due to the calculations not capturing all the outcomes of the provision.⁷⁰

The Commission on Young Lives advocated for a Sure Start style approach for teenagers in its final report in 2022, recognising the importance of open-access support for older children.⁷¹

Something to do

While the impact of youth clubs is most easily measured in relation to the presence - or absence - of a physical place, it is what happens in that space that improves outcomes for young people: whether it's through the activities they do or the relationships they build, young people are supported to make positive choices and lead happier, healthier

⁶⁵ Department for Education (2010) [Statistical Release: Numbers of Sure Start Children's Centres as at 30 April 2010](#)

⁶⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes](#)

⁶⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁶⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes](#)

⁶⁹ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021) [The health impacts of Sure Start](#)

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Commission on Young Lives (2022) Hidden in Plain Sight

lives. Positive activities, such as volunteering, community-based projects, sports, and arts and cultural experiences, bring a wealth of demonstrable benefits.

Having something positive to do not only keeps young people occupied but helps them to build resilience and positive behaviours that last outside of the activities: the IFS, for example, found that young people were not only more likely to be involved in crime after a youth club shut down, but that offences increased both at times when youth clubs wouldn't typically be open as well as then they would be.⁷²

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) exists to equip young people with skills which they can't find in the classroom. Through encouraging participants to volunteer, develop new skills, and participate in outdoor expeditions, young people aged 14-24 are supported to be active and build ties to their community. This has been shown to bring improvements to life satisfaction, confidence, resilience, and problem solving.⁷³

The Roundhouse

The Roundhouse is one of the most iconic performance venues in the country – and the largest provider of non-formal creative opportunities for young people in the UK. It is a working commercial venue that runs over 200 live gigs and events each year whereby every ticket bought for a gig helps fund its creative youth programmes. On a par with sports, engaging young people in arts and creative activities can transform lives – from building skills, finding routes into employment and improving health and wellbeing.

Year-round access to Creative Studios and positive activities provides a truly safe space for young people to come together, share their work and build connections. Roundhouse works directly with 10,000+ young people every year (11-25s). Projects are low-cost and affordable, as little as £2. Financial support is available to remove other obstacles such as travel and childcare.

The Roundhouse's work is underpinned by the principles and practice of youth work to ensure that young people feel seen, understood, and safe. A dedicated, onsite, trusted youth work team – supporting individual needs of young people and connecting them to services in their local area.

In a survey of the programme's⁷⁴ alumni, 85% credited Roundhouse with improving their confidence, while 70% said it improved their transferable skills.

⁷² Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#)

⁷³ The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (n.d) [Impact Report 2024](#)

⁷⁴ Roundhouse (n.d) [Roundhouse Creating Futures: Helping a generation re-build their future](#)

Activities also support mental and physical health, boost social and emotional development, and provide an opportunity to develop new skills and interests.

“Extra-curricular activities boost young people’s confidence to interact socially with others; extend their social networks; and provide them with new skills and abilities” [Social Mobility Commission]

Positive activities outside of school are widely accepted as playing a key role in a child’s development and laying the foundations for their future life prospects. These positive activities – as well as attending open access youth clubs – fall under the umbrella term ‘enrichment’, which has been shown to support mental health outcomes and promote “a general sense of belonging”.⁷⁵

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme⁷⁶

The DfE’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme was launched in 2018, allocating £2m to support new and existing holiday club providers. The aim of the programme is to support disadvantaged families by providing healthy meals and positive activities to children during the summer holidays. The programme is delivered through local authorities, with a ring-fenced grant provided based on their proportion of children eligible for FSM.

A review of the 2021 HAF programme found that the majority (77%) of participants reported greater confidence, while 71% reported learning something new.

The programme also had benefits for physical health; participants were 10 percentage points more likely to undertake 60+ minutes of exercise than their peers, and significantly more likely to feel that they ate healthily over summer.

Positive activities not only provide an opportunity to develop a new interest or learn a new technical skill but they also develop participants’ ‘soft skills’. These include communication, teamwork, and negotiation. Higher levels of soft skills have been linked with ‘upward mobility’, in this case defined as someone attaining higher educational achievement than their parents.⁷⁷

While the benefits of positive activities are hugely diverse, from improved employability skills to better physical health, perhaps the greatest benefit for young people is often overlooked: they provide an opportunity for young people to enjoy themselves.

“Above all, they offer an important space to have fun and relax away from the pressures of school work. These more qualitative benefits must not be

⁷⁵ Centre for Young Lives, Leeds Beckett University & YMCA George Williams College (2025) [Beyond the Classroom: The role of enrichment in tackling the school absence crisis](#)

⁷⁶ Department for Education (2022) [Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme](#)

⁷⁷ Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility](#)

discounted, especially in the context of contemporary challenges around young people's mental health and wellbeing" [Social Mobility Commission]⁷⁸

Premier League Kicks

Premier League Kicks is free, open-access football provision funded by the Premier League Charitable Fund and delivered by 93 different professional football club charities across England and Wales.

With a focus on areas of high need, as well as engaging girls and young people with disabilities, Premier League Kicks uses the appeal of football and professional clubs to reach young people and provide an opportunity to be physically active and engage in educational workshops.

These activities are transformational for their participants; 85% say their mental wellbeing improves as a result, while 86% say it benefits their physical wellbeing. 85% also say they feel inspired by the programme, with almost three-quarters (73%) saying it has supported them to progress in or into education, employment, and training.⁷⁹

Someone to talk to

What often makes these activities so effective is the skilled and relatable staff who deliver them. Youth workers offer an alternative to typical 'authority figures' who young people can struggle to trust or engage with. They are able to form strong, positive bonds with young people, which helps to build a shared sense of community and responsibility.⁸⁰

"A trusting relationship is key to impact with young people at risk." [Hoggarth, L. & Smith, D.]⁸¹

Learning from Connexions⁸²

The Connexions Service, launched in April 2001, aimed to support young people to make informed choices and thereby ensure a successful transition to adulthood. It did this through providing a network of Personal Advisers (PAs).

An impact assessment of the programme reveals several key learnings, both about the value of trusted adult relationships but also the importance of youth provision which is universal and open access rather than targeted.

Regarding the former, the service produced a range of positive outcomes based on the success of PAs, which were the central mechanism of the programme which led to changes in reasoning, resources, and behaviour.

⁷⁸ Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility](#)

⁷⁹ Premier League Charitable Fund (n.d) [Impact Report Season 2021/22](#)

⁸⁰ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2024) [Youth provision and life outcomes](#)

⁸¹ Hoggarth, L. & Smith, D. (2004) [Understanding the Impact of Connexions on Young People at Risk](#)

⁸² Ibid.

The assessment highlights the importance of *trusted* adults, with young people's likelihood of disclosing their issues contingent on them having a strong relationship with their PA.

For many young people, it is likely that they have multiple or inter-related risk factors which a holistic approach, when done effectively, is better suited to address and has evident positive impact.

"A holistic and non-stigmatising approach to these problems was most effective and single-stranded interventions had less impact." [Hoggarth, L. & Smith, D.]

Youth mentoring consists of "a trusting, purposeful and ongoing relationship between a younger person or people, and an older, unrelated person, which involves the exchange of support, advice, encouragement, and skills development".⁸³

Across academic, behavioural, emotional, and social outcomes, mentoring programmes have been shown to have a positive impact, with longer relationships linked to better outcomes.⁸⁴ The impact of mentoring is also enhanced when mentors and mentees have shared interests and values,⁸⁵ which was also a finding of the assessment of the Connexions Service. Positive outcomes were more likely when the PA has a strong understanding of the young person's background.⁸⁶ Regarding violence in particular, mentoring programmes have been shown to be effective in reducing violence, offending, and externalising behaviour.⁸⁷

Football Beyond Borders

Football Beyond Borders supports vulnerable young people who are disengaged at school through building long-term trusting relationships through the power of football.

The programme offers weekly sessions to secondary school aged children, with time spent in the classroom and on the football pitch. These sessions are the foundations for young people to build trusting relationships with skilled practitioners who share many of the same experiences as the young people.⁸⁸

The programme's latest impact report reveals the transformational change that having a trusted adult can bring; young people on the programme are up to ten times more

⁸³ Nesta & Manchester Metropolitan University (2020) [What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary](#)

⁸⁴ Nesta & Manchester Metropolitan University (2020) [What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary](#)

⁸⁵ Nesta & Manchester Metropolitan University (2020) [What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary](#)

⁸⁶ Hoggarth, L. & Smith, D. (2004) [Understanding the Impact of Connexions on Young People at Risk](#)

⁸⁷ Youth Endowment Fund (2022) [Mentoring: Toolkit technical report](#)

⁸⁸ Football Beyond Borders. [Our Mission](#). Accessed: 16.05.25

likely to pass their English and maths GCSEs than their peers, while of those on the programme finished the year in school.⁸⁹

Students on the programme also report greater confidence and an improved ability to manage their emotions. These wellbeing improvements have a social benefit too, amounting to £2,300 per student on average.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Football Beyond Borders (n.d) [Impact Report 2023/24](#)

⁹⁰ Pro Bono Economics. [Investing in trusted relationships: The economic value of Football Beyond Borders' impact on children's wellbeing](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

THE LANDSCAPE OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is developing the government's ten-year youth strategy which will set the direction for government policy and vision for young people. To deliver meaningful change for young people, the strategy needs to address not only chronic underfunding but a lack of consistency in funding for youth work and related services across central government departments and local government.

After the 2021 Spending Review, the National Audit Office calculated that the government was spending £2 billion on programmes across seven departments which supported families, vulnerable adolescents and children. However, it also found that there was a lack of strategic intent or outcomes in the investment, with little understanding of how many vulnerable young people benefited from funding.

There is a statutory duty on upper tier local authorities to secure access to youth activities and services in their local area, defined as educational and recreational leisure time, outside of the school day to improve young people's wellbeing. Strengthened statutory guidance and peer reviews by local authorities, in 2024, look to promote good practice that supports a local youth offer.

However, there is often no obligation to fund these services so local authorities can determine their own allocation of funding.⁹¹ As a result, the majority of English local authority funding for youth provision (59%) is spent on targeted youth services, which is equivalent to £207 million.⁹²

Local authorities are required to plan and secure sufficient school places in their local area, each then funded through central government allocations. Yet, there is no central, national budget for youth services and instead a myriad of providers are commissioned predominantly from voluntary and community organisations. This leaves youth services and the delivery of positive activities reliant on multiple funding streams across government departments, agencies, and funders for often programme-led or short term projects.

As a result, much of the local infrastructure and capacity of many local authorities to deliver and support youth work has fallen away. Without stable, long-term funding the opportunities for jobs and careers in youth work and the necessary support of volunteers is diminished greatly.

The government's commitment to restore open-access universal youth services, Young Futures and early help through prevention partnerships, has the potential to be a catalyst for systems-change to meet local needs.

⁹¹ House of Commons Library (2025) [Youth Services in the UK](#)

⁹² Department for Education. '[LA expenditure on children's services – unrounded data](#)' from '[LA and school expenditure](#)'. Accessed: 16.05.25

Young Futures

The Government has committed to rolling out the Young Futures programme, which builds on the central recommendation of Baroness Anne Longfield's Commission on Young Lives – the precursor to the Centre for Young Lives – for a “Sure Start for Teenagers” model of early intervention and support.⁹³

The programme will deliver open access youth provision in Young Futures Hubs with targeted support, working with young people ‘at risk’ to provide early help and prevention, as well as supporting families. Designed to reach young people at risk and who experience problems such as drug abuse, youth crime, school failure, and mental health problems, Young Futures is a central part of the Government's strategy to reduce knife crime and increase opportunities.

Young Futures Hubs will also make-up the initial infrastructure for the Government's pledge to deliver open access mental health hubs in local communities, with growing evidence that this model increases access to support for young people who are under-represented in other services, provides holistic support, and improves mental health outcomes.⁹⁴

Young Futures will be formed of two parts:

- **Young Futures Hubs**, led by the Department for Education. The government intends for the first early adopters to open during the financial year 2025-26. These will inform the longer-term development of the programme.
- **Young Futures Prevention Partnerships**, led by the Home Office. Partnerships will map existing youth services and identify at-risk young people.

National Youth Strategy

A new national youth strategy will be published by the Government in Summer 2025. The strategy will set a clear direction for government over 10 years, for 10-21 year-olds, connecting services and equitable access to positive activities with young people across communities. It will “prioritise delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level”, with a recognition that youth services have a key role in delivering the Government's missions to break down barriers to opportunity, create safer streets, and reduce pressure on the NHS.⁹⁵

Drawing on existing commitments for youth work, there is £85 million from the government and £100 million from the Dormant Assets Scheme has been committed to deliver better coordinated youth services, with young people at the heart of their design

⁹³ Commission on Young Lives (2022) [Hidden in Plain Sight: A national plan of action to support vulnerable teenagers to succeed and to protect them from adversity, exploitation, and harm](#)

⁹⁴ Future Minds (2025) [Why investing in children's mental health will unlock economic growth](#)

⁹⁵ Department for Culture, Media & Sport. [New National Youth Strategy to break down barriers to opportunity for young people](#). Accessed: 16.05.25

and delivery.⁹⁶ A further £26 million has also been pledged through the Better Youth Spaces programme to support renovations of youth clubs.⁹⁷ This can be seen as a building block for long term change and the early promise of a generational shift in how young people are involved in the design of services and involvement in their communities. DCMS's Local Youth Transformation Pilot aims to support up to 12 local authorities in assessing their current levels of youth provision and develop a tailored action plan to restore high-quality youth services.⁹⁸

Led by young people in consultation and its design, the aim of the youth strategy is to break down barriers and provide a lasting, generational shift in young people's lives. The youth strategy will help plot a course over 10 years, such that a 10 year-old today will have experienced greater opportunities and positive activities by the time they turn 20. This sits alongside and connects to Young Futures, Youth Guarantee and education reforms to SEND, the school curriculum and post-16 provision, and children's social care, putting young lives at the centre of government.

In turn, the government is consulting on a Third Sector Covenant, as an agreement between government and the voluntary and community sector. The youth strategy is well placed to deliver a cross sector approach – utilising and supporting the capacity of the voluntary and community sector.

Youth Guarantee

In November 2024, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Education (DfE), and the Treasury (HMT) published the Get Britain Working White Paper, which set out plans to reduce economic inactivity. Crucially, the paper also sets out the Youth Guarantee, “a vision to ensure all young people aged 18 to 21 are learning or earning”.⁹⁹

The guarantee is based on existing provisions and entitlements, with a view to creating new opportunities through actions within the White Paper. The existing provision includes:

- Funded further education provision such as free English, maths, or digital training
- Apprenticeships
- Skills Bootcamps and supported internships
- Employment support through DWPs Youth Offer
- Careers advice

From Spring 2025, Youth Guarantee trailblazers are being established in 8 mayoral authorities, backed by £45 million, with the aim of improving coordination, engagement, and accountability on a local level.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Department for Culture, Media & Sport. [Local Youth Transformation Grant - application guidance](#). Accessed: 01.05.25

⁹⁹ DWP, HMT & DfE (November 2024) [Get Britain Working White Paper](#)

DWP Youth Offer

The Youth Offer – launched in 2020 – is some of the ‘existing provision’ which forms the Youth Guarantee.

All 16-24-year-olds who make a new claim and are placed in the Intensive Work Search regime are eligible for the Youth Offer, which is made up of 3 key parts:

- Youth Employment Programme
- Youth Hubs
- Youth employability coaches

The Youth Employment Programme aims to provide intensive support during the first 13 weeks of a Universal Credit claim, by preparing young people for work, increasing their chances of being employed, and referring them to appropriate support. The process consists of reviews with a work coach, in person or over the phone, who can support with personal barriers to working and referring to other opportunities.

Youth Hubs (also known as Youth Employment Hubs) were set up in response to the pandemic in 2020, and there are now more than 100 across Britain, supporting over 14,000 young people in 2023/24.¹⁰⁰ The hubs provide up to 6 months of support from a Youth Hub Work Coach and other practitioners who are all based at the hub. According to DWP, “suitable claimants will have specific skills and employability barriers preventing them from moving in to work that could be addressed by the support of a DWP Work Coach situated in a Youth Hub.”

In 2024, a review of Youth Hubs found young people to be consistently positive about the hubs, but that there is generally low awareness of them among young people.¹⁰¹

Work coaches may also refer young people to a Youth Employability Coach, who are based in jobcentres and provide up to 6 months of support, which can be extended to 12 months. They provide support to young people “with multiple barriers to work and complex needs to develop the skills to look for, find and keep employment”.

A review of the youth offer found the coaches to be highly experienced in working with vulnerable young people, such as care leavers. However, capacity pressures in Jobcentre offices resulted in some taking on non-youth employability coach roles, “diluting” their role.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Demos (2024) [Launch Pads: The Future of Youth Employment Hubs](#)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² DWP (2024) [Youth Offer process evaluation](#)

OUR VISION FOR YOUTH PROVISION



What we can achieve if we are ambitious for young people

Young Futures

Young people can join an open access young futures hub where they have **somewhere to go, something to do, and someone to talk to.**

This support includes working with 'at risk' young people to increase opportunities, improve mental health and ultimately reduce knife crime.

Cost: £561 million over first three years. Contributing to the benefits set out below.

Somewhere to go

Young people have a variety of safe, accessible spaces to find support and socialise in every community, keeping them off the streets, out of their bedrooms, and engaged in meaningful activities.

As well as supporting their development, confidence, health, and relationships, access to a safe space improves young people's school engagement and attainment. This brings future productivity benefits equal to **£2.6 billion in 2035.**

Cost: £235 million over first three years.

Something to do

Young people are able to access positive, year-round activities. They have a say in what these activities look like and when and where they take place.

Young people's mental health and wellbeing is supported and they are able to stay well. The economy and society benefits by over **£2.4 billion in 2030.**

Cost: £538 million over the first three years.

Someone to talk to

All young people have a trusted adult, someone to support them and help them to make positive choices.

Young people are diverted away from offending, and re-offending, with benefits to society and the economy amounting to **£250 million in 2030.**

Cost: £90 million over the first three years.

The current trajectory

Absent and excluded

One in five children are now missing 10% or more of school. This rises to more than one in three children who are eligible for free school meals. School suspensions and exclusions are on the rise.

Cost: The costs of persistent absence from school are now over £1 billion per year. School exclusions cost at least £170,000 per child.

Young lives blighted by crime

16% of 13 to 17-year-olds report perpetrating violence

Over two-thirds of young people fear becoming a victim of violence from their peers.

Cost: Serious youth violence in England and Wales is costing the country around £1 billion each year.

A youth mental health crisis

1 in 5 young people has a mental health problem. The UK has lowest overall life satisfaction among 15-year-olds out of 27 European countries.

Childhood mental health problems leads to £1 trillion in lost earnings across the generation across the generation.

A NEET generation

1 in 8 young people are NEET. That's almost 1 million young people.

Each young person who becomes NEET costs the UK economy over **£100,000.**

We envision a vibrant future for youth provision where every young person has access to safe, welcoming spaces that foster safety, belonging, and growth. These spaces offer a diverse range of engaging activities—from sports and creative arts to skills development and leadership opportunities—designed to inspire, challenge, and empower. At the heart of this vision are dedicated youth workers who build positive trusted relationships, provide guidance, and support young people through life's challenges and transitions. Together, these elements create an environment where young people can thrive, discover and reach their potential, and shape their own futures with confidence and hope.

Our costed model for youth provision outlines where existing funding can be better coordinated as well as establishing where new funding – and how much – is required.

This investment accounts for the three core components of youth provision:

1. **Capital expenditure** to ensure young people have somewhere to go, through new and refurbished youth centres or the adaptation of other facilities.
2. **Revenue expenditure** to provide young people with great activities and opportunities.
3. **Workforce development** to ensure young people have strong support and someone to talk to. This includes volunteers as well as qualified youth practitioners.

Youth clubs with positive activities and trusted adults are an irreplaceable part of the solution to many of the challenges young people are facing today, challenges which are hugely damaging to young people's lives and come at huge expense to society.

This is why we are setting out our costed, pragmatic strategy to turn the tide. Our vision for this investment is designed to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable young people are being met, while also contributing to the Government's welcome ambitions to make communities safer, get the economy growing, and widen opportunity.

This starts with the Young Futures programme, which the Government has already committed to rolling out in areas of high need to bring together services to improve access to opportunities and support, in order to tackle knife crime and help young people to thrive. We have commissioned cost estimates of what it will take to deliver 210 Young Futures Hubs over the next three years, along with 1,600 qualified youth practitioners and positive activities funded through the Youth Opportunity Fund.

We have also costed a universal youth offer, which builds alongside Young Futures and provides support to every community. This costed model includes all of the necessary building blocks of a system of youth provision which is better coordinated at a local level, ensuring young people get the early intervention support they need.

We have modelled these core components to stand alone for investment to meet discrete needs. However, they should be seen as building blocks for modular construction, to be configured with investment phased over 10 years for system-wide

change. We provide calculations for the total investment needed and where unit costs can be attributed. Costs for Young Futures are included in these wider calculations.

Young Futures

The Young Futures programme is the springboard for our costed model. We have estimated the capital and revenue costs as a proportion of the total revenue and capital expenditure to deliver all three of the building blocks of universal and sustainable youth provision – set out below.

Over the first three years, expenditure on Young Futures amounts to £561 million in capital and revenue costs. This would deliver up to 210 Young Futures Hubs in areas of the greatest need, staffed by 1,600 qualified youth practitioners, and filled with exciting, positive activities funded through a 40% allocation of the Youth Opportunity Fund.

Somewhere to go

As well as Young Futures Hubs, young people need a variety of safe spaces to access provision and socialise. In many cases, this can happen in a youth centre, which provides a hub for youth workers, activities, and other facilities. However, in other cases, young people may be more comfortable, and therefore likely to attend, if provision is available in other spaces where they spend time. Ensuring young people have somewhere to go therefore extends to ensuring schools, parks, and public spaces are accessible and equipped with provision.

Our ambition is for there to be 1,000 new, repurposed, or refitted youth centres – including the Young Futures Hubs – by 2035, delivering two new-build centres for every upper tier local authority in England. Assuming that 100 new centres are developed each year on average, we calculate that this would come at a cost of £9 million per annum in 2026, increasing to £159 million in 2030 and then reducing to £134 million in 2035. The figure in 2026 reflects the need for existing buildings to be repurposed and refitted in the first instance. Under our costings, set out in annex A, the establishment of new buildings would commence in 2028. Our plans set out the path to increasing the stock of new youth centres to 1,000 over 10 years.

In addition to the 1,000 centres, up to 500 smaller capital projects per annum would supplement the number of centres by providing mobile facilities, as well as enabling the use of school facilities by external youth provision providers, sports and arts venues, and the conversion of underused community spaces. Falling school rolls in some areas, leading to closure of schools in some cases, provides a unique opportunity to maximise these spaces which would require relatively few adaptations to suit the needs of a youth centre.

We have assumed that any adaptation of school buildings will fall under DfE schools building and capital funding, with guidance on wellbeing and use of school facilities for youth provision outside the school day. However, small scale capital projects could cover external youth providers using the school facilities, for example through mobile units. We have based costs for these projects on the first phase of the Youth Investment Fund 2021/22, which allocated £10 million to youth provision in left behind areas of England, distributed by BBC Children in Need.

Our model also accounts for the maintenance of youth centres every 15 years, with costs equivalent to 20% of the capital value of each respective centre. In total, capital expenditure would total £235 million over the first three years, rising to £644 million over five years and £1,550 million over a decade.

Our costings also include the administration and partnership costs associated with youth centres, with an assumption that staff would be required to support local partnerships which include the co-location of connected services such as DWP Youth Hubs, Mental Health Hubs, and Family Hubs.

Something to do

All young people of secondary school age benefit from equitable access to regular positive activities during both their educational and leisure time. We have costed this as establishing after-school clubs in all secondary schools during term time and holiday activities in all secondary schools during the rest of the year, in addition to detached youth work to extend reach.

After-school clubs in every secondary school would be free for all young people eligible for FSM, with support for other vulnerable young people. There would then be a progressive charging model applied for all other young people but with at least one day a week free of charge for everyone. We estimate that this would cost £74 million p.a. in 2028.

During the holidays, the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) is aimed at children and young people aged 5-16 in receipt of benefits related to FSM but local authorities can use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for other children who could benefit from the provision. However, we know from previous years that there are low participation levels with the secondary school ages 11-16. Therefore, additional provision and funding should be considered including detached youth work and pop-up provision where young people are in parks and urban areas, to extend reach.

These two types of provision – after-school clubs and an extended HAF programme – would form the basis of universal, year-round provision. In addition, the ringfenced Youth Opportunity Fund would provide further positive activities in communities. This is led by young people, giving them the power to decide how the funding is spent and therefore a sense of ownership. Based on the historical annual budget of the fund, we expect this to cost £63 million p.a. in 2026.

Overall, revenue expenditure for positive activities would total £538 million over the first three years, rising to £1,381 million over five years and £3,569 million over ten years.

Someone to talk to

There is a need for skilled and trained youth workers who are able to connect to wider services. However, there is no agreed measure of ‘sufficiency’ and there has been a sharp decline in youth work training and qualifications over the last 20 years.

Our working assumption is that a sufficient total number of youth workers should be based upon a ratio of youth workers to secondary schools. They would not normally be employed by schools but by local community organisations working with the schools, including in after-school provision. For every secondary school, there would be:

- 4 qualified youth workers
- 2 family workers
- 2 outreach workers

By 2035, this equates to 10,000 additional youth practitioners with youth work training and with a salary and status on a par with education.

To achieve this, a national youth workforce strategy is required, backed by investment to increase both the supply of trained youth workers, as well as demand. It must also cover the up-skilling of practitioners, as well as set mandatory safeguarding training for all youth practitioners and volunteers.

A new strategy should draw on the previous Labour government’s children’s workforce development strategy, which was aligned to the youth work practice national standards and qualification framework.

It must also recognise the significant role that detached youth workers play, building sustained and trusting relationships with young people in the places and spaces where they are in their communities.

To increase the supply of trained youth practitioners, investment in the first three years from the Spending Review we assume will help build capacity through a national recruitment campaign, akin to the childcare recruitment campaign of 2023.¹⁰³

Demand for youth workers would in part be driven by a reinvigorated programme of positive activities, set out in the section above. It would also be stimulated by the fast-tracking of the 1,600 qualified youth practitioners needed to staff Young Futures Hubs, with a range of employers and alternative funding options then available to achieve the goal of 10,000 additional youth workers by 2035.

¹⁰³ DfE. [Childcare recruitment campaign launched](#). Accessed: 01.05.25

In total, we estimate that total revenue expenditure on the youth workforce would be £90 million over three years, £283 million over five years, and £1,263 million over ten years.

This exponential rise in costs over the decade reflects our assumption that recruitment levels would grow over time, from 720 new hires in 2026, 940 p.a. in 2027 and 2028, 1,000 p.a. in 2029 to 2031, and 1,100 p.a. in 2032 to 2035. The total expenditure also includes the training and upskilling of 2,500 practitioners and volunteers each year.

COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

We commissioned Alma Economics to conduct a Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) to model the impact of these separate ‘building blocks’ of youth provision. While the benefits of these different elements of youth provision are inherently difficult to disentangle, the CBA model identifies existing evidence linking each of the individual building blocks to specific outcomes. As a result, the model excludes a number of positive outcomes and is therefore likely to be a conservative estimate.

For safe spaces which provide somewhere for young people to go, the model draws on evidence from the IFS which shows the link between youth centre closures and poorer educational outcomes. In the case of positive activities providing something for young people to do, the CBA considers the impact of positive activities on young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

The CBA shows that this model of youth provision would pay for itself within 15 to 20 years and, with social benefits considered on top of these financial benefits, the model would exceed costs from within the first three years.

Combined, the return on investment of our proposed make-up of youth centres and other community spaces, activities, and youth practitioners is estimated to be **at least £2.40 in financial, economic, and social benefits for every £1 invested.**

Somewhere to go: 1,000 more youth centres

Youth centres and safe community spaces play a crucial role in supporting the development, wellbeing, and future prospects of young people. Beyond offering a safe environment away from the risks of crime, exploitation, or social isolation, these centres provide access to trusted adults, structured activities, and opportunities to build life skills, confidence, and aspirations. They are a vital part of the social fabric, fostering resilience and belonging while helping young people navigate challenges and transitions in their lives. Critically, youth centres can also be transformative in terms of education and employment outcomes — offering targeted support that improves school engagement, attainment, and ultimately long-term economic productivity.

The CBA model developed by Alma Economics focuses on these educational benefits of youth centres, with improved attainment closely correlated to higher earnings and productivity in the future.

Assuming a young person begins to access the provision at age 13 in 2026, the CBA begins to calculate the benefit of the youth centres from 2031, when that young person is 18 and entering the labour market. It finds that the value of higher productivity levels - arising from higher educational attainment as a result of accessing youth clubs - is equal to £590 million in 2031, rising to £2.6 billion in 2035. Productivity benefits can be assumed to last throughout the supported young people’s working lives, so this is likely to be a conservative estimate of the economic benefit of youth centres.

Something to do: access to positive activities for all secondary school children

Ensuring all secondary-school aged children have something to do when they aren't in school is essential. Programmes such as DofE show how a sense of community and belonging, as well as skills and relationships, can all be developed outside of the classroom, bringing substantial benefits to communities, young people, and the economy. These include developing skills for work, community cohesion, and improved mental wellbeing.

The CBA model developed by Alma Economics focused on the benefits of activities for young people's mental health and wellbeing - as established by a study of the Football Beyond Borders programme¹⁰⁴ - with improvements to wellbeing delivering a substantial fiscal return, as set out by the HM Treasury. The CBA finds that the benefits of providing positive activities to all secondary-school aged children would deliver a benefit of £560 million in 2026, rising substantially over the first four years to over £2.4 billion in 2030.

Someone to talk to: 10,000 qualified youth practitioners and 40,000 volunteers

Too many young people lack a trusted adult, someone to support them and guide them onto positive pathways. This relationship is most likely to form and be sustained wherever the young person is comfortable, for example in a youth centre, a park, or a shopping centre.

Alma Economics have therefore modelled the impact of detached youth work, which helps to disentangle the benefits of the youth work itself from other elements of youth provision, such as a youth centre.

The CBA reveals the impact that an extra 10,000 qualified youth practitioners and 40,000 adult volunteers could have on young people and crime reduction. This is felt not only at the stage of preventing a young person from offending but also at the stage when they may re-offend.

The cost of crime is significant and borne by victims as well as the justice system. Every violent incident costs nearly £11,500 to the victims alone through crime prevention, physical and emotional harm, lost output, health services, property damage, and victim support. In addition, every young offender costs the justice system £8,000 on average per year.

The impact then, of reducing both offending and re-offending through youth work stands to be hugely beneficial. The CBA finds that working towards a ratio of four qualified youth workers, two family workers, and two outreach workers for every secondary school in England would deliver net benefits from year one. In 2026, we estimate the cost to be £40 million and the benefit to be £60 million from benefits to youth crime alone.

¹⁰⁴ Pro Bono Economics. [Investing in trusted relationships: The economic value of Football Beyond Borders' impact on children's wellbeing](#). Accessed: 01.04.25

As the quantity of youth workers and volunteers grows, the CBA model shows these benefits to increase by nearly £50 million per annum for four years to a return of £250 million in 2030.

CONCLUSION

The lives of too many young people are held back by the circumstances they grew up in. Sustainable and well-resourced universal, open access youth provision is essential to ensure all young people can access a fair chance in life. The Centre for Young Lives set out how this vision could be realised, from the costs involved to the economic and social returns.

Alma Economics' cost benefit analysis has captured huge social and economic benefits through improved skills for life and work, better mental and physical health, and through less crime or violence. These conservative estimates do not account for the significant wider economic and social benefits including improved physical health, lower school suspensions, reduced inequality, and creating a connected and close-knit society with collective attitudes and behaviours that support community cohesion and a sense of belonging in communities across the country.

To realise this, young people need spaces to go when they aren't in school, where they can build trusting relationships with trained youth practitioners, as well as access vital provision and partake in positive activities.

The Young Futures programme will be transformative in delivering this. Hubs and prevention partnerships will deliver improved mental health and youth crime outcomes, as well as the foundations to develop a wider local youth offer which improves life chances through commissioned services and local youth partnerships.

We envisage that a wider offer - including 1,000 new youth centres and the use of other community spaces, such as schools - is what is needed to revive the youth sector's crumbling or lost infrastructure of safe spaces. This would lay the foundations for all young people to have equitable access to regular, weekly positive activities in their educational and recreational leisure time, as well as access to trained and qualified youth practitioners for those who need it.

Re-building this infrastructure of the youth sector cannot happen overnight, which is why action needs to urgently begin, with sustainable funding for youth provision delivered through the Spending Review. The Government has set out an ambitious agenda for young people, but this cannot be delivered without a thriving, universal, and sustainable youth sector. A truly transformative vision for the country - one that is fairer, safer, and more cohesive for future generations - depends on seizing this opportunity.

This is a unique moment for the government to lead and deliver lasting change. The path forward is clear: a renewed national youth strategy, underpinned by multi-year investment, delivered locally through empowered local authorities, and coordinated through a cross-departmental taskforce that recognises the far-reaching impact of youth provision on education, health, justice, and communities.

While this requires investment, the benefits would be far greater than the costs. Combined, this model would generate at least £2.40 in financial, economic, and social

benefits for every £1 invested, and this is inclusive of only a select few of the myriad of benefits that universal youth provision offers. The true value lies in unlocking the potential of an entire generation.

ANNEX A: COSTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Summary, including Young Futures

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Policy 1: Youth work: 'someone to talk to'	-	40	74	105	137	166	193	221	247	271	293
Policy 2: Positive activities: 'something to do'	-	135	131	347	413	475	470	464	458	452	446
Policy 3: Youth Centres: 'somewhere to go'	-	139	135	215	208	201	194	187	181	175	169
Local partnerships	-	24	47	68	87	105	122	138	152	165	177
Total (£m)	-	339	386	735	845	947	978	1,010	1,038	1,063	1,085

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	1,460
5-year costings (2026-2030)	3,251
10-year costings (2026-2035)	8,424

Summary, excluding Young Futures

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Policy 1: Youth work: 'someone to talk to'	-	12	31	48	81	112	141	170	198	224	247
Policy 2: Positive activities: 'something to do'	-	109	106	323	390	453	448	443	438	433	427
Policy 3: Youth Centres: 'somewhere to go'	-	57	82	96	208	201	194	187	181	175	169
Local partnerships	-	2	12	20	41	61	79	96	112	127	140
Total (£m)	-	182	230	487	720	826	862	897	929	958	984

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	898
5-year costings (2026-2030)	2,444
10-year costings (2026-2035)	7,073

Young Futures

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Hubs and partnerships, start up and administration costs	-	22	35	47	46	44	43	41	40	39	37
New, repurposed, or refitted youth centres	-	82	53	119	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Additional youth workers	-	28	43	58	56	54	52	50	49	47	45
Youth Opportunity Fund (40% allocation of fund budget)	-	26	25	24	23	22	22	21	20	20	19
Total (£m)	-	157	156	248	125	121	116	113	109	105	101

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	561
5-year costings (2026-2030)	807
10-year costings (2026-2035)	1,351

Key assumptions

The cost estimates presented in the table above reflect the costs of delivering the outlined Young Futures programme, which represents an allocation of the total capital and revenue spend required to deliver the three 'building blocks' of youth provision: youth centres, positive activities, and youth workers (set out above).

Hubs and partnerships, start up and administration costs, with costs driven by:

- 210 new Young Futures Hubs set up between 2026 and 2028. This has been profiled as 90 hubs set up in 2026 and 60 per annum in each of 2027 and 2028.
- Average annual start up and administration costs per youth hub of £250,000 per annum (2025 prices), including:
 - hub and local youth partnership manager; administrator; communications/marketing; administration/office costs; and local youth partnerships.
- Revenue cost.

New, repurposed, or refitted youth centres, with costs driven by:

- Development of 210 new, repurposed, or refitted youth centres over the period 2026 to 2028, with build profile and costs as follows (2025 prices):
 - 90 youth centres in 2026.
 - 60 youth centres per annum in each of 2027 and 2028.
 - In 2026 and 2027 it has been assumed that two thirds of the youth centres will be repurposed from existing buildings (£1.3m per centre) and

one third will be developed through the refitting of existing youth centres (£0.8m per centre).

- In 2028 it has been assumed that one third of this mix will be replaced by new build youth centres, a quarter of which are built on purchased land (£6.5m per centre) and three quarters of which are built on council-owned land (£4.0 per centre).
- Capital cost.

Additional youth workers, with costs driven by:

- Additional 1,600 qualified youth practitioners by 2028. This has been profiled as 720 new hires in 2026 and 440 per annum in each of 2027 and 2028.
- Coverage of salaries for all hired workers between 2026 and 2035, at an annual cost per head of £40,000 (2025 prices), including salary, employer national insurance contributions, and employee benefits.
- This requires fast-track recruitment, training and up-skilling of youth practitioners; based on 8 youth practitioners (x4 youth workers, x2 family workers, x2 outreach/detached youth workers).
- Revenue cost.

Youth Opportunity Fund, with costs driven by:

- A 40% allocation of the Youth Opportunity Fund for year-round positive activities over the period 2026 to 2035.
- Revenue cost.

Macroeconomic assumptions:

- 3% annual cost inflation.
- All costs presented in nominal terms and undiscounted.

Youth centres: somewhere to go

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
New, repurposed, or refitted youth centres	-	9	35	51	164	159	153	148	143	138	134
Maintenance against dilapidation of existing youth centres	-	39	37	36	35	34	33	31	30	29	28
Small scale capital projects (500 per annum)	-	10	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	7	7
Total (£m)	-	57	82	96	208	201	194	187	181	175	169

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	235

5-year costings (2026-2030)	644
10-year costings (2026-2035)	1,550

Key assumptions

Development of 100 new youth centres per year on average over the period 2026 to 2035. These costs are inclusive of Young Futures Hubs for the purposes of this analysis to show the total capital expenditure.

Build profile and costs (in 2025 prices):

- 25% new build youth centres from 2028, a quarter of which are built on purchased land (£6.5m per centre) and three quarters of which are built on council-owned land (£4.0 per centre).
- 50% repurposed from existing buildings (£1.3m per centre).
- 25% developed through the refitting of existing youth centres (£0.8m per centre).
- In the absence of new builds in 2026 and 2027, the additional youth centres in these years have been allocated between repurposed and refitted youth centres on a pro rata basis.

Ongoing refurbishment of the existing youth centre stock:

- An existing stock of 1,000 youth centres at the start of 2026.
- Maintenance against dilapidation for existing youth centres every 15-years (equivalent to refurbishment rate of 7% per annum).
- Refurbishment costs equivalent to 20% of the capital value of each youth centre (£4.0m per centre, 2025 prices).

Small grants of £500 to £50,000 (500 per annum) for mobile facilities and resources which support detached youth work and pop-up provision in community settings:

- £10m of grant funding per year (2025 prices).

Macroeconomic assumptions:

- 3% annual cost inflation.
- All costs presented in nominal terms and undiscounted.

All costs represent capital expenditure.

Positive activities: something to do

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Holiday activities programme for teenagers in schools	-	46	45	43	42	40	39	38	36	35	34
Youth Opportunity Fund	-	63	61	59	57	55	53	51	50	48	46

Secondary school after-school clubs (at least 4-days per week)	-	-	-	74	107	137	133	128	124	120	116
Regular out-of-school activities, adventure trips, volunteering	-	-	-	147	185	220	223	226	228	230	231
Total (£m)	-	109	106	323	390	453	448	443	438	433	427

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	538
5-year costings (2026-2030)	1,381
10-year costings (2026-2035)	3,569

Key assumptions

Provision of holiday activities programme for teenagers in schools for period 2026 to 2035:

- Annual cost of £48m per annum (2025 prices), based on share of existing Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme budget (£200m, 2025 prices) allocated to teenagers (24%).

Youth Opportunity Fund for year-round positive activities for period 2026 to 2035:

- Annual cost of £92m per annum (2025 prices), based on historical annual budget of Youth Opportunity Fund; these costs are inclusive of Young Futures hubs (see above), for the purposes of the review we assume a 40% allocation of the Fund to Young Futures.

Provision of secondary school after-school clubs (at least 4-days per week):

- Introduced as a policy in 2028 (to be phased in at 50% of its full scale in 2028, rising to 100% by 2030).
- Average cost of £50 per secondary school pupil (2025 prices).
- Number of secondary school pupils remains broadly flat at c. 3.3m (aligned with ONS National Pupil projections).

Provision of regular out-of-school activities, adventure trips, volunteering:

- Introduced as a policy in 2028 (to be phased in at 50% of its full scale in 2028, rising to 80% by 2030 and 100% by 2035).
- Average cost of £100 per secondary school pupil (2025 prices).
- Number of secondary school pupils remains broadly flat at c. 3.3m (aligned with ONS National Pupil projections).

Macroeconomic assumptions:

- 3% annual cost inflation.

- All costs presented in nominal terms and undiscounted.

All costs represent revenue expenditure.

Youth work: someone to talk to

Costs (£m, real and discounted)	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Additional youth workers	-	-	19	36	70	101	130	160	188	214	238
Additional volunteers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Training, up-skilling, and recruitment of youth workers and volunteers	-	12	12	11	11	11	10	10	10	9	9
Total (£m)	-	12	31	48	81	112	141	170	198	224	247

Multi-year total costs (£m, real and discounted)	
3-year costings (2026-2028)	90
5-year costings (2026-2030)	283
10-year costings (2026-2035)	1,263

Key assumptions

Provision of an additional 10,000 qualified youth practitioners by 2035:

- An average of 1,000 new hires assumed per annum through 2026 to 2035. The profile for new hires has been assumed to be slightly back loaded, with 720 new hires assumed in 2026, 940 per annum in 2027 and 2028, 1,000 per annum in 2029 to 2031, and 1,100 per annum in 2032 to 2035.

Annual cost per head of £40,000 (2025 prices), including salary, employer national insurance contributions, and employee benefits.

- These costs are inclusive of Young Futures for the purposes of this submission to show the total capital expenditure.

Provision of an additional 40,000 adult volunteers working with young people by 2035:

- 4,000 additional volunteers assumed per annum through 2026 to 2035.
- No volunteer costs assumed.

Training and up-skilling of 2,500 youth workers and volunteers per annum:

- £2,500 per training course (2025 prices).

Annual recruitment and marketing campaign for youth workers and volunteers:

- £6.5m cost per annum (2025 prices).

Macroeconomic assumptions:

- 3% annual cost inflation.
- All costs presented in nominal terms and undiscounted.

All costs represent revenue expenditure.

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