











There is a plethora of initiatives, programmes and reports on youth employment, in response to the pandemic and recession. This report seeks to complement the work of the Youth Employment Group, and others, which brings much of the evidence together; and to consider a youth work response. Its purpose is to inform government policy and the design of services. Equally, to provide seamless support across the age-range, that can mobilise youth workers to complement and increase the capacity of youth employment services, through the training and up-skilling of youth workers and related professionals.

## Young lives

1. The impact of the pandemic and a global recession on young people will be far-reaching, and it is essential that the right services are there to support them. The crisis has compounded inequalities that already existed and has hit vulnerable and marginalised groups the hardest. The disruption in education has increased disparities, at a critical time of life for emotional and physical development, affecting mental health and life chances too.
  - The scarcity of jobs for school and college leavers presents many with bleak prospects<sup>1</sup>. 2 (IEVP) vulnerable 16 to 24 year olds who are not in full-time education or employment face significant barriers to work now and when the extended furlough scheme ends in 2021.
  - Some 60% of those who have become unemployed through the pandemic are between the ages of 18 to 24. This is compounded by a lack of work experience, with one in ten 16 to 24 year olds not having a paid job outside of casual or summer work<sup>3</sup>, and other barriers such as the ability to travel to work or, conversely, inadequate space to work from home<sup>4</sup>.
4. More than half of under-25s and of over-65s have been either placed on furlough or lost their jobs, compared to one-third at other ages. The impact on young people is greatest, given the lasting damage of unemployment at an early age, and deterioration in living standards compared to their parents' generation<sup>5</sup>.
5. For those in work, the youngest and oldest workers are overrepresented in jobs under the greatest threat – such as in hospitality, leisure and retail. This also closes the door for many young people entering the job market in those sectors. There is a disproportionate effect on young people from a loss of hours worked than jobs lost<sup>6</sup>.
6. The barriers to work are consistent from pre-pandemic and now through a global recession. Young people lack work experience, are low on confidence, not know what jobs are available and not seen to have the right skills<sup>7</sup>. There is no seamless understanding or support that provides early help and identification of needs 'upstream' at ages 14 to 17, that is sustained for young people aged 18 to 24 years.

1 Bath University, Prof. P Gregg, Economics and Social Policy; October 2020

2 Youth Employment Group, Securing a place for young people in the nation's economic recovery, September 2020 3 Learning & Work Institute, Fit for purpose? Education & employment support for young people 2019 4 Resolution Foundation, An intergenerational audit for the UK, October 2020

5 Resolution Foundation, An Intergenerational Audit for the UK, October 2020

6 IFS, Sector Shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed, 2020

7 Youth Employment UK: Youth Voice Census, 2020

8 ONS: Estimates of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) who are not in education, employment or training, March 2021

## Government support

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7. The government recognises that young people are hit especially hard by the crisis and introduced an Opportunity Guarantee of an apprenticeship or an in-work placement, including employer incentives for each apprentice under-25. The Kickstart scheme for young people and Job Entry Targeted Support programme for all ages, providing significant investment in increasing the number of apprenticeships, traineeships and work coaches, for example, and helping unemployed young people into work.
8. However, Treasury analysis which shows that the youngest and poorest benefited most from the government's initial economic interventions does not tell the whole story. The current drive towards job creation and training schemes may lead to stabilisation of the labour market<sup>8</sup> in the short term, for young people; but this alone is unlikely to be sufficient.
9. Further support will be provided through Job Centre Plus young people's hubs, where young people can access wider support, which will be co-located and co-delivered by a network of partners. In addition, employability coaches will focus on young people with more complex needs. There needs to be a greater recognition of youth work and youth services in those arrangements, to ensure access to quality provision for young people from qualified youth workers and appropriately trained volunteers throughout.
10. There is a danger a myriad of government and charity initiatives is just as confusing to the professionals as it is to the young people and communities they seek to support. We need clear, shared outcomes and consistent use of language across services, readily understood by young people and employers alike. A youth work approach is central to this. It includes quality assurance of such provision and outcomes, which engage young people directly and complements employment services.

## A youth work response

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11. There is extensive research evidence that early unemployment leads to long term poor health outcomes and the relationship with educational levels too. For many young people financial instability will rise during the COVID-19 crisis and low-income families already unable to budget for unexpected expenses will be hit the hardest<sup>9</sup>.
12. In response, skilled and qualified youth workers can help to remove barriers to employment. They provide long term, trusted relationships that support young people during their employment and training, and between jobs. A churn of jobs and opportunities may be the pattern of work for many, given the nature of future-jobs and for young people trying to make ends meet or those just starting out in their chosen careers.
13. At its core, youth work builds on the strengths of a young person in an asset-based approach. Trained youth workers provide emotional support (people to lean on), social capital (personal connections), practical support (including financial) and skills (how to get on in life).<sup>10</sup> It promotes enterprise and young people's agency, with a range of skills which employers want for young people 'to be work ready',<sup>11</sup> and is equally important for the self-employed, business start-ups and gig economy.
14. As we adapt to a new economy, post-Brexit and COVID-recovery, youth work can unlock young people's potential. Some talk of 'character' and its four areas of virtue – intellectual, performance, moral and civic.<sup>12</sup> Youth work has demonstrable impact on those character traits, such as resilience, self-confidence and self-belief<sup>13</sup> and so-called soft skills for communication, organisation and decision-making<sup>14</sup>.

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8 Institute for Employment Studies, Labour Market Statistics, 2020

9 The Children's Society, The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people, March 2020:

1.7 million aged 10-17 are living in a household with problem debt

2.1 million aged 10-17 are living in a household where there has been difficulty paying the bills

10 The Health Foundation: A healthy foundation for the future, Oct. 2019

11 CBI: Education and Learning for the Modern World, Nov. 2019

"Soft skills, essential skills, employability skills, transferable skills, 21st century skills, interpersonal skills, life skills and character education, are just some of the interchangeable but not identical ways of describing what it means to be 'work ready'."

12 N Morgan: Taught, Not Caught: Education for 21st Century Character, 2017; citing University of Birmingham, Jubilee Centre

13 NYA: Time Out, re-imagining schools, June 2020

14 National Careers Service: Careers-advice, how to develop your soft skills

This is essential to help bridge the gap between formal education and employment, and to sustain support for school and college-leavers from 16 to 24 years of age.

**15.** Employment programmes which stand alone are not sufficient. More wrap-around support is needed for those schemes<sup>15</sup>. Significant investment is needed for training professional youth workers and up-skilling volunteer-led youth and community organisations, as an intrinsic part of any youth offer for young people up to 24 years of age. This includes youth work training for related professionals<sup>16</sup> embedded in employment services, including Job Centre Plus Youth Hubs.

**16.** As such, youth workers provide an essential service that can be an integral part of employment programmes; from involving young people in the design of youth services as part of Youth Hubs, to the Good Youth Employment Charter for employers, and to help young people stay connected with group activities and opportunities in their local community.

**17.** The recommendations in this report support employment services to listen to young people, agile in response to their interests and concerns. Also for employers to engage with young people on a surer-footing, to be confident in our shared futures – ambitious for young people.

15 APPG Youth Employment: Making youth employment policy work, January 2021

16 NYA: Education & Training Standards Committee (ETS); youth work qualifications from Level 3 to Masters Degree

**Youth work** focuses on personal and social development, designed to support young people through adolescence, typically from 8 to 25 years of age. For the purposes of this report our recommendations focus predominantly on young people of 16 to 24 years at critical stages of transition as young adults in particular for vulnerable or marginalised young people.





# Recommendations

## Triple lock for youth employment

### 1. Work ready

Investment must be put into identifying young people hidden at a local level, not in education, employment and training. It requires qualified **youth workers and trained volunteers to provide early help and identification** of needs 'up-stream', before young people enter training or employment and to maintain that trusted relationship over the longer term.

### 2. Opportunity guarantee

Clear and ongoing information, advice and guidance must be aspirational and practical; it needs to come from (or be guided by) trusted sources, informed by young people and supported by youth workers providing a bridging role to specialist support and employers in the community. This goes beyond an assessment of needs and support packages into employment. It must be **a proactive service, guided by a youth work curriculum**, for practical support

to remove barriers to work and sustain employment, in particular for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people.

### 3. Locked-in support

A youth work approach should be embedded in Job Centre Plus (JCP) Youth Hubs and employment programmes. This provides the basis of complementary quality standards to read-across the range of services and partner agencies, to include mentors, employability coaches and trusted adult workers. It is especially important for smaller organisations or young people in rural or isolated areas, to access the resources they need. This will include a **Youth Premium, equivalent to the pupil premium, to access youth work provision**. It will help put vulnerable young people on a surer footing and provide a ring-of-confidence around them for employers, and throughout periods of underemployment.

## Rapid Response

Immediate action is needed to **mobilise the youth workforce** to support young people and employment. The scale of need is growing at a rapid rate. It is not possible to create enough job opportunities, in the short term. Major investment in training programmes, apprenticeships and further education for young people is essential. Greater

urgency is needed to **expand the number of Youth Hubs** and wraparound services. To be most effective, this approach requires significant investment in training and a much stronger understanding of, and collaboration between, the employment and youth work professions.

NYA Youth Work Academy <sup>17</sup> and Youth Employment UK will join forces to help fast-track training and professional development opportunities:

- To up-skill youth workers and build the capacity of youth and community organisations as an intrinsic part of the youth employment offer;
- To provide youth work training and blended learning opportunities for related professions across employment services and work programmes.

The collective impact is to ensure no young person is left behind: transforming the lives of young people and their communities now, and for the future.

<sup>17</sup> The NYA Youth Work Academy is working in collaboration with partners across England to deliver training to meet the needs identified both regionally and nationally.

# Introduction

*“Young people continue to be worse off than any other group in the labour market. They told us they felt unsure of their futures before COVID-19 took hold, and that sense of anxiety and uncertainty is growing.”*

## Youth Employment UK

The purpose of this report is to inform government policy, the design of services and professional practice, to provide seamless support for young people up to 25 years of age; for a youth work response to complement and increase the capacity of youth employment services.

The challenges and barriers young people face pre-date COVID-19 and have been exacerbated by the strains it has placed on the labour market. Data from the Youth Voice Census 2020 shows that mental health and wellbeing is an increasing concern for many young people, alongside a lack of confidence, and the practical costs of getting to work. One-third of young people in work struggle with wellbeing; and 35% of respondents who have experienced being not in employment, education or training (NEET) put anxiety in their top-5 barriers to finding employment, with nearly one in five (17%) specifically citing their mental health. Confidence is also low, just one in ten expect to find meaningful and quality work (13%) or believe they have the skills that employers want (as low as 10% for young people with additional needs). Whether by perception

or experience, only one-third thought employers were supportive of hiring young people,<sup>18</sup> while transport costs and connections featured heavily in the barriers young people face.

Specific skills are required to support young people during this important time – in making significant life choices, forming new relationships and tackling new challenges. A youth work approach looks beyond the economic value of employment, in support of the health and happiness of the young person. It provides more than careers guidance, when education aspirations and efforts are the primary indicator of job employment opportunities<sup>19</sup>, and supports the holistic approach of some service providers in particular for young people with complex needs. In times of economic downturn, youth services provide motivation, confidence and aspiration for young people, and a sense of belonging rather than isolation or feeling ‘left behind’, which is most pronounced for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, further widening inequality<sup>20</sup>. Youth work needs to be seen as an essential service, not an add-on.

## Labour market

There is a real need to create more jobs and support for young people. Unemployment has risen in the UK to its highest level for 2 years. For young people aged 16 to 24, the unemployment rate is at its highest since 2013. There has not been a comparable rise in the number of unemployed young people since 2009<sup>21</sup>. The drive towards job creation and training schemes such as Kickstart provide the basis of an ‘opportunity guarantee’ for training, apprenticeships or job opportunities. However, this alone is unlikely to be sufficient in particular for areas of high deprivation, rural and remote areas<sup>22</sup> with poor transport links and commutable opportunities, and for vulnerable young people furthest from the labour market. Programmes like Kickstart are a great starting point, but

there are concerns from young people of ‘what happens when the 6-months training ends?’<sup>23</sup>, and from employers who might not have the resources to keep them in a job.

An additional 1,000 opportunities need to be created everyday in order to return NEET levels to pre-pandemic levels by October 2021 and avoid a 50% rise in NEET young people<sup>24</sup>. The numbers of young people who are unemployed for 6 months or more is increasing<sup>25</sup> and are at the highest estimates since October 2016. The number of NEET young people had fallen to roughly 750,000 before the Covid-19 crisis began, half of which are unemployed. It is now expected that this could rise to above 1 million<sup>26</sup>. This does not reflect the true nature of the youth labour market, excluding many more in precarious and part time

18 Youth Employment UK: The Good Youth Employment Charter encourages realistic and achievable standards for good youth employment practice

19 Education Endowment Trust: Youth Transitions: creating pathways to success, 2020

20 Prince’s Trust: Aspiration Gap, Sept. 2020

21 Institute for Employment Studies: Labour Market Statistics, Sept. 2020

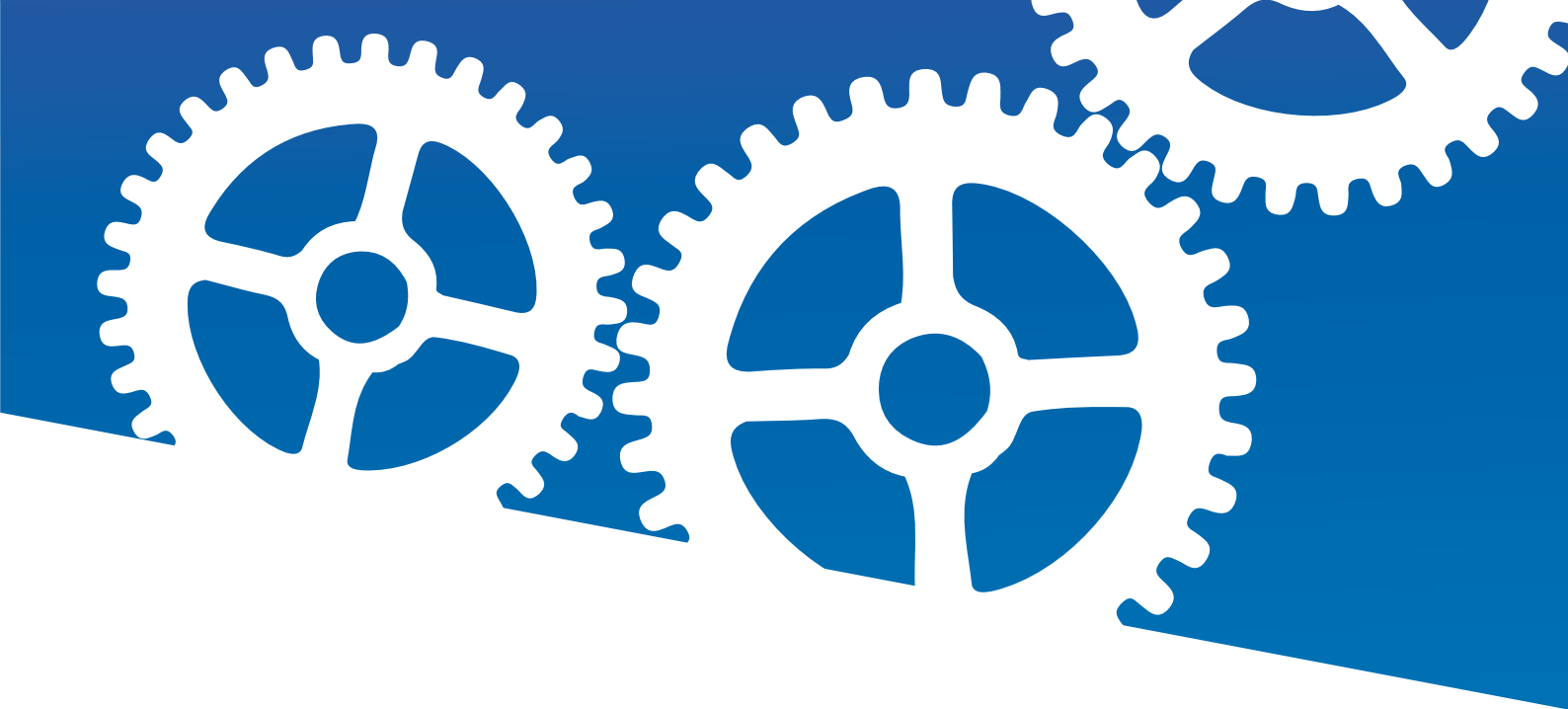
22 Rural England: Challenges Facing Rural 16-18 year olds in accessing appropriate education and work-based learning, 2019

23 NYA: Young Researchers Network

24 Youth Employment Group, 2020

25 Office for National Statistics, A01: Summary of labour market statistics: Jan 202

26 APPG Youth Employment: Making youth employment policy work, January 2021



work. There are worrying trends that young people are becoming unemployed, and are unable to get out of it quickly.

The nature of work is also changing, where home-working can provide greater access to jobs for some young people, others do not have suitable space or connectivity to work from home. Meanwhile retail, leisure and hospitality sectors have been hit especially hard by the pandemic, and young people make up a disproportionate level of the

workforce in entry level positions, seasonal employment and job insecurity. In truth, we cannot create sufficient opportunities and jobs quickly enough, nor sustained over a longer period. Future employment remains uncertain.

For young people unable to secure work earlier or who hold insecure jobs, there is a scarring effect of stigma, loss of confidence and subsequent lower pay or reduced chances of career progression.

## Vulnerable young people

Over 1 million young people<sup>27</sup> come from a 'vulnerable family background', of which nearly 450,000<sup>28</sup> are unknown to formal or statutory services but are likely to be known by youth workers. An estimated 1.3 million young people are estimated to have emerging needs triggered or caused by COVID-19, and many more with hidden or unforeseen consequences from the pandemic.<sup>29</sup> Early help and identification is required, with youth work well-placed to support young people with multiple and often complex needs, which will have a profound impact on employment and the future labour market. It also requires emotional and practical support from youth services; sustained over time that bridges statutory children's and adult services from 18 years of age.

We know that poverty and mental health are significant determinants of employment and well-being; as well support needed for special educational needs and disabilities<sup>30</sup> (SEND) and complex needs<sup>31</sup>. Social-economic determinants include low income households, poverty and debt and, in turn, unemployment, insecure or underemployment and worklessness. Before they enter the job market, up to 5 million young people

(10-17) are living in a household with a problem debt and difficulty paying the bills. Also, half of all mental health conditions first occur by age 14, and three quarters by age 24.<sup>32</sup> COVID-19 restrictions and increased online use in education, for example, will have long term-impacts. Mental health concerns are also more prominent amongst those young people facing other risks or disadvantages, including amongst care-leavers and those with disabilities. It is the intersectional nature of the social determinants that also gives greater focus on racial and ethnic disparities, exacerbated by racism, unconscious or not.

All too often youth services are funded on the basis of provision for 11-17 year olds, but support young people up to 25 years old, for community-based services and peer-group activities. In particular, appropriate adjustments are needed to be made for SEND including community-based youth work, and professional SEND training for the youth workforce. Therefore, a new Youth Premium, equivalent to the pupil premium, to access youth work provision, would help put vulnerable young people up to 25 years of age on a surer footing. For those in work, such support would also provide a ring-of-confidence around them for employers.

27 Children's Commissioner for England: 1.24 million children (8-17) in a 'vulnerable family background', 2019

28 Ibid

29 NYA: 'Out of Sight?' - vulnerable young people: COVID-19 response, April 2020

30 NYA: Inside Out, young people's health and wellbeing, August 2020

31 NYA: Out of Sight? vulnerable young people, April 2020

32 Health and Social Care Committee: The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation

# A Youth Work Response

## An asset-based approach

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The key social determinants of young people's current and future wellbeing are: income and poverty; living conditions and home; family relationships, instability and state care; education levels and employability; work and unemployment, insecure and underemployment; peers and social groups.<sup>33</sup> Youth work focuses on personal and social development - the skills and attributes of young people. It can play an essential bridging role for young people, and families, to schools and colleges, social care and health services; and enables young people to take up the opportunities available to them especially for the most vulnerable young people. Crucially, we need to include young people directly in the evidence, decision-making and response to the challenges of COVID-19, and their health and wellbeing over the long term.

It is important for services for young people to come together seamlessly. This goes beyond simply buying in or bolting on a youth service. Rather to embrace the asset-based approaches providing:

- Emotional support (people to lean on and relationships)
- Social capital (confidence and personal connections)
- Economic (financial and practical support)
- Skills (academic, technical and personal development)

This is based on long-term, relationships. It requires qualified youth workers and trained volunteers to provide early help and identification of needs, 'up stream' for young people to be 'work ready'; as a trusted source for clear and ongoing information, advice and guidance, providing a bridging role to specialist support and employers; and, sustained peer-group activities and one-to-one support for those in-work, between jobs, self employed or through periods of prolonged unemployment. In particular, to ensure there is no cliff-edge support when young people reach 18 years of age.

## A trusted adult

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A youth work approach must be embedded in Job Centre Plus (JCP) Youth Hubs and employment programmes. An age-appropriate response is essential to support, sustain relationships, and strengthen support networks, with a trained and skilled trusted adult worker to provide a bridge specialist services. The Government should provide cross-departmental investment in Youth Hubs, increasing their support of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>34</sup> This goes beyond an assessment of needs and support packages into employment and complements the wrap around support of employment services; this should involve education and training providers, local authorities, the National Careers Service and charities locally, to be most effective.

While each professional and practice has its own distinctive approach – including coaching, mentoring, careers guidance – youth provision must be guided by the

youth work curriculum, for practical support to remove barriers to work and sustain employment. Youth workers are also well-placed to help capture better data on young people who are falling through the gaps, not always known by formal services, and to ensure that more young people with additional needs are supported by trained professionals.

Improving the quality of practice through clear and impactful quality standards and professional development, from sharing good practice and knowledge transfer across sectors, to ensure continuous improvement is at the core of youth work practice. Professional competencies and development include the ability to make informed judgments about complex ethical and professional issues, underpinned by professional learning.

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<sup>33</sup> Association of Young People's Health & Health Foundation: social determinants of young people's health, 2018

<sup>34</sup> APPG Youth Employment: Making youth employment policy work, January 2021

## Service design

There is a danger from a myriad of government and charity initiatives, names and terminology. It is not sufficient to simply co-locate a network of partners and providers in JCP Youth Hubs. We need a proactive youth service with clear, shared outcomes and consistent use of language across services, readily understood by young people and employers alike. It requires quality assurance of such provision and outcomes that engage young people directly. This does not mean a new service or branding, rather to build the capacity of existing youth services and community provision.

Youth work needs to be - and be seen to be - transformational, in harnessing the skills of young people not fulfilled by formal education, and for their personal and social development. As well as breaking down barriers to employment, youth work helps young people to stay connected, with a sense of belonging, involved in group activities and opportunities in their local community.

- Where youth work provides a safe place to be creative
- Providing and developing a social network and friendships
- With a trusted adult, youth worker (who knows what is needed)

Youth work has demonstrable impact on character traits, such as resilience, self-confidence and self-belief and so-called soft skills of communication, organisation and decision-making<sup>35</sup>. This is essential to help bridge the gap between formal education and employment, and to sustain support for school and college-leavers from 16 to 24 years of age.

A review of over 100 youth projects supporting employment found common service design principles<sup>36</sup>:

- Holistic approaches, not just focussed on academic / technical skills.
- Enabling and inclusive environments, providing safe spaces and enabling learning environments for young people, regardless of their level of ability/disability or vulnerability.
- Long-term approach, supported through transitions from early childhood through adolescence to adulthood, including transition from education to work or NEET to EET.
- Reflect local and national markets, aligned with national priorities, the labour market, and the needs of children and young people and their communities, taking account of local culture and context.
- Meaningful participation, including service-user voice in the design, implementation, assessment and governance of skills development.
- Evidence-based, drawing from 'what works', 'what is needed', and 'what is wanted'.

Crucially, there needs to be increased involvement of Youth Voice in the design and delivery of youth employment services. This includes wider consultation amongst 16-24 from diverse demographic backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds, levels of experience and education, and locations to ensure a 'one-size fits all' solution is not applied<sup>37</sup>.

Such an approach to service design is supported by the recommendations of the Youth Employment Group.

### Securing a place for young people in the nation's economic recovery

- Provide welcoming physical and digital places for 14 - 24-year-olds to access high-quality advice, information and other support services;
- Establish partnerships with (and funding for) local statutory and non-statutory / Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) employment services, including housing associations, independent support providers and local authorities;
- Provide access to specialist 'youth employability coaches' in partnership with JCP Work Coaches so they can support young people under the Expanded Youth Offer;
- Provide holistic wraparound support for young people on the work placements – potentially funded by the DfE/DWP or leveraged via local stakeholders (e.g. Combined and Local Authorities, Housing Associations and other funders investing in their communities);
- Support young people via JCP Work Coaches and Careers Advisors with regular contact and a clear focus on progression into non-subsidised, sustained work.

Extracts: Final recommendations from the Youth Employment Group (YEG), 2020

<sup>35</sup> Centre for Youth Impact – A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.0, 2019

<sup>36</sup> Education Development Trust, Youth Transitions: Creating Pathways to Success, 2020

<sup>37</sup> APPG Youth Employment: Making youth employment policy work, January 2021

## What youth work does

There is an important and complementary role for youth work in employment. It is rooted in a youth work curriculum, national occupational standards and qualifications support practitioners as a form of education which focuses on the personal and social development of young people. (See also, Annex Two: youth work practice in employment).

- Specialist knowledge of how young people develop through adolescence, by stage not age; removing the need to meet a certain threshold, to identify needs and opportunities
- Engaging young people in positive activities and critical dialogue, to overcome barriers and develop their own voice and agency, and transition to social and economic independence
- Reflective practice, peer education and situational learning; providing opportunities for young people to acquire and develop practical and technical skills and competencies
- Experiential learning (learning through experience) to grow in confidence, motivation, inspiration, self-determination and interpersonal skills
- Providing young people with the skills they need to learn 'where they are at', to build on their strengths and assets, complementary to formal education, in their communities, employment and social networks
- Guided by a youth work curriculum for economic skills in education and employment and financial literacy; social skills for communications and decision making; life skills in health and wellbeing, and to improve relationships
- Youth work provides early help 'up-stream' at ages 14 to 17, that is sustained for young people aged 18 to 24 years, supported into work, between jobs and within the community. It supports individuals with skills and connections to increase their social mobility, and group networks which build community resilience and employment opportunities.

## Digitally connected

The pandemic has seen youth services adapt and move online for digital contact, networks and online resources. This follows a pattern of social media use and technology by young people, and shadows a drive for greater digital access to public services. Many young people see remote support as more accessible than face-to-face services due to its flexible timing, shorter waiting times and no need to travel for appointments. This is especially important for rural areas and with poorly served – or costly – public transport links.

More research is needed to see how young people have managed over the whole period and whether the range of online platforms has proved useful to them or not. Also, addressing digital exclusion, ensuring all young people have access to the technology and data they need to access services. Up to one million young people went off the radar from formal services and dropped away from contact with youth workers during the first national lockdown from March 2020.

This is likely to be especially important for young people aged 18 years and over, and those who are NEET at an earlier age, who are no longer in formal education and out of contact with teachers or wider peer groups. Where

there is increased access to online resources and use of social media, this does provide greater flexibility for regular contact, learning opportunities, advice and guidance. There is also concern for digital safeguarding and need for training of youth workers and others to create safe online spaces and use of online platforms, for a wider offer to young people.

There are established online services, such as The Mix providing information, advice and guidance for under-25's, including employability and volunteering<sup>38</sup>; the Go Think Big platform run by NYA<sup>39</sup> of online tools, advice and work placement opportunities, this is a one-stop-shop to help you get a foot on the career ladder; and the Careers Hub run by Youth Employment UK<sup>40</sup> on options and opportunities, supported by youth-friendly employers. Each provides delivery platforms which directly support young people through youth work, but as a complement to and not a replacement for face to face youth work. Digital access to online resources, support and networks is of growing importance. Yet it is through youth work and group activities in community settings that young people develop the essential skills and personal development, which forge social connections and build social capital.

38 The Mix: Skill Up, online advice and courses - [www.themix.org.uk/get-involved/skill-up](http://www.themix.org.uk/get-involved/skill-up)

39 NYA: Go Think Big - <https://gothinkbig.co.uk/>

40 Youth Employment UK: Careers Hub - <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/careers-hub/>

Overall, a comprehensive package of support and increased funding is needed for education <sup>41</sup>, training providers and young people through free/subsidised

broadband and provision of equipment, enabling disconnected and under-connected young people with limited access to ensure no young person is left behind <sup>42</sup>.

## Digital divide

Approximately one million children and young people, as well as their families, do not have adequate access to a device or connectivity at home <sup>43</sup>. This affects the most disadvantaged and the most geographically remote to a greater extent

For young people known to formal services, more than 1 in 5 lack devices at one-third of schools in the most deprived areas, and 1 in 5 lack internet access, in one-fifth of the schools; compared to 1 in 20 at the most affluent stage schools <sup>44</sup>.

While 90% of young people have access to digital devices, young people who are NEET and those with a history of economic disadvantage have access to a smaller range of devices, at fewer locations. They rely on others for devices and connectivity, including Wi-Fi, and are left feeling embarrassed.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, around 40% of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people also struggle with “netiquette” decisions about their own behaviour or dealing with the negative behaviour of others online.<sup>46</sup>

## Workforce development

“Key aspects of the contribution of [youth] services include trusted, non-judgemental and long-term relationships with responsible adults, safe spaces, positive activities and social action, and assistance to access further support where necessary.”<sup>47</sup>

Employment programmes which stand alone are not sufficient. Significant investment is needed for training professional youth workers and up-skilling volunteer-led youth and community organisations, as an intrinsic part of any youth employment offer for young people. On which an eco-system of volunteering, learning opportunities and work experience can flourish, to translate into jobs, local enterprise and social capital.

For a cohort of young people, including those joining the Kickstart government programme, this could build in level 2-3 youth work training and extended to other young people through use of government bursaries, providing training

and qualifications for young people with lived experience to support their peers. This supports young people to be job-ready with the character skills and resilience valued by employers while on work experience. Operating online and use of social media with face to face support, provides a blended offer for tailored support, advice and guidance. For example, young people on the Kickstart programme could be supported by a youth worker. The youth worker would help the young person map their own unique support journey, ensuring that they are able to benefit from the placement and the scheme.

This holistic approach provides a social value to employers for activities in their local communities and equips the young people with transferable skills for other jobs. Some may choose to progress in youth work as a career, all will be skilled to continue as youth and community volunteers and throughout their lives.

**Youth work supports young people through the adolescent developmental phase, with critical stages of transition up to 25 years old, between childhood and adulthood that brings significant physical and emotional changes. It requires particular skills to support young people at an important time for making significant life choices, to safely explore risky impulses, form new relationships and take on new challenges. It supports youth voice and the agency of young people, to look for, create and co-design opportunities, and to be included in decision-making.**

41 NYA: where youth work is recognised as a distinct form of education (Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body for youth work in England

42 APPG Youth Employment: Making youth employment policy work, January 2021

43 NYA: Out of Sight? April, 2020; Nominet, Digital Access for All, 2019

44 The Sutton Trust survey of teachers: Remote Learning, the digital divide, January 2021

45 Princes Trust: Slipping Through the Net, 2016

46 Ibid

47 All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs: Youth work inquiry, final report April 2019

# Pen portraits

Examples of youth employment and training programmes which include aspects of youth work.

## Economy: Groundwork UK

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'Economy' runs workshops in schools and offers accredited vocational training, to introduce young people in London aged 11-24 to the green economy. Run as part of Our Bright Future (OBF) the Economy is supported by the National Lottery Community Fund and led by The Wildlife Trusts. The programme subsidises placements for 16- to 24-year-old NEETS over 26 weeks (25 hours per week) and Achievement Coaches provide mentoring and support throughout the six-months, helping the young people adjust to the expectations of work and ensuring the experience is beneficial for both the young person and the organisation.

The six-month paid work placements provide the opportunity for young people to gain employability skills and work experience, improve their wellbeing, and act as catalysts for positive change within their local community and environment. The work placements support young people who are facing barriers to employment, including limited qualifications and experience, a lack of confidence challenging home lives, and an absence of career direction, meaning they struggle to progress into work.

## Centrepont Works

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Centrepont supports homeless young people across London, Manchester, West Yorkshire and the North East to get their lives back on track. By working in partnership with local employers, we identify skills gaps and recruitment trends which shape our programmes to fully prepare young people for the placement or job opportunity. Our training team deliver English and Maths, employability training, personal development courses and Traineeships in Security, Warehousing, Groundwork/Plant Machinery and Administration.

We complete a 'Skills Mapper' with young people to determine their individual needs and what support or

programmes would most benefit them. Our Employability programme is a 1-4 week long programme for NEET young people to develop the knowledge, understanding and essential skills employers look for in employees. Young people can also access standalone units in employability dependant on their needs. Once young people secure a work placement, we then provide one-to-one support for young people to help ensure they successfully engage with and complete the placement. They are also responsible for negotiating adaptations and pastoral and practical support on the placement to ensure that the young person has the best opportunity to succeed.

## OnSide: Get A Job

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The Get a Job programme supports young people aged 16-24 who are struggling most to stay in education or training or secure work. OnSide offer tailored group sessions and personalised one-on-one support to really help address what is holding them back. Whether it's a lack of qualifications or core skills, negative behaviour, or additional challenges such as mental health issues, substance misuse or a history of criminal activity, Get a Job helps identify and overcome each NEET (not in employment, education or training) young person's specific challenges. This starts with six weeks interactive group training designed to increase understanding of the opportunities available, raise aspirations and build essential skills and competences to succeed; including self-confidence, verbal and written communication, initiative, self-motivation.

It draws on the support of the local business community to provide inspirational role models, help young people develop the very skills local employers are looking for and to facilitate work experience or volunteering placements; guaranteeing each young person an interview for a real local job. Our Employment Coordinators also offer one-to-one support to enable participants to work through any personal obstacles and build on their individual attributes. Our experience of running these programmes alongside the ESF programme and Big Lottery Fund's Talent Match with young people with significant barriers to employment and feedback from our beneficiaries, has taught us that intensive one-to-one support and practical training (as opposed to classroom based), is the most transformative approach.



## Digital Skills & Careers Services from: Youth Employment UK

Youth Employment UK is home to an online [skills and careers platform](#) for young people aged 14-24. Access to the information is free, impartial and both the service and its content has been co-created by young people. Within the Careers Hub young people are able to access information about the range of careers that exist, including labour market information and information on the pathways available to them. In addition, the Hub is filled with practical and up-to-date content around job hunting, digital skills, financial and mental health support. The Hub directly links young people to opportunities by housing a database of Youth Friendly organisations who are able to

list their good quality opportunities to young people.

The Young Professional is a suite of learning programmes for young people supporting them on their journey to work. Based on the NPC Journey to Employment Framework and mapped to Gatsby Benchmarks, Skills Builder and the CDI Framework the Young Professional provides personalised and certificated learning for young people. Organisations supporting young people can access their own dashboard to track and evidence the progress young people in their network are making against the frameworks.

## Go Think Big: O2 and NYA

Launched in 2012, GoThinkBig is a youth employment accelerator, designed to help young people overcome the 'no experience – no job' dilemma. Simple tools help young people identify their talents and passions, developing new skills to kick start their career. It is an online digital platform providing work experience opportunities, careers advice, CV reviews, and exclusive tips. GoThinkBig aims to equip young people with core skills will build their self-confidence and enable them to reach their full potential. This includes project management, leadership, teamwork, communication, creativity and innovation, and digital literacy.

Peer networks and building a young person's social capital are intrinsic to the programme, linking up with the right contacts, connecting to the experts, planning for the future and developing skills needed to succeed. Built on the principles of the earlier O2 Think Big social action programme, which gave small grants and support to launch an idea or enterprise projects that helped support their local communities; employing youth workers, both qualified and young apprentices, NYA engaged young people in social action and made it relevant to their lives, building their social capital and as their own agents of change.



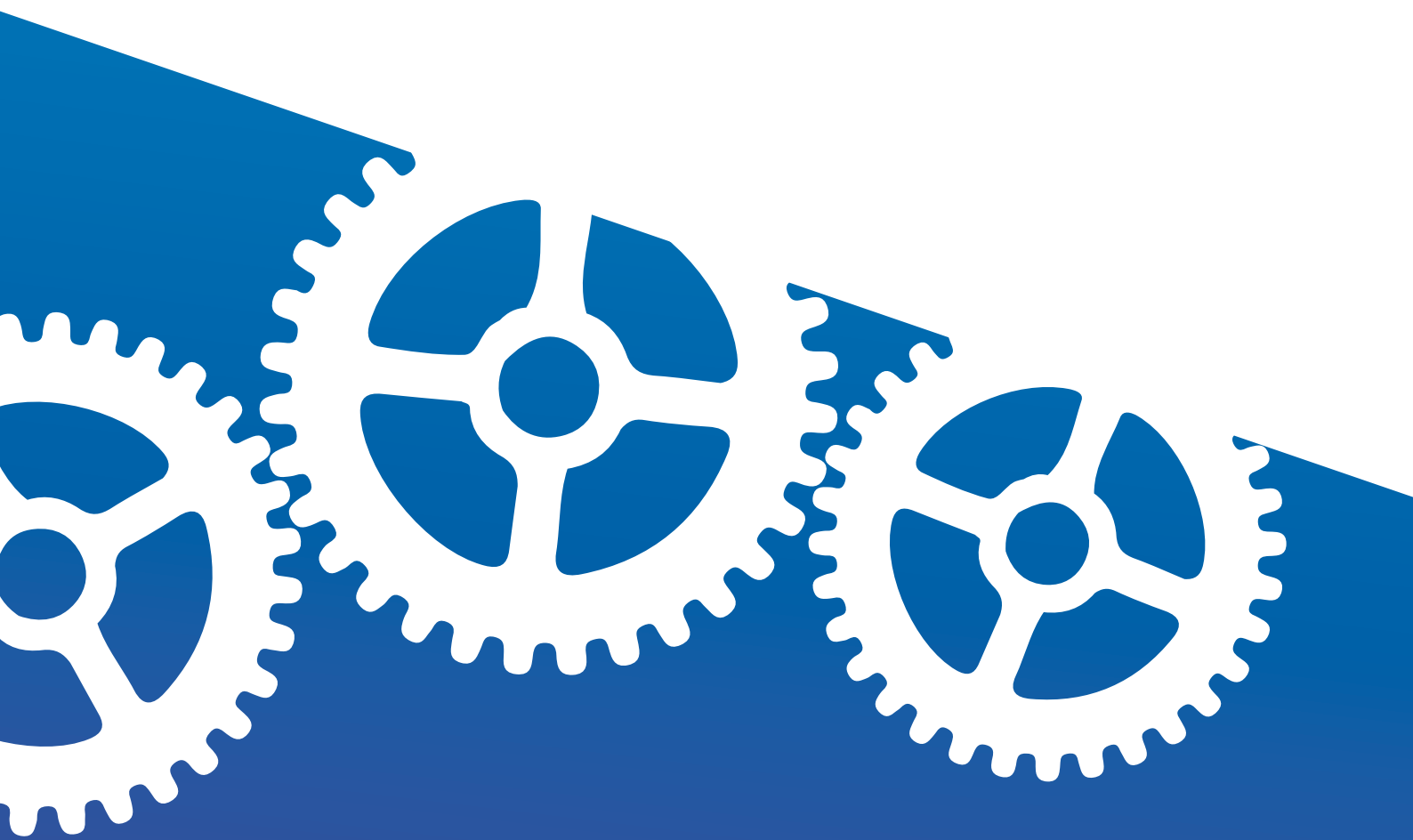
# Conclusion

Youth work has an essential role to play in removing barriers to unlock young people's potential through trusted relationships sustained over time. This helps to build young people's social capital and networks, and community resilience, based on the cornerstones of education, empowerment, equality and participation. Through such an approach, youth work is well-placed to help identify needs, engage young people 'where they're at', in particular for disadvantaged or marginalised young people; and supported into work, between jobs and within the community.

Youth work provides non-formal education, starting where young people are, through their voluntary engagement and trusted relationships, to navigate their transitions to adulthood. There is an established professional framework, skills and training supported by contextualised safeguarding and quality standards, with clear guiding principles and practice. It is important we do not 'reinvent the wheel' in designing and delivering youth employment programmes and services. Rather, to increase the capacity of current youth services, mobilise youth workers and invest in youth work training to support youth employment, and across professions and skilled volunteers – as mentors, coaches and wrap around services, for example. This requires significant investment in and alignment of youth services to support young people into work and sustained through long term relationships with a youth worker up to 25 years of age.

The recommendation for [a rapid response to mobilise the youth workforce](#) provides the starting point for cross-sector professional development and capacity building, to meet the scale of young people's needs.

Our recommended '**triple lock**' for youth employment emboldens the government's Opportunity Guarantee, levelling up youth provision across communities, as the foundation for the collective impact of the youth and employment sectors. The collective impact is key to ensure no young person is 'left behind', developing in young people the skills, resilience and flexibility for a rapidly changing society and labour market: transforming the lives of young people and their communities through youth work.



## A commitment to all young people

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### Youth Covenant<sup>48</sup>

The Youth Covenant is 'a promise from the nation' for all young people to be safe and secure in the modern world, and treated fairly; supporting young people in the present and ambitious for their future:

- Skilled and equipped to learn and earn
- Positive health and wellbeing
- Active members of their communities
- Happy and confident in their future

### The Good Youth Employment Charter<sup>49</sup>

The charter compliments best practices around the engagement and employment of young people from protected groups and wider commitments to good employment. It recognises the importance of the following principles.

- **Creating opportunity** – Provide opportunities for young people to gain the skills and experiences they need, through meaningful and good quality experiences of the world of work that raise their aspirations, skills and personal networks.
- **Recognising Talent** – Recruit young people based on their ability, talent and potential, recognising they may have limited experience. Ensure young people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups, as well as those young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those with additional needs or barriers are not unfairly excluded.
- **Fair Employment** – Provide good quality employment opportunities for young people, such as apprenticeships, graduate roles, entry level jobs and supported internships. Offer fair and safe opportunities and rewards in accordance with the highest industry standards.
- **Developing People** – Promote the development of all young people through on and off the job training and support so they are motivated to take ownership and responsibility for their careers, and they are equipped to progress.
- **Youth Voice** – Listen to young people. Actively provide opportunities for their voice to be heard within a community or organisation.

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<sup>48</sup> Youth Covenant: published by NYA; open-sourced for all services and agencies to sign up as a commitment in support of young people. It provides a common language and shared outcomes for individuals and whole communities, acting also as a guide to align funders, commissioners and services in positive outcomes for young people.

<sup>49</sup> The Good Youth Employment Charter published by Youth Employment UK in collaboration with a range of youth employment experts and young people including the Youth Employment Group. It provides a framework to support, inspire and recognise all those employers who are committed to providing good quality opportunities to young people; who can also choose to be listed on the national Youth Friendly Database connecting to thousands of young people.

# Appendix One

## Tables: youth work practice in employment

The table below includes key themes from the youth work curriculum that may be associated with employment to support the personal and social development of young people.

**Table 1.**

Curriculum themes	Issues
<p><b>Health and wellbeing</b> Youth workers support young people to make informed choices about how they live, approach risk and take responsibility for their own behaviour in relation to their lifestyle</p>	<p>Health and wellbeing are not just about an individual's physical, mental or emotional health but also about how these affect a young person's ability to achieve their goals or to contribute to their community or society.</p>
<p><b>Healthy relationships</b> Youth workers support young people to make informed choices about how they live, to assess risks and to take responsibility for their own behaviour in relation to their lifestyle.</p>	<p>Health and wellbeing are not just about an individual's physical, mental or emotional health but also about how these affect a young person's ability to achieve their goals or to contribute to their community or society. It also supports skills for managing interpersonal relationships within the workplace.</p>
<p><b>Skills development</b> Youth work helps young people to communicate clearly, make decisions, work together and contribute to a group, planning, problem solving and organisation.</p>	<p>Youth work offers opportunities for young people to learn specific skills which, in turn, develop personal and social skills over time. It provides opportunities for them to apply and develop their interests (such as arts, cookery, music production and sports).</p>
<p><b>Financial literacy</b> Youth work provides financial literacy education, for example, and access to further opportunities for study and employment.</p>	<p>Financial literacy and the transferrable skills of teamwork, decision making, reflection and critical thinking support young people in all aspects of their lives, including (future) employment.</p>
<p><b>Identity and belonging</b> Youth workers support young people as they explore their own identity and how they find a sense of belonging, and guide them to additional support, if required.</p>	<p>Identity (who we are, how we think about ourselves and the characteristics that define us and make us different from others) is not fixed. It is expressed through everyday interactions, how we relate to others and the role models who we look up to. During adolescence, the process of identity formation often involves conflicts and contradictions as neurological developments add an extra layer of complexity.</p>

The table below is an extract from the NYA Employability, Competencies and Skills Framework, supporting young people into employment.

**Table 2.**

<b>Self-confidence</b> <b>Self assurance</b> <b>Resilience</b>	Confidence to perform a task correctly or act appropriately to perform a job or solve a problem; including confidence in own abilities, decisions and views
<b>Project management</b> <b>Time management/ prioritisation</b> <b>Leadership and accountability</b>	To organise tasks efficiently and independently, setting the right priorities, use of time and managing the time of others in the most efficient way possible
<b>Communication</b> <b>Persuasiveness</b> <b>Teamwork</b>	To structure and convey messages and to convince others of ideas in any context and in order to achieve a particular task.

The table below illustrates some youth work practice in response to characteristics that may be associated with health and wellbeing.

**Table 3.**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Youth work practice: asset-based approach</b>
<b>Lack of confidence or self-esteem</b>	Positive self-image/role models/language/identity. 1:1 and group work to develop resilience and personal capacity
<b>Socially isolated/poor social skills</b>	Inclusive communication, opportunities to develop a diverse range of social skills/peer mentors/group work
<b>Undiagnosed difficulty (ADHD, dyslexia, hearing loss)</b>	Emotional assessment of needs (self-assessment Outcomes Star for instance), anti-discriminatory practice, reducing stigma, mentors, referrals
<b>Addiction and risky behaviours (alcohol, drugs, gambling, offending)</b>	Interventions/early help/peer mentors/peer education/awareness/group work. Harm reduction approaches
<b>Dysfunctional family or breakdown of family relationships</b>	Family support/education of basic rights/young carers support/referrals and role models

## Youth employment policies

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### Kickstart Scheme

A £2bn funding scheme for employers to create job placements for 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit, those particularly at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. The funding covers 100% of the National Minimum Wage for 25 hours per week, lasting for a total of 6 months; employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment (pension) contributions.

### Job Retention Bonus

This is a £1000 one-off taxable payment for employers that had placed an eligible employee on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and who remains continuously employed after its closure in October 2020. However the CJRS was first extended until December 2020, and then to April 2021 pending review in January 2021. The Job Retention Bonus has now been scrapped with a new incentive scheme set to take its place at the right time.

### Youth Hubs

A project in progress led by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to set up co-located employment services; where young people can go to access all the support under one roof, with the aim to engage the most at-risk and disadvantaged young people furthest from the labour market

### Employment, training and apprenticeships

- £1.6 billion towards up-scaling youth employment and training schemes (2020):
- £2000 will be given to businesses hiring new apprentices under the age of 25. This will be in addition to the existing £1000 payment given for 16-18 year old apprentices, and those under 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan
- £111m to triple the number of traineeships in 2020-21, increasing access to high quality training. £1000 funding will be available for each new trainee
- £17m for sector-based work academy placements in 2020-21, lasting for 13 weeks.
- £900m to double the number of work coaches to 27,000
- £32m investment in the National Careers Service, aiming to reach an additional 250,000 young people
- £150m increase to the Flexible Support Fund

# Appendix Three

## What the papers say: research and reports

### Youth Employment UK's Youth Voice Census

How young people of all backgrounds feel about education, training, experience, work and prospects in the UK today, 2020.

[Youth Voice Census 2020](#)

### Youth Futures Foundation

Why we need to start worrying more about youth unemployment, April 2020.

[Young, vulnerable, and increasing](#)

### Resolution Foundation

The labour market effects of the coronavirus crisis, May 2020.

[Young workers in the coronavirus crisis](#)

### Princes Trust

UK employers are warning of a looming skills crisis, January 2020.

[Futures at Stake 2020](#)

### Education Development Trust

Key principles to shape policy and practice drawing on 105 reports, 2020

[Youth transitions: creating pathways to success](#)

### Impetus

A collection of reports investigating the link between education and employment outcomes, 2019 and 2020

[Youth Jobs Gap](#)

### Youth Employment Group

Securing a place for young people in the nation's economic recovery, August 2020

[YEG Working Group Recommendations](#)

## About Youth Employment UK

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Youth Employment UK is an independent, not for profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment. As experts on youth employment and unemployment, Youth Employment UK is ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people, employers and policy makers; actively tackling youth unemployment and giving young people a voice in the youth employment issues that affect them.

Youth Employment UK provides the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment. Its aim is to promote youth employment in all its forms and the role of young people within the economy; to ensure young people's voices are heard; to highlight the need for quality opportunities; and to share best practice. [APPG for Youth Employment](#)

### More from Youth Employment UK

[Youth Voice Census](#) - how young people feel about education, training, work and prospects, 2020

[Good Youth Employment Charter](#) - a framework to support and recognise employers, 2020

[1000 Opportunities](#) - Youth Employment Group Campaign, 2020

[Long Shadow of Deprivation](#) - Youth Employment UK response to the Social Mobility Commission report, 2020

[Kickstart Guide for Employers](#) - YEUD briefing on DWP guide, 2020

## About National Youth Agency

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NYA is the national body for youth work in England (Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body) and the lead partner for Government, the Local Government Association, national youth organisations and non-governmental bodies (in teaching, policing and social care).

Formal guidance has also been published on the level of youth sector activities permitted at the different stages of the pandemic and is kept under review in line with government guidelines:

[Managing youth sector activities and spaces during COVID-19](#)

### More from NYA

[Out of Sight?](#) - Vulnerable young people, April 2020

[Hidden In Plain Sight](#) - Gangs and exploitation, May 2020

[Time Out](#) - Reimagining schools, June 2020

[Call for key worker status](#) - Youth work response to -19, July 2020

[Inside Out](#) - Young people's health and wellbeing, NYA-Brook, August 2020

[Youth Work Curriculum](#) - educational framework for youth work practice, September 2020

[Quality Mark](#) - built on the National Occupational Standards for youth work



# Notes

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The logo for the National Youth Agency (NYA) consists of the letters 'NYA' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The 'N' and 'Y' are connected at the top, and the 'A' is slightly offset to the right. The background is split into a blue triangle on the left and an orange triangle on the right, separated by a white diagonal line. In the upper right corner, there are three interlocking white gears on an orange background.

National Youth Agency

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