

Invitation for expressions of interest to be on the Youth Futures Foundation panel of evaluators

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About Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures Foundation was established in response to the government’s commitment to allocate an initial £90m of dormant asset funding to youth employment, particularly for those a long way from the labour market and those facing ethnic disparities in employment opportunities. Youth Futures is working to remove the barriers preventing disadvantaged young people from entering the labour market.

By focusing on young people furthest from the labour market and championing well-crafted solutions that have employers at their heart, we believe we can create a triple-win for society:

- Meaningful employment for young people
- Engaged and motivated employees for businesses
- A clear view on “what works” for young people, programmes and places to help inform practitioners on good practice and help policy makers to make robust decisions

Youth Futures will focus on young people aged 14-24 (with a priority for those aged 16-24) who face significant barriers into sustained, meaningful employment. Our funding will provide grants to promising or established support services and projects that support young people to overcome multiple barriers into high quality employment.

The first programme grants will be awarded from July 2020 on a rolling basis. We anticipate funding a range of programmes into two main streams:

- **Development funding:** for newer promising projects that Youth Futures will support to develop capacity, scale (where necessary) and develop a robust theory of change. Youth Futures will support these programmes through a mix of internal and individually commissioned capacity building support external to the evaluation panel.
- **Impact funding:** for more established projects, where we have high confidence that an evaluation is appropriate, we will trigger a call to our evaluation panel to tender. Programme funding will support two streams within impact funding. **Pilot grants** will be funded where projects need time to explore the participant journey through the programme and to potential outcomes. Full **efficacy grants** will be funded where the intention is to develop programmes into full experimental or quasi experimental trials (using robust counterfactual impact / RCT design) estimating the impact on employment and closely related outcomes.

For projects allocated to either pilot or efficacy stream, we are proposing **up to a one-year pre-launch phase** where we will fund supportive evaluation activities with the successful grant holder to ensure that projects have:

- A robust, accurate and compelling theory of change
- A full map of participant journeys and intermediate outcomes through support
- Clear articulation of the support model, good fidelity and attribution of EET outcomes
- A clear, well-designed evaluation plan
- That the grantee has robust data systems and processes
- The evaluator has (where appropriate) secured access to any relevant control group data or datasets that fully meet the needs of the evaluation specification

We anticipate that over one to two years, the majority of grant holders will be ready to undertake a full trial of their support. Where impact evaluations are not feasible or appropriate, we will fund high quality alternative methods.

Youth Futures approach to evaluation

We are an affiliate of the What Works network¹, guided by the principle that the ultimate aim of all our grants is to find out which programmes are effective (and which are not) and to learn, more broadly, 'what works'. We know that there is currently little robust available evidence on which programmes are most effective to support young disadvantaged groups into meaningful employment and we aim to bridge this gap. Our forthcoming initial evidence review looking at employment outcomes for those facing barriers will be shared with interested applicants.

As an independent organisation, we set our internal timescales and costs for achieving our aims. We are very clear that as a commissioner we will focus on the *quality* of the research process and ensure that we mitigate threats to validity by ensuring that projects are ready to move to different evaluation stages.

Each of our evaluations will be guided by some key principles:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>

- **Independent:** While monitoring should be integrated into providers' activities, evaluation is a specialist skill. To maintain the quality, comparability, and the objectivity of the evaluation, we will commission evaluations from organisations independent of both the Youth Futures and the providers being assessed.
- **Appropriate:** We want to increase the levels of evidence available on this issue. However, we believe that there is little to be gained from enforcing the most rigorous methods (e.g. randomised controlled trials) on a programme if it is not appropriate. This could be inappropriate due to the size, level of development of the intervention, risks to delivery etc. We will assess the appropriate level of evaluation in partnership with independent evaluators and the providers.
- **Quality:** We want our grants to generate robust yet accessible findings at every stage so that our findings will have the maximum impact for policy and practice. As such, we will always commission the highest quality mixed methods evaluations in order to support the youth employability sector to find out not just *what works*, *but why*.
- **Partnership based:** The ability for evaluators to build positive relationships with delivery organisations, built on mutual respect and understanding will be key. While we do not expect providers to be evaluation experts, we do recognise their expertise in their model and their beneficiaries. The evaluation will be designed in partnership with them. Where the chosen evaluation approach requires changes to the delivery model or data collection, if all parties agree this is the right way forward, Youth Futures will fund any additional capacity needed to achieve this.
- **Transparent:** We will be transparent about intended evaluation plans, timelines for results, and by publishing all commissioned evaluations. Our published evaluations will present what doesn't work as well as what does, focusing on learning for the sector rather than individual organisational performance.
- **Clarity:** We will make the outputs of evaluations as clear and useful as possible. Evaluation partners will be required to think about this when designing and developing outputs, to ensure they are both rigorous and accessible to practitioners, local and national government, employers, young people and the wider community.

Youth Futures are running this expression of interest to build a panel of evaluators with relevant skills and experience to conduct high quality research and evaluation projects for youth employment initiatives funded through our Impact grants. We are looking for a range of skills and competencies, so it is not necessary to meet every core competency outlined below. We anticipate that some large-scale, complex evaluations may require partnerships between different research organisations.

We expect our work to grow over the coming years and envisage expanding the panel further in the future. We are now seeking the most promising evaluation partners with the skills and capacity to help us establish a high-quality evaluation practice in our first year of funding.

Memorandum of Understanding

In joining the Youth Futures evaluation panel, panel members and Youth Futures agree to the following terms:

- Successful panel members are not guaranteed to secure evaluation funding and each evaluation or research project will be tendered for individually
- Panel members agree to work to Youth Futures' research and evaluation standards and policies
- Agree to attend a first induction workshop
- Agree to participate in periodic meetings and provide expert advice and guidance to Youth Futures

How to apply

If you are interested in joining the panel, please complete a response template following the guidance below and send this to Jane Colechin jane.colechin@youthfuturesfoundation.org by 19th May 2020.

Organisations will be shortlisted based on the criteria below. Shortlisted organisations will be contacted by early June 2020 for a face-to-face meeting.

Timetable

Stage	Dates
EOI published	20 March 2020
Answers published to questions received published on this webpage weekly	20 March -15 April
Proposals due	19 th May
Assessment and interviews (<i>these will be carried out remotely if necessary</i>)	11 th May – 1st June (early applicants will be assessed from 11 th May)
Decisions made	2 nd June
Conference for appointed evaluators (<i>these will be carried out remotely if necessary</i>)	Mid June 2020

Guidance for submission of tenders

Please read this guidance carefully so that your response includes all the information we need to make an informed decision about your relevant skills and experience.

All EOI submissions must be a maximum of 15 A4 pages using the space as you see fit, whether text (no smaller than size 11 Arial font) or diagrams. We would also welcome a further page of Endnote references (with hyperlinks where available) to published evaluations you reference in your response template.

It would be helpful for you to follow the outline structure and headings in bold below. You do not have to have experience in every section and we only require responses for sections where you have significant expertise and experience.

In **addition** to your (up to 15 page) response we would like you to attach the following policies:

- Research ethics
- Safeguarding
- Data protection and GDPR
- Project management protocols

We recognise that a great number of labour market impact/trial evaluations have not been feasible in the past due to the ways in which they were commissioned. In your response we would like you to specify what you would do in **ideal conditions to support the highest quality evaluation processes/outputs** (not necessarily what you have done in the past).

Response template

Please outline using the main section headings (in bold):

- **Contact details**
- **Key staff and methodological/policy expertise**
- **Organisational experience in delivering youth-focused employment, training and labour market evaluations**
 - Including understanding the policy environment
 - Key considerations for delivering labour market evaluations for young people, especially those which focus on children and young people with complex needs into EET (Education, employment and training outcomes)
- **Approach to using programme theory in evaluations**
 - Including role of programme theory
 - Approach to developing and deriving indicators from logic models/theories of change
- **Approach to supporting projects/programmes in a pre-launch phase to support the design of an appropriate, robust evaluation framework**
 - Including formative, action-research/participatory methods
 - Supporting projects to capture data, pre-post measures and attribute outcomes
- **Approach to process analysis during pre-launch and within pilot/efficacy trials**
 - Including qualitative/quantitative methods and analysis
- **Approach to designing and delivering high quality impact evaluations**
 - Including RCT/QED design (particularly small/medium scale)
 - Other counterfactual designs using matched datasets

- **Other econometric methods and analysis**
 - Including cost-benefit analysis and other forecasting/modelling techniques
- **Accreditation, access and approach to sourcing appropriate datasets for youth employment programmes**
 - Including key longitudinal datasets
 - Strategies to create datasets where ideal data is not available
- **Other (innovative) methods and approaches to evaluate youth employment programmes**
- **Approach to reporting, disseminating and ensuring relevance of all findings to optimise regional and national learning and policy influencing**
- **Other (innovative) methods and approaches to reporting and disseminating learnings about what works to transform practice across delivery organisations and employers**
- **Table of day rates for staff/grades**
- **Contact details of two referees and the projects you completed for them**

Scoring criteria

We will score all EOIs against the following criteria

Scoring area	Criteria for excellent responses	Evidence rating
Organisational / staff experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant experience of delivering research and evaluation projects that support young people with complex needs into EET • Organisation understands the youth employment policy environment and how this affects evaluation design • Has worked with young people facing significant disadvantage and/or barriers to work and provides an excellent commentary on key research and evaluation considerations for working with these young people • Has a number of key staff with relevant research and policy experience in the youth employment sectors and can evidence impacts in in youth employment policy and/or practice 	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor
Programme theory / action research /	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive knowledge and experience of how programme theory is used in evaluations, including supporting 	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor

evaluation design	<p>programmes to design a robust theory of change, including outcome chains and relevant indicators from these. Excellent understanding of how programme theory is used formatively and summatively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent understanding of the issues and techniques to support programmes in the set-up phase of an evaluation, including excellent strategies to maximise the internal and external validity of any evaluation design and anticipate and mitigate key threats to these. Understands how to support programmes to participate fully in research and evaluation activities • Excellent understanding of the process of data collection in youth employment programmes, the potential issues and strategies to ensure that programmes can collect relevant data through the lifetime of the project to ensure the success of evaluation outputs 	
Evaluation methodologies (Including where completed: Process / Impact / Econometric design)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust, high quality approaches to specific methodology, with excellent understanding of how to apply these to the youth employment context • Understands the key opportunities and constraints of different methodological approaches • Capable of operating effectively when faced with ambiguity, small sample sizes and the need for flexibility 	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor
Data access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation has secured access to all major datasets that could be used in youth employment evaluations (including LFS, LEO) • Demonstrates ongoing participation in national networks to secure greater access to relevant datasets that could support Youth Futures Foundation's programme evaluations • Demonstrates good understanding and techniques to ensure impact evaluations can proceed where relevant national datasets are not available 	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor
Reporting and policy/practice impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has robust reporting approaches at every stage of an evaluation • Has an excellent understanding of how to write unbiased, reliable findings • Can write for a variety of policy, practice and lay people audiences • Can demonstrate novel or interesting ways to convey complex data in an engaging 	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor

	<p>way; uses a variety of communication methods and formats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has excellent understanding of and/or experience of using evaluation findings to have impact on policy and practice	
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