



Youth Hubs – what works?

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Introduction

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The Youth Futures Foundation is keen to understand, evaluate and report on the effectiveness of all services that provide employment support for young people. With the recent introduction of plans for creating Youth Hubs, we are keen to support DWP to ensure the programme is a success.

The Youth Futures Foundation has an important role to play as an affiliate of the what works network in identifying existing evidence and examples of good practice for DWP to draw on when designing and setting up Youth Hubs (and other employment programmes).

This paper provides a high-level summary of the evidence on co-located employment services. It will be followed by a 'Youth Hubs Cheat Sheet' setting out how to apply these learnings in practice when opening a new Youth Hub and a podcast series featuring practitioners who have successfully delivered co-located employment services, so DWP staff can hear from them directly.

In addition, the Youth Futures Foundation is able to offer funding and expertise to establish an independent evaluation of the Youth Hub model to capture insights and learning that can be fed back to continuously improve practice and build the evidence base.

♦ Aims

Our aim is to develop an evidence base, supported by robust data that will report what works and inform best practice for Youth Hub models that enable effective, high-quality interventions for young people. We are aware that previous initiatives led by various organisations (DWP, local authorities and private and voluntary and community sector delivery organisations) have led to some success through co-location of employment support services. In light of the heightened impact of Covid19 on young people's employment prospects, there is an urgent need to roll-out dedicated Youth Hub services that are effective and easily accessible 'one stop shops' set-up to encourage engagement by young people, particularly those that are the most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market.

♦ Review of the effectiveness of co-located employability support services

To develop our immediate understanding of learnings so far, we have completed a rapid review of various research and evaluation reports related to employability support services. This paper identifies some key principles for consideration from these reports that may provide a helpful steer for designing co-located support services for young people.



Key principles for effective co-location of employment support services for young people

- **Governance and Partnerships**
- **Attracting and engaging young people**
- **Co-design with active feedback from young people**
- **Data, systems and effective review and evaluation of services**

Governance and Partnerships

♦ **Governance systems need to be included at the strategic level to provide effective leadership.**

This includes the implementation of clear structures and active leadership with members that have authority to make decisions. The most effective models had inclusive and constructive working arrangements, where members had equal input and could talk openly about challenges. Leaders should also consider establishing meaningful partnerships with neighbouring local authorities, JCP and other public sector organisations to better integrate employability support at a sub-regional scale, working across business districts and commuter towns to create employability services and systems within a place, irrespective of whether they are part of a devolved area or not.

♦ **Good project management is important to provide oversight and co-ordination through clearly articulated ways of working to ensure robust operational services.**

This ensured that systems and processes ran smoothly, communicated with and engaged partners to resolve conflicts and challenges. Such leadership is deemed particularly critical during the early stages of rolling out services. In addition to Partnership Agreements, it was felt that Service Level Agreements (SLAs) would be beneficial for operational service delivery between partners, particularly to co-ordinate working practices, making responsibilities clear and plan resourcing needs.

♦ **Lead Partners' capabilities and experience play a vital role in setting the direction and tone.**

The skills, capacity and legitimacy of lead partners were essential to the formation of effective partnerships. These factors enabled partnerships to develop quickly and led to effective management of relationships between partners (both strategic and delivery partners). Lead partners acting as 'independent brokers' in driving the service, to address challenges, manage the performance of delivery partners, or more broadly co-ordinate actions for an emerging need or for a new funding opportunity.

♦ **Create a culture of strong, trusting relationships and leverage the power of collaborative partnerships.**

From senior strategists to frontline staff, co-location offered opportunities for stronger personal and professional relationships between staff of different organisations, supported by collaborative leadership and good governance at both strategic and operational levels. This was found to be particularly important to creating closer relationships between work coaches and key workers to ensure ‘warm handovers’ and better tailored and effective support for individuals.

♦ **Previous experience of partnership working should be considered to expedite setup.**

Partners with previous success of co-located services instilled confidence and where partners operated in the same local area, they were often able to utilise their existing contacts to offer a speedy service.

Attracting and engaging young people

♦ **Create the right environment through effective partnerships.**

The service should be accessible in youth-friendly locations, with an appealing brand that is distinct from JCP. Some young people found centrally located Hubs convenient and enjoyed the social aspect of group settings. Some young people with additional needs and barriers found accessing busy group settings unsettling, particularly where it was their first encounter. Warm introductions to group settings by youth or community leaders who the young people trust will support engagement.

♦ **Outreach services are critical for engaging hard-to-reach young people.**

Engagement of ‘harder to reach’ young people can be achieved through outreach activities and partnerships with other organisations in the local area. Providing suitable ‘hooks’ to engage young people and making the offer sufficiently flexible will help to engage young people with more complex needs. A single service that extended beyond the JCP claimant offer and local authority/ partner-led services was found to engage more participants not claiming benefits at the point of referral.

♦ **Active case management and tracking needs of support participants is critical to minimising drop out.**

The most effective models assess initial support participants’ needs, provide a clear support ‘journey’ to the participant and then refer, or provide a warm handover to support. It is important for the case manager and referral partners to have clear shared systems and processes to respond to support actions or referrals, and feedback information between them so that support participants do not have to repeat their needs or barriers at every stage.



♦ High quality coaching support

- Many participants directly attributed successful outcomes to the quality of the support received. One- to-one support from a coach was usually the most valuable aspect of the service for participants. Young people value advisors or coaches who are helpful, caring, approachable and knowledgeable. Staff training is vital to ensure high quality provision and equip advisors/coaches to identify and support young people with additional needs, including mental health or learning disabilities. Continuity is important; changes of advisors or coaches are found to disrupt support and prevent effective relationships being formed.
- An in-house employer engagement and training team can enhance the offer, enabling greater use and sequencing of work experience, traineeships and work-focused training. This is important as it enables advisors to offer choice to young people and steer them towards a job they are interested in – and more likely to stick with. Work and training opportunities are often regionally specific so strengthening relationships between advisors, local training and support providers and local employers is helpful.

Co-design with active feedback from young people

♦ Involvement of young people is extremely beneficial to creating services that they will engage with.

Several partnerships highlighted the important contribution made by young people in bringing a different dynamic to partnerships. The 'lived experience' of young people seeking employment helped shape the nature and delivery of activities and delivery partners. Examples included the involvement of young people in interview panels for the selection of delivery partners, their role as peer mentors and in challenging providers' assumptions around the needs of young people. During delivery it is vital to involve the young people who are receiving support and coaching in shaping their own training and employment needs.

Data, systems and effective review and evaluation of services

♦ Clear implementable data sharing guidance for partnerships improves the quality of support.

The sharing of data between statutory and non-statutory agencies, on an informed consent basis, would make life easier for advisors and vastly improve the quality of support offered, particularly in keeping people engaged in voluntary programmes. In many cases, this will require data sharing legislation and/or use of service level agreements and informed consent as widely as possible.



♦ **Local authorities play a lead role in sharing supply and demand data to enable alignment of services.**

Local authorities as experts on their local labour market and the demographics of their area are well placed to join the two up. Acting as both the broker and data analyst to provide up-to-date information on supply and demand, so that partners can better understand the underlying barriers to employment in any given area and how to tackle them and plug gaps. By mapping local labour market trends, utilising local intelligence and through brokering local relationships and networks, local authorities can create appropriate channels to disseminate this information to local employers and their residents.

♦ **Effective systems and processes recommended for recording and monitoring referrals.**

Clearly articulated systems and processes for managing referrals, that are maintained and shared with partners provide for a common understanding across partners. This enables accurate and timely follow-up of referrals and ensures support participants are not lost between the different services.

♦ **Test and learn approaches, supported by early, robust evaluations to understand what works.**

To overcome difficulties in learning across delivery partners and create a culture of joining up at every level, the early commissioning of evaluations to run alongside programme delivery helped to alleviate some of the barriers early on and provided a common focus for strategic and operational delivery partners. This enabled partnerships to adapt activities which were not working sooner, and to try new ones. More generally this created a positive atmosphere for partnership working that was different from those previously experienced. With the new Youth Hubs model there is potential for a coordinated nationwide evaluation to perform this role by learning from activity on the ground, capturing and sharing insights across the network.

For reference, the research and evaluation reports can be found under the following links:

[MyGo Evaluation: Final report](#) (Learning and Work, 2018)

[Evaluation of the Liverpool City Employment Gateway](#) (Learning and Work, 2018)

[Talent Match Evaluation: Youth Employment Partnerships](#) (Sheffield Hallam University 2018)

[Work Local - Report to the Local Government Association on developing a modern, local, public employment and skills service](#) (Learning and Work Institute, 2017)

[Work It Out - Creating Local Systems of Employability Support](#) (Association for Public Service Excellence 2016)

[Evaluation of the deepened co-location trials](#) (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012)

Please contact the Youth Futures Foundation to discuss further:

info@youthfuturesfoundation.org

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futures
FOUNDATION

Tintagel House
92 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TY