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Introducing Youth Futures Foundation

We are an independent not-for-profit organisation established in December 2019 to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Youth Futures launched with an initial endowment of £90 million from the Dormant Assets Scheme and, in January 2022, the government announced that we had been allocated a further £20 million.

The youth unemployment challenge

In early 2021, as the economy entered another full lockdown, young people from marginalised backgrounds were caught between weak demand in the economy and high competition for jobs because the hospitality and leisure sectors were still largely shut down.

When lockdown lifted and the furlough scheme ended in the second half of 2021, an economic uptick triggered high demand for jobs, but worrying trends of long-term youth unemployment and economic inactivity had taken root.



This was a pivotal moment for grasping the changing youth unemployment context:

- It's still unacceptable that one in 10 young people (689,000) in the UK were not in education, employment or training (NEET) between July and September 2021.
- Young people in general were hit worst by the labour-market crisis triggered by the pandemic. In February 2020, there were 3.9m young paid employees (aged 16–24) in the UK but by December this had fallen to 3.4m. This 0.5m fall accounted for about half the total reduction in employment, although by September 2021 it had returned to at least pre-pandemic levels.
- Research funded by Youth Futures and conducted by The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) found that the falls in employment were mainly among men. The employment rate for young women remained largely unchanged, with more turning to education instead.
- The fall in employment during the pandemic was four times greater for young Black people than for young White people, while the fall for young Asian people was nearly three times greater.
- Long-term youth unemployment (more than six months) grew at its fastest rate in a decade during the pandemic and reached a five-year high. However, this has now started to fall back slowly. Figures released in November 2021 showed that 167,000 young people had been unemployed for more than six months.
- Job vacancies from August to October 2021 rose to a new record of 1.2m, an increase of 400,000 from pre-pandemic levels. Fifteen of the 18 industry sectors were showing record highs, with the fastest rates of growth seen in construction, transport and storage.
- Based on interviews with 90 employers and analysis of survey data from 81,000 businesses, research for Youth Futures by IFF Research showed that for employers to provide meaningful opportunities to young people, there must be an acceptance that the short-term training costs will be repaid once young people become productive in the workplace.
- The highest rates of unemployment for 16–17- and 18–24-year-olds are were London (52% and 19% respectively). The highest rates of NEETs are in the North East. There must be an acceptance that short-term training costs must be weighed against the benefits of young people becoming more productive in the workplace later.

*<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/november2021>

Foreword from Sir Tony Hawkhead

Youth Futures achieved a huge amount in 2021: we provided critical funding, collaborated on – and shifted – Government policy, and built a diverse team across England.

2021 was a busy and exciting year of growth for Youth Futures but it was characterised by constant change. The pandemic caused significant economic and educational disruption, and the subsequent increase in youth unemployment pushed this issue to the top of the political agenda.

As restrictions lifted and the economy began to recover, youth unemployment fell, but the benefits of the economic recovery were not felt equally. This is the core mission of Youth Futures – to support young people facing disadvantage into the job opportunities that are now available.



Driving systemic change

Young people from marginalised backgrounds continued to face the biggest challenges, with the most vulnerable still having to navigate disjointed services. When young people facing disadvantage told us what they wanted from employment support, they talked about changes to the whole system. We responded by:

- Investing in potentially game-changing approaches and identifying what works to improve the overall system
- Launching our flagship £6.1m Connected Futures Fund to reduce the fragmentation of youth employment and skills delivery in the places that need it most. The fund aims to join up services at a local level so that young people furthest from the job market receive consistent high-quality support to address complex needs
- Developing a first-of-its-kind interactive map of the youth-employment system based on the experiences of young people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, those with experience of the care system, and those with experience of the criminal-justice system. This innovative digital tool informed the creation of the Connected Futures Fund

Focusing on what works

Young people from marginalised backgrounds need the best possible support to get good jobs. To help them find work, we need to know which approaches are most effective. Our initiatives that produced results in 2021 included:

- Taking a significant step towards identifying what works by launching our Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map – the world's largest, quality-checked evidence base on youth employment – which shows the global evidence base on what works to improve youth skills, employment and job quality
- Generating evidence of what works by running England's largest portfolio of evaluations of youth employment provision.
- Assessing the programmes we fund: 66% of the 8,540 young people on the Inspiring Futures project, co-funded with Children in Need, have already made progress – including 37% (3,156) who have made significant progress – on pathways towards education, training and employment outcomes.



Youth participation is a cornerstone of our work. Young people with direct experience of disadvantage and discrimination feed into all of our activity.

Collaborating

Igniting change through collaboration is in our DNA. In 2021, we built new networks and boosted existing partnerships by:

- Co-chairing the Youth Employment Group (YEG), taking on the position of secretariat, and successfully influencing Government policy to extend Kickstart through our Opportunity Guarantee campaign
- Setting up the YEG Ethnic Disparities subgroup to tackle systemic racism and discrimination faced by young people in the labour market
- Building links with employers by launching our Employer Advisory Board and commissioning two evidence reviews on employer recruitment and retention practice

Igniting change through youth voice

Youth participation is a cornerstone of our work. Young people with direct experience of disadvantage and discrimination feed into all of our activity, including:

- Sitting on our Board of Directors and making decisions on our grants and investment portfolio
- Shaping our research and evaluations and influencing key stakeholders and practice within the system
- Developing robust approaches, by measuring the impact of youth participation with the first cohort of our Future Voices Group at the heart of this work, to ensure it is meaningful, impactful and developmental

Building capacity

To realise our ambition, Youth Futures has recruited 34 permanent members of staff and opened new hubs in Birmingham and Leeds. We now have a vibrant, diverse and talented team working across the country.

None of this would be possible without the tireless support of Youth Futures' founding Chair, Joe Montgomery. In his three-year tenure, he provided expert insight and guidance and steered the organisation through the youth unemployment crisis. We would like to offer our sincere gratitude to Joe and wish him every success in his next venture.

Looking forward into 2022, our strategic focus will be:

- Maintaining, growing and communicating our What Works expertise and activities
- Addressing fragmentation in the system at a local level
- Understanding the evidence on employer practice and behaviour, and working with others to improve it
- Continuing to build a strong, happy and motivated team

Working with our partners and stakeholders, we're looking forward to driving through long-term systemic change so that young people from marginalised backgrounds achieve their full potential.

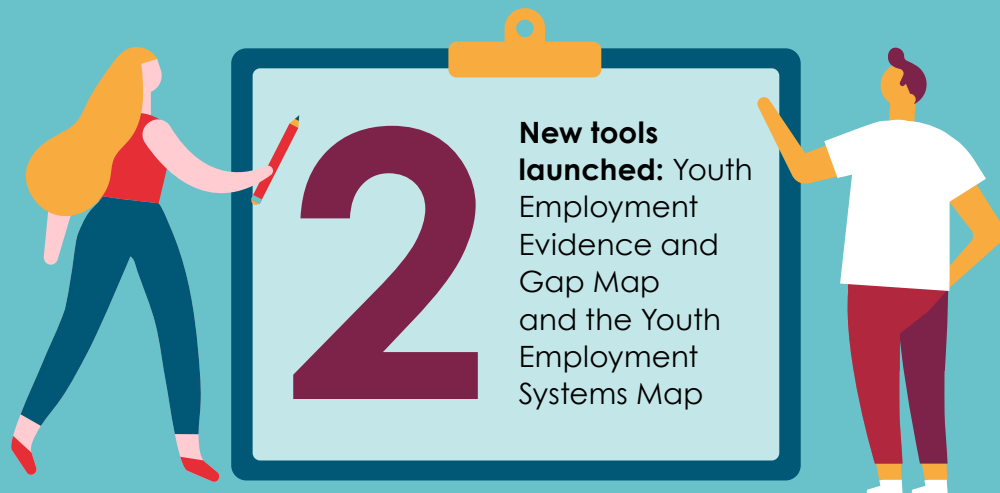
Sir Tony Hawkhead Interim Chair



2021 in numbers:

£20.2 million

Cumulative grant funding awarded (£5.2m awarded in 2021)



New tools launched: Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map and the Youth Employment Systems Map

300+

Members of the Youth Employment Group

20

Pieces of content produced by our Future Voices Ambassadors

2

New grant programmes launched

4,081

Organisations supported via infrastructure funding

3

New advisory panels launched: 13 x members EAB, 18 x member organisations, one evaluation panel, 40+ members of the YEG ethnic disparities subgroup

11

Grantees supported via new awards

1,325

Young people reached (from a cumulative total of 17,757)

148

Organisations supported in total

658

Studies in the Evidence and Gap Map and 3,606 visits to website page

70% Increase in LinkedIn followers and 35% increase in Twitter followers

2

Policy papers written and 1 Government submission with the YEG, and 2 Government submissions by Youth Futures

8

Research and evaluation papers published: 88% of stakeholder survey respondents say that they trust the evidence and research we produce

8

Parliamentary mentions in the Lords and the Commons related to the Dormant Assets Bill recognising the impact of our work

£3.3 million

Committed to 23 evaluations

Cumulative total of young people reached

17,757

Our vision

A society where all young people have equal access to good-quality jobs.

This includes:

- Equal employment outcomes for young people who face discrimination or disadvantage
- Fewer young people outside the labour market or in insecure work
- Improved progression pathways for young people

Our mission

To narrow the employment gap by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

Our values

- **We are bold:** We want to disrupt the status quo and transform the youth-employment system
- **We are always learning:** We are evidence-driven, we innovate and we aren't afraid to fail
- **We are inclusive:** We embrace, celebrate and champion diversity in all its forms – it's core to who we are
- **We are collaborative:** We build partnerships and share power to increase the collective impact
- **We are determined:** We are relentless in our pursuit of a better future for all young people

Our long-term impact

By collaborating with others, we can have a positive long-term impact on the lives of marginalised young people across the country. We will do this by reducing the employment gap and improving the quality of jobs that young people enter and progress to.

Our long-term focus is to:

1 Reduce the employment gap (or risk of NEET*) between young people:

- From ethnic minority groups and those who identify as White British
- Who have disabilities and those who don't
- From disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are better off
- Across different regions of England

2 Reduce the pay gap between certain ethnic minority groups and the average.

3 Reduce the percentage of young workers in temporary jobs or on zero-hours contracts when they want permanent jobs or fixed hours.

4 Increase the percentage of young people moving out of low-paid work.

*Not in education, employment or training

Our strategic approach

We are an ambitious organisation that takes a systemic approach to supporting young people from marginalised backgrounds to land good jobs. From 2020–23 we are focusing on three strategic priorities:

- 1 Changing the system:** Work with others to transform the youth-employment system.
- 2 Creating opportunities:** Support more employers to recruit and retain young people from marginalised backgrounds.
- 3 Building capacity:** Equip practitioners to train and support young people from marginalised backgrounds so that they are ready for work.



A timeline

2019
–
2020

Building Capacity
Organisation setup and creating our flagship What Works initiative

2021

Systems Change
Dedicating time to understanding and addressing youth employment at a systemic level by creating a national Youth Employment Systems Map and our Connected Futures Fund

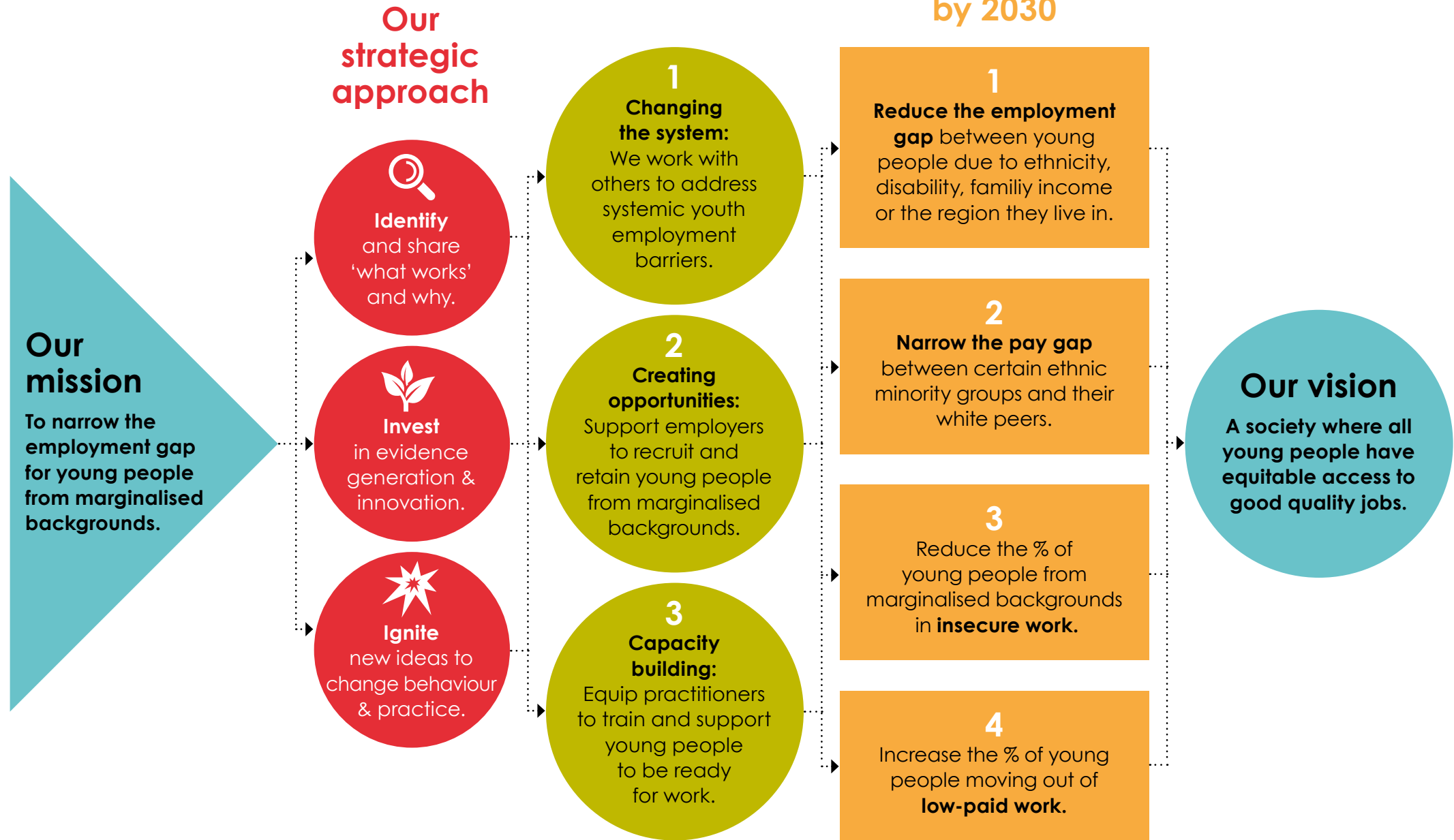
2022

Creating Opportunities
Start to influence employer practice and behaviour

2023

Continued Expansion
Strong foundations will be in place across our strategic priorities

Strategic framework





Investing in potential



When we launched Youth Futures Foundation, our aim was to invest in great practice and innovation through our Development and Impact Grants Programme.

These programmes find, support and evaluate promising practice that demonstrates what works in improving labour market outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

When the pandemic changed the youth employment landscape, we identified the need to support frontline community organisations and the infrastructure bodies that sustain them. We therefore added a strand of work to provide resilience funding for the youth-employment ecosystem. In 2021, we opened the second phase of our Infrastructure fund to build on this momentum and scale up the use of evidence while learning from the frontline.



Did you know?

Our Grants and Evaluation Committee includes two young members who participate in all our funding decisions.

Our Inspiring Futures COVID-19 response programme, developed in partnership with Children in Need and Rocket Science, supported 107 frontline organisations. Cordis Bright, our evaluator, is working closely with our Youth Reference Group to make sure the young people who have benefited from the programme are able to give honest feedback about what worked and what could be improved.

With our grant programmes delivering results and our COVID-19 fund supporting the frontline, we launched our flagship £6.1 million Connected Futures Fund to deliver our priority of changing the system.



“The Youth Reference Group has really enjoyed working with Cordis Bright. We’re looking forward to discovering the impact of the Inspiring Futures programme and how we can harness best practice to ensure young people are well supported towards employment.”

Anisha and Louise
Youth Reference Group

Connected Futures Fund

In 2021, we launched our Connected Futures Fund, our flagship £6.1 million fund that will help young people facing disadvantage land good jobs through pioneering local partnerships. The fund aims to join up services at a local level so that young people furthest from the job market receive consistent high-quality support.

Those with multiple disadvantages and lower qualifications are much more likely to become long-term unemployed. These young people need:

- holistic employment support that takes their needs and strengths into account
- aligned services that work together to help them achieve their goals
- connected services with effective communication and coordination across organisations and sectors so that they don't have to navigate everything for themselves
- consistent support over time

When we talk about connected futures, we're looking at the ways employers, educational settings, health services, social care, housing agencies and the criminal-justice system can come together to improve the outcomes for young people facing disadvantage. We hope this fund will encourage deeper collaboration at local level with young people at the centre.



Investing in potential: Infrastructure Resilience Grants



Our Infrastructure Resilience Grants supported key organisations to deliver capacity-building for charities and not-for-profits, as well as driving evidence-led practice that will help Youth Futures ignite change.

We provided support for these infrastructure organisations with a focus on:

- National organisations responding to the needs of all young people seeking work
- Organisations that exclusively empower young people from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, including those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage

So far, we have committed £1.7m in funding for 11 national and regional infrastructure organisations. Grant recipients include Ubele, a social enterprise that supports people from the African diaspora; the Association of Employment & Learning Providers; and UK Youth.

In 2021, we commissioned RAND Europe to produce a report of the findings of this programme. Together, we are creating a national network to share insights about what works drawn from the global evidence base and evaluations we commission.

In August 2021, we opened the next wave of Infrastructure funding to applications and will support a further eight organisations with multi-year funding.

"Early findings suggest that infrastructure organisations can play a key role in supporting employment of young people from marginalised backgrounds. Greater collaboration and knowledge sharing with funders could help to identify gaps and unmet needs in service provision, increase broader awareness of relevant issues and influence policy and practice."
Joanna Hoffman, RAND Europe

The Ubele Initiative

The Ubele Initiative (Ubele) is an African diaspora-led infrastructure organisation empowering Black and minoritised communities in the UK. It works with 250 community organisations to bring about social and economic change by delivering intergenerational leadership initiatives, capacity support, enterprise and asset development.

Ubele uses Infrastructure funding to support its employability programme: Supporting Youth Employability in Black and Ethnic Minority-Led Organisations. This programme helps Black and minoritised young people identify routes into manual trades and the labour market through the Kickstart Scheme.

"To bring about change, we must recognise the gaps in our knowledge, attitudes and practice. It will require input from policy-makers, decision-makers, the construction and manual

trade sectors, schools and families to change young people's perceptions of the opportunities available to them. We must continue to highlight the challenges facing Black and minoritised young people."

[Karl Murray, Associate Director Research and Evaluation](#)

Ubele's insights into perceptions about manual trades:

- A male-dominated industry that is unwelcoming and unattractive to girls and young women. This lack of gender diversity is seen as a barrier for females
- The need to earn income quickly and be your own boss attracts many young people to manual trades
- There is poor information and advice on the opportunities and pathways for entering manual trades
- Racism and discriminatory attitudes in the building trade are barriers for some Black and minoritised young people



Investing in potential: The What Works Programme



Our What Works Programme helps us identify what does and doesn't work when supporting young people to land good jobs. We invest in approaches and interventions that can be tested, evaluated and, where proven to be effective, scaled up.

These grants support organisations working with young people aged 14–24 who are either not in employment, education or training (NEET) or are at risk of becoming NEET. Two types of grant funding are available:

- Development Grants – helping organisations strengthen the design, delivery, scale and reach of programmes that are not yet ready for larger-scale delivery or evaluation
- Impact Grants – supporting programmes that have the potential to generate useful lessons both for the organisation and a wider audience through robust evaluation

Since 2020, we have awarded £10.3m in funding to 25 frontline charities and social enterprises across England. Grantees include Nottingham-based Switch Up, a charity that supports young people aged 16–25 at risk of criminal exploitation; and West of England-based 1625 Independent People, a charity that supports young people leaving the care system and those who are at risk of becoming homeless.



Switch Up

Switch Up and its sister charity, the Nottingham School of Boxing, provide life-changing support to more than 100 young people (aged 14–24) who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET in communities affected by crime and violence. Using mentoring, sport and personal-development plans, the charity improves young people's mental and physical wellbeing.

Most of the young people are from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds who have experienced adverse childhoods. They are introduced to Switch Up through boxing classes, referrals from statutory agencies and schools, online and offline advertising, and media reports.

The grant supports Switch Up's intensive mentoring and employability workshops, physical-activity sessions (primarily boxing), and emotional counselling if required.



Switch Up's insights:

- What you offer young people has to be flexible to meet individual needs
- To engage and retain young people, it is vital to involve staff and volunteers who have lived experience of the issues they face
- Switch Up has a support network of more than 40 employers and training providers, through which we provide young people with a huge range of opportunities

"The grant from the Youth Futures Foundation shows how far Switch Up has come. We are thrilled to have been recognised for the support we have given to vulnerable young people."
[CEO Marcellus Baz, BEM](#) 🏆

"Switch Up and Youth Futures helped me turn my life around. Now I want to help others do the same."
[Enoch, a young beneficiary of Switch Up's programme](#)

Investing in potential: **Inspiring Futures Fund** 📄



The COVID-19 outbreak heightened existing challenges for children and young people looking to access further education, training and work. In partnership with BBC Children in Need, we delivered £7m in grants through the Inspiring Futures Fund to 107 frontline charities and social enterprises. These organisations work with nearly 13,000 young people who have experienced discrimination or disadvantages that create barriers to employment, especially those whose journeys towards employment have been affected by the pandemic.

Organisations that received funding included the Damilola Taylor Trust in London, Mencap, Manchester-based the Proud Trust, and Carers Trust Heart of England.

So far, 66% of the 8,450 young people on the programme are starting to make progress, of whom 3,156 have already made significant progress on their way towards education, training or employment.¹

Inspiring Futures' insights:

- Children and young people's wellbeing suffered in the pandemic. Contributing factors include a lack of digital resources and isolation. Confidence, motivation and self-esteem were affected by disruption to education and exams

- Children and young people adapted and, over time, many young people's resilience increased. However, some still require more support to increase their confidence and motivation
- The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing challenges. Disadvantaged families were affected the most as services faced funding difficulties
- There have been challenges shifting to mostly virtual support. It is harder to engage and connect with young people virtually, and services need to consider digital literacy and access to resources. On the other hand, you can reach more young people online and it helps develop practitioners' digital skills

¹ Data was collected from 46 organisations representing 8,540 young people. Examples of what progress/significant progress is measured against: improved employability skills, meaningful work experience, improved confidence, emotional resilience and self-esteem, work experience leading to work opportunities, and securing/sustaining EET outcome.

Toranj Tuition

In Hull, the number of under-16s living in poverty is nearly double the national average, and the local authority ranks in the top three for deprivation ([DCLG, 2019](#)). 📄 Poverty has a tremendous impact on Hull's diverse population, many of whom are refugees or low-paid migrant workers. Toranj Tuition plugs the gaps in local education provision and helps young people reach their potential.



"We fill the gaps in local education provision, support migrant communities, and help children and young people fulfil their potential." **Dr Pedram Saied**, Director, [Toranj Tuition](#) 📄

Toranj Tuition's insights:

Over the last three years, Yorkshire and the Humber has seen an increase in the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASCs) who are often victims of human trafficking. The Inspiring Futures grant supports young asylum seekers through secondary school by delivering English tuition, peer-mentoring sessions and work placements.

- Local resources can fix local problems
- Recruit tutors and peer-mentors from local universities and ethnic minority groups to be role models for young people arriving in the UK
- Provide training in the latest peer-mentoring techniques and safeguarding procedures



Identifying what works



Our approach as a What Works centre

As a member of the national What Works Network, all our decisions are guided by the best-quality evidence of what works when supporting young people from marginalised backgrounds to get good jobs.

Having curated and analysed studies from around the world conducted over the last two decades, we have funded the largest range of youth-employment interventions ever seen in this country (worth £3.3m). We have also produced research, resources and policy papers that tackle the issues affecting young people's employment and educational prospects. We learn from the projects we fund, and scale up that learning to drive long-lasting systemic change.



Did you know?

60% of our stakeholders agree Youth Futures is a leading What Works centre for supporting marginalised young people into jobs. They are also aware of our Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map.

In September, we launched the first ever Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map. This is the world's largest mapping resource, and it shows the global evidence base on what works to improve youth skills, employment and job quality. So far engagement with our evidence and gap map has been strong with 60% of our stakeholders surveyed using this resource. This map is supplemented with our own evaluations of practitioner interventions.

- Our flagship What Works Programme is up and running with evaluations underway for all 23 grants funded through Development and Impact
- These evaluations are being conducted by members of the Youth Futures evaluation panel
- We have established a Youth Reference Group to ensure young people shape our evaluation approach
- In November, we published a review of our Inspiring Futures Programme

In 2021, we produced eight new pieces of analysis of the nature of the problem and what works to deal with it. This includes several reports highlighting the impact of the pandemic on the youth labour market; prospects for future employment growth; a suite of reports focusing on SME and large employer engagement in the youth labour market; and a review of our Inspiring Futures grant programme. We are seen as a leading producer of research on 'what works' when it comes to youth unemployment, almost nine out of 10 of our stakeholders surveyed trusted our research and evidence.

Identifying what works: Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map



In 2021, we launched the first iteration of our [Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map](#). This lays out 658 high quality global studies from the last two decades on the effectiveness of interventions to help young people into work.

The map helps us identify gaps in evidence so we can focus research and evaluation on areas that build our understanding of what helps young people into employment. It provides a visual representation of the evidence available, gives access to studies to support our decision-making, and is a foundation for developing evidence-based products and services.

The five intervention categories in the map are: support to employment; decent work policies; training; information and finance; and entrepreneurship, of which the two largest are training and support to employment.

The next step involves creating a youth-employment toolkit, which will help decision-makers design high-quality services and policies by distilling the evidence base into easy-to-read summaries and guidance.

"We will build the evidence architecture so that it becomes a resource used by our stakeholders – policymakers, youth-employment practitioners and employers – to impact youth employment at scale across England." [Chris Goulden, Director of Impact and Evidence, Youth Futures](#)

Listen to the podcast:
<https://anchor.fm/youth-futures/episodes/Episode-1--Youth-Employment-Evidence-and-Gap-Map-e1a2goe/a-a6sbfid>

Intervention types in the map



| Intervention | Studies |
|--|---------|
| Training, up-skilling & re-training/skilling | 527 |
| Support to employment | 315 |
| Decent work Policies | 159 |
| Information | 81 |
| Entrepreneurship promotion & financing | 162 |

Identifying what works: Employer research



We commissioned research – with funding partners Movement to Work – to explore employer engagement in the youth labour market. It focused on employers' experiences and perceptions of recruiting young people, participating in apprenticeships and traineeships, and providing work experience and work inspiration activities. The research comprised analysis of the Employer Skills Survey 2019 and qualitative research with more than 90 employers across the country.

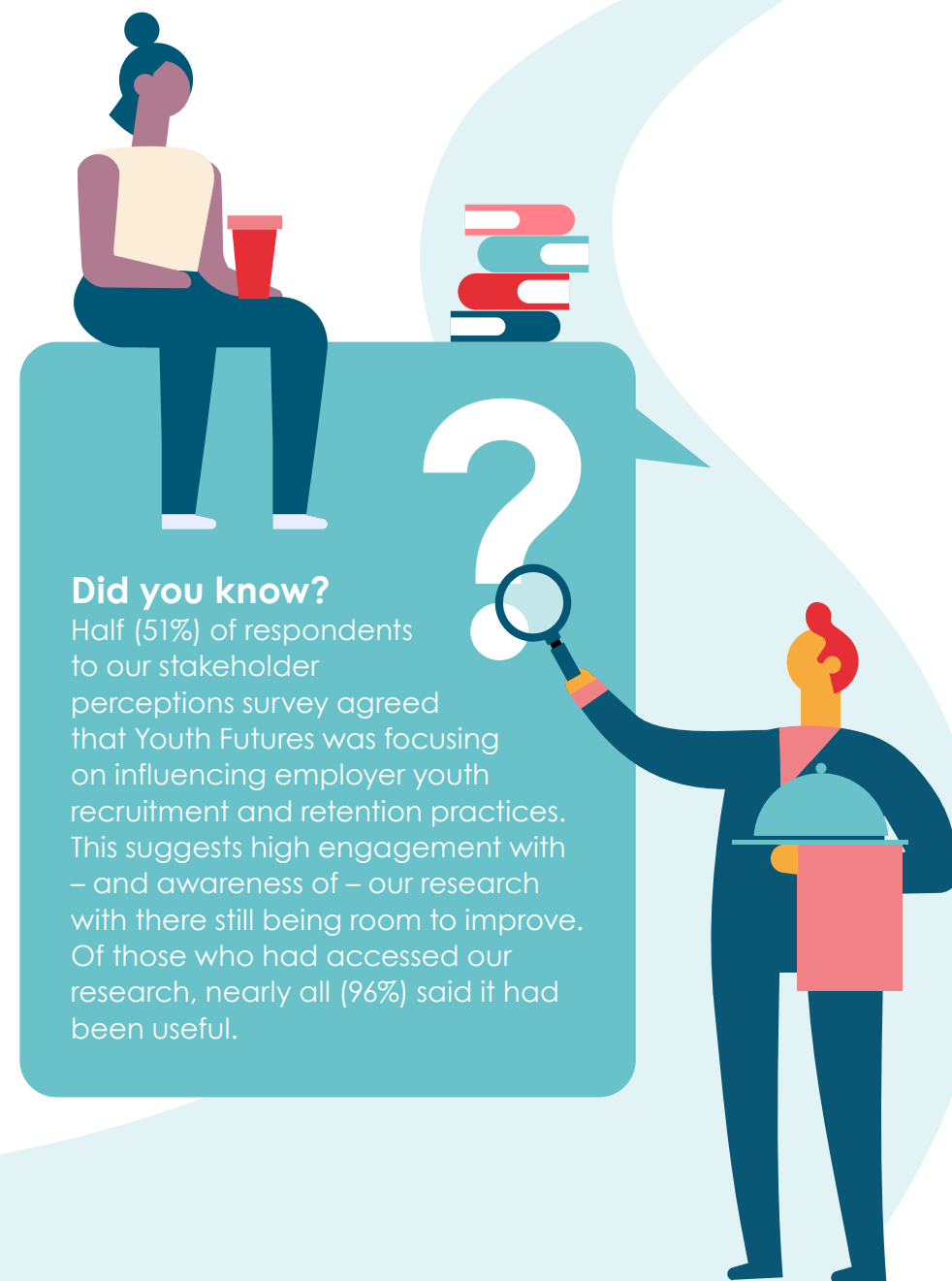
By engaging in youth-employment programmes, we believe employers can break the vicious 'no job – no experience' cycle that many young people facing disadvantage experience. Alongside the economic and societal benefits, including better job prospects for young people who lack connections, the research shows that there are benefits for businesses looking to engage. Employer-led youth-employability schemes are a great way to strengthen talent pipelines, harness diverse ideas and skills, and futureproof businesses.

The findings will inform our approach to learning from employers and sharing good practice in 2022. We will also build links with employers and intermediary bodies to help connect young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with good-quality job opportunities.

Our Future Voice Ambassador, Naomi Robinson, took part in a roundtable to promote the reports and offered her insights: "It's vital for young people to research employers to find out if they are the right fit because it's important to be your true self at work."



Listen to the podcast:
<https://anchor.fm/youth-futures/episodes/Employer-engagement-in-the-youth-labour-market-e1emikj/a-a7f05vb>



Did you know?

Half (51%) of respondents to our stakeholder perceptions survey agreed that Youth Futures was focusing on influencing employer youth recruitment and retention practices. This suggests high engagement with – and awareness of – our research with there still being room to improve. Of those who had accessed our research, nearly all (96%) said it had been useful.



Igniting a movement for change



We worked throughout 2021 to ignite behaviour and practice change by collaborating with partners, communicating the evidence, building coalitions and influencing policy.

We began mobilising cross-sector support to boost recruitment and retention of young people through our new Employer Advisory Board. We've formed partnerships with a range of key players and have delivered events that have attracted a national audience of practitioners and policymakers.

We've built constructive relationships across government to influence flagship youth employment COVID-19 response policies, arguing for – and securing – the extension of Kickstart.

“As a co-chair of the Youth Employment Group, Youth Futures has played a pivotal role in shining a light on the needs of young people facing disadvantage, the impacts of the pandemic, and how to improve outcomes. Taking an evidence-led approach, listening to young people, and understanding public policy and delivery has been invaluable, and I’m sure they will have a positive impact on young people, the economy and society in the future.”

Tony Wilson

Director, Institute for Employment Studies

As a founder member and co-chair of the Youth Employment Group (YEG), we collaborate with other organisations to make the case for young people furthest from the job market. In 2021, we championed an Opportunity Guarantee to support young people facing barriers to employment and established the Ethnic Disparities subgroup of the YEG.

Meanwhile, our Future Voices Group puts young people's views at the heart of what we do by providing their insights and feedback on our business plan, research and communications.

Youth Employment Group

Originally founded in response to the COVID-19 crisis, this growing coalition of more than 300 organisations brings together practitioners, employers, local authorities and key think tanks to make evidence-based recommendations to policymakers on how to improve the employment chances of young people furthest from the job market.



Kickstart extension

In February 2021, as youth unemployment peaked during the third lockdown, the YEG produced *Five reasons to extend Kickstart*. This report made the case for extending the government's flagship youth-employment scheme beyond December 2021. The lockdown restricted employers' ability to deliver placements, meaning fewer young people could gain vital work experience. The Chancellor announced at the Spending Review that the extension would be granted, enabling more young people to access the scheme until March 2022.



An Opportunity Guarantee

By the middle of the year, COVID restrictions lifted and the economy was showing signs of recovery. However, we knew the crisis wasn't over for the one in eight young people not in full-time education or training, most of whom weren't looking for work due to poor health, disability or caring responsibilities. As co-chair of the YEG, we seized the opportunity to influence the debate about the government's Levelling Up agenda and how it could support young people.

To address these challenges and improve youth employment in the post-COVID economy, Youth Futures led the drafting of the YEG's paper by proposing a three-stage approach in '['Levelling up for young people: Building an Opportunity Guarantee'](#)'. 📄

In August, we coordinated an open letter from the YEG to the Prime Minister and secured support from 89 youth-employment experts calling for an Opportunity Guarantee of an education place, apprenticeship or job for all young people. Excerpts from the letter were featured in The Mirror. By November, the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee had backed our calls for an Opportunity Guarantee (skills for every young person), offering **all** young people aged 16 to 24 the guarantee of a job, education or training.

📄 **Read the article:**
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/boris-johnson-warned-youth-unemployment-24864490>

Tackling ethnic disparities

Data from the Race Disparity Audit in 2017 highlighted employment disparities faced by young people from ethnic minorities. The pandemic clearly compounded these barriers.

In July 2021, as co-chair of the YEG, we responded by launching an Ethnic Disparities subgroup to assess specific youth-employment barriers. Youth Futures has also commissioned a rapid review on the labour market, as well as educational, social, migration and criminal-justice policies that have affected ethnic minority youth employment over the past 10–15 years. It will highlight the positive and negative impact of policy decisions on ethnic minority youth employment, identify research gaps, and make recommendations for further research, policy innovation and reform.

“As Chair of the YEG Ethnic Disparities subgroup, I want to uncover what influences the employment prospects of young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Currently, we are identifying how evidence is informing policy and practice in this area, as well as pinpointing gaps in knowledge. Our aim is to support more young people into high-quality education, training or employment by developing evidence-based recommendations.”

Kahiye Alim, Director, Council of Somali Organisations

Working with employers

In the summer, we launched an [Employer Advisory Board](#) of 13 employers from different industries across the country. Organisations like Unilever, Nissan, United Utilities and [more](#) are now working with us to support young people from marginalised backgrounds into good jobs. Members of the group have contributed to our podcast about research on employer engagement in the youth labour market, as well as providing content for our website about the value of apprentices.

 **Listen to the podcast:**
<https://anchor.fm/youth-futures/episodes/Employer-engagement-in-the-youth-labour-market-e1emiki/a-a7f05vb>



Igniting change: Future Voices Group



Following the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’, youth voice is woven through every element of our work. Young people from marginalised backgrounds with lived experience of unemployment help shape our strategy and lead all our work.

In 2021, we made huge progress in delivering our youth participation work, which is underpinned by a strategy that brings together activities central to our approach. We were ambitious with our youth-participation programme, ensuring that young people with lived experiences shaped all areas of our work to make it richer and more robust. Highlights of how we put young people at the heart of our work in 2021 include:

- Aligning with our theory of change, the Future Voices Group undertook work in three subgroups: Identify, Invest and Ignite
- We published more than 20 pieces of content on our Future Voices digital space, amplifying youth voices on a range of topics relating to youth unemployment, including mental health, autism and LGBTQ+ experiences
- We established a Youth Reference Group of seven young people from marginalised backgrounds who are co-designing the evaluation of our Inspiring Futures Programme

- Members of the Future Voices Group have helped co-design the evaluation of our Infrastructure Resilience Fund
- Our Grants and Evaluation Committee now includes two young members who have actively participated in all our funding decisions
- Future Voices Ambassadors in the Invest subgroup helped design and run a workshop on youth voice in services to support our current portfolio of Development and Impact grantees
- Future Voices Ambassadors in the Identify subgroup commissioned and supported research undertaken by 30 Kickstart young researchers
- The Future Voices Group Invest subgroup helped vet potential grantees and researched youth-led organisations to explore their eligibility for funding



Spotlight on Naomi Robinson, Future Voices Group

We spoke to Naomi, one of our Future Voice Ambassadors, to learn more about her experience in the group. She has been involved in several of our projects over the past year, including sitting on our Invest subgroup, [analysing key pieces of research](#) and reflecting on what this means for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

Here's what Naomi had to say:

Why did you apply to be a Future Voices Ambassador?

I applied to be an FVG ambassador because I believe that youth unemployment is one of the biggest inequalities in society. I wanted to work with the Youth Futures team to provide solutions for young people across the UK.

What do you enjoy about being part of the Future Voices Group?

My highlight has been working alongside the other ambassadors. Our online meetings always involve insightful conversations, and meeting each other in person definitely strengthened our bond. I've also found it interesting to hear what's happening outside London, as well as people's experiences in education and work.

What sparked your interest in youth unemployment that led you to apply to be a Future Voices Ambassador?

My interest in youth employment developed during my experience of navigating the working world after graduation. I soon realised that youth unemployment is multifaceted and there isn't necessarily a quick fix.

As an ambassador, do you think your voice has been heard on youth employment?

I feel valued and listened to as an ambassador. We are encouraged to take part in conversations outside our FVG group that align with our interests. It's been a great opportunity to build my network and practise public speaking. Being considered for these opportunities has given me confidence that I am welcome in these spaces.

What do you hope the Future Voices Group will achieve in 2022?

The group is so passionate and I know we're all exploring how we can continue to contribute to this important agenda, and help build sustainable solutions.



Our plans for 2022

We aim to ensure that future generations have access to fulfilling work, no matter what their background, by identifying and sharing knowledge, providing a bridge between employers and practitioners, and influencing decision-makers.

We have identified five priority areas for 2022. These initiatives support our mission and will be the foundation from which we will collaborate with others, gain credibility and expertise, and influence behaviour:

1 Build on our growing systems change expertise

We will deliver the first phase of our £6.1 million flagship Connected Futures Fund. The fund aims to reduce the fragmentation of youth employment and skills delivery in the places that need it most, as well as contributing to the Levelling Up agenda. The aim is to join up services at a local level so that young people with complex needs who are furthest from the job market receive consistent high-quality support. We will build our network by working with at least eight places.

2 Ramp up our contribution to employer practice and behaviour

We will build momentum around what works to boost employer engagement in the youth labour market. We will continue to build our evidence base, case studies and learning, and our partners will share insights through their networks to reach at least 100 employers.

3 Create tools to change behaviour based on our growing set of evidence

In 2022, we will build a Youth Employment Toolkit that will show the effectiveness of six topics that impact on young people's ability to get good jobs. This idea was well received by our stakeholders who were likely to share this with their wider networks. We will also curate a knowledge hub of effective employer practice with a business case to improve recruitment and retention of young people from marginalised backgrounds.

4 Continue to build our unique national portfolio of youth-employment evaluations and share the findings of what works to generate systemic change

We will continue to monitor and evaluate all 23 grantees in our What Works portfolio, which represents the largest range of youth employment intervention evaluations commissioned in England. We will share our findings with policymakers, practitioners and employers to improve youth-employment outcomes.

5 Ensure that Youth Futures has a strong and sustainable future

Our team will continue to build on a values-led culture focused on high performance. We will undertake activity to secure future funding and will continue to develop Youth Futures' profile and build on positive stakeholder perceptions of our work.

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