

Evaluating England's youth employment infrastructure: final report

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- Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Dormant Assets Scheme to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change
- Youth Futures commissioned RAND Europe to conduct research to better understand the roles of third sector organisations that work with others (such as service providers, funders or policymakers) and offer support to those working directly with young people
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Abbreviations

AELP	Association of Employment and Learning Providers
BYC	British Youth Council
CfYI	Centre for Youth Impact
CPD	Continuing professional development
CYA	Cumbria Youth Alliance
DDCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EFA	Education Funding Agency
ERSA	Employment Related Services Association
FO	Frontline Organisation
FVG	Future Voices Group
GLA	Greater London Authority
GRT	Gypsy, Roma, Traveller
IATE	Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education
ICFLI	Independent Commission on the Future of Local Infrastructure
IO	Infrastructure Organisation
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LGSE	Little Gate Supported Employment
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NYA	National Youth Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PHF	Paul Hamlyn Foundation
RQ	Research question
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SCVYS	Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services
ToC	Theory of Change
WMCA	West Midlands Combined Authority
YA	Youth Access
YEG	Youth Employment Group
YFWM	Youth Focus West Midlands

Glossary

Key term	Definition
Capacity building	Support provided that intends to improve an organisation's sustainability or to increase their size or reach. ¹
Championing youth voice	Work aimed at encouraging and facilitating meaningful contributions from young people to the work of other bodies, including frontline organisations (FOs), policymakers and funders.
Embedding youth voice	An ongoing process of co-production within an organisation that aims to foster a culture where: (i) young people make a meaningful contribution to the development of their policies and activities by expressing their own thoughts and opinions; and (ii) there is a sense of partnership between young people and adults in the work. ²
Frontline organisation (FO)	An organisation that directly delivers services to, or campaigns or advocates for or on behalf of, young people. ³
Infrastructure organisation (IO)	A third sector organisation whose main purpose is to provide support and services to FOs working directly with young people. IOs may offer support, training, information and advice, act as advocates, promote communication and collaboration between FOs, or seek to influence policy on behalf of them, among other activities.
Young people	Young people in this study include people aged 16-24.
Youth employment space	The youth employment space brings together a range of organisations working in different fields (youth work, employment, including youth employment) and roles (from influencing policy to organisational capacity building).
Youth voice	A stance, where young people are not expected to speak like adults to be listened to; rather, adults and other young people together find ways for young people to express what they know and believe, and have these ideas used for program improvement, policy-making, or social change. ⁴

¹ NCVO, *Capacity building*, NCVO, 2017.

² This understanding is informed by VeLure & Baizerman, *Civic youth work primer*, Peter Lang, 2013; and Hart, *Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship*, United Nations, 1992.

³ Harker & Burkeman, *Building blocks: developing second-tier support for frontline groups*, City Parochial Foundation, 2007.

⁴ VeLure & Baizerman, *Civic youth work primer*, Peter Lang, 2013.

Executive summary

The project

This research generates evidence and learning on how infrastructure organisations (IOs) in England support the youth employment space and effect change.

It is grounded in the underlying theory of how IOs are expected to work and answers the following research questions (RQs):

- How do IOs support the needs of the youth employment sector?
- How do IOs effect change (at regional, national and systemic levels)?
- How do IOs network and collaborate?
- What impacts do IOs have on the organisations they support, and young people?
- How can IOs be better supported by policymakers and funders to improve youth employment outcomes?

The study draws on qualitative and quantitative methods: online survey, social network analysis (SNA), semi-structured interviews, review of documentation, workshops, and case studies. The research was conducted between May 2021 and June 2022.

Findings

- In the youth employment space, IOs are third sector organisations that provide support and services to frontline organisations (FOs) working directly with young people and helping them into employment, education, or training.
- IOs are an essential ingredient of the youth employment landscape, helping to bring its different parts closer together. Many are membership organisations or operate less formal, yet strong, networks that help them both obtain and share good practice and knowledge. IOs tend to foster collaboration through informal alliances, often arising through networking activities.
- IOs have diverse characteristics and often play multiple roles in the youth employment space. They support FOs through five main functions: influencing policy and practice, raising qualifications and standards, facilitating learning and access to data, embedding and championing youth voice, and capacity building.

- IOs:
 - Share knowledge and learning that they gain from their work or from FOs with policymakers – speaking with 'one voice' and engaging with policymakers on multiple levels amplifies the power of FOs' and IOs' messaging.
 - Offer access to resources and courses that aim to improve the professionalisation of the workforce and quality of services provided by FOs to young people – recognising the added value of working with IOs and being a learning organisation helps FOs to participate and benefit.
 - Facilitate learning and access to data to address one of the key issues in the youth employment space: the scarcity of good quality, comparable and longitudinal data. Yet, providing policymakers and funders with such data is stymied by numerous challenges, such as methodological issues, limited resources, and capacity.
 - Lead by example by working with young people through dedicated advisory groups, on individual projects, or through training. Management support, dedicated staff, and resources enable IOs to better embed and champion youth voice.
 - Build capacity by offering resources, training, networking and collaborating opportunities to FOs. The areas of their support span from service quality improvement through organisational governance, leadership, talent, and financial management, to empowering youth voice.
- IOs face a number of barriers to their work with the most prominent being limited capacity and resources (including funding opportunities). Other challenges relate to the limited ability of FOs to engage with IOs for the similar reasons, competing governmental priorities, or difficult access to decisionmakers.

Conclusion and recommendations

- In order to strengthen their impact, IOs need to maintain and further develop strong relationships with FOs.
- In order to work even better with FOs and other stakeholders, IOs need to:
 - Provide more clarity on the support they offer to increase FOs awareness and take up.
 - Find the right balance between remote and face-to-face support, and the opportunities they offer so that the wider range of organisations can participate and benefit.
 - Intensify efforts to champion evidence-based approaches, support FOs in data management and analytical skills, and help demonstrate value added.

The ability, however, of IOs to do more or to perform their functions better relies on the availability of resources, including staff, funding, and expertise.

- Policymakers and funders, including Youth Futures, could better support IOs by developing a strategy to offer long-term, flexible and all-encompassing funding and support. This future strategy need to offer guidance on:
 - The optimal mix of local and national funding for IOs
 - The range of funding available (from project-based to core funding and funding plus)
 - Short and long-term priorities among the functions of IOs (e.g. learning and access to data, and capacity building)
 - Access to funding and application processes, considering differences between IOs in terms of their size, experience and capacity (see also Recommendation 6 below).

Determining funding priorities, however, can be challenging given the need to balance multiple factors (societal needs, organisational capacity, return on investment, accountability, expected impacts, etc.). Clear, systematic and collaborative processes for priority-setting can help ensure that funding has the potential for impact and meets needs, and that resources are used fairly and efficiently.

- **Support from policymakers and funders for IOs should be more holistic and go beyond funding.** Some IOs need help with bid-writing, fundraising, and strengthening their analytical skills. Experiences of other fields and other countries in supporting social infrastructure may offer useful comparisons and inspiration for different approaches that can be taken.
- **Policymakers and funders need to better recognise the role and value of IOs in the youth employment space.** This could be achieved by building stronger relationships with IOs and seeking their inputs more systematically. In particular, Youth Futures should use information about the IOs' network presented in this report to leverage its own influence (and that of other key players) over the youth employment space.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

The landscape of youth work and youth employment has gone through substantial changes over the last several years that have contributed to its current state.⁵ The main changes related to the structures and funding of youth employment support are each discussed in turn below.

First, established structures (such as the integrated youth support service, Connexions)⁶ evolved, and, while some continued with a new purpose, many of their responsibilities were transferred to local authorities. Second, between 2011 and 2016, local authority funding (used to support voluntary organisations and wider youth support activities) was substantially cut due to austerity measures.⁷ The scale of these cuts between 2010/11 and 2018/19 in England ranged between 62% (in the East of England) and 80% (in the West Midlands).⁸ Despite new initiatives, such as employer-led Local Enterprise Partnerships⁹ and commercial contracts for national and regional programmes (such as the Youth Contract¹⁰ or the Kickstart scheme)¹¹ both the coordination and resourcing for youth employment seem lacking.¹²

The reductions in funding call for concerted efforts to help young people, especially those from disadvantaged groups into employment. Yet, such efforts require a good understanding of the stakeholders involved, their interests, and the resources they can bring to the table. Equally, such efforts require a good understanding of the necessary improvements in capacity and capability of those organisations working towards increasing youth

⁵ Henehan, *Class of 2020: education leavers in the current crisis*, Resolution Foundation, 2020.

⁶ Maragkou, *The connexions service. Learning from the past, paper no. 1*, Edge Foundation, 2021.

⁷ Davies & Evans, *Perfect storms*, Children England, 2012.

⁸ YMCA England and Wales, *Out of service: a report examining local authority expenditure on youth services in England & Wales*, YMCA England and Wales, 2020.

⁹ Local Enterprise Partnerships are non-statutory collaborations between the private sector, local authorities and academic and voluntary institutions supporting local economic development in England. See LEP, *The LEP network*, LEP, 2023.

¹⁰ The Youth Contract was a programme (launched in England in 2012 and closed in 2016) for hardest to reach people aged 16 and 17 to support them into education, training or a job with training. See EFA, *Guidance: youth contract provision: 16- and 17-year-olds*, HM Government, 2016.

¹¹ The Kickstart Scheme (launched in 2020 and closed in 2023 by DWP) was a UK-wide initiative that offered funding to employers to create jobs for the young people aged 16 to 24 who were on Universal Credit. See DWP, *Kickstart scheme*, HM Government, 2022.

¹² Hutchinson, Beck & Hooley, *Delivering NEET policy packages? A decade of NEET policy in England*, Journal of Education and Work, 2016.

employment, that have been hindered by multiple cuts and changes of the past.¹³

This awareness puts infrastructure in the centre of focus as it exists to provide support and services to FOs working directly with young people. In this context, infrastructure means the services and networks which individual organisations need to operate and to be (collectively) more effective.¹⁴ IOs in the youth employment space comprise organisations that focus on youth work, as well as on education and employment more broadly. They should be well placed to offer such support services to others (the premise that this report examines), because they are often embedded in and understand the voluntary sector, and also have specialist skills, knowledge, and expertise.¹⁵

‘Without infrastructure level support [...] impact [of frontline organisations] is limited. [T]he infrastructure [organisations are] the glue that holds the sector together.’¹⁶

The two-way relationship that IOs develop by working with FOs is mutually beneficial: IOs do not only help to amplify the impact of FOs, but by consulting FOs, gathering and disseminating good practice and learnings they also generate new knowledge and expertise. By working closely with other stakeholders, IOs develop good understanding of the landscape and existing needs. IOs respond to these needs by providing vital support to FOs working directly with young people. IOs can provide valuable support at the local, regional and national level, for example by providing training, acting as advocates for their sector or enabling communication and collaboration between civil society organisations.¹⁷

¹³ ICFLI, *Change for good: report of the independent commission on the future of local infrastructure*, NAVCA, 2015.

¹⁴ Common Vision (2022).

¹⁵ ICFLI, *Change for good: report of the independent commission on the future of local infrastructure*, NAVCA, 2015.

¹⁶ Scoping interview 2.

¹⁷ Wells & Dayson, *Measuring the impact of third sector infrastructure organisations*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2010; Hunter & Longlands, *The future of civil society in the north: civil society Support in the north of England*, Manchester: Institute for Public Policy Research North, 2017; Macmillan, *A rapid evidence assessment of the benefits of voluntary and community sector infrastructure*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2016.

Yet, there is limited research into the impact¹⁸ and effectiveness of IOs.¹⁹ Existing evidence points to challenges faced by IOs (e.g. lack of contacts with other likeminded organisations, and lack of resources).²⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic made the situation even more difficult: the increased demand for support coincided with more limited access to services. In response to these challenges, Youth Futures launched the Infrastructure Resilience Fund, which offered funding for IOs to support their work towards youth employment, education or training.²¹ The first round of funding in 2020-2021 included **11 grantees** (Table 1).

Table 1: Organisations in receipt of Youth Futures' Infrastructure Resilience Fund grant

Grantee	Established	Nature of business
Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)	1988	Activities of business and employers membership organisations
Centre for Youth Impact (CfYI)	2017	Other social work activities without accommodation not classified elsewhere
Employment Related Services Association (ERSA)	2005	Activities of business and employers membership organisations
Enabling Enterprise (Skills Builder Partnership)	2009	Primary education, general secondary education, and educational support services
Hackney CVS (BlackMen4Change)	Not available	Not available
Money4You	2018	Financial education, entrepreneurship and capacity building training
National Youth Agency (NYA)	1994	Other education not classified elsewhere
Ubele Initiative	2014	Cultural education
UK Youth	2005	Other education not classified elsewhere
The Traveller Movement	2000	Other social work activities without accommodation not classified elsewhere
Youth Access (YA)	1994	Other social work activities without accommodation not classified elsewhere, and activities of other membership organisations not classified elsewhere

Source: Companies House²² and Charity Commission²³; information on income latest available.

¹⁸ We understand **impact** as higher-level effects on a wider environment and **effectiveness** as an extent to which results or objectives are achieved. See OECD, *Applying evaluation criteria thoughtfully*, OECD, 2021.

¹⁹ Wells & Dayson, *Measuring the impact of third sector infrastructure organisations*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2010.

²⁰ Hunter & Longlands, *The future of civil society in the north: civil society Support in the north of England*, Manchester: Institute for Public Policy Research North, 2017.

²¹ See Youth Futures, *Infrastructure grants*, Youth Futures, 2023.

²² HM Government, *Companies house*, Gov.uk, 2023.

²³ Charity Commission, *Search the register of charities*, Charity Commission, 2023.

In addition to providing the funding, Youth Futures wanted to better understand the roles of IOs and the impacts of their work. Youth Futures commissioned RAND Europe to conduct this research on IOs, including working directly with the grantees of the Infrastructure Resilience Fund.

1.2. Research questions and methods

We used several research methods to respond to the research questions (RQs). These are summarised in **Table 2** and in the narrative below. More details on each method can be found in **Appendix A**.

Table 2: Research questions and methods

Research question	Report section	Survey	Social Network Analysis	Grantee interviews	Review of grantee reports	Workshops	Case studies
RQ1. How do IOs support the needs of the youth employment sector?	Section 2	●		●	●		
RQ2. How do IOs effect change?	Section 4			●	●	●	●
RQ3. How do IOs network and collaborate?	Section 3	●	●	●		●	●
RQ4. What impacts do IOs have?	Section 4	●		●	●	●	●
RQ5. How can IOs be better supported by policymakers and funders?	Section 5	●		●	●	●	●

Source: RAND Europe.

- **Survey:** we carried out an online survey of IOs and FOs in order to understand their needs, activities, and connections. We received 54 responses in Round 1 (in 2021) and 32 responses in Round 2 (in 2022). We used descriptive statistics and social network analysis (below) to examine the results.
- **Social Network Analysis (SNA):** we analysed if, and to what extent, IOs responding to the surveys are connected to each other and to other organisations.

- **Grantee interviews:** we carried out interviews with grantees in receipt of the Infrastructure Resilience Fund (with 11 grantees in 2021, and with nine grantees in 2022).
- **Review of grantee reporting:** we reviewed grantee documentation, including their grant applications and the end of grant reports submitted to Youth Futures to better understand their work and impacts.
- **Workshops:** four workshops helped to validate emerging findings and facilitated peer-learning among participants. Each workshop had a specific focus (policy and influencing, learning and data, championing and embedding youth voice, networking and collaboration, and capacity building). The workshops took place in 2021 and 2022.
- **Case studies:** to gain in-depth understanding of some of the roles of IOs, we conducted five case studies on: policy and influencing, learning and data, championing and embedding youth voice, networking and collaborating, and capacity building. Interviews with key stakeholders and a targeted review of the existing literature informed these case studies.²⁴

The design of the study and methods used were informed by preliminary activities, including four **scoping interviews** with experts working with IOs in the youth employment space. These interviews were used to explore existing information on IOs and how they operate, as well as understanding key stakeholders. In addition, to identifying the key activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts that IOs work towards and to understand the overall roles they fulfil, we conducted **theory of change (ToC) workshops**. In these workshops, we worked individually with each grantee to create a new (or better understand) an existing ToC of the grantee organisation. On the basis of these preliminary activities, we developed a **meta ToC** in collaboration with Youth Futures and the Future Voices Group (FVG).²⁵ This outlines different ways in which IOs tend to work and build capacity among the organisations they support, and focuses on their mechanisms of capacity building, as well as their outputs (see Chapter 1).

1.3. Strengths and limitations of this study

- This study reflects experiences of a few organisations, some of whom have benefitted from Youth Futures funding. This creates a risk of bias but allows

²⁴ Reports from these case studies are available on Youth Futures' website. See Youth Futures, *Resources*, Youth Futures, 2023.

²⁵ The FVG is a group of 16-25 year old ambassadors who put youth voice into Youth Futures' vision, strategy and operation, advocating for young people on the issue of employment. For further details, see Youth Futures, *Future voices*, Youth Futures, 2023.

the research team to get an in-depth understanding of their work and expected impacts over time.

- This study relies heavily on the self-reporting of IOs, which offers a great level of detail on particular IOs activities (but far less on their outcomes and impact on FOs and young people). Perspectives of other stakeholders, such as FOs, funders and policymakers are not widely explored or presented in this research.
- SNA draws on voluntary survey responses. The results of the analysis are thus relevant to responding organisations and the connections they declared.
- The evidence on impact that IOs have on FOs and young people presented in the report is more limited (compared to IOs activities), and it does not constitute a rigorous or comprehensive assessment of impact (as this would fall outside the scope of this study). It relies heavily on examples of impacts perceived by interviewees and workshop participants.
- As this is one of the first studies looking in-depth at IOs working towards youth employment, existing literature and data are scarce and thus could not be used extensively to contextualise the findings of the study.

2. How do IOs support the needs of the youth employment space?

In this section, we examine the ways in which IOs support FOs in their work (RQ1). We look first at who the IOs working in the youth employment space in England are. Then, we outline the five functions that we use to map how IOs support FOs drawing upon the meta ToC (Figure 2-6).

2.1. Who are the IOs working in the youth employment space?

To understand how IOs support the needs of FOs, it is important to know what type of organisations work within the youth employment space (see Box 1).

Box 1: What is the youth employment space?

We understand that the 'youth employment space' is an eclectic place and it brings together a range of organisations working in different fields:

- Organisations that focus on youth work (who, for example, might provide a range of services that include informal education activities or employment support to young people).
- Organisations that focus on employment (including those who offer this type of support specifically for young people).²⁶
- Organisations that focus on capacity building and supporting FOs more broadly, rather than on youth work or employment specifically.²⁷

Source: RAND Europe.

We found no comprehensive sources that map IOs in the youth employment space in England, nor any previous attempts to do so. A partial illustration is provided through the analysis of responses to our survey. It is, however, not possible to comment on how the respondent group differs from the entire population of IOs in the youth employment space, as this remains unknown.

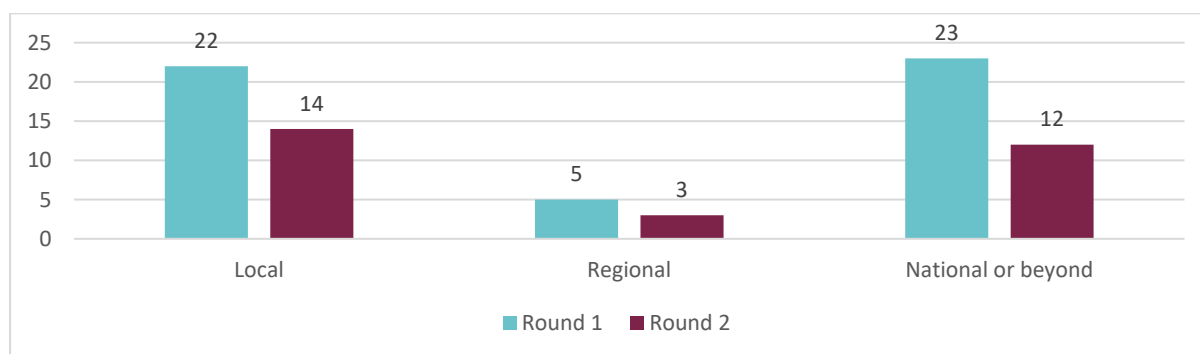
Most IOs responding to our survey operate locally or nationally, rather than regionally. There was a fairly even split between organisations who reported

²⁶ Scoping interview 4.

²⁷ Scoping interview 3.

working at the local level,^{28, 29} and those who reported working nationally (Figure 2-1).^{30, 31} Organisations that played both an infrastructure and frontline role were more likely to work at the local level compared to those with only an IO role,³² which more often operated nationally. Very few responding IOs indicated that they work on the regional level.^{33, 34}

Figure 2-1: How would you describe your service?



Note: n=50 in Round 1, n=29 in Round 2. Includes those indicating an IO role only.

Source: Survey.

Most IOs responding to the survey are based in Greater London, the West Midlands, and the North West. Figure 2-2 outlines the geographical distribution of responding IOs and highlights a notable absence of respondents based in East of England. It is, however, not clear whether this reflects the scarcity of IOs, a lack of responses from organisations based in this area, or a combination of these two possibilities.

All IOs are different, have diverse characteristics, and often play multiple roles in the youth employment space. As such, it is difficult to group IOs together based on one specific characteristic.³⁵ Many IOs responding to our survey appear to also provide direct support to young people in addition to supporting FOs.³⁶

²⁸ Local level was defined as one of the nine regions in England.

²⁹ Survey Round 1: 22/50; Round 2: 13/29.

³⁰ National level was defined as England and any other parts of the UK.

³¹ Survey Round 1: 23/50; Round 2: 12/29.

³² Survey Round 1: those with just IO roles 4/20, those with IO and FO roles 18/30; Round 2: those with just IO roles 3/13, those with IO and FO roles 11/16.

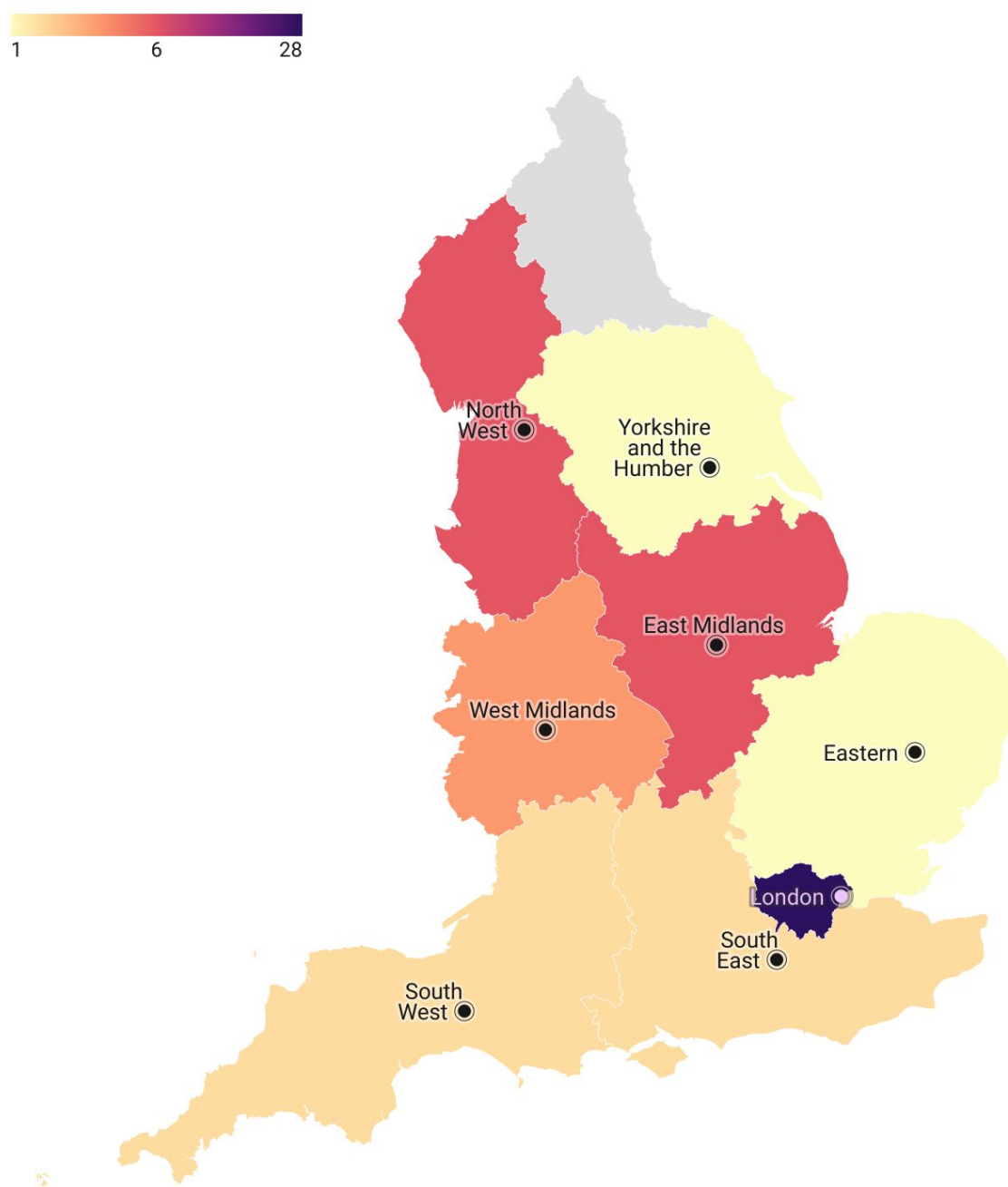
³³ Regional level was defined as England only.

³⁴ Survey: Round 1: 5/54; Round 2 3/32.

³⁵ Scoping interviews 1-4.

³⁶ Survey Round 1: 30/50; Round 2: 16/29.

Figure 2-2: Geographical distribution of survey respondents



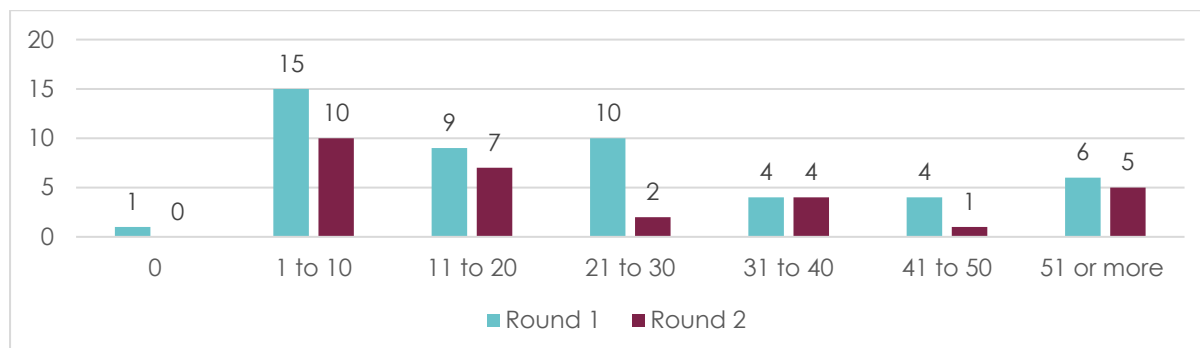
Source: Survey.

Responding IOs were mainly small or medium in terms of the number of staff.

Organisations supporting the youth employment space varied in terms of the number of paid staff working at them. Yet, most responding IOs had between one and ten paid members of staff (Figure 2-3). Responding organisations that played only infrastructure roles were more likely to report having no volunteers or small numbers of volunteers compared to organisations with

dual (frontline and infrastructure) roles, which were more likely to rely on voluntary work (Figure 2-4).

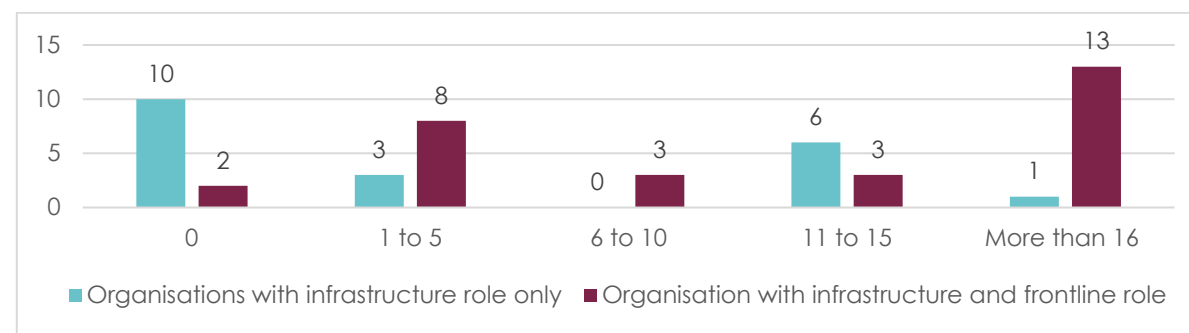
Figure 2-3: What is the current number of paid staff in your organisation?



Note: n=49 in Round 1, n=24 in Round 2. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

Figure 2-4: What is the current number of unpaid staff (volunteers) in your organisation? Round 1



Note: n=49 in Round 1. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

Most commonly, responding IOs receive funding from charitable foundations,³⁷ other governmental and private sources, and from offering paid-for services. On the whole, few differences in relation to funding were seen between those with only IO roles and those with both IO and FO roles. Organisations, however, with dual roles were more likely to receive funding from private organisations and corporate sponsorship.³⁸ The majority of responding IOs received over £500,000 in funding in 2020 and 2021.³⁹

³⁷ Survey Round 1: 42/49; Round 2: 25/30.

³⁸ Survey Round 1: those with just IO roles 6/52, those with IO and FO roles 17/83; Round 2: those with just IO roles 3/34, those with IO and FO roles 8/46.

³⁹ Survey Round 1: 32/49 received more than £500,001. In Round 2, more response categories were added. In total, 19/30 reported receiving at least £500,001, and (of those) 6/30 received at least £1m.

2.2. IOs provide support to FOs through five main functions

In order to understand the roles that IOs play in supporting FOs and young people, we developed the meta ToC which explains how IOs tend to work, and how their activities are expected to lead to impacts (see methods in Chapter 1).⁴⁰ In structuring the meta ToC, we used the classifications developed by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation,⁴¹ which points to five main functions of IOs (Figure 2-5).⁴²

Figure 2-5: What do IOs do?



Source: RAND Europe, based on Paul Hamlyn Foundation, *Youth infrastructure sector support*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2020.

Underlying all these functions are the resources necessary to perform them. These include experienced and skilled staff and leadership; networks or connections with relevant stakeholders and collaborators (e.g. member organisations, contracted consultants, and volunteers); existing information, research and specialist knowledge that IOs have access to; and their reputation, track record, testimonies, and the added value to the sector they can demonstrate. Financial and physical resources are also key for IOs' functions. This is because IOs obtain and offer funding (e.g. from membership fees, grants, service contracts, and paid-for services) as well as physical and online infrastructure (such as resources, platforms, or tools).

In the following sections, we outline these functions and map their mechanisms, activities, outputs, and outcomes to achieve a more detailed understanding of how IOs can, in theory, support FOs and other stakeholders in the youth employment space. The meta ToC presents an ideal scenario

⁴⁰ Hofman, Picken, Flemons, Feyerabend & Janta. *Evaluating England's youth employment infrastructure: meta Theory of Change*. Youth Futures, 2023.

⁴¹ PHF, *Homepage*, PHF, 2023.

⁴² Paul Hamlyn Foundation, *Youth infrastructure sector support – learning & insight community*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2020.

where everything goes as intended – though this is, of course, rarely the case. We explore how IOs turn these functions into reality in Chapter 4.

2.2.1. Influencing policy and practice



In our meta ToC (Figure 2-6), relevant activities include advocacy and lobbying the government, networking, strategic planning, and communications. By carrying out these activities, IOs strengthen relationships (with FOs, policymakers, funders, and others), establish a positive reputation in the youth employment space, become key contact point for skills and knowledge in the youth employment space, and create networks and increase visibility of issues related to youth employment, education or training.

Outcomes of these activities include IOs becoming a link between FOs and other stakeholders, having a closer relationship with funders and policymakers, and providing more information to funders on the needs of FOs. Through this, FOs gain access to good practices (which is key for Youth Futures in terms of how and why they engage with IOs) and can respond to policy priorities or challenge them. The eventual impact is that, through the work of IOs, the needs of FOs and young people are met, there is improved provision of, and access to, high quality services for all young people, and the rights of young people are upheld.

Almost all IOs who responded to the survey indicated that they worked to influence policy and practice.⁴³

2.2.2. Raising qualifications and standards



In our meta ToC (Figure 2-6), we consider that IOs work to increase qualification levels and standards among FOs that volunteer themselves to participate. This often involves offering assessments of staff skills and qualifications, providing continuing professional development (CPD) courses, providing assessments and evaluations of the quality of services, support in safeguarding, online delivery, and health and safety.

These activities should lead to a better awareness of skills and qualifications of people working in FOs, staff in FOs having better access to training, and

⁴³ Survey Round 1: 25/26; Round 2: 19/20.

FOs' increased awareness of what quality service provision means and how services can be improved. These outcomes are expected to lead to professionalisation of the workforce in the youth employment space, opportunities for career progression in FOs, increased job satisfaction of staff, FOs improving their services, and FOs learning from each other. We expect the work in this area will lead to attracting more potential recruits for FOs, professionalisation of the youth employment space, better services for young people, and – ultimately – increased employability for young people.

Almost all responding IOs indicated that they develop skills or qualifications of professionals who work directly with (young) people.⁴⁴

2.2.3. Facilitating learning and access to data



In our meta ToC (Figure 2-6), learning and data play an important role in evaluating the impact of the work of FOs. Activities in this area include collecting, analysing and disseminating data and research, and identifying secondary sources and good practices from other organisations or stakeholders. These activities often focus on the needs of young people, the effectiveness of existing services, and the impact FOs have on the lives of young people.

These activities lead to the following outputs: the existence of more and better evidence, the identification of good practices, the identification of emerging trends, and an increase in available information for FOs to improve their services. This leads to more evidence being available to FOs, policymakers and funders, IOs becoming trusted providers of evidence, FOs improving services based on evidence, and their ability to demonstrate their impact. If these changes take place (i.e. if more evidence is available to and used by FOs to improve their services), this may lead to the following impacts: availability of better-quality services to young people, improved funding and policymaking, increased knowledge in the youth employment space, and the greater visibility and evidence of the work of IOs.

Several IOs responding to the survey indicated that they collect, analyse or disseminate evidence on supporting employment of (young) people.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Survey Round 1: 24/26; Round 2: 17/20.

⁴⁵ Survey Round 1: 19/26; Round 2: 14/20.

2.2.4. Embedding and championing youth voice



In our meta ToC (Figure 2-6), relevant activities include: supporting FOs to use youth voice within their organisation and within their communities, as well as advocating through various media, encouraging young people from different backgrounds to take part in youth voice activities, championing youth voice, leadership and sharing power across FOs, and championing safeguarding and inclusion through toolkits or training.

Through these activities, IOs aim for young people taking an active role in designing and delivering services for young people, youth voice becomes more mainstreamed (and amplified) across organisations, young people and other stakeholders have a space to engage with each other, FOs are better prepared to work with young people, and young people are better equipped with skills and networks to make their voices heard. As a result, we expect to see an increase in the recognition of youth voices by policymakers and funders, an improvement in ways of engaging young people in the work of IOs and FOs, the provision of FOs' support relevant to the needs of young people, an increase in young people's trust in FOs, and an increase in young people gaining skills and confidence to use their voice efficiently. These outcomes should lead to the following impacts: increased engagement of young people in social action and policymaking, including shaping the services of FOs (youth empowerment), FOs providing more targeted and better quality services to young people, and increased impact and credibility of FOs.

Almost all IOs respondents indicated that they work to empower youth voice or participation among FOs.⁴⁶

2.2.5. Capacity building



In our meta ToC (Figure 2-6), relevant activities include training, mentoring, resource sharing, networking, and all other activities that support FOs. These activities are expected to lead to strategic partnerships and increased networking, among FOs and with other stakeholders, IOs being able to represent more FOs, FOs receive necessary training, FOs gaining access to resources, IOs facilitating

⁴⁶ Survey Round 1: 23/26; Round 2: 19/20.

information flows between stakeholders, and identifying knowledge gaps. We expect these translate to the following outcomes: more frequent collaboration between stakeholders, FOs having more connections and increased influence, IOs having larger networks and influence, vulnerable groups receiving more support, FOs becoming more sustainable, FOs improving their services, increasing knowledge in the youth employment space, and IOs and FOs being able to demonstrate their value. These outcomes should lead to the main impact, namely: FOs becoming more efficient, resilient, and capable to respond to the needs of young people.

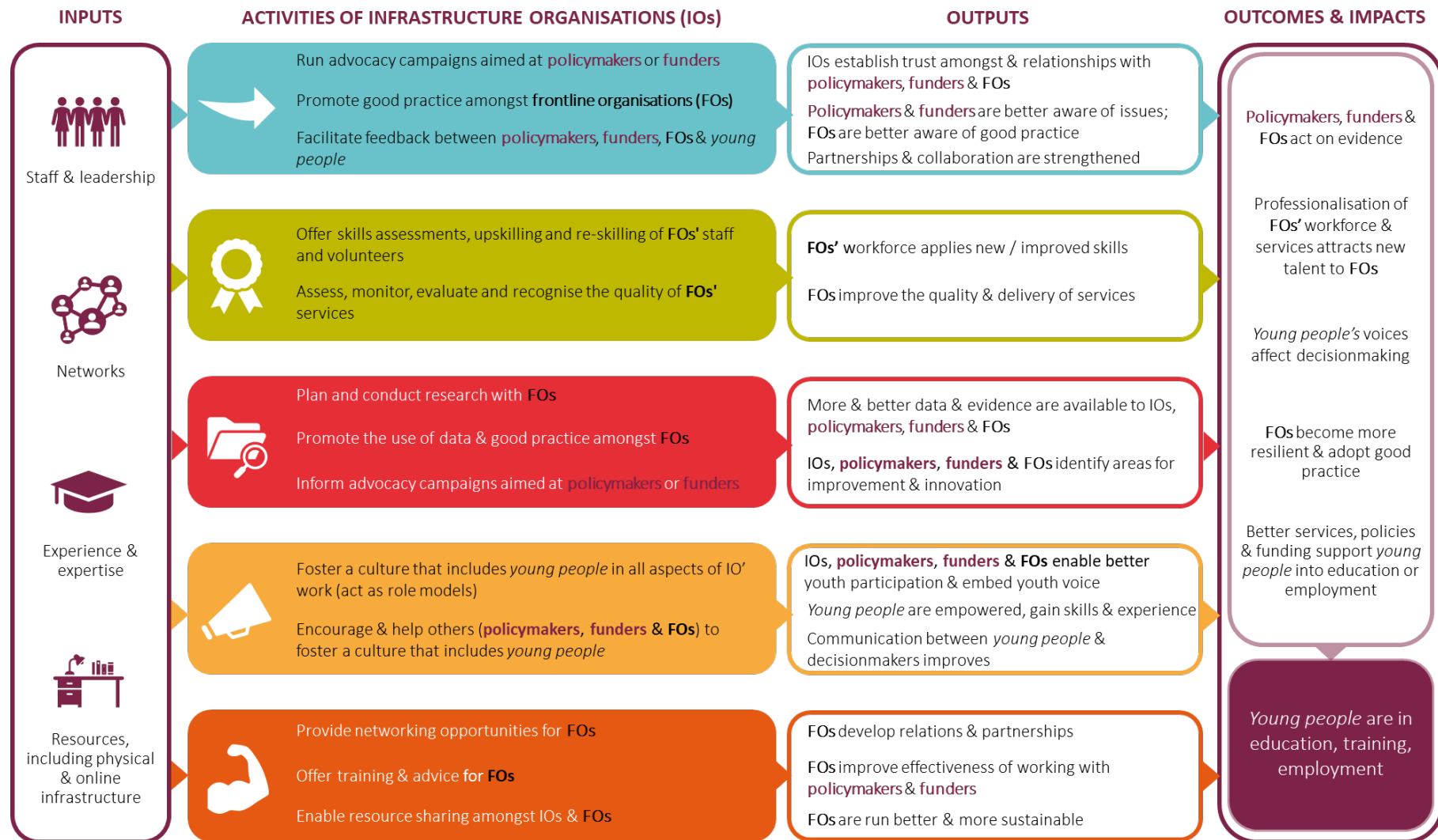
Almost all IOs' respondents indicated that they provide capacity building services.⁴⁷

Figure 2-6 brings together all functions discussed above into a single, meta ToC of IOs in the youth employment space. It is further discussed in a separate publication.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Survey Round 1: 25/26; Round 2: 18/20.

⁴⁸ Hofman, Picken, Flemons, Feyerabend & Janta. *Evaluating England's youth employment infrastructure: meta Theory of Change*. Youth Futures, 2023.

Figure 2-6: Meta-ToC



Source: RAND Europe.

3. How do IOs network and collaborate?

In this section, we explore how IOs network and collaborate with each other and with other organisations, and use the following interpretations for these terms:

- **Networking** is an action or process of interacting with other individuals or organisations that share a common interest to exchange information or ideas, and develop professional contacts.
- **Collaboration** involves some level of shared accountability and interdependence between individuals or organisations, and clarity about distinct roles and goals.

We also explore the facilitators and challenges that IOs face in networking and collaboration and how the latter can be addressed. We report here the results of the survey and SNA, as well as information from workshops, interviews, and case studies. We also explore the ways IOs collaborate among themselves and with other organisations.

We start by noting that a wider literature (not specific to the youth employment infrastructure) points to the importance of relational capital. The term refers to the capital generated through informal interactions in alliances/interorganisational relationships.⁴⁹

The role of infrastructure (in the context of voluntary and community sector more broadly) is described as 'seeking to bring about change in relationships between and beyond individual voluntary and community organisations'.⁵⁰ Examining small and medium-sized charities, Dayson and colleagues point to their role in building and nurturing relationships between key people and organisations within an ecosystem, and say:

⁴⁹ Kale, Singh & Perlmutter, *Learning and protection of proprietary assets in strategic alliances: building relational capital*, Strategic Management Journal, 2020.

⁵⁰ Macmillan, *A rapid evidence assessment of the benefits of voluntary and community sector infrastructure*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2006.

‘...these relationships provide vital linkages between individuals, services and communities, and enable effective, sustainable and collaborative approaches to addressing disadvantage to be developed.’⁵¹

The concept of relationality is associated with knowledge acquisition that takes place not only through formal cooperation processes, but (especially with tacit knowledge) also through informal interactions.⁵² In the more structured approach, written material or formal training facilitates transfer of knowledge. In the more informal approach, experiences are shared through conversations that not only help diffuse tacit knowledge but also create new perspectives.⁵³ Therefore, the relationality of IOs seems to be not only one of their inherent features but also an asset for, and result of, capacity building work among FOs (see section 4.5).

3.1. Many IOs reported having strong networks that helped them share good practice and knowledge

In our survey, we asked IOs whether they were part of a wider forum for sharing good practice and knowledge. The majority of respondents in both rounds told us that they were (see Figure 3-1).

Most IOs that reported being part of these kinds of networks or platforms were satisfied with them and felt they benefitted from their support, collaboration opportunities, and access they offer to others (see Figure 3-2). Data from our case studies suggest that IOs tend to foster collaboration through informal alliances.⁵⁴ Collaboration was considered different from networking in that it is not only about sharing but also about accomplishing something together, usually with other IOs. Collaboration, however, was frequently regarded as arising from networking activities.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Dayson, Baker, & Rees, *The value of small In-depth research into the distinctive contribution, value and experiences of small and medium-sized charities in England and Wales*, Lloyds Bank Foundation, 2018.

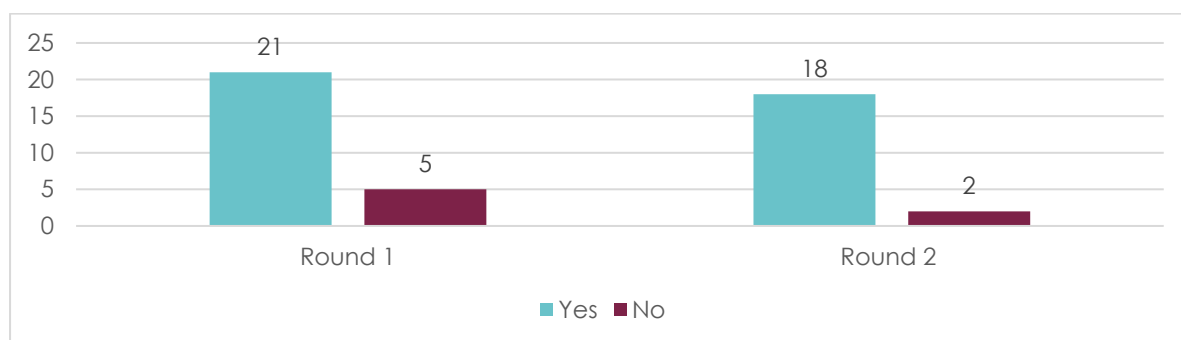
⁵² Liu, Ghauri & Sinkovics, *Understanding the impact of relational capital and organizational learning on alliance outcomes*, Journal of World Business, 2010.

⁵³ Liu, Ghauri & Sinkovics, *Understanding the impact of relational capital and organizational learning on alliance outcomes*, Journal of World Business, 2010.

⁵⁴ Case Study 5.

⁵⁵ Case Study 5.

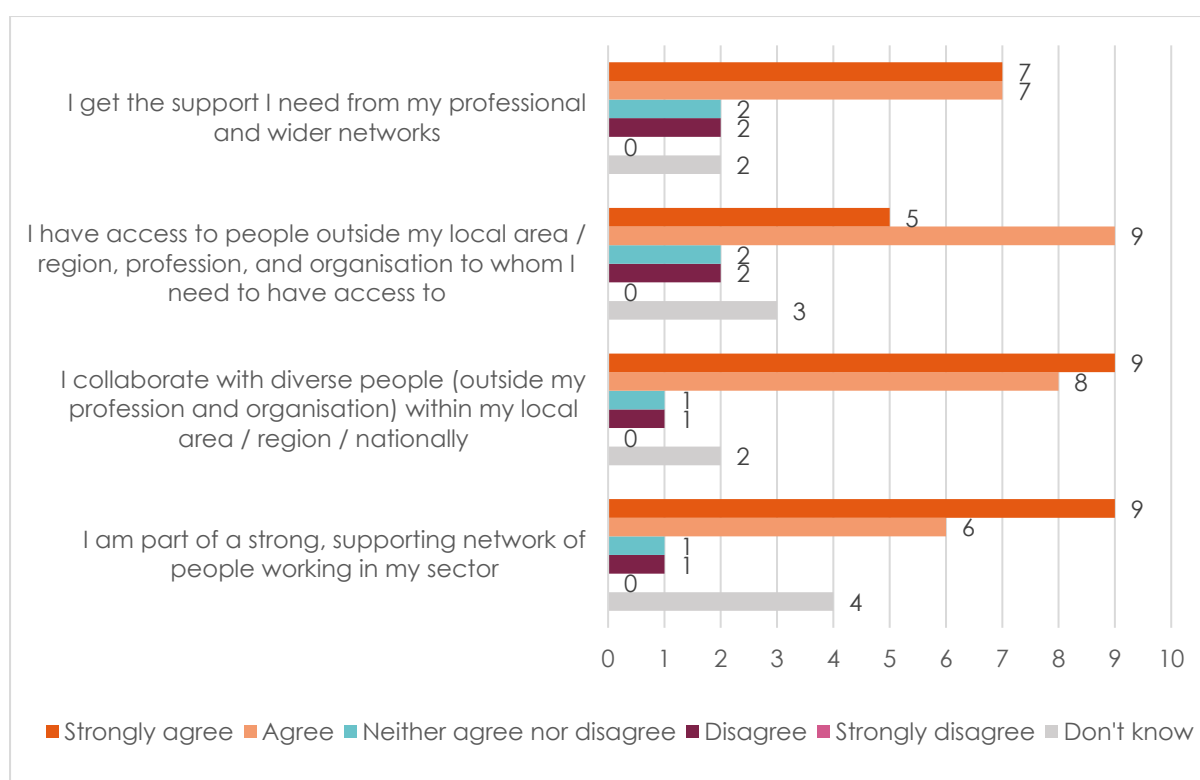
Figure 3-1: Is your organisation already part of a network, platform or community that facilitates sharing of knowledge or good practice?



Note: n=26 in Round 1, n=20 in Round 2. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

Figure 3-2: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your involvement in a network, platform or learning community?



Note: Round 1 only, n=21.

Source: Survey.

While the survey does not tell us what kind of networks or platforms respondents were part of, additional insights are offered by Youth Futures grantees. Many of these are membership organisations, others operate or are part of less formal networks. We present **each grantee** below:

- **The AELP:** its membership is open for training providers, employers, local authorities, and higher education institutions. The full membership fee depends on the number of learners.⁵⁶
- **The ERSA:** its membership is open to any organisation that delivers services or has an interest in employment support. The full membership fee depends on the turnover related to employment services.⁵⁷
- **The CfYI:** it is not a membership organisation, but it collaborates with many partners to build the infrastructure supporting evaluation, learning, and improvement across the youth sector.⁵⁸
- **Enabling Enterprise (Skills Builder Partnership):** it is open for individuals, businesses, education institutions and impact organisations. The educators group operates through a tier system: individual account (free), digital membership (fixed fee), and accelerator programme (fixed fee with funded options).⁵⁹ Impact organisations can join various programmes, such as the Impact Programme or the Group Training Programme.⁶⁰
- **Hackney CVS (BlackMen4Change):** its (free) associate membership is available to all voluntary and community sector organisations in Hackney.⁶¹
- **Money4You:** this organisation offers a subscription-based accelerator programme to charities and social enterprises led by black, Asian, multi-ethnic, and refugee groups. It also has a (free) platform open to all.⁶²
- **The NYA:** it is not a membership organisation, but it works collaboratively with others to support and improve services for young people. It also holds networks of frontline youth work providers.⁶³
- **Ubele Initiative:** it is not a membership organisation, but it works in partnership with many collaborators and supporters.⁶⁴
- **UK Youth:** it holds an open network of youth organisations (the UK Youth Movement) and collaborates with a number of partners.⁶⁵
- **The Traveller Movement:** it is not a membership organisation, but it collaborates with many organisations and supporters.⁶⁶
- **YA:** the membership is open to youth information, advice and counselling services. The full membership fee depends on the number of staff.⁶⁷

⁵⁶ AELP, *Membership – how to join*, AELP, 2023.

⁵⁷ ERSA, *Membership*, ERSA, 2023.

⁵⁸ YMCA George Williams College, *Partners*, YMCA George Williams College, 2023.

⁵⁹ Skills Builder Partnership, *Support your college students to succeed*, Skills Builder Partnership, 2023.

⁶⁰ Skills Builder Partnership, *Increase your organisation's impact with essential skills*, Skills Builder Partnership, 2023.

⁶¹ Hackney CVS, *Associate membership*, Hackney CVS, 2023.

⁶² Money4you, *About money4you*, Money4you, 2023.

⁶³ NYA, *About us*, NYA, 2023.

⁶⁴ Ubele, *Our partners & supporters*, Ubele, 2023.

⁶⁵ UK Youth, *Join the UK youth movement*, UK Youth, 2023.

⁶⁶ The Traveller Movement, *About us*, The Traveller Movement, 2023.

⁶⁷ Youth Access, *Our members*, Youth Access, 2023.

The survey results and examples provided above demonstrate that IOs work in close collaboration with others.

3.2. SNA provides further insights on the connections held by IOs with each other

Our SNA provides early insights on how the organisations who responded to our survey are connected to each other and to other organisations working in the youth employment space. Our analysis presented here relies on the survey data and does not reflect all connections that exist between these organisations as it only presents the connections that were reported in the survey. For example, some organisations were named by one or several organisations, but did not respond to the survey themselves and, therefore, their networks are not (fully) presented in our analysis. The key findings from SNA are summarised below (see Appendix B for more detail):

- **IOs' networks are clustered and most organisations were either directly or indirectly linked:** 24 IOs respondents (in Round 1) named in total 210 connections. For the most part, respondents were connected to each other, with a few exceptions of IOs with more isolated networks (and not part of a larger network structure). The network has five connected components: one accounts for the majority of the network (79%), and four smaller elements include organisations linked with Little Gate Supported Employment⁶⁸ (LGSE, 10% of the network), Cumbria Youth Alliance⁶⁹ (CYA, 7%), DFN Project SEARCH⁷⁰ (3%), and the ADHD Foundation⁷¹ (2%).
- **A few most connected organisations stand out:** Voice4Change England⁷² (with 20 first-degree connections), CfYI (18 connections), the NYA (16 connections), the Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS)⁷³ (16 connections), Ablaze,⁷⁴ the AELP, and Youth Works Unit⁷⁵ (11 connections each). This represents a mix of membership or network-type organisations (such as Voice4Change England), as well as those that do not have a membership base (e.g. Ablaze).

⁶⁸ LGSE, based in East Sussex, finds paid jobs and apprenticeship opportunities for adults with learning disabilities and autism. They are a member of the British Association for Supported Employment. See LGSE, *Homepage*, LGSE, 2023.

⁶⁹ The CYA, based in Cumbria, builds the capacity of the third sector organisations to better support the needs of young people. It also works with young people offering them an alternative youthwork curriculum and tailored employment support. See CYA, *Homepage*, CYA, 2023.

⁷⁰ DFN Project SEARCH, based in London, supports young adults with a learning disability or autism into work. See DFN Project SEARCH, *Homepage*, DFN Project SEARCH, 2023.

⁷¹ ADHD Foundation, based in Liverpool, offers tailored support for people with neurodevelopmental conditions and works with employers and educators to help them become more effective and inclusive. See ADHD Foundation, *The ADHD foundation neurodiversity charity – an integrated health and education service*, ADHD Foundation, 2023.

⁷² Voice4change, *Homepage*, Voice4change, 2023.

⁷³ SCVYS, *Homepage*, SCVYS, 2023.

⁷⁴ Ablaze, *Homepage*, Ablaze, 2023.

⁷⁵ Youth Work Unit, *Homepage*, Youth Work Unit, 2023.

- **Of the 22 'hub' organisations (i.e. those with more than five first-degree connections), seven are the grantee organisations:** the CfYI, the NYA, UK Youth, Ubele Initiative, the ERSA, the AELP, and Skills Builder Partnership.
- **Organisations with the highest influence⁷⁶ in the network are:** the CfYI, the NYA, UK Youth, Youth Works Unit, the SCVYS, The Foyer Federation,⁷⁷ Regional Youth Work Units,⁷⁸ and Voice4Change England. The level of network influence among Youth Futures grantees varied from the CfYI (highest) to Skills Builder Partnership (lowest).
- **Two main clusters emerge among Youth Futures grantees:** those largely focusing on youth work are all directly connected to each other (i.e. the CfYI, UK Youth, and the NYA), while two grantees focusing on employment (the AELP and the ERSA) are connected to each other. These two clusters are linked only by one connection (so called 'bridge'),⁷⁹ namely Groundwork UK.⁸⁰ This suggests that there may be further scope for bridging the youth work and employment infrastructure. Other bridge-organisations include the NYA, the ERSA, the AELP, and Voice4Change.⁸¹
- **Understanding the bridges is key to working with a wider network:** some bridges connect larger (often national) IOs with smaller (often regional) IOs. This is the case in the Youth Focus West Midlands (YFWM) and London Youth: both link organisations with more connections at a national scale with those who have fewer connections and work at a regional scale. YFWM, for example, links the CfYI with two regional IOs (the SCVYS and One Walsall). London Youth connects the NYA with regional IOs such as the Young Harrow Foundation. The Foyer Foundation links the well-connected NYA and CfYI with other national organisations such as Housing Association Youth Network and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) England and Wales.
- **The network that is emerging from the analysis seems rather sparse:** the two most distant organisations in the network were 14 connections apart from each other, and the average distance between all pairs of organisations was just above five connections. Since this is the first attempt to analyse the youth employment space using SNA, there are no previous reference points to facilitate further interpretation of these results. The network density, however, is very low indicating that there are many more possible relationships in the network that could be made. It is also important to point out that multiple connections do not automatically translate into higher effectiveness but, as noted earlier, are important foundations on which IOs can build their work.

⁷⁶ EigenCentrality measures an organisation's influence in the network by counting all connections through the network (not only the first-degree connections). The cut-off point was set above 0.4.

⁷⁷ Foyer Federation, *Homepage*, Foyer Foundation, 2023.

⁷⁸ Network of Regional Youth Work Units, *Homepage*, Network of Regional Youth Work Units, 2023.

⁷⁹ Ahn, *Thresholds and Collective Action*, Science of the Web, 2008.

⁸⁰ Groundwork, *Homepage*, Groundwork, 2023.

⁸¹ Bridges were identified using betweenness centrality score. The cut-off point was set above 3,000.

3.3. IOs networked and collaborated for various reasons and faced some challenges

3.3.1. IOs perceive various benefits when collaborating and networking



A number of interviewed IOs reported various ways in which they collaborated and felt that making partnerships with other organisations and individuals was beneficial, allowing them to better access resources and policymakers.⁸² These benefits are:

- Sharing of expertise and fostered peer learning⁸³ (see Box 2)
- Helping IOs speak to policymakers in 'one voice' and influence policy⁸⁴ (some believed that this would help bring about positive changes more quickly).⁸⁵

Box 2: Facilitating information sharing and learning through networks

The **ERSA's** Kickstart forum was launched via news outlets, social media and **ERSA** members. The first meeting was attended by 324 organisations (exceeding expectations of the organisers). Through online participation small, remote organisations could also feel included. In addition, the **ERSA** brought in members of the Youth Employment Group (YEG) and **Youth Employment UK** to ensure the forum had access to a broader range of expertise and experiences. The online chat channel allowed for informal continuous information sharing and joint problem-solving between formal sessions.

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 5: collaboration and networking, Youth Futures, 2022.*

- Better access to (more) information and resources⁸⁶ (e.g. a database of ethnic minority led organisations)⁸⁷
- Enabled better use of resources to avoid duplication of efforts⁸⁸
- Access to regional partnerships (see Box 3) and structured approaches to collaboration⁸⁹ or networking.⁹⁰

⁸² Round 1 – seven grantee interviews.

⁸³ Round 1 – six grantee interviews.

⁸⁴ Round 1 – six grantee interviews.

⁸⁵ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

⁸⁶ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

⁸⁷ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁸⁸ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁸⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

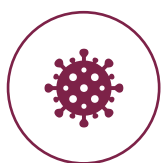
⁹⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

Box 3: Facilitating formal regional networking

The **CfYI** works with FOs, IOs and academics across England to establish Regional Impact Networks and discuss issues relating to youth service provision. The **CfYI** uses these networks as a knowledge-sharing channel and runs them in a collaborative manner to ensure that the content is aligned with the participants needs.

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 3: data and learning*, Youth Futures, 2022.

3.3.2. COVID-19 may have changed how IOs collaborate and network



Many IOs reported that there had been a recent move away – attributed to COVID-19 – from competitiveness in the field with IOs towards understanding how they can better support each other.⁹¹ This took a variety of forms, including:

- **Greater openness and sharing of data:**⁹² COVID-19 led to many organisations considering that increased transparency and sharing data in the youth employment space may be helpful.⁹³ Competitiveness gave way to working more collaboratively to overcome challenges faced during this time.⁹⁴
- **Difficulties in delivering services:**⁹⁵ IOs had to shift networking events from in person to online, which made it harder for participants to engage. COVID-19 also affected delivering services and access to policymakers.⁹⁶ Several IOs developed methods to continue their services online and offered resources (such as online hubs or short briefings) so that their networks could adapt frontline services for the young people.

3.3.3. The key challenge to collaboration is lack of resources



A somewhat less optimistic view on collaboration among IOs was presented by some stakeholders who emphasised forces at play that limit the sharing of resources and expertise among IOs.⁹⁷ We discuss these below.

Among the barriers to collaborative working among IOs were:

- **Lack of time:** Relationship building takes time and effort and it is not necessarily the main job of IOs' staff who need to make time for it, which is often difficult. Access to networking events and opportunities is also uneven: some organisations lack the capacity for these kinds of

⁹¹ Round 1 – eight grantee interviews.

⁹² Scoping interview 1.

⁹³ Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 3: Data and Learning*, Youth Futures, 2022.

⁹⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁹⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁹⁶ Case Study 4.

⁹⁷ Scoping interview 3.

development opportunities, while larger, more established and better connected organisations may find it easier to be involved in formal or informal learning communities.⁹⁸

- **Competition and lack of trust between IOs:**⁹⁹ Effective collaboration relies on significant levels of trust, and some smaller FOs (and IOs) are hesitant to collaborate with larger organisations for fear that their knowledge and skills will be appropriated and their volunteer resources exploited to the benefit of the latter.¹⁰⁰ Differing priorities, sector politics, and historical relationships and rivalries, and organisation sizes¹⁰¹ present additional barriers to collaboration,¹⁰² in addition to competition for funding.¹⁰³ This is further emphasised by some funders who support IOs.¹⁰⁴ In their view, the nature of the sector is competitive due to cuts in funding, and the relationships among organisations in the sector are often conflictual and tense.¹⁰⁵

‘[Infrastructure] organisations are used to competing against each other, so it was hard to bring them together and talk about cooperation.’¹⁰⁶

- **Crowded space and limited knowledge:** The large number of organisations working towards youth employment make collaborating more challenging.¹⁰⁷ Some IOs felt limited to who they know.¹⁰⁸ Building relationships often relied upon personal connections of senior staff, and there is a need to cascade networking skills to more junior staff due to a sometimes high turnover in senior leadership.¹⁰⁹
- **Some areas are more challenging to collaborate than others:** Research was one example where each organisation may have inherent interest in different research areas (or specific policy or funding), stifling collaboration in terms of objectives and messaging.¹¹⁰

⁹⁸ Scoping interview 1; Workshop 4.

⁹⁹ Scoping interview 3; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁰⁰ Dayson, Baker & Rees, *The value of small In-depth research into the distinctive contribution, value and experiences of small and medium-sized charities in England and Wales*. Lloyds Bank Foundation, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Scoping interview 3.

¹⁰² Scoping interview 3.

¹⁰³ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

¹⁰⁴ Scoping interviews 1-3.

¹⁰⁵ Scoping interview 3.

¹⁰⁶ Scoping interview 1.

¹⁰⁷ Round 1 – eight grantee interviews.

¹⁰⁸ Workshop 4.

¹⁰⁹ Workshop 4.

¹¹⁰ Case Study 5.

3.3.4. Key facilitators include modelling good practice and dedicating time



Collaboration and networking is important because through this IOs build relationships between key players within the youth employment space, and enable effective approaches to addressing disadvantage to be developed. One way of fostering collaboration is for IOs to consider new projects as opportunities to create new partnerships with other IOs or FOs.¹¹¹ It is also important for IOs to model good practice when they collaborate in the following ways:

- **Explore the value base** from which each organisation is approaching the collaboration, how the work meets the objectives of each organisation's strategies, and develop a mutual understanding in these areas ahead of any issues arising.¹¹²
- **Open and honest communication** to help ensure that the strategic priorities of the organisations involved are aligned, and that there are no false or misplaced expectations.¹¹³ This is all the more important in cases where the collaborative vision may not be panning out as had been anticipated.¹¹⁴
- **Dedicate time to the collaboration itself**, not just to the activities being delivered together.¹¹⁵ Navigating the ambitions and personalities of multiple organisations and individuals can be complicated and take a long time.¹¹⁶ Time is also needed to build personal relationships across the youth work and employment areas, which can be a key element of an organisation's success.¹¹⁷

Most IOs who participated in this research are part of various networks and seem generally pleased with opportunities they offer. Many IOs, including some grantees are membership organisations or create other forums for different organisations (mainly FOs) to share knowledge and experience. A network, however, comprising only IOs only (rather than the entire landscape of the youth employment system) seems relatively loose – with sparse connections and several clusters linked through a limited number of organisations that act as bridges between them. Building relations, facilitated by IOs, helps create new perspectives and develop solutions to transform the youth employment system so that it better supports marginalised young

¹¹¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹¹² Case Study 5.

¹¹³ Case Study 5.

¹¹⁴ Case Study 5.

¹¹⁵ Case Study 5.

¹¹⁶ Case Study 5.

¹¹⁷ Workshop 1.

people. The lack of resources for this activity is the main barrier to the more effective use of the influence of IOs through their network connections.

4. How do IOs effect change and what impact do they have?

This section explores how IOs effect change at regional, national and systemic levels in each of the five functions identified (see Chapter 2). We explore the approaches and practices used, the key barriers and facilitators, and what IOs consider to be working well. This section also presents evidence of (perceived) impact of the activities carried out by IOs on FOs and young people. We also outline the challenges of measuring impact across IOs and the ways that interviewees and workshop participants felt IOs could better support both FOs and young people.

4.1. Function 1: Influencing policy and practice



IOs share knowledge and learning that they gain from their work or from FOs with policymakers – speaking with ‘one voice’ and engaging with policymakers on multiple levels amplifies the power of FOs and IOs messaging

The government responsibility for youth policy falls across and between different departments: the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DDCMS), the Department for Education (DfE), and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). To some extent, IOs tend to reflect this division. IOs share knowledge and learning that they have gained from their work, or that of FOs, in their network with policymakers.¹¹⁸ This might be by:

- **Speaking directly to policymakers:**¹¹⁹ Hackney CVS (BlackMen4Change) had regular meetings with the Mayor of Hackney and used these meetings to share information from their network to the mayor directly.¹²⁰
- **Identifying evidence gaps** by drawing on their contacts with local or regional communities and groups:¹²¹ the DfE used the support of IOs to engage with young people to gain their insights on what investment in youth (re)engagement should look like.¹²²

¹¹⁸ ToC workshops – three grantees; Case Study 1; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹¹⁹ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Grantee report; Case Study 1.

¹²⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹²¹ Case Study 1.

¹²² Case Study 1.

- **Drafting and disseminating policy briefings to policymakers,**¹²³ participating in government consultations¹²⁴ or submitting evidence to policymakers (Select Committees, HM Treasury, and government departments).¹²⁵ Through their close engagement with FOs, IOs provide policymakers with collated information on the needs, strengths and weaknesses of social action in their area.¹²⁶ The Traveller Movement worked to influence the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill¹²⁷ by providing briefings to policymakers.¹²⁸ The ERSA responded to the government consultation for the UK Community Renewal Fund¹²⁹ and the Shared Prosperity Fund,^{130 131} while YA took part in the consultations for the Mental Health Plans.¹³²
- **Linking up policymakers and FOs**¹³³ (by introducing FOs and policymakers, hosting joint meetings, facilitating direct conversations and building trust between them): working with IOs helped the Greater London Authority (GLA) engage with FOs.¹³⁴ The Traveller Movement linked local FOs with local policymakers to create engagement between the two groups.¹³⁵ IOs can also connect policymakers with hard to reach communities.¹³⁶
- **Raising awareness about issues of importance in the youth employment space:** Multiple IOs use (social) media campaigns to influence policy and affect change on local, national, and systemic levels:¹³⁷ the ERSA campaigned for the extension of Kickstart¹³⁸ and YA's campaign aimed to influence government spending reviews and increase investment in the youth sector.¹³⁹ Other campaigns aim to raise visibility of certain communities (such as the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT)¹⁴⁰ or the Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups)¹⁴¹ or service provision (e.g. independent learning providers,¹⁴² or mental health hubs).¹⁴³

¹²³ Grantee report; Case Study 1.

¹²⁴ Case Study 1.

¹²⁵ Case Study 3.

¹²⁶ Case Study 1.

¹²⁷ UK Parliament, *Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022*, UK Parliament, 2022.

¹²⁸ Case Study 1.

¹²⁹ HM Government, *UK community renewal fund: prospectus 2021-22*, Gov.uk, 2021.

¹³⁰ HM Government, *UK shared prosperity fund: prospectus*, Gov.uk, 2022.

¹³¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹³² Grantee report.

¹³³ ToC workshops – one grantee; Case Study 1.

¹³⁴ Case Study 1.

¹³⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹³⁶ Case Study 1.

¹³⁷ ToC workshops – three grantees; Case Study 1.

¹³⁸ ToC workshops – one grantee.

¹³⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁴⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

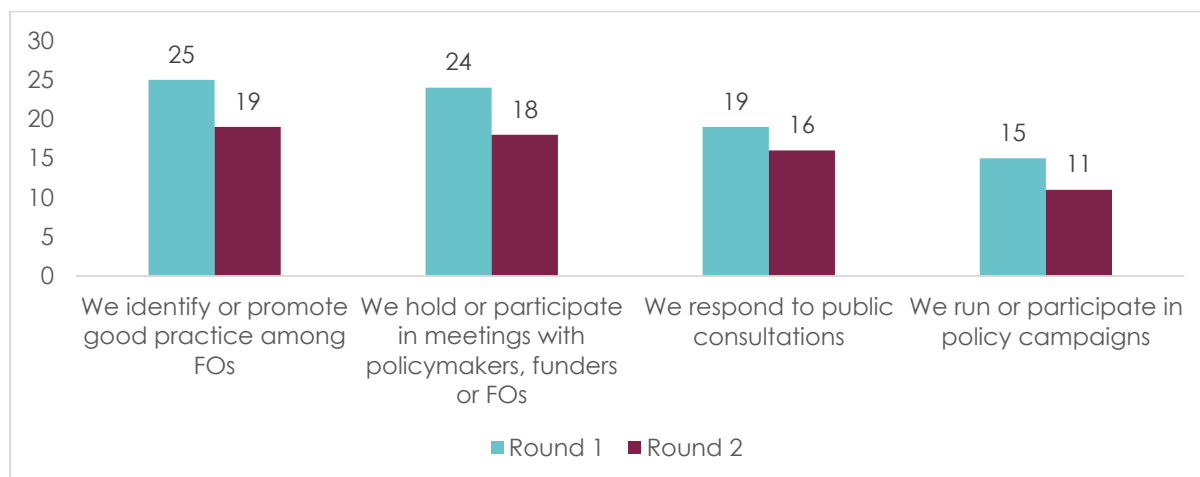
¹⁴¹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 1.

¹⁴² Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

¹⁴³ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

The most common method of influencing policy and practice among IOs responding to the survey was identifying or promoting good practice among FOs, followed by meetings with policymakers, funders and FOs (see Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1: What specific activities does your organisation offer in [influencing policy and practice]?



Note: n=25 in Round 1, n=19 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

IOs aim to present a united voice and speak on behalf of their respective sectors, such as the youth sector. This may amplify the power of FOs and IOs messaging. At the same time, policymakers may be more receptive to this communication as it is easier to speak with a group compared to having to speak with individual organisations (Box 4).¹⁴⁴ This approach can also build bridges between different sectors, such as the youth sector and the GRT sector.¹⁴⁵ This voice may be further amplified by multiple IOs joining up together. Some FOs also reported reluctance to challenge the government for fear of putting their funding at risk.¹⁴⁶ Some FOs may consequently prefer to use IOs as a conduit for this campaigning and influencing.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Case Study 5.

¹⁴⁵ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁴⁶ Case Study 5.

¹⁴⁷ Case Study 5.

Box 4: An example of IOs coordinating a stronger voice on behalf of multiple organisations

The GLA Skills & Employment Team draws on IOs such as the **ERSA** and the **AELP** to act as a voice of the employment sector to test their thinking, to avoid duplication of work, and to ensure GLA adds value when developing new programmes.¹⁴⁸

The DfE draws on the YEG for a similar purpose: as the YEG liaises with different government departments, local authorities, and third sector organisations. Their inputs can equip the DfE with a broader context.¹⁴⁹

Source: Flemons, Feyerabend, Hofman & Picken, Case study 1: policy and influencing, Youth Futures, 2022.

Some IOs aim to support systemic change by engaging with policymakers on a variety of levels at the same time.¹⁵⁰ For example, the Traveller Movement is working for more inclusion and visibility of the GRT community in mainstream policies and services as well as designing isolated policies and services geared particularly towards the GRT community. To do this, the Traveller Movement participates in national groups, such as the YEG, in order to liaise with other organisations and to engage with policymakers. At the same time, the Traveller Movement engages with national and local general youth services to include pathways for the GRT community in their services rather than providing separate ones.¹⁵¹

4.1.1. IOs reported both challenges and facilitators when influencing policy and practice

The challenges included:



Reaching out to, and interacting with, policymakers and FOs during COVID-19¹⁵² discussed already in section 3.3.2.



Lack of capacity¹⁵³ **and funding**¹⁵⁴ to build personal relationships (exacerbated by COVID-19),¹⁵⁵ also discussed above in section 3.3.2.



Competing governmental priorities, particularly those related to COVID-19.¹⁵⁶ With policy priorities continuously shifting, IOs may be unable to address new issues as they emerge without additional resources.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the multiplicity of policymakers in the youth

¹⁴⁸ Case Study 1.

¹⁴⁹ Case Study 1.

¹⁵⁰ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 1.

¹⁵¹ Case Study 1.

¹⁵² ToC workshops – five grantees.

¹⁵³ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁵⁴ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁵⁵ ToC workshops – four grantees.

¹⁵⁶ ToC workshops – two grantees.

¹⁵⁷ Case Study 1.

employment space¹⁵⁸ and leadership turnover, often due to government reshuffles, necessitates the development of new relationships and makes it more difficult to achieve systemic change.¹⁵⁹ A few IOs working with specific groups, such as the GRT community, also found that some policymakers were hesitant to engage with them.¹⁶⁰

The facilitators were:



Having strong relationships with, and becoming trusted advisers of, policymakers and funders (e.g. the ERSA and their relations with the DWP and other departments).¹⁶¹ Yet, building these kinds of relationships requires specific skills, targeted approaches to individual policymakers,¹⁶² and it can be a lengthy and resource-intensive process.¹⁶³



Representing a wide network of organisations or members helps IOs gain credibility with policymakers and amplifies the voices of individual groups and communities.¹⁶⁴

4.1.2. Approaches and practices that IOs consider to be most effective

Some IOs agreed that **focusing on providing evidence-based information and data on activities and their impact to policymakers** was important.¹⁶⁵ By doing so, IOs provide policymakers and funders with an analysis of needs, strengths, and weaknesses of their areas of work; and a basis for policymakers and funders to address those.¹⁶⁶ This is the case even if influencing policy effectively often also requires a combination of different types of evidence, the ability to speak with authority, a receptive audience, good timing, and more.

Many IO reported that it is important to **frame messages in a way that is relevant and interesting to stakeholders**.¹⁶⁷ This might involve using the same language as policymakers: Enable Enterprise, for example, have been working with policymakers to use the same languages around skills to make the discourse more coherent and work of FOs more comparable.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁸ Case Study 1.

¹⁵⁹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

¹⁶⁰ Case Study 1; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁶¹ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁶² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁶³ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁶⁴ Case Study 1; Case Study 5.

¹⁶⁵ ToC workshops – two grantees; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

¹⁶⁶ ToC workshops – two grantees; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

¹⁶⁷ Workshop 1; ToC workshops – one grantee; Case Study 1.

¹⁶⁸ ToC workshops – one grantee.

Working with other stakeholders and organisations to influence policymakers can be a useful tool to affect change.¹⁶⁹ Some IOs worked closely with others in order to highlight the importance of certain issues: for example, UK Youth created a partnership with the Black Youth Alliance and The Scouts to show a united voice for young people to further engage MPs and other policymakers.¹⁷⁰ Attending the YEG was also considered an important way that IOs collaborate to bring about positive changes.¹⁷¹

Understanding the motivations of FOs to attend and engage with networking opportunities and policy influencing is important.¹⁷² One IO reported that they found FOs and local IOs more likely to engage with a networking opportunity if it provided real-life, concrete examples of the issues or approaches being discussed.¹⁷³ They also reported that the presence of national IOs at local or regional networking forums appeared to encourage engagement. This was because the participants felt they were being heard at the national level and kept up to date from a national perspective.¹⁷⁴ IOs perceive themselves as well placed to do policy and influencing work on national, regional, and local levels as strategic and long-term planning is part of their roles.¹⁷⁵ Some IOs noted that FOs who may also be doing policy or influencing work tend to not have the capacity for more than so-called 'firefighting measures'.¹⁷⁶

4.1.3. Impacts on influencing policy and practice

IOs build connections between FOs and policymakers, which supports better integration between policy and practice. This has various impacts on FOs' ability to provide feedback on policies that affect young people:

- **FOs save the time and resource** of having to engage with policymakers themselves, allowing them to focus on service-delivery, which in turn is likely to positively impact the quality and number of opportunities available to young people (see Box 5).¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Workshop 1; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; ToC workshops – two grantees; Case Study 1.

¹⁷⁰ Workshop 1; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁷¹ Case Study 1, Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁷² Case Study 5.

¹⁷³ Case Study 5.

¹⁷⁴ Case Study 5.

¹⁷⁵ Case Study 1.

¹⁷⁶ Case Study 1.

¹⁷⁷ Case Study 1.

- **FOs may appreciate IOs facilitating sessions with funders,**¹⁷⁸ and providing expertise that FOs would otherwise find it difficult to have access to.¹⁷⁹

Box 5: An example of how IOs linked up FOs to policymakers

Kickstart is a government scheme that provides funding to create jobs for people aged 16 to 24 who are on Universal Credit. The **ERSA** mobilised FOs and employability experts, including the YEG, to set up the Kickstart forum on Microsoft Teams. The Forum works closely with the DWP and Jobcentre Plus through a series of meetings and consultations to support the implementation of Kickstart. Drawing on their collective experiences and research, the Forum identified challenges with the scheme and proposed solutions for administration difficulties, basic IT and communication problems, payments issues, etc. These recommendations to the DWP were informed by sharing good practices among Forum participants and research conducted by the **ERSA**.

The Kickstart forum enabled FOs to ask attending DWP civil servants directly about any questions or concerns they had about the programme – leading to up-to-date and immediate answers that were reported to be difficult to access otherwise.¹⁸⁰ This was seen as particularly beneficial among attending FOs.¹⁸¹

The forum also supported more connections and collaborative working between FOs, as it brought together organisations with a focus on sharing experiences, problem-solving and highlighting success.¹⁸² The **ERSA** reports that the forum became the 'go to' place for Gateway organisations, and that the online chat became an ongoing, genuine community for problem-solving and sharing good practice.¹⁸³ For example, one FO interviewee praised the **ERSA's** Kickstart forum for its flexibility, accessibility and availability as this allowed even small, remote organisations to feel they were still 'in the loop'.¹⁸⁴ The **ERSA** reported that the forum and its meetings did not only help their members have access to policymakers but also provided a valuable opportunity for policymakers, such as the National Audit Office (NAO), to hear from organisations implementing Kickstart.¹⁸⁵

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, Case study 5: collaboration and networking, Youth Futures, 2022; End of grant reports.

Some IOs identified a few areas where they consider that there has been positive change as a result of their influencing at the national level, including:

- **Examples when IOs have fed back FOs' experience to policymakers** (see Box 6)¹⁸⁶
- **Examples when IOs have raised awareness of an issue** (Box 7 and Box 8)
- **Examples where IOs have suggested standards to be used in practice** (see Box 8).

¹⁷⁸ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁷⁹ Case Study 4.

¹⁸⁰ Case Study 5.

¹⁸¹ Case Study 5.

¹⁸² End of grant report.

¹⁸³ End of grant report.

¹⁸⁴ Case Study 5.

¹⁸⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁸⁶ Case Study 5.

It is, however, extremely difficult to assess the extent to which IOs' work contributed to policy change in the first place, let alone the extent to which any change in the policy had a concrete impact on young people's lives.¹⁸⁷

Box 6: An example of IOs feeding back FO experiences to policymakers

The **ERSA** reported that the DWP had informed them that the Kickstart programme would not have achieved the success it did without the forum, as by attending the forum they became informed about what was and what was not working.¹⁸⁸ Drawing on collective experiences and research, the Forum identified challenges with the scheme and proposed solutions for administration difficulties, basic IT and communication problems, payments issues, etc.¹⁸⁹ This led to the DWP to make concrete changes relating to the paperwork, the claims processing, the involvement of gateway organisations in job centres, and how vacancies were advertised – including having them appear on the Find a Job page.¹⁹⁰

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 5: collaboration and networking*, Youth Futures, 2022.

Box 7: An example of collaboration between IO in order to increase the reach of a policy campaign

In 2021, **YA** led a lobbying campaign that resulted in over 20,000 emails sent to MPs calling for a national rollout of 'early support hubs' that offer all types of mental health support to people aged under 25. This was done in collaboration with several mental health charities to increase the reach of the campaign. At the same time, **YA** was part of a collaborative effort to disseminate policy briefings, build relationships, and organise meetings and roundtables with relevant policymakers. These combined efforts contributed towards the Department of Health and Social Care requesting HM Treasury to fund the roll of the hubs (thus improving provision in currently not serviced areas). While the campaign ultimately failed to secure the governmental funding in 2021, the Health and Social Care Select Committee's inquiry into children and young people's mental health resulted in a recommendation for the government to fund a national rollout of these hubs.

Source: Flemons, Feyerabend, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 1: policy and influencing*, Youth Futures, 2022.

Box 8: Examples of IO work adding issues and making changes to the political agenda

In some cases, IOs perceived their influencing work to be having an effect at the governmental level. For example, the **AELP** and the **ERSA** collaborated on a joint submission to the Justice Committee Inquiry on a prisoner apprenticeship pathway, and claimed that this work had played a role in the recent government interest in this approach.¹⁹¹ The influence IOs can have in this sense can also be seen in the inclusion of **Enabling Enterprise's** standards in The Gatsby Benchmarks.¹⁹²

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 3: learning and data*, Youth Futures, 2022; Grantee interviews.

¹⁸⁷ Case Study 2.

¹⁸⁸ Case Study 5.

¹⁸⁹ Case Study 1.

¹⁹⁰ Case Study 5.

¹⁹¹ Case Study 3.

¹⁹² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

4.2. Function 2: Raising qualifications and standards



IOs offer access to resources and courses that aim to improve the professionalisation of the workforce and quality of services provided by FOs to young people – recognising the added value of working with IOs and being a learning organisation helps FOs to participate and benefit

IOs help professionalise the workforce and services in the youth employment space by:

- **Providing resources and courses that aim to meet FOs' needs** by building individuals' skills to improve the capabilities and quality of provisions within the participants' organisations.¹⁹³ Survey responses suggested that the most common services provided within qualification and standards were continual professional development courses for FOs (see Figure 4-2). The courses vary considerably between IOs, including accredited and unaccredited programmes that are aimed at increasing the skills of staff working in organisations with different structures and focus.¹⁹⁴ IOs aim to increase overall quality standard of the youth employment space,¹⁹⁵ and better understand the impact of FOs.¹⁹⁶
- **Assessing and verifying the quality of services provided by FOs.** Survey responses show that several IOs also provide an assessment and verification process for quality of services provided by FOs (see Figure 4-2). For example, Skills Builder Partnership provides an assessment of each organisation against their standards and relevant modules to further improve their organisational standards.¹⁹⁷ They also collect data through their standards on the need for CPD and other support within their network.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ ToC workshops – one grantee.

¹⁹⁴ ToC workshops – two grantees.

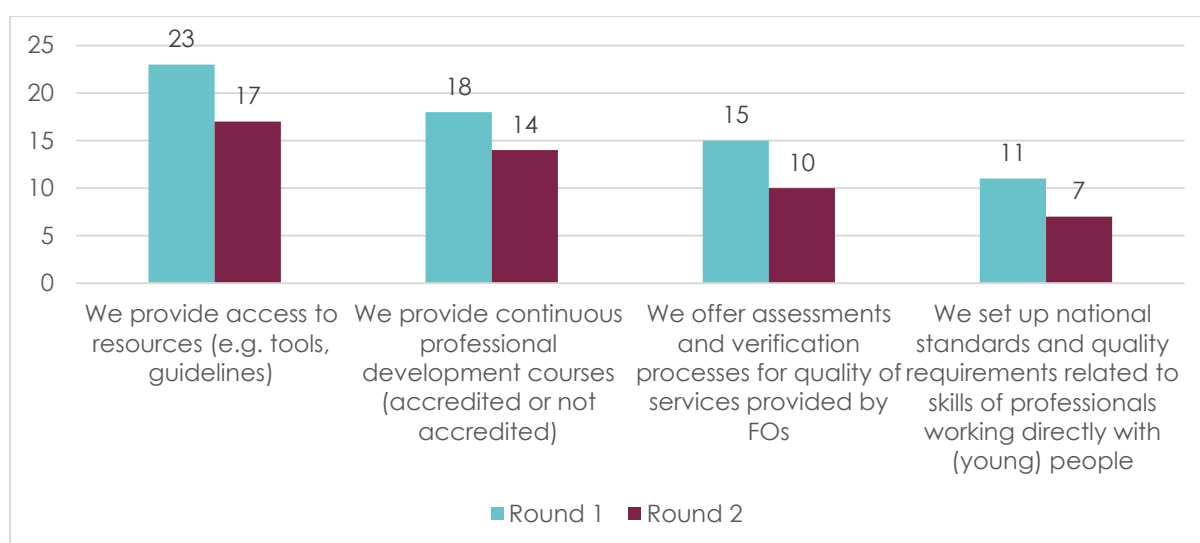
¹⁹⁵ ToC workshops – three grantees; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

¹⁹⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁹⁷ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

¹⁹⁸ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

Figure 4-2: What specific activities does your organisation offer in [qualifications and standards]?



Note: n=24 in Round 1, n=17 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

4.2.1. IOs reported both challenges and facilitators when raising qualifications and standards

The challenges included:



Limited capacity and lack of time among FOs to benefit from support offered:

Many of the programmes providing quality marks and standards or qualifications for staff take a significant amount of time and financial resource on the part of participating FOs.¹⁹⁹ This takes resource away from the FO's core activities, such as service delivery to young people. This situation was exacerbated by COVID-19.²⁰⁰



Being a volunteer-driven sector poses challenges to qualification levels:

The large proportion of volunteer workers in the youth sector creates challenges for bringing about change as the volunteer staff changes frequently, and it is more difficult to deliver workforce training systematically.²⁰¹



FOs may be reluctant to engage in IOs' work around qualifications if

they do not see the added value of the support, or worry that they would have to completely change the way they work.²⁰² The opposite is the key facilitator.

The facilitators were:

¹⁹⁹ ToC workshops – four grantees; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – three grantee interviews.

²⁰⁰ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²⁰¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁰² ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – one grantee interview.



Recognising the added value of working with IOs: A better understanding of the value of IOs' support in improving qualifications of staff or service quality helps secure FOs' interest and participation. FOs can also better see the benefits of working towards qualifications and standards when they engage with funders.²⁰³



Being a learning organisation: FOs interested in improving their services and able to prove the level of service they provide are more willing to engage with the IOs in professionalisation activities.²⁰⁴

4.2.2. Approaches and practices that IOs consider to be most effective

Building or using a common framework for qualification and skills across IOs and other organisations makes it easier for organisations to demonstrate their impact to policymakers, funders and other stakeholders.²⁰⁵ Sharing standards and quality indicators may also mean that similar language is used across a sector, which can increase effectiveness.²⁰⁶ One of the key goals for Skills Builder Partnership is to increase the use of common language on standards and skills. Their standards are currently referenced under the Gatsby benchmarks,²⁰⁷ which Skills Builder Partnership sees as confirmation of the need to use common language within the youth employment space.²⁰⁸

Working with institutions and regulatory bodies is an effective approach as it gives more legitimacy to the standards, as well as increasing visibility.²⁰⁹ Being able to work with national bodies and to have their standards officially recognised enhances credibility and ensures that FOs are more interested in participating in order to help them gain reputation with funders and policymakers.²¹⁰ Working closely with such bodies may also help ensure additional funding for these programmes for IOs, as policymakers and funders might see a positive impact for young people.²¹¹ Finally, the exposure among policymakers can help IOs to influence policy around including more targeted training and qualifications in national curriculums.²¹²

²⁰³ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁰⁴ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

²⁰⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²⁰⁶ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Workshop 1.

²⁰⁷ Gatsby, *Good career guidance*, Gatsby, 2023.

²⁰⁸ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁰⁹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²¹⁰ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²¹¹ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²¹² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

For example, Enabling Enterprise's approach to skills and standards was approved by the Institute of Apprenticeships.^{213, 214}

At the same time, IOs have seen advantages to **being a separate entity to official regulatory bodies**. Collaborating with organisations and working alongside them to improve the quality and standards of their services has proven helpful for Enabling Enterprise's engagement with other organisations.²¹⁵ When the NYA was developing COVID-19 guidance, numerous FOs they worked with showed an interest in being consulted and collaborating in this process.²¹⁶

Raising awareness in the youth employment space of the support IOs provide is also important to increase the awareness of these standards and their impact.²¹⁷ Skills Builder Partnership uses a variety of newsletters, webinars, meetings with stakeholders or partners to promote their standards.²¹⁸ For the CfYI, the dissemination largely took place at meetings with stakeholders and network meetings to raise awareness on the tools and support available.²¹⁹

4.2.3. Impact on qualifications and standards

IOs seek to improve the quality of the services FOs deliver.²²⁰ This has intended direct implications for FOs that deliver better quality services to young people and, as a result, increased employability for young people.

The provision of more quality standards within the youth employment space may also contribute towards a greater professionalisation of the youth sector and help to attract more potential youth workers. Examples of relevant activities can be found in Box 9. In this study, however, we were not able to identify how activities to improve qualifications and standards brought about impact in these areas.

²¹³ IATE, *Homepage*, IATE, 2023.

²¹⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²¹⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²¹⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²¹⁷ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²¹⁸ ToC workshop – one grantee.

²¹⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²²⁰ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

Box 9: Examples of activities undertaken by IOs to introduce qualifications and raise standards

The **NYA** provides accredited CPD courses through their Youth Work Academy, which allows both volunteers and paid staff to gain qualifications required to support young people.²²¹

Money4You runs a non-accredited capacity building programme, which is meant to support the qualifications, skills, and resilience of organisations. The programme includes a set course, and organisations 'graduate' from the programme.²²² **Money4You** also supports smaller ethnic minority led organisations specifically by providing targeted training and support. Increasing the resilience of these organisations means working at a local level to achieve change.²²³

In cooperation with the Institute for Youth Work, **the Traveller Movement** has been commissioned to provide targeted training and support for the GRT community. By contributing to official training curriculums through these modules, **the Traveller Movement** is supporting systemic change to provide better support for the GRT community through mainstream services.²²⁴

Source: Grantee interviews.

4.3. Function 3: Facilitating learning and access to data



IOs that facilitate learning and access to data address one of the key issues in the youth employment space: scarcity of good quality, comparable, and longitudinal data. Yet, providing policymakers and funders with such data is stymied by numerous challenges, such as limited resources and capacity.

It is important to note that in the youth employment space and in youth sector official data is scarce, fragmented and difficult to obtain. This role of IOs is thus particularly important. IOs facilitate learning and access to data in the youth employment space by:

- **Researching the needs and experiences of the sectors in which they work.**²²⁵ They do this by collecting and analysing primary and secondary data from surveys with stakeholders, forum and focus groups, government data (publicly available or requested), data from other organisations such as think tanks, online sources, and grey literature,²²⁶ as well as via more informal channels.²²⁷ IOs may also carry out data collection to substantiate more anecdotal claims. At the local level, IOs work to access more targeted data on local projects, needs, and communities.²²⁸

²²¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²²² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²²³ ToC workshops – one grantee.

²²⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²²⁵ ToC workshop – two grantees; Round 1 – three grantee interviews; Case Study 3.

²²⁶ Case Study 3.

²²⁷ Case Study 3.

²²⁸ Round 2 – two grantee interviews.

Box 10: Examples of research undertaken by IOs

The **NYA** is conducting case studies within nine local authorities (LAs) to better understand the local barriers and facilitators to youth work. They are collaborating with a specialised research organisation to support these research efforts by capturing views of organisational leads, LA representatives, counsellors, and other stakeholders responsible for the youth work offer. This work is funded by the DDCMS to provide qualitative findings to support government decisions on what works in local areas and to share good practices across communities and to facilitate greater collaboration between them.

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 3: learning and data, Youth Futures, 2022*.

- **Sharing data and research findings with others in order to suggest changes to policy or practice.** Data may be shared by feeding into ad-hoc guidance or examples of good practices,²²⁹ research reports, and other outputs providing information or evidence to stakeholders.²³⁰ These outputs are then used to influence policy (see section 4.1). Almost all IOs working to facilitate learning and data reported in the survey that they shared research findings with policymakers, funders, and FOs as one of their key activities (see Figure 4-3). For example, the AELP used research findings on the disadvantageous impact of the apprenticeship reforms on smaller employers and younger apprentices to provide discussion points for the DfE in an effort to improve the apprenticeship funding model.²³¹ The NYA uses both primary and secondary data from sources that government bodies are less likely to have an overview of to inform policy reports and other submissions to governments (see section 4.1).²³²
- **Supporting FOs in using the data that they already collected,** as FOs often lack large research capabilities or resources to develop or disseminate research outputs.²³³ Some IOs receive specific funding to support the research capacities of FOs.²³⁴
- **Acting as a conduit of data for policymakers** by consolidating the large volume of data and research on different sectors available in the youth employment space to share with the government. This allows both policymakers to have access to a wider range of data, and for FO data to be presented to policymakers more easily.²³⁵
- **Collecting and analysing information from government, think tanks and foundations and present it in a usable format to FOs** who may otherwise not have access to this information.²³⁶ The AELP considers this one of their core activities and aims to present accessible information to their

²²⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²³⁰ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²³¹ Case Study 3.

²³² Case Study 3.

²³³ Workshops 1 and 2; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 3, Case Study 4.

²³⁴ Scoping interview 4; Case Study 3.

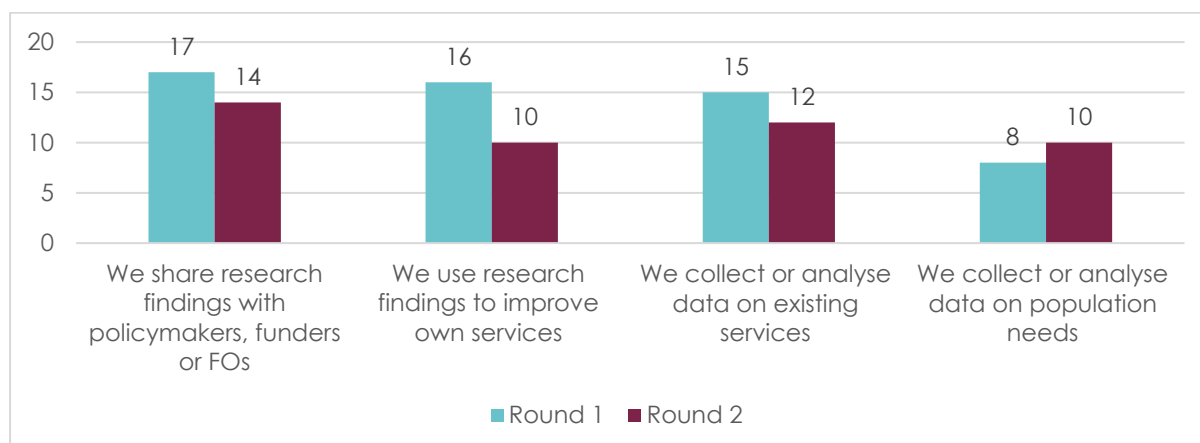
²³⁵ Case Study 3.

²³⁶ Case Study 3.

members to ensure they have necessary information to adapt to changes in policy or current trends to support their organisational resilience.²³⁷

Finally, in the survey, several IO respondents reported that they collected data to improve their own services (see Figure 4-3).

Figure 4-3: What specific activities does your organisation offer in [learning and data]?



Note: n=19 in Round 1, n=14 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

4.3.1. IOs report both challenges and facilitators when facilitating learning and access to data

The challenges included:



Limited funding for IOs and FOs research activities:²³⁸ this translates to the lack of resources and capacity (including skills in data analysis and handling) to work with data, carry out large national-level research projects,²³⁹ shift towards more evidence-based practice, or access data from (other) FOs in sufficient quantity and detail to carry out meaningful analysis.²⁴⁰



Limited availability of long-term data: IOs tend to conduct research at a specific point in time, likely to be focused on one programme or organisation, and results are consequently not comparable.²⁴¹ IOs are starting to collect data from the FOs in their networks more regularly, in the hope that this will facilitate highlighting the impact of FOs.²⁴² The NYA, for example, explained that there had been a 13-year data gap

²³⁷ Case Study 3.

²³⁸ Case Study 3.

²³⁹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²⁴⁰ Case Study 3.

²⁴¹ Workshop 2.

²⁴² Case Study 3.

on the youth sector prior to their current youth census work. This made collecting data more labour-intensive than if data had been collected every year. They are now aiming to follow up the youth census with more data collection to fully understand the landscape and how it changed throughout COVID-19.²⁴³



Lack of standardised data collection methods within and across

sectors: Even where data collection by FOs is improving, such a diverse range of approaches are implemented that it is difficult for IOs to standardise the data available for cross-organisational analysis, even in terms of common language or taxonomy for the services available.²⁴⁴ Demographic factors provide a good illustration: these are often perceived as 'straightforward' but are collected in different ways.²⁴⁵ As a result, using data to evidence impact to policymakers and funders proves difficult and sometimes almost impossible.²⁴⁶

The facilitators were:



Reputation of IOs and their rapport with FOs can facilitate sharing data collected by FOs with IOs:

while some FOs may not feel comfortable sharing their data with IOs (for the fear of being misused or not attributed),²⁴⁷ having a good reputation and rapport with both FOs and policymakers helps alleviate these concerns.^{248, 249} For example, the Traveller Movement find that being well-known and respected within the GRT sector increased the response rate to their survey and interview requests and helped them access policymakers.²⁵⁰



Recognition of the need for more evidence and high-quality data: this recognition originates both from policymakers and funders (to help make decisions), and from FOs (to understand gaps in service provisions).²⁵¹ This need was amplified by COVID-19, as it highlighted gaps in existing services. There is a need to understand what support is needed in a post- COVID-19 recovery.²⁵²

4.3.2. Approaches and practices that IO consider to be most effective

IO reported that **collaborating with other partners (including other IOs, local authorities, clinical commissioning groups or universities)** is helpful for facilitating learning and access to data. It can ensure that all relevant data are included, increase the reach and quality of the data collection and

²⁴³ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²⁴⁴ Case Study 3.

²⁴⁵ Workshop 2.

²⁴⁶ Workshop 2.

²⁴⁷ Workshop 2.

²⁴⁸ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

²⁴⁹ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

²⁵⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁵¹ Round 1 – four grantee interviews; Case Study 3.

²⁵² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

analysis, and enhance the credibility of research outputs.^{253 254} For example, UK Youth and the CfYI's joint work on the 'Just one question' initiative (which sends a question to youth workers each day) ensures that they can draw on the network of the former and the methodological expertise of the latter to collect data on the needs of the youth work.²⁵⁵ **Using existing networks** can help IOs have more engagement with their research,^{256, 257} as can **ongoing structured engagement** with FOs.²⁵⁸

When sharing data and learning, **using the same language as policymakers or funders** on specific topics is valuable, as is **providing data on the impact of work that FOs and IOs do** to demonstrate their value.²⁵⁹ IOs reflected on the value of different types of data: including that of insights gained through **peer research** (can increase the relevance of a research project and ensure high quality data),^{260, 261} **quantitative data** (often more likely to gain traction and good media attention),²⁶² and **qualitative data** (more nuanced information, particularly around the quality of services and barriers to accessing them).²⁶³

Finally, it is important that IOs **maintain momentum** by following up on connections or interests generated from the publication of research.²⁶⁴ For example, the NYA's research showing the need for CPD courses ultimately led to the DDCMS's support of these courses.²⁶⁵

4.3.3. Impact on learning and access to data

IOs can use learning and data to improve FOs practice and to generate actionable insight to enable change (Box 12).²⁶⁶ These activities can contribute to better quality and more diverse/tailored services being available for young people:

²⁵³ Case Study 3.

²⁵⁴ Workshop 2; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁵⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁵⁶ Case Study 3.

²⁵⁷ Workshop 2.

²⁵⁸ Workshop 2.

²⁵⁹ Workshop 2; Case Study 3.

²⁶⁰ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²⁶¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁶² Case Study 3; Workshop 2.

²⁶³ Case Study 3.

²⁶⁴ Workshop 2; Scoping interview 4; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²⁶⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

²⁶⁶ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

- **IO can identify gaps and unmet needs in service provision through research and data.** This can lead to additional support for young people if acted upon by FOs (see Box 12).²⁶⁷
- **IO can use their data and research functions to develop resources** that (as explored in section 4.1) can help FOs to improve the quality of their services. For example, following research work carried out with the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL), AELP developed a code of good governance²⁶⁸ for Independent Training Providers to support good practice in this area.²⁶⁹

‘[We are] starting to make real headway in getting people using these tools [frameworks and resources on improving practice around measuring impact and quality] in the last three months. For the first time, we have some data around these things both as a way of testing whether the tools developed are fit for purpose and to reflect back to practitioners what their work is doing.’²⁷⁰

- **Stronger shared knowledge base on young people’s needs** and the barriers that prevent them from being fulfilled (see Box 11).

Box 11: Examples of IOs strengthening the shared knowledge base

Recent research activities by **Ubele** identified the key barriers that young people face in seeking to enter into the manual trade sector or construction industry, as well as barriers affecting women and Black and minoritised young people specifically.²⁷¹ Similarly, research by **the Traveller Movement** identified the key barriers that can prevent young GRT people from entering good employment.²⁷² **YA** identified the kinds of support young people are looking for as society enters the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷³

Source: End of grant reports.

²⁶⁷ Case Study 1.

²⁶⁸ AELP, New code of good governance launched for independent training providers, AELP, 2023.

²⁶⁹ Case Study 3.

²⁷⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁷¹ End of grant report.

²⁷² End of grant report.

²⁷³ End of grant report.

In addition, the support of IOs to evidence impact of FOs can help with their bids for funding.²⁷⁴ IOs can also provide learning and data to policymakers to target efforts and inform decision making. This can lead to improved funding and policymaking for IOs and FOs and to a better understanding of the case for investing in youth employment infrastructure.

- **FOs are provided with more evidence/data to help them prove their impact.**²⁷⁵ This may help FOs in making successful funding bids.
- **IOs' research and data may also raise awareness of current provision among the public, the government and funders, increasing engagement and uptake of these services, as well as funder support** (see Box 14).
- **FOs can use the data more effectively:** For example, the AELP provided analysis and research support that enabled one FO make better use of the data they were already collecting (see also Box 12).²⁷⁶
- **IOs use data on their programmes and FOs' programmes to demonstrate their value to government and funders, meaning that such programmes/services continue:** For example, the AELP considered that their data gathering helped convince government of the importance of the traineeship programme, leading to continued focus on this policy. They felt that as a result, this would benefit young people who can access a larger number of training opportunities available to them (see Box 13).
- **IOs research activities likewise provide young people with information on the youth employment space and the opportunities available to them,** as is the case for Ubele's work on the manual trade sector (see Box 11).

Box 12: An example of IOs using data and research to support better services for young people

The **CfYI** have created an open access data portal and measurement tools that youth organisations can use to collate data in alignment with the **CfYI's** updated Outcomes Framework. This provides the **CfYI** and the FOs they support with a clear route to outcomes measurement around which wider evaluation efforts can be structured. The measurement tools are also designed to produce immediate, actionable insight for FOs. The **CfYI** have, for example, used these tools to look at the results from quality assessment to inform where capacity building support for a particular evaluation cohort should be targeted.

Source: End of grant report.

²⁷⁴ Case Study 3.

²⁷⁵ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

²⁷⁶ Case Study 4.

Box 13: An example of using data and learning to influence policy

Following the scaling-down of the Traineeship programme, the **AELP** continued to collect data on learner outcomes, referrals, conversion rates and drop-outs (including among Black and minoritised communities specifically) to share with policymakers in order to demonstrate its ongoing impact.²⁷⁷ The **AELP** argued that this work they did to sustain the programme and demonstrate its potential contributed to the government's renewed focus on the programme in the light of the pandemic, and its consequent expansion.²⁷⁸

Source: Flemons, Hofman & Picken, *Case study 3: learning and data*, Youth Futures, 2022.

Box 14: Examples of IOs highlighting gaps in existing provision

The **NYA** carried out a youth work census that highlighted the geographic areas, as well as the kinds of support, for which there is currently insufficient provision.²⁷⁹ This enables IOs and others to provide more targeted support for youth employability provision.²⁸⁰ Similarly, research by **YA** identified gaps in Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services provision across the country.²⁸¹

The **AELP** collaborated with the Warwick Institute for Employment Research and IFF Research to survey 200 employers and 75 providers on the impact of the levy on Apprenticeship recruitment. This resulted in the first hard evidence of reduced recruitment affecting young people at Level 2, in direct contradiction to policy intent.²⁸²

The Traveller Movement's research identified gaps in youth service provision and presented clear recommendations to address them to policymakers, commissioners and service providers, including through a roundtable report launch in parliament with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the GRT community.²⁸³

Source: End of grant reports.

4.4. Function 4: Embedding and championing youth voice



IOs lead by example by working with young people through dedicated advisory groups, on individual projects or through training. Management support, dedicated staff and resources enable IOs to better embed and champion youth voice.

One key activity that many IOs survey respondents undertook in the area of empowering youth voice and/or youth participation was leading by example by including young people in their own work (see Figure 4-4). This was also the primary approach taken by many of the IO interviewed and consulted.

²⁷⁷ Case Study 3.

²⁷⁸ Case Study 3.

²⁷⁹ End of grant report.

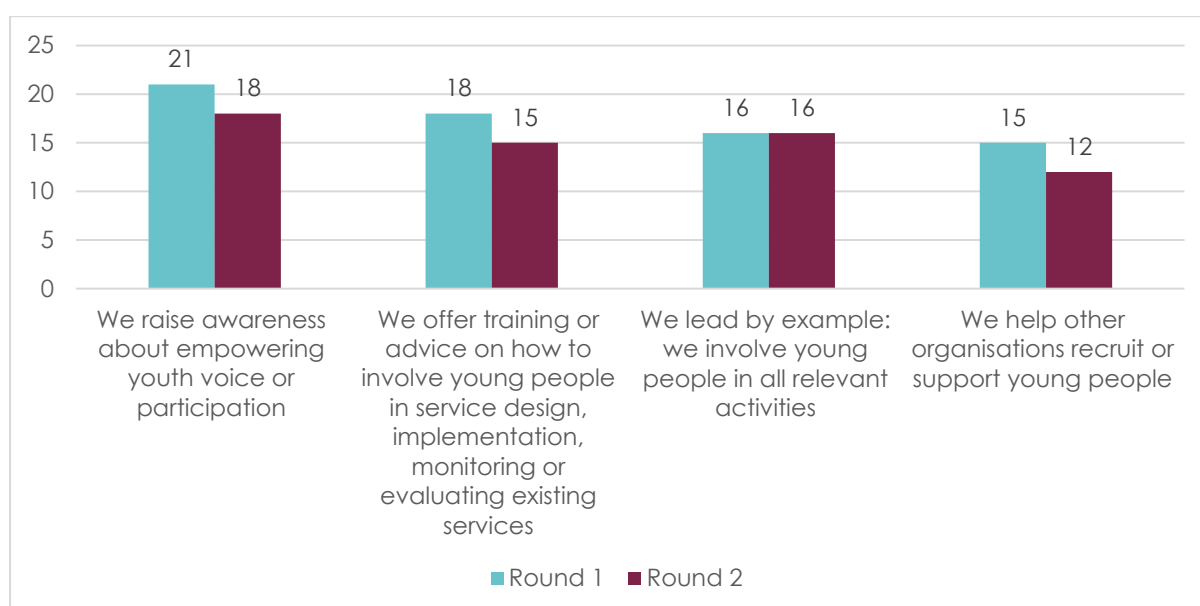
²⁸⁰ End of grant report.

²⁸¹ End of grant report.

²⁸² Case Study 3.

²⁸³ End of grant report.

Figure 4-4: What specific activities does your organisation offer in [regarding championing]?



Note: n=23 in Round 1, n=19 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO and FO role.

Source: Survey.

IOs lead by example in embedding and championing youth voice by:

- **Working with a youth advisory group:** This sits within the IO and is involved in several activities across the organisation.²⁸⁴ Ubele, for example, runs a Young Emerging Leaders Group that initially worked on just one project (focusing on the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on mental health for young people), but is increasingly involved in more projects and the day-to-day business of the organisation.²⁸⁵
- **Working with young people on specific projects:** The CfYI were engaging with young people directly on the evaluation of the iWill fund,²⁸⁶ where young people advised and validated research findings.²⁸⁷
- **Training young people to conduct peer-research** or to develop skills for co-creation.²⁸⁸
- **Encouraging young people to take an active role in their organisations and their communities:**²⁸⁹ as is the case with Youth Employment UK's Youth Ambassadors network.^{290, 291}

²⁸⁴ ToC workshops – two grantees; Case Study 2.

²⁸⁵ Case Study 2.

²⁸⁶ YMCA George Williams College, *Youth voice within the #iwill fund*, YMCA George Williams College, 2023.

²⁸⁷ Case Study 2.

²⁸⁸ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

²⁸⁹ Case Study 2.

²⁹⁰ Youth Employment UK, *Volunteer as a youth ambassador*, Youth Employment UK, 2023.

²⁹¹ Case Study 2.

4.4.1. IOs reported both challenges and facilitators when embedding and championing youth voice

The challenges included:



Young people may struggle to commit time to ensure meaningful engagement with IOs, due to other commitments and the nature of young people's lives.²⁹² This could be addressed by providing remuneration or other forms of incentives to recognise young people's time and commitment. Example of such a recognition are training in CV writing or networking workshops that provide young people with skills that can be used in future.²⁹³



Limited IOs capacity and resources: it becomes harder for staff to find the time to engage with these activities.²⁹⁴ Addressing this challenge can be difficult because little flexible funding for including youth voice exists²⁹⁵ that would allow for more time to work with young people and to co-design programmes together.²⁹⁶

The facilitators were:



Having support from senior management within IOs to listen to young people and make changes in response to their feedback or to truly embed them.²⁹⁷ The support UK Youth receives in this regard encourages them to implement suggestions of young people without worrying about negative reactions of the senior management to substantial changes.²⁹⁸



Having dedicated staff who engage with young people as part of their job can build trust and increases the engagement of the young people.^{299, 300}



Building and maintaining good relationships with funders might help obtain more flexible funding.³⁰¹ UK Youth received some funding – part of it could be used as their youth advisory board saw fit, which – they felt – increased the sense of ownership by the young people.³⁰² IOs also found an increased interest in engaging young people in funding bids.³⁰³

²⁹² Case Study 2.

²⁹³ Case Study 2.

²⁹⁴ Round 2 – two grantee interviews.

²⁹⁵ Case Study 2.

²⁹⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

²⁹⁷ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

²⁹⁸ Case Study 2.

²⁹⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

³⁰⁰ Case Study 2.

³⁰¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

³⁰² Case Study 2.

³⁰³ Case Study 2.

4.4.2. Approaches and practices that IO consider to be most effective

IOs identified a number of good practices for engaging with young people.

Building good relationships with the young people they work with is key to championing the youth voice and meaningful youth engagement.³⁰⁴ UK Youth tries to work directly with youth workers to engage young people as they already have an existing relationship with the young people.³⁰⁵ Using appropriate language and behaviour can help with this, as young people may feel more comfortable when the language used to engage them is age appropriate without being condescending.³⁰⁶ **Interacting with young people in a variety of ways** (through phone calls, direct messages, one-to-one sessions, group events, or digital tools and platforms) is important to ensure that everyone is included.³⁰⁷ IOs highlighted the importance of acknowledging that individual young people will respond differently to approaches used to engage them, and consequently trying to make the organisation's work as accessible as possible.³⁰⁸

Using young people to engage with other young people (peer-led approaches) can also be valuable in championing youth voice³⁰⁹ and ensuring that young people's voice is involved in research projects.³¹⁰ Ubele noticed an increase in participation when peer-researchers were involved in their projects,³¹¹ while the Traveller Movement saw improved levels of confidence in the young people who participated as peer researchers.³¹² **Involving young people across the organisation and throughout all stages of projects or programmes**, including the planning stage, is also important to ensure meaningful engagement.^{313, 314}

Several stakeholders highlighted the importance of **leading by example**: by demonstrating how an IO is including youth voices in their own organisation, they can model their approach to others, including FOs. This can also be done by **sharing good practices** with other IOs and their networks and taking

³⁰⁴ ToC workshops – one grantee; Case Study 2.

³⁰⁵ Case Study 2.

³⁰⁶ Case Study 2.

³⁰⁷ Case Study 2.

³⁰⁸ Case Study 2.

³⁰⁹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

³¹⁰ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

³¹¹ Case Study 2.

³¹² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³¹³ Scoping interview 2; Case Study 2.

³¹⁴ Case Study 2.

part in peer-learning on the topic.³¹⁵ Finally, ensuring that IOs **actively listen and act on young people's suggestions**, even when this feels uncomfortable or challenges their original plans, was considered important.³¹⁶

It is vital to **ensure a diverse group of young people are included** in efforts to support youth employment³¹⁷ to recognise the heterogeneity of young people and their various experiences.³¹⁸ Youth Employment UK have an open recruitment process that appears to attract a diverse group of young people, while the British Youth Council (BYC) uses more targeted approaches to engage a diverse group of young people in their work.³¹⁹ When recruiting young people, **using appropriate language** is important, especially when engaging people from marginalised communities. Tips included avoiding language around 'disadvantage', as this can deter young people from the target groups who will not identify as such,³²⁰ and using 'positive hooks' instead.³²¹

'Much of the interest come from less engaged members. (...) Previously we found it hard to engage with young people, so this time it was a nice surprise to see participants spread out across the country (not just in London).'³²²

Being aware of young people's individual needs when recruiting and engaging with young people is essential:³²³ YA makes sure they address the mental health needs of the young people they work with,³²⁴ while the BYC highlighted the importance of ensuring the young people with disabilities or learning difficulties have structures in place which facilitate their engagement.³²⁵

³¹⁵ Case Study 2.

³¹⁶ ToC workshops – one grantee; Case Study 2.

³¹⁷ Case Study 2.

³¹⁸ Case Study 2.

³¹⁹ Case Study 2.

³²⁰ Case Study 2.

³²¹ Scoping interviews 4 and 2.

³²² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³²³ Scoping interviews 2 and 4; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

³²⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³²⁵ Case Study 2.

4.4.3. Impact on embedding and championing youth voice

IOs work to embed and champion youth voice which may have impacts on young people by encouraging engagement and developing skills of young people. Youth engagement opportunities can also empower young people by giving them the sense that they can achieve real change.³²⁶ This leads to increased participation, active citizenship, and social action among youth.

- **IOs provide opportunities for youth voice to feed into the work of policymakers, funders and other stakeholders directly.** YA's National Youth Advice Working Group contributes to the government consultation on the proposed mental health strategy.^{327, 328}
- **IOs engage young people to act as peer researchers** (see Box 15), which has the potential to reach more beneficiaries within the target community – particularly those who would otherwise be reluctant to engage with a researcher who is unfamiliar and/or outside of the community.
- **Participation in IO projects can help young people develop useful skills** (see Box 15). Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people who participate in these kinds of activities increase their confidence and engage more in projects or programmes.³²⁹

Box 15: Examples of IO engaging with young people to embed their knowledge

As part of their research, **Ubele** trained 16 young people in a CPD-endorsed programme on facilitating community conversations so that they could act as peer researchers.³³⁰ In addition to the formal recognition accorded by this programme,³³¹ **Ubele** reported that some of these participants have been able to undertake additional research as a result of the programme.³³² Similarly, **the Traveller Movement** provided eight young GRT people with qualitative research training to conduct needs assessment research with their peers.³³³ The young people contributing to the quality assurance and validation of data for the **CfYI's** evaluation work likewise receive training in the relevant research methods.³³⁴ IOs may also develop tools and resources for young people specifically, such as **Money4You's** Bonsai Money programme³³⁵ that aims to improve financial literacy.³³⁶

Source: Feyerabend, Picken & Hofman, Case study 2: working to embed and champion youth voice in infrastructure organisations, Youth Futures, 2022; End of grant reports; Grantee interviews.

³²⁶ End of grant report.

³²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence>

³²⁸ End of grant report.

³²⁹ Case Study 2.

³³⁰ End of grant report.

³³¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³³² End of grant report.

³³³ End of grant report.

³³⁴ Case Study 2.

³³⁵ Money4you, *Bonsai*briefs, Money4you, 2023.

³³⁶ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

By championing and embedding youth voice in this way, IOs can also provide a model for FOs, funders, and policymakers to emulate – thereby ensuring that youth participation is meaningful and impactful (rather than merely tokenistic), and encouraging good practice (see Box 16). As a result, young people take an active role in shaping FOs and the priorities of IOs, funders, and policymakers and FOs support young people to have their voices heard by policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders. In cases where young people are meaningfully shaping FOs activities (as in Box 16, for example), it is likely that the services the FOs provide will be of a higher quality and more aligned with young people's needs.

Box 16: Examples of IOs role modelling meaningful youth participation

Youth Employment UK report that the work and opinions expressed by their Youth Ambassador network directly impact their activities when choosing priorities or how to address policy issues.³³⁷ The young people participate in activities such as webinars on policy matters impacting young people, provide feedback on developments like the spending review, join meetings and panels with stakeholders, and writing content for articles or blogs.³³⁸ Similarly, the **CfYI** have a panel of 10 young people who supported data analysis and developed typology as part of the evaluation of the iWill fund, feeding into the quality assurance process and validation of data.³³⁹

Source: Feyerabend, Picken & Hofman, Case study 2: working to embed and champion youth voice in infrastructure organisations, Youth Futures, 2022.

4.5. Function 5: Capacity building



IOs build capacity by offering resources, training, networking and collaborating opportunities to FOs. The areas of their support span from service quality improvement through organisational governance, leadership, talent, and financial management, to empowering youth voice.

There is a growing body of literature on what works in building capacity and capabilities in the voluntary sector more broadly.³⁴⁰ While there are key ingredients for effective capacity building (e.g. a comprehensive and systematic approach with a clear and agreed purpose, based on a

³³⁷ Case Study 2.

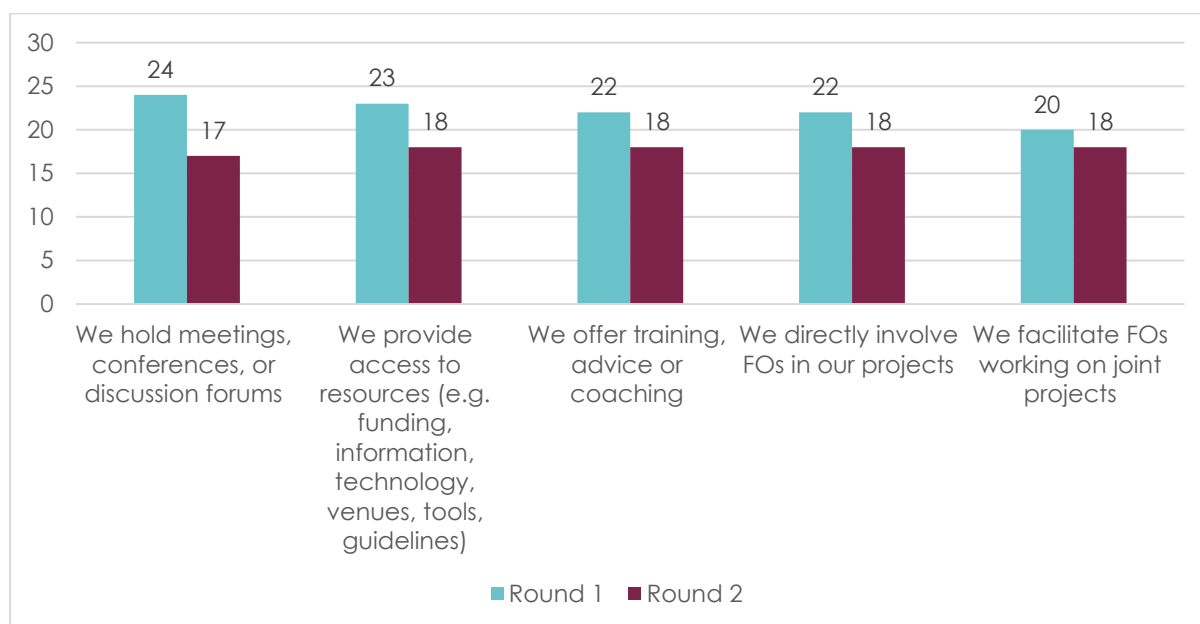
³³⁸ Case Study 2.

³³⁹ Case Study 2.

³⁴⁰ See for instance: Macmillan, Ellis-Paine, Kara, Dayson, Sanderson & Wells, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: what the evidence tells us*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014; Walton & Macmillan, *A brave new world for voluntary sector infrastructure? Vouchers, markets and demand-led capacity building*, Third Sector Research Centre, 2014.

diagnosis, and tailored to specific needs), these are context dependent.³⁴¹ Capacity building is one of the core functions of IOs that can usefully support smaller organisations operating at the local, regional and national levels. Capacity building could take the form of different activities, from holding meetings to collaborative working (see Figure 4-5).

Figure 4-5: What specific activities does your organisation offer in [capacity building]?



Note: n=25 in Round 1, n=18 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

Some typical ways in which IOs provide capacity building include:

- **Training FOs in a number of areas**³⁴² (e.g. bid writing, safeguarding or quality standards).³⁴³ The NYA, for example, offers accredited and non-accredited CPD courses for individuals working in the youth sector through their National Youth Work Academy.³⁴⁴ The NYA also provides youth workers with training resources on topics such as Life Skills, Young People in Employment or Training, and Transition to Independence.³⁴⁵ Money4You provides AVOCADO+, a one-year programme that aims to help organisations improve their business resilience. The course includes a series

³⁴¹ Macmillan, Ellis-Paine, Kara, Dayson, Sanderson & Wells, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: what the evidence tells us*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014.

³⁴² Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 4; Scoping interview 1; ToC workshops – three grantees.

³⁴³ ToC workshops – three grantees; Scoping interview 1; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

³⁴⁴ NYA, *The NYA youth work academy*, NYA, 2023.

³⁴⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

of 'bootcamps' on different areas (including bid writing, leadership and governance or fundraising) and aims to provide holistic support for small ethnic minority led organisations.³⁴⁶

- **Providing tailored support to individual organisations** to help build capacity, including through mentoring or consultancy support.³⁴⁷ Money4You offers one-to-one consultancy support for the participants of the AVOCADO+ programme. Consultants engage with participating organisations over the course of the programme and provide tailored support.³⁴⁸
- **Offering networking opportunities** that link FOs up with each other and with policy makers and funders.³⁴⁹ Almost all IOs that responded to the survey reported carrying out capacity building support that focuses on networking (see Figure 4-6) – also discussed in Chapter 1. Through large networks, IOs aim to reach a variety of organisations across the country to provide their services and capacity building support.³⁵⁰ Examples include Enabling Enterprise's establishment of organisational networks in the fields of special educational needs and disability (SEND) and careers and employability. These networks aimed to collaborate, exchange good practices, and develop resources for their specific target groups.³⁵¹ The CfYI use their network to provide a space for mutual learning and evaluation support,³⁵² while Money4You builds an alumni network for organisations that have taken part in their AVOCADO+ programme to stay in touch and collaborate with each other.³⁵³ UK Youth aims to create a peer support network on the national level through their network and to affect change this way.³⁵⁴ IOs may also host events involving FOs, policymakers, and funders to encourage interactions between these stakeholders and give FOs an opportunity to liaise with policymakers and funders.³⁵⁵ For example, Money4You hosts funders, as well as FOs, at their annual grant-giving competition 'Dragons Den', where FOs can directly interact with funders and ask questions or for feedback.³⁵⁶ These networks may help FOs realise the advantages of collaboration and having a network of support.³⁵⁷
- **Creating and sharing resources with FOs** through published guidelines, online hubs³⁵⁸ or social media platforms.³⁵⁹ The Money4You hub enables organisations to complete a digital resilience check, which highlights key

³⁴⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁴⁷ Scoping interview 1; Case Study 4; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁴⁸ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁴⁹ Scoping interview 1; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁵⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵³ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁵⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁵⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵⁷ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

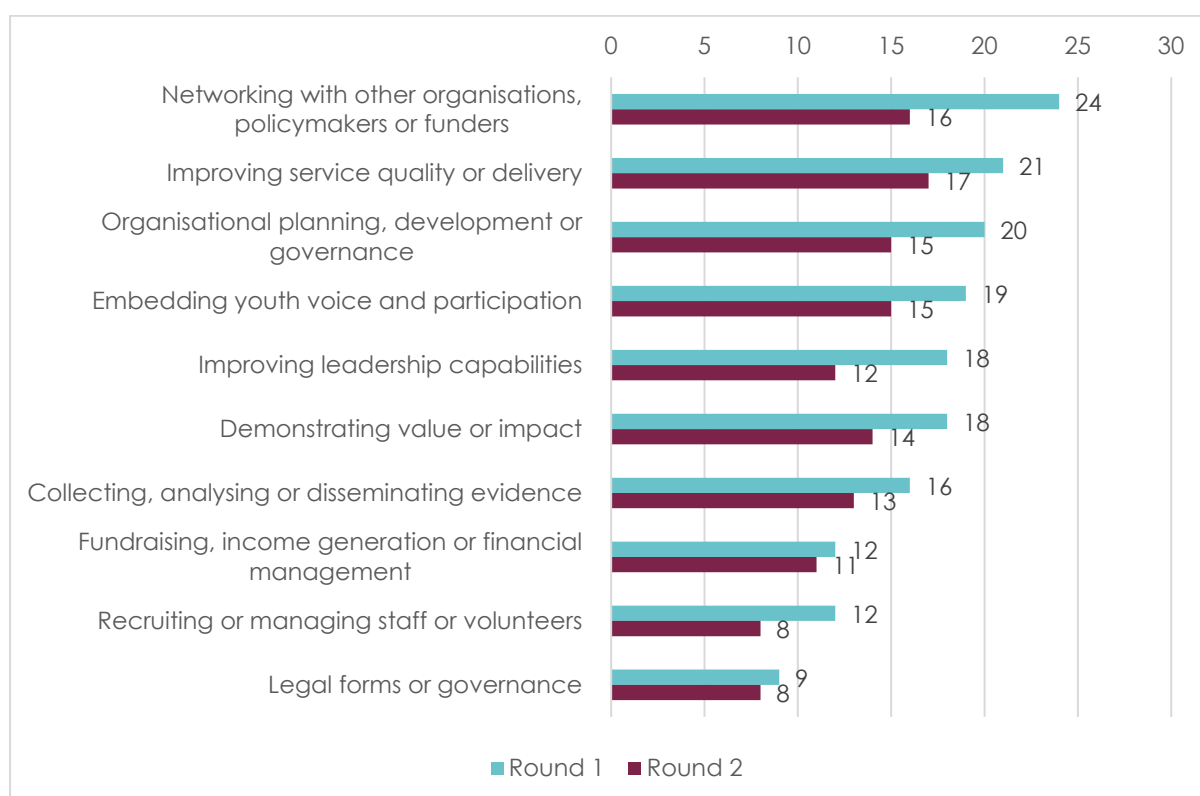
³⁵⁸ Scoping interview 1; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁵⁹ Grantee report.

areas for development and guides them to relevant resources. The AELP provides SectorShare, a public platform that includes resources curated by the AELP and by other organisations signed up to the platform.³⁶⁰ The NYA Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub supports a safer environment across the youth sector.³⁶¹ Similarly, the CfYI have provided FOs with resources to enhance their understanding of the relationship between youth work practice, socio-emotional learning and emotional wellbeing.³⁶²

- **Building the confidence and resilience of FOs** by providing advice, a safe space to ask questions, and support to help them run their organisations better.³⁶³ Many IO respondents reported that they provided FOs with support around organisational planning, development or governance, and improving leadership capabilities (Figure 4-6).

Figure 4-6: What specific areas of capacity building does your organisation support?



Note: n=25 in Round 1, n=20 in Round 2. Multiple answers possible. Includes those indicating an IO and IO/FO role.

Source: Survey.

³⁶⁰ Case Study 4.

³⁶¹ NYA, *The safeguarding and risk management hub*, NYA, 2023.

³⁶² YMCA George Williams College, *Impact and improvement hub*, YMCA George Williams College, 2023.

³⁶³ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 4.

4.5.1. IOs report both challenges and facilitators when building capacity

The challenges included:



Lack of capacity and resources among IOs and FOs: many IOs stated that demand for capacity building exceeds what they can provide, given the resources they have and the fact that different FOs have different support needs.³⁶⁴ As such, finding the right balance and format for support can be challenging.³⁶⁵ This was exacerbated by cuts in funding³⁶⁶ and the impact of COVID-19 on their membership base – with some FOs having to furlough staff and leave networks³⁶⁷ to prioritise service delivery.³⁶⁸ This is especially the case for smaller organisations due to their size and limited number of staff.³⁶⁹



Lack of awareness among FOs on how IOs can support them: it may be unclear to FOs how IOs can help,³⁷⁰ what benefits such support may offer, and what value for money it represents.³⁷¹ Fewer than half of FO survey respondents reported having received no support from IOs during the previous year.³⁷² Developing a better understanding and relationships with FOs requires a significant amount of work from IOs.³⁷³



Occasional reluctance among FOs to work with each other can limit capacity building efforts that rely on peer learning. Some IOs consider this is due, in part, to the competition for funding. Yet, improvements were noted over the past few years, with FOs more willing to cooperate and to focus on how they can use collaboration to enhance their impact.³⁷⁴

The facilitators were:



Having good relationships with FOs: this ensures that IOs' capacity building services remain relevant and that FOs engage with the support.³⁷⁵ Some IOs work closely with their members and networks to solicit feedback about different services needed.³⁷⁶ For example, the AELP has bi-annual phone calls with every member of their network to check in with them.³⁷⁷

³⁶⁴ ToC workshops – one grantee; Case Study 4.

³⁶⁵ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – three grantee interviews; Grantee report.

³⁶⁶ ToC workshops – two grantees.

³⁶⁷ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

³⁶⁸ ToC workshops – three grantees; Round 1 – three grantee interviews; Grantee report; Case Study 4.

³⁶⁹ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁷⁰ ToC workshops – one grantee; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁷¹ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 4.

³⁷² Survey Round 1: 8/22 respondents; Round 2: 6/10 respondents.

³⁷³ Workshop 1; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁷⁴ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

³⁷⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁷⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

³⁷⁷ Case Study 4.



IOs' expertise, experience and knowledge of the youth employment space so that IOs are able to support FOs.³⁷⁸ IOs' staff expertise in other areas (e.g. research, and human resources) is also helpful.³⁷⁹



Demand among FOs for capacity building support,³⁸⁰ exacerbated by COVID-19 (when many organisations required support to shift to online service provision).³⁸¹



IOs' networks: some FOs explained that by engaging with IOs, they have better access to policymakers and their work is amplified and shared with more stakeholders.³⁸²



Changes brought by COVID-19 made some capacity building activities more easily accessible: shorter online training sessions have become increasingly popular as they are easier to attend, allow FOs to stay connected and access information, and can be recorded and used at a later date. CfYI attendance at events increased during COVID-19. Webinar fatigue, however, began to emerge with high attendance occurring at in-person meetings once they were re-introduced.³⁸³

4.5.2. Approaches and practices that IOs consider to be most effective

Facilitating peer-learning and the sharing of good practices is one of the approaches some IOs consider most effective in capacity building.³⁸⁴ Peer-learning between FOs can help encourage adoption of good practice,³⁸⁵ and use this to create new tools and guidance for FOs networks.³⁸⁶ Skills Builder Partnership established their SEND network specifically to create a space where FOs working with people with special educational needs and disabilities can come together and develop resources based on their experiences to help others.³⁸⁷

Having an online space to access collated resources when needed and from anywhere is also considered effective: according to some IOs, these resources are widely used by FOs.³⁸⁸ Yet, for platforms to be used they need to be **easily accessible and user-friendly**. For example, when Skills Builder Partnership merged the platforms of two previously separated tools together,

³⁷⁸ ToC workshops – three grantees; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 4.

³⁷⁹ Case Study 4.

³⁸⁰ ToC workshops – two grantees; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Case Study 4.

³⁸¹ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

³⁸² Case Study 4.

³⁸³ Case Study 4.

³⁸⁴ ToC workshops – four grantees; Round 1 – three grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁸⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁸⁶ ToC workshops – two grantees; Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

³⁸⁷ ToC workshops – one grantee.

³⁸⁸ Round 1 – four grantee interviews.

they were more widely used.³⁸⁹ Providing an online resource hub for a specific topic or target group may also be helpful. Examples include: the NYA Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub (which contains templates and information on safeguarding easily accessible in one place),³⁹⁰ the Money4You hub (resources specifically for minority ethnic led organisations),³⁹¹ and the YA Member Hub.³⁹²

Having high quality and targeted resources is also important to ensure engagement of members and networks.³⁹³ Based on feedback from their members AELP publishes fewer resources now but ensures their relevance to increase engagement.³⁹⁴

Working with partners when providing capacity building can be helpful, in order to complement skills and experiences of IOs.³⁹⁵ Money4You has a partnership programme with the Computer Science Department³⁹⁶ of City University (FOs are paired with students for digital support, such as building websites) and also worked with the Google Digital Garage³⁹⁷ to deliver a digital marketing course for their network.³⁹⁸ The Traveller Movement worked with the Institute for Youth Work to create a module on service provision for the GRT community within mainstream services.³⁹⁹

4.5.3. Impact on capacity of FOs

Providing access to training and resources has various impacts on FOs' ability to provide more diverse, tailored and long-term services available to young people, notably:

- **FOs save time and resource** in not having to locate this information themselves, and allowing them to focus on service-delivery instead.⁴⁰⁰ Almost all survey respondents who had received IOs support reported that it had helped to improve their organisation's performance.⁴⁰¹

³⁸⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁹⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁹¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁹² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

³⁹³ ToC workshops – four grantees; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁹⁴ Case Study 4.

³⁹⁵ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 4.

³⁹⁶ City University of London, Department of computer science, City University of London, 2023.

³⁹⁷ Google, *Learn the skills of the future*, Google, 2023.

³⁹⁸ ToC workshops – one grantee.

³⁹⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁰⁰ Case Study 4, End of grant report.

⁴⁰¹ Survey Round 1: 6/8 respondents; and Round 2: 7/7 respondents reported that the support they had received from an IO had helped to improve their organisation's performance.

- **Some FOs reported learning from these resources, improving the quality and quantity of services available:** through participating in forums facilitated by an IO, FOs were able to follow up on certain areas and discover information that they would not otherwise have had access to, find out about each other's good practices and solutions, dispel myths and misconceptions, and answer each other's questions.⁴⁰² This can likewise have an impact on the quantity and quality of FOs' available services. For example, one FO interviewee reported that through the ERSA Kickstart forum (see Box 5) they found out about an administrative platform that a social enterprise had developed to manage the financial side of being a gateway organisation.⁴⁰³ By adopting this administrative platform, the FO was able to manage 300 jobs when they had anticipated only being able to manage 40-80.⁴⁰⁴
- **FOs are supported to better understand the experiences of young people,** which in turn supports improved provision and better opportunities for young people.⁴⁰⁵

IOs also support FOs to access funding (by helping them to develop fundraising skills,⁴⁰⁶ connecting them with relevant funders and policymakers, providing space for learning and support, and advertising FO activities).⁴⁰⁷ This helps to build more resilient FOs in the following ways:

- **FOs gain connections from IOs that can improve bids for funding:** for example, Money4You connected one FO with a funder that had repeatedly rejected their bids. This link enabled the FO to receive feedback from the funder and, consequently, improve their bidding approach.⁴⁰⁸ UK Youth unlocked £3m through Lloyds Bank for supporting the provision of money management skills programmes for young people.⁴⁰⁹
- **FOs feel supported:** some FOs describe some networking forums organised by IOs (such as the ERSA's Kickstart forum) as offering a space to share their successes and setbacks, and access peer support.⁴¹⁰
- **FOs services are disseminated and uptake encouraged** by IOs providing information about and signposting relevant FOs to young people.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰² Case Study 5.

⁴⁰³ Case Study 5.

⁴⁰⁴ Case Study 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Case Study 5.

⁴⁰⁶ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁰⁷ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁰⁸ Case Study 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Scoping interview 4.

⁴¹⁰ Case Study 5.

⁴¹¹ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

4.6. Challenges for identifying the impact of IO practice on FOs and young people and ways in which IOs could further improve impacts

Many IOs and FOs carry out evaluation activities or have processes in place to monitor their impact.⁴¹² Many survey respondents reported that evaluations had demonstrated the effectiveness of specific services they offered.⁴¹³ Yet, assessing their impact against the meta ToC in this study was challenging due to a number of barriers:

- **There is little standardisation between IOs in terms of data collection and monitoring – meaning measuring impact is more challenging.** This is partly because there is no national dataset or standard. Even where impact is measured in some form, every organisation has a different approach to collecting those data.⁴¹⁴ This makes it challenging to draw comparisons or to carry out any kind of benchmarking. Many organisations have limited capacity and ability to carry out this kind of work.⁴¹⁵ The very nature of IO support, which can be intangible,⁴¹⁶ further complicates impact measurement in this area. Moreover, both IOs and FOs work towards the same broad outcomes in such a variety of ways and with a range of populations that measures of 'success' would have to be different for every organisation.⁴¹⁷
- **There still tends to be a focus on shorter-term, qualitative, and limited outputs rather than longer-term, broader impacts among IOs.**⁴¹⁸ IOs may focus on understanding the audience being reached by their activities,⁴¹⁹ or on collecting feedback on a training offer,⁴²⁰ rather than on the longer term impact that these outputs may then have on young people's employability.⁴²¹ IOs may also collect *ad hoc* qualitative impact evidence in the form of case studies or impact statements, rather than through systematic data collection or the use of indicators for reporting.⁴²² In addition, where efforts are made to ascertain impact specifically, these tend to only be short-term as a result of practical constraints: IOs may be able to measure impact on a young person while they are participating in a programme, but tracking the participants after the completion of that programme is more difficult.⁴²³

⁴¹² Survey Round 1: 46/49 respondents; and Round 2: 28/29 respondents.

⁴¹³ Survey Round 1: 40/49 respondents; and Round 2: 24/29 respondents.

⁴¹⁴ Scoping interview 1.

⁴¹⁵ Scoping interview 1.

⁴¹⁶ Macfarland, *Investing in infrastructure: how to build movements, missions and muscle in civil society*, Common Vision, 2022.

⁴¹⁷ Scoping interview 4.

⁴¹⁸ Case Study 3.

⁴¹⁹ Scoping interview 1.

⁴²⁰ Case Study 3.

⁴²¹ Case Study 3.

⁴²² Case Study 2; Case Study 4.

⁴²³ Case Study 2.

- **Attributing impact on young to IOs work introduces additional complications** as IOs work more directly with FOs than with young people themselves.⁴²⁴ This type of impact is not always apparent, even to the FOs themselves: many survey respondents reported they had not received IOs support to improve outcomes for (young) people.⁴²⁵ Nonetheless, it is possible to trace a line through these kinds of activities to the quality of the services and opportunities FOs are able to deliver to young people.⁴²⁶ The ways in which IOs impact on young people can be mediated through several factors, including FOs receptiveness and responsiveness to their support, which adds further challenges in this respect.⁴²⁷
- **There are challenges associated with assessing the extent to which FOs themselves have an impact on young people.**⁴²⁸ The very nature of the impacts FOs hope to achieve, are often subtle, incremental and difficult to measure.⁴²⁹ There is, however, conviction among funders and organisations supporting youth employment that FOs contribute to supporting young people to engage in employment, transition successfully into adulthood and achieve positive outcomes – even if those connections are not always apparent or direct.⁴³⁰

IOs identified four possible ways in which they could further enhance their impacts on FOs.

4.6.1. Build and maintain strong relationships with FOs



Having strong relationships with FOs enables IOs to connect FOs with relevant policymakers,⁴³¹ and ensures that IOs can bring organisations together in the most effective way.⁴³² This means that they can develop relevant training and resources,⁴³³ better understand the gaps in existing support to FOs,⁴³⁴ and generally understand better how to increase engagement.⁴³⁵ This, in turn, ensures that FOs benefit more fully from the support IOs offer.⁴³⁶

To build these strong relationships, listening to and consulting with FOs is key.

This includes listening to understand the kind of support FOs need and the

⁴²⁴ Scoping interview 4.

⁴²⁵ Survey Round 1: 15/22 respondents; and Round 2: 2/6.

⁴²⁶ Case Study 5.

⁴²⁷ Case Study 3.

⁴²⁸ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴²⁹ Case Study 3; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴³⁰ Scoping interview 2.

⁴³¹ Case Study 1; Case Study 5.

⁴³² Case Study 5.

⁴³³ End of grant report.

⁴³⁴ Workshop 3.

⁴³⁵ Case Study 5; End of grant report.

⁴³⁶ Case Study 4

challenges they face, feeding this into support design,⁴³⁷ or co-creating support with FOs.⁴³⁸ IOs can support FOs by reaching out proactively to gain FOs input and learn from their experience, and by creating forums where FOs can network and exchange ideas.⁴³⁹ Listening to FOs needs and experiences will enable IOs to better support FOs through the next phase (for example, in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic).⁴⁴⁰

Ensuring that FOs trust IOs is important for enabling IOs to work successfully across several functions. It is important that FOs trust IOs to accurately represent their position to policymakers.⁴⁴¹ Building relationships of trust with FOs is also important for collaborative work.⁴⁴²

At the same time, IOs need to strike an operational balance: getting too close to the ground may also make it harder for IOs to step back to support FOs more objectively.⁴⁴³ Support and communication with FOs need to be balanced with a form of leadership that can guide FOs where they need to be.⁴⁴⁴

4.6.2. Find a balance between continuing remote support and providing face-to-face opportunities



Both benefits and limitations have been associated with the shift to a hybrid model of working as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and finding the right balance was identified as a key factor or promoting FOs engagement.⁴⁴⁵ Increased accessibility of events and training may broaden the pool of FOs receiving support from IOs.⁴⁴⁶ COVID-19 forced smaller organisations to become more digitally proficient. This made services more appropriate and accessible for young people⁴⁴⁷ and enabled FOs to reach those who may have found it difficult to engage with in-person provision.⁴⁴⁸ Some organisations, however, reported decreased online engagement over time, and that in-person meetings, once re-

⁴³⁷ Round 2 – one grantee interview; End of grant report.

⁴³⁸ Case Study 5.

⁴³⁹ Case Study 5.

⁴⁴⁰ End of grant report.

⁴⁴¹ Case Study 1; Case Study 5.

⁴⁴² Round 1 – one grantee interview; Case Study 5.

⁴⁴³ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁴⁴ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁴⁵ Case Study 4.

⁴⁴⁶ Case Study 5; Round 1 – two grantee interviews; End of grant report.

⁴⁴⁷ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁴⁸ End of grant report.

introduced, became more popular.⁴⁴⁹ Others felt that engaging in informal networking opportunities was more challenging with virtual events,⁴⁵⁰ understanding the impact being achieved by FOs could be challenging without in-person visits,⁴⁵¹ and building relationships online was also more challenging in general.⁴⁵² Some interviewees also noted that there was a 'digital divide' as not all organisations or communities have the digital literacy to engage with online work.⁴⁵³

4.6.3. IOs could do more to support and role-model evidence-based approaches for FOs



Some IOs suggested that there were actions IOs could take to improve learning and data in ways that would ensure FOs deliver better quality services to young people:

- **Increased research and data literacy within IOs** would promote an emphasis on the quality, validity and reliability of data, leading to higher quality of outputs⁴⁵⁴ and the implementation of appropriate methodological approaches.⁴⁵⁵ This could also support an increased use of data and research to inform policy standpoints, rather than merely bolster them, resulting in better services.⁴⁵⁶
- **Placing more emphasis on collecting data relating to outcomes and impact for both FOs and IOs.**⁴⁵⁷ This would mean that IOs could then also provide funders and policymakers with better data on the impact of the FOs they support, and thus pave a way for improved funding for IOs and FOs and better policymaking.⁴⁵⁸
- **Developing a standardised method for approaching measurement across all relevant FOs.**⁴⁵⁹ This would mean funders could engage with an agreed approach, rather than asking individual organisations to measure the impact of their work with young people.⁴⁶⁰
- **Facilitating data sharing between FOs and IOs for use in research:** for example, by using data sharing agreements between FOs and IOs to enable data to be shared⁴⁶¹ and thinking creatively around how data can be collected appropriately from young people without disengaging

⁴⁴⁹ Case Study 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Case Study 5; Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁵¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁵² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁵³ Round 1 – four grantee interviews.

⁴⁵⁴ Case Study 3.

⁴⁵⁵ Case Study 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Case Study 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Case Study 1; Case Study 3; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁵⁸ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

⁴⁵⁹ Round 2 – one grantee interview, Case Study 3.

⁴⁶⁰ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁶¹ Case Study 3.

them.⁴⁶² Facilitating data sharing between FOs and IOs would also create larger datasets and enable more robust analyses.⁴⁶³

- **Supporting learning among FOs around measuring impact and assessing data.**⁴⁶⁴ Collecting, analysing or disseminating evidence was one of the areas in which many FO survey respondents required some, much or a great deal of support.⁴⁶⁵ Yet, relatively few IOs respondents offered support in this area.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, few IOs respondents offered help to demonstrate value and impact,⁴⁶⁷ even though responding FOs required at least some support in this respect.⁴⁶⁸

4.6.4. IOs could clarify what support they offer to increase FOs awareness and take up



In the first round of our survey more responding FOs have not received support from an IO,⁴⁶⁹ compared to those who had been supported by an IO.⁴⁷⁰ The most common reason for this was the lack of awareness of the support being offered.⁴⁷¹ This lack of awareness was an issue across several functions (see sections 4.1-4.5). Increasing awareness among FOs of what IOs can do to help is an important first step in better supporting outcomes for these organisations, as well as for the young people they work with.

The overall role of IOs in the youth employment space could be clarified for both FOs and policymakers.⁴⁷² This is particularly pertinent in light of a trend that sees national IOs increasingly delivering programmes to young people (i.e. taking on FO responsibilities as well), which can create conflict between organisations in relation to available funding, duplicated work, and confused remits.⁴⁷³ This can, in turn, further entrench challenges for collaboration between IOs and FOs.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶² Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁶³ Case Study 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁶⁵ Survey Round 1: 14/54 respondents; and Round 2: 6/32 respondents.

⁴⁶⁶ Survey Round 1: 16/54 respondents; and Round 2: 13/32 respondents.

⁴⁶⁷ Survey Round 1: 18/54 respondents; and Round 2: 14/32 respondents.

⁴⁶⁸ Survey Round 1: 14/54 respondents; and Round 2: 6/32 respondents.

⁴⁶⁹ Survey Round 1: 14/22 respondents; and Round 2: 4/10 respondents.

⁴⁷⁰ Survey Round 1: 8/22 respondents; and Round 2: 6/10 respondents.

⁴⁷¹ Survey Round 1: 3/4 respondents.

⁴⁷² Case Study 1.

⁴⁷³ Scoping interview 3.

⁴⁷⁴ Scoping interview 3.

5. How can IOs be better supported by policymakers and funders to improve youth employment outcomes?

This section presents the reflections that emerged from conversations with IOs, FOs, policymakers and funders around the ways policymakers and funders could better support IOs to improve youth employment outcomes. In most cases, the experiences of individual IOs and FOs with policymakers and funders varied depending on the type of organisation, the funders, and policymakers they were interacting with, and the target audience for their work.

As highlighted in Section 4, IOs face a number of barriers to improving youth employment outcomes. IOs reported challenges in accessing necessary funds due to a tendency for funding provision to be conditional,⁴⁷⁵ short-term,⁴⁷⁶ and tied to a specific piece of work,⁴⁷⁷ as well as the difficulty of convincing funders of the value of IOs' work.⁴⁷⁸ These funding concerns breed further challenges, including:

- Competition between allied organisations (including the FOs they support) over the limited funding available⁴⁷⁹
- Restricted opportunities to embed and champion youth voice⁴⁸⁰
- Insufficient resource, expertise and/or status to engage with policymakers and funders.⁴⁸¹

In addition, existing structures in big funding bodies and the government do not always provide the support to specific needs of certain communities.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁵ Round 2 – four grantee interviews.

⁴⁷⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁷⁷ Case Study 1; Workshop 1.

⁴⁷⁸ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Scoping interviews 1-3; Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁸⁰ Case Study 2.

⁴⁸¹ Round 1 – three grantee interviews; Case Study 1; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁸² Workshop 1.

This is a broader issue that requires a systemic response and concerted efforts, not just voluntary sector organisations.

Interviewees identified a number of ways in which policymakers and funders could do more to support IOs in overcoming these barriers and to ensure IOs are able to support FOs and young people as effectively as possible.

5.1. Many interviewed IOs called for longer-term funding with fewer conditions attached

- **Core funding, and funding that is continuous, more flexible and more predictable:**⁴⁸³ IOs consider that this would provide resource for strategic planning and long-term programmes, rather than constant 'firefighting'⁴⁸⁴ and short-term projects.⁴⁸⁵ It would also allow for more flexible timelines and designs,⁴⁸⁶ and a greater investment in staff development.⁴⁸⁷ The current project-based funding model affects the rate of staff turnover. Addressing it could thus help build internal organisational stability and continuity of efforts. The level at which such funding could be provided requires some consideration. The fact that local providers account for a majority of the support offered to FOs⁴⁸⁸ points to the need for such funding to be at the local level. Many IOs, however, operate at the national level (while offering services across the country) – for those national funding would be more practical to apply. As such, a mix of local and national funding may be needed.
- **Funding to support FOs to participate in capacity building activities or IO networks:**⁴⁸⁹ Even though FOs access support on a large scale, the demand for support has been on the rise⁴⁹⁰ and it is important that an entire organisation (and not just one or two members of staff) participate in capacity building.⁴⁹¹ As discussed in section 4.4.3, funding for FOs to enable this was seen as key.⁴⁹² It is, however, uncertain whether FOs would chose to use such funding for services offered by IOs, or by for-profit providers (such as independent consultants or large firms) that also



⁴⁸³ Round 1 – two grantee interviews; Round 2 – eight grantee interviews; Case Study 1; Workshop 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Round 1 – three grantee interviews.

⁴⁸⁵ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁸⁶ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

⁴⁸⁷ Case Study 1.

⁴⁸⁸ Macmillan, Ellis-Paine, Kara, Dayson, Sanderson & Wells, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: what the evidence tells us*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹ Case Study 4; Case Study 5.

⁴⁹⁰ Dayson & Sanderson, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: a review of the market*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014.

⁴⁹¹ Macmillan, Ellis-Paine, Kara, Dayson, Sanderson & Wells, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: what the evidence tells us*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014.

⁴⁹² Case Study 4; Round 1 – six grantee interviews.

operate in this market. Future cuts in funding for capacity building support may force more IOs to charge for such services to generate income.⁴⁹³

- **More accessible funding** could be offered for smaller organisations and/or unregistered groups that are unable to meet the standard conditions for funding.⁴⁹⁴ For example, funders may formulate different specifications for different groups of IOs, based on their size, experience or capacity: smaller organisations with limited experience could apply for smaller pots of funding with fewer requirements, while bigger players with more experience could compete for larger funding.

5.2. Some interviewed IOs hoped for more holistic funding and support

- **Providing additional sustainability support**,⁴⁹⁵ sometimes referred to as 'funding plus', which describes the practice of giving more than money,⁴⁹⁶ such as bid writing and income generation support workshops (including for unsuccessful applicants), and more informal guidance around how organisations can better promote their work.⁴⁹⁷ Ad hoc mentoring, workshops and training sessions in other areas (e.g. safeguarding) as and when needed is also seen as valuable.⁴⁹⁸ Both non-governmental funders and public authorities can provide these opportunities.⁴⁹⁹
- **Using their convening power to facilitate virtual learning exchanges and action learning set opportunities** to promote collaboration,⁵⁰⁰ and open up communication channels with policymakers and funders.⁵⁰¹
- **Developing a more holistic and systematic relationship** with grantees, in place of a narrow delivery model,⁵⁰² including engaging in more strategic conversations with IOs around gaps in the funding landscape and how best to fill them.⁵⁰³
- **Simplifying the funding application process** would reduce the time and resource demanded of applicants.⁵⁰⁴
- **More joined-up approaches** between funders and cross-departmental communication between policymakers could reduce inconsistencies and



⁴⁹³ Dayson & Sanderson, *Building capabilities in the voluntary sector: a review of the market*, Sheffield-Hallam University, 2014.

⁴⁹⁴ Round 2 – four grantee interviews.

⁴⁹⁵ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁹⁶ Cairns, Burkeman, Harker & Buckley, *Beyond money: a study of funding plus in the UK*. Institute for Voluntary Action Research, 2011.

⁴⁹⁷ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁴⁹⁸ Round 2 – two grantee interviews.

⁴⁹⁹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁵⁰⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Scoping interview 1.

⁵⁰¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁵⁰² Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 2.

⁵⁰³ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵⁰⁴ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

duplication in the work being funded.⁵⁰⁵ Funders could also encourage policymakers to be more attentive and receptive to the messages IOs are seeking to share.⁵⁰⁶

- **Supporting collaboration** by providing larger grants for partnership opportunities and collaborative working, with dedicated funds for the collaborative process (not just the output),⁵⁰⁷ as well as more upstream commissioning.⁵⁰⁸
- **Better understanding the resources that go into meaningfully embedding youth voice in IOs' work**, providing the necessarily flexible support accordingly, and being open to non-traditional models and approaches.⁵⁰⁹

5.3. Some interviewees wished there was more financial support for IOs' and FOs' research, data collection, and evaluation activities

- **Investing more in IO's research work:**⁵¹⁰ As discussed in section 4.2.3, IOs felt there was more they could do to collect, use and analyse data. IOs that are looking to collect data and conduct research could also benefit from funding to support FOs to participate in their research, and thereby increase engagement.⁵¹¹
- **Bringing non-financial assets to the table:** funders and policymakers could, for example, help to disseminate IOs research,⁵¹² work alongside the IO to share their key messages and support their communications process,⁵¹³ and set out universal quality measures around how impact is measured and quality ensured (which would improve consistency in the data collected and reported).⁵¹⁴
- **Addressing the quality, quantity and disjointedness of FOs data collection.** For example, standardising data and evidence requirements across different policymakers and funders would also make it easier for FOs to collect data – as long as FOs' input is sought to ensure these are neither too complex nor too resource-intensive.⁵¹⁵ High-quality data would be more easily accessible if local authorities had a statutory duty to provide data on youth work.⁵¹⁶ Data comparability and reliability has been a pertinent issue in the youth employment space (and not an easy one to



⁵⁰⁵ Round 2 – four grantee interviews; Case Study 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

⁵⁰⁷ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 5.

⁵⁰⁸ Case Study 5.

⁵⁰⁹ Workshop 3.

⁵¹⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Workshop 2.

⁵¹¹ Case Study 3.

⁵¹² Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵¹³ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵¹⁴ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵¹⁵ Workshop 2.

⁵¹⁶ Case Study 3.

resolve), most recently highlighted by efforts to value youth work in England.⁵¹⁷

- **Improving IOs own data and research literacy** to understand what a piece of research can reasonably tell them,⁵¹⁸ as well as to have more realistic ambitions around the amount and kind of data and evidence on impact that organisations can realistically collect.⁵¹⁹
- 5.4. Common was also a desire for greater recognition of, and support for, the role of IOs in supporting youth employment outcomes**

- **Proactively seeking IOs' input** and facilitating IOs' engagement with policymakers⁵²⁰ by creating more transparent paths to policymaker access,⁵²¹ and providing a more consistent 'seat at the table'⁵²² (such as giving evidence at Select Committees),⁵²³ or participating in the YEG.⁵²⁴ This also requires policymakers and funders to be more open and receptive to IOs contributions,⁵²⁵ as well as more honest and realistic about what IOs can achieve.⁵²⁶
- **Building stronger relationships with IOs** enables IOs to express their needs and insights more freely, as well as share data more easily,⁵²⁷ all of which can result in better and more relevant support for FOs and young people,⁵²⁸ and facilitate more supportive funding arrangements.⁵²⁹ Close working relationships with government departments, for example, may give IOs useful insight into the work and priorities of policymakers.⁵³⁰ In return, IOs can help policymakers and funders to better understand the populations they are trying to reach.⁵³¹
- **Proactively funding IO's work** to ensure that IOs are not forced into competition with the FOs they support.⁵³² This should include funding for policy and lobbying work.⁵³³ Clarity around future funding projects and



⁵¹⁷ Frontier Economics & UK Youth, *The economic value of youth work. A report for UK Youth*, UK Youth, 2022.

⁵¹⁸ Case Study 3.

⁵¹⁹ Case Study 3.

⁵²⁰ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.

⁵²¹ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵²² Round 1 – three grantee interviews; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵²³ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵²⁴ Case Study 1.

⁵²⁵ Round 1 – two grantee interviews.

⁵²⁶ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵²⁷ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵²⁸ Case Study 1.

⁵²⁹ Round 2 – one grantee interview.

⁵³⁰ Round 2 – two grantee interviews.

⁵³¹ Round 1 – one grantee interview.

⁵³² Scoping interviews 1-3.

⁵³³ Round 2 – one grantee interview; Case Study 1.




timelines also enables IOs to better support the sector by pre-empting needs that are likely to emerge.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁴ Round 1 – one grantee interview; Round 2 – two grantee interviews; Workshop 1.



6. Conclusions and recommendations

This research offers first insights into how IOs support the youth employment space and respond to the RQs set out at the start. The previous chapters explain how IOs collaborate and network, outline the key functions of IOs drawn from the literature, and, where possible, provide evidence of how IOs effect change and what (perceived) impacts they have on the organisations they support and young people.

The over-arching themes that emerge from this research point to:

- **The complexity of the youth employment space** that affects the number and character of relationships between organisations. There is no clear understanding of what the youth employment space consists of: the multiplicity of actors and fields (employment, education, youth work), and the variety of roles and functions they perform (from influencing policy to capacity building) contribute to the lack of clarity who is who and who does what. This hinders the ability of all stakeholders to develop and maintain strategic relationships, which is further aggravated by limited capacity of actors to engage in building the relationship capital. This study suggests that there is potential to enhance the density of connections in this space and more effectively influence the overall network if stakeholders take a more strategic approach to building bridges and connections. This, however, requires resources that are currently scarce: knowledge and capacity. 
- **Insufficient knowledge and understanding between IOs and FOs** that inhibit potential mutual benefits from their collaboration, including the impact IOs could have on both FOs and young people. IOs need to better communicate what they offer to FOs, as well as to funders and policymakers in order to improve the transparency in the youth employment space. Other stakeholders could contribute to this process by facilitating information flows, providing networking, collaboration, and funding opportunities that bring more clarity to this landscape. 
- **Lack of capacity within IOs** is evident across all key functions they perform. Even though relationship building seems to be a pre-requisite for, and the essence of, IOs existence, many IOs have a limited number of staff for whom networking and collaboration is not their main job and who lack time for it. This is further worsened by insufficient skills in relationship building. This 

research shows that another key area for improving the capacity of IOs is around data. In particular, knowledge around data management and analytical skills could be further strengthened.

- **Lack of capacity within FOs** may seem less prominent throughout the report – with the research focus on IOs – but it is the very reason why IOs exist and provide the services they do. This research indicates that there is a level of mismatch between what FOs need and what IOs offer (e.g. in terms of collecting, analysing or disseminating evidence, or demonstrating value and impact). This suggests that in some areas FOs' capacity is particularly lacking and demand for support has not yet been met. 
- **COVID-19 aggravated most of the challenges** faced by IOs and FOs, adding additional strain to already limited resources and capacity. While it facilitated a shift to online service provision for both IOs and FOs, this also brought with it online fatigue, exposed digital divide and posed risks of deepening these inequalities. 

This report outlines ways in which IOs can further amplify the impact they have. These recommendations are:

- 1** In supporting FOs, IOs need to balance online and face-to-face opportunities so that a wider range of organisations can participate and benefit from what they offer.
- 2** IOs ought to do more to support and role-model evidence-based approaches for FOs so they can influence practice and make a positive difference to young people more effectively.
- 3** IOs could clarify what support they offer to increase FOs' awareness and take up.

IOs, however, will only be able to act on these recommendations if their unmet needs are addressed. This research points out how funders and policymakers can better support IOs. These recommendations are:

- 4** Policymakers and funders need a strategies to offer IOs longer-term, more flexible, and all-inclusive funding (particularly in relations to research, data collection and evaluation activities, networking and collaboration, and empowering youth voice). The Infrastructure Resilience funding from Youth Futures that offered time-limited but otherwise flexible support for the 11 IOs

examined here is an example of such an instrument, despite the challenges it poses to funders. Offering such flexible or all-inclusive funding may not be possible for a donor who is bound to a specific purpose. It may also hamper capturing impact that would require more time to materialise and more efforts to capture and attribute to such funding instruments. As such, a wider discussion among the funders, policymakers and IOs is needed to build a consensus and priorities for IOs funding in the future. This will require more strategic and coordinated considerations compared to past efforts. These should involve funders operating at different levels and in different fields. A future IO funding strategy needs to offer guidance on:

- The optimal mix of local and national funding for IOs
- The range of funding available (from project-based to core funding and funding plus)
- Short- and long-term priorities among functions of IOs (e.g. learning and access to data, capacity building)
- Access to funding and application processes, considering differences between IOs in terms of their size, experience and capacity (see also Recommendation 6 below).

Determining funding priorities, however, can be challenging given the need to balance multiple factors (societal needs, organisational capacity, return on investment, accountability and expected impacts, etc.). Clear, systematic and collaborative processes for priority-setting can help ensure that funding has potential for impact and meets needs, and that resources are used fairly and efficiently.

5

Support from policymakers and funders for IOs should go beyond funding and include other forms of building their capacity and resilience (such as bid writing or fundraising workshops, peer learning facilitation, and strengthening analytical skills). Experiences of other fields and other countries in supporting social infrastructure may offer useful comparisons and inspiration for different approaches that can be taken.

6

Policymakers and funders need to better recognise the role and value of IOs in the youth employment space. This could be achieved by building stronger relationships with IOs and seeking their inputs more systematically. In particular, Youth Futures should use information about the IOs' networks presented in this report to leverage its own influence (and that of other key players) over the youth employment space. For example, Youth Futures should examine who else they need to engage with (because they seem well-connected) and what links between

other players (that seem missing but are critical for achieving systems change) Youth Futures should enable or facilitate.

Finally, we identify gaps in existing evidence that require further investigation:

- **A typology of different kinds of IOs:** This research provides some insights into the youth employment space, drawing primarily on limited survey responses and qualitative data. A basic categorisation of IOs could consider the following characteristics:
 - Size (IOs vary in the number of paid and unpaid staff they have)
 - Field of work (IOs may focus on youth work, employment, education, or other fields)
 - Function performed (not all IOs perform all functions).

A more comprehensive (and regularly repeated) mapping of the youth employment landscape would help better understand the complexity of this space and its evolution over time.

- **Competition between organisations:** It is unclear to what extent competition between IOs (and between IOs and FOs) exists and how, if at all, it affects networking and collaboration in the youth employment space. This research unveiled some contradictory views on the subject – with policymakers and funders having more pessimistic opinions in comparison to IOs themselves, who noted positive changes in the time of COVID-19. The question remains if this shift is likely to last.
- **The quality of network connections:** Evidence is also needed on the quality of network connections and how they support the dissemination of ideas, knowledge, and know-how across the youth employment space.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Further research is needed on whether (and if so how) infrastructure work produces greater diversity and inclusive practice across the youth employment space.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed methodology

Scoping interviews

RAND Europe conducted four semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders working with infrastructure organisations (IOs) and who have previously carried out research to understand how IOs work. These interviews were scheduled 30-minute interviews conducted over Microsoft Teams in May-June 2021. The participants were sent information on the interview beforehand, including information on how the data were going to be used in the study. To support note-taking the interviews were recorded. The interview data were analysed to inform different parts of the study including the meta-ToC and the final report.

ToC workshops

ToCs are often used to understand how individual organisations work to achieve a specific impact. They highlight activities organisations do, the outputs they gain from the activities, the outcomes they hope to achieve, and the long term impacts they aim for.⁵³⁵

Grantee ToC Workshops

To understand the roles of IOs more generally, RAND Europe conducted a series of ToC workshops with the 11 grantees of the Youth Futures foundation. Over the course of four workshops, the study teams talked with each organisation individually about their theories of change. The workshops lasted three hours and were conducted over Microsoft Teams. The sessions included introductions to the project and ToC models, and subsequent breakout sessions that were guided by RAND Europe staff. A breakdown on timings and attendance of the workshops can be found in Table A 1.

⁵³⁵ W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook*, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2009.

Table A 1: Theory of change workshop dates and participants.

ToC Workshops	Date	Participating organisations
ToC Workshop 1	21.05.2021	YA, the CfYI
ToC Workshop 2	24.05.2021	The Traveller Movement, Ubele, the NYA
ToC Workshop 3	26.05.2021	Money4You, UK Youth, Skills Builder
ToC Workshop 4	27.05.2021	Hackney CVS, the AELP, the ERSA

Source: RAND Europe.

The workshops had several aims:

- To provide an opportunity for the evaluation team to meet the grantees remotely, to hear staff views and expectations about their upcoming work and Youth Futures project, and to build relationships between the RAND Europe team and grantee staff.
- To discuss a ToC model of the project funded by Youth Futures.
- To provide a forum for dialogue and reflection on grantee activities.
- To develop a shared understanding of the evaluation process among participants.

Prior to the workshops, RAND Europe drafted a ToC for each of the grantees based on the grant application shared by Youth Futures. Prior to the workshops, RAND Europe sent these drafts to the grantees and asked if they had existing organisational theories of change. Some grantees shared their organisational ToC in advance of the workshop.

In the sessions with the grantees, the ToCs were tested and refined with the help of grantees. RAND Europe staff shared the document with the ToC and made changes or added notes for changes throughout the meeting. The workshop also highlighted barriers and facilitators grantees might encounter. Following the workshop, RAND Europe revised the ToC in line with the discussions that took place in the breakout sessions.

Meta-ToC workshop

To understand how the IOs work more generally, RAND Europe developed a meta ToC based on desk research and the individual theories of change of

grantees developed in the ToC workshops. The workshop took place in June on Microsoft Teams.

In a workshop with staff from Youth Futures, the RAND Europe team guided a discussion on the findings and the functions of IOs. The workshop was used to validate and refine the findings of the study team. In breakout sessions each function was discussed in a smaller group. Following the workshop RAND Europe updated and refined the meta ToC.⁵³⁶

Survey

A survey was conducted to gain a wider understanding of the demographic factors of the organisations working in the youth employment space and of the roles they perform. The survey was rolled out in two rounds, one in September 2021 and the second one in March 2022, in order to capture any changes over time in terms of IOs' support offered to FOs (and how this was received) and any significant changes in the connections between IOs (to be examined through SNA – see below). The survey was sent to grantees of Youth Futures and stakeholders identified through the desk research. Organisations who received the survey were asked to disseminate the survey further through their networks.

The survey questions were developed by RAND Europe with revisions from Youth Futures and with support from the FVG. The survey was distributed through SmartSurvey. Participants were asked 41 questions in Round 1 and 44 questions in Round 2. The questions were mostly closed-text questions, with a few open text questions. Open text questions were mainly used for demographic factors and information used for the SNA.

The team received 54 responses in Round 1 and 32 responses in Round 2. Survey participants were asked for the name and postcode of their own organisation, as well as organisations they worked with. These data were used in the SNA. Survey responses were analysed through descriptive statistics and Excel was used to create a visual representation of the data. Due to the small number of responses, especially in Round 2, we decided against

⁵³⁶ Hofman, Picken, Flemons, Feyerabend & Janta. *Evaluating England's youth employment infrastructure: meta Theory of Change*. Youth Futures, 2023.

examining any temporal differences between two datasets and presented results for both.

Social Network Analysis (SNA)

SNA is the process of modelling social networks into graphs and is used to study relationships, interactions, and communications. Organisations are represented as nodes, and connections between them as edges in a conventional social network illustration.⁵³⁷ The analysis consists of graph techniques that are broadly concerned with connections, distributions and clustering.⁵³⁸

As part of investigations into how IOs network and collaborate, SNA was conducted on survey responses from Round 1, which was conducted in September-October 2021. We chose Round 1 of survey data as there were more responses, which were helpful in visualising a larger network structure. To better understand the broader picture of how these organisations are connected to each other, visualisations of these network patterns were generated. In the survey, we asked IOs to name all the other infrastructure bodies they had connections with, irrespective of whether these were formal or informal.⁵³⁹ To provide consistency in terminology, a 'connection' in the survey was defined as having interacted with an individual from another infrastructure body by phone, email or at a workshop.⁵⁴⁰ Of the 54 respondents, 24 named their connections, and approximately 210 connections were named.⁵⁴¹

The analyses carried out are subject to certain caveats and limitations:

- The data and subsequent results are not indicative of all the connections these organisations have, and are only relevant to the responses submitted in the survey. Therefore, they should not be extrapolated as representative of networking and collaboration efforts and trends within

⁵³⁷ Powell & Hopkins, 14 – *Social networks*, Chandos Publishing, 2015.

⁵³⁸ Powell & Hopkins, 14 – *Social networks*, Chandos Publishing, 2015.

⁵³⁹ Survey Q40 'Please name below all infrastructure bodies that you have any formal or informal connections with'

⁵⁴⁰ Preamble to Q40 – '**What is and what is not a connection?** If you have simply come across an infrastructure body online or at a workshop then this is **not a connection**. If you interacted with someone from this body by phone, email or at the workshop (for example, to discuss how you could apply the learning from the talk they gave in your own organisation), **this is a connection**.'

⁵⁴¹ Survey Q40 – 'Please name below all infrastructure bodies that you have any formal or informal connections with.'

the sector. Some respondents had specifically also highlighted that their connections were 'too many to mention'.⁵⁴²

- The data collected is incomplete as we only have connections of the survey respondents and no data on those of the organisations as a whole. They were named but did not respond to the survey. As such, we do not have the full picture of how these connections interplay with our 24 organisations. Furthermore, the data contains organisations and institutions named by respondents that do not necessarily correspond with the definition of IOs adopted for the study (see Glossary). Extreme examples include HM Treasury or the DfE – both of which were named as connections but represent government departments, rather than IOs.
- These data, however, do provide a useful snapshot of some connections that can help provide insights into how IOs network and collaborate with each other in the sector.

Results of the SNA are presented in Appendix B.

Grantee interviews

The study team conducted 20 interviews with grantees in two rounds (Round 1 took place between September and October 2021, and Round 2 took place between February and March 2022). The interviews were semi-structured, and the grantees interviewed in each round can be found in Table A 2: Grantee Interviews.

Table A 2: Grantee Interviews

Grantee Interviews	Timeframe	Number of interviews	Participating organisations
Grantee interviews Round 1	September/ October 2021	11	The AELP, the CfYI, the ERSA, Hackney CVS, Money4You, the NYA, Skills Builder, the Traveller Movement, Ubele, UK Youth, YA
Grantee interviews Round 2	February/March 2022	9	The AELP, the CfYI, Money4You, the NYA, Skills Builder, the Traveller Movement, Ubele, UK Youth, YA

Source: RAND Europe.

⁵⁴² Survey response to question 39.

Semi-structured interviews were used to facilitate the grantees to share the progress they had made towards the outcomes and impacts identified in the ToC workshops. In addition, the study team asked questions about the experiences of grantees when engaging with policymakers and funders, and how they network and collaborate. This format allowed grantees to highlight challenges and facilitators encountered when implementing their programmes, approaches that were working well for them, and the outcomes and impacts they were achieving. It was also a chance for grantees to report unexpected changes and outcomes.

All interviews were conducted under the principle of informed consent and via Microsoft teams. The grantees received information about both the purpose of the interview and how their data would be used in the study prior to the interview. Interviews were recorded for the purpose of note-taking with the participants' permission. The interview data were analysed using qualitative data analysis. The research team used thematic analysis to identify key issues, trends, and the roles of the IOs.

Grantee reporting

Throughout the study, RAND Europe reviewed documents provided by the grantees to Youth Futures. These documents included the application of the grantees for the grant and the end of grant reports. The review of the application documents served the purpose of understanding the work of the individual grantees ahead of the ToC workshops. The documents were used as the main source for drafting ToC for each grantee.

The review of the end of grant reports included a final summary of the work of the grantees and their perceived impacts. End of grant reports were available for seven of the grantees. The findings from the review were included in the final report of the study.

Workshop

The RAND Europe team ran four workshops which had three main purposes:

- Presenting emerging findings from the study
- Discussions about what IOs do

- The opportunity to talk to other organisations, build networks, and to provide input to the study.

The workshops were open to both grantees and non-grantees of Youth Futures to get a better understanding of the work of a wider network. The workshops focused on different topics in line with the functions of the meta ToC. More information can be found in Table A 3.

Table A 3: Action Learning Workshop

Workshops	Date	Topic	Contributions by
Workshop 1	22.09.2021	Policy and Influencing	The ERSA, the NYA, Ubele Initiative
Workshop 2	22.11.2021	Data and Learning	The CfYI, Skills Builder, the Traveller Movement
Workshop 3	10.03.2022	Championing and embedding youth voice	The FVG
Workshop 4	19.05.2022	Collaboration, networking and capacity building	

Source: RAND Europe.

The workshops took part on Microsoft Teams and lasted for approximately 90 minutes. The workshop sessions included a mix of plenary sessions and breakout sessions. The introductory plenary sessions were led by RAND Europe. In these sessions, RAND Europe presented the background of the study, explained the relevant function of the meta ToC, and presented preliminary findings.

The breakout sessions allowed for participants to engage with each other and to share their experiences related to the relevant work of IOs. In the first two workshops, three grantees provided a 10-minute presentation of their experiences to start the discussion with grantees and non-grantees. The discussion was facilitated by a member of the RAND Europe staff. In the third workshop, the discussion on embedding and championing youth voice was led by members of the FVG. There were no breakout sessions in the fourth workshop due to a low number of participants. Following the breakout

sessions, another plenary session took place to discuss the findings from the breakout sessions, and to allow the study team to ask more in-depth follow up questions.

Case studies

Over the course of the study, RAND Europe performed a series of in-depth case studies looking at specific functions of IOs. The case studies focused on a limited number of organisations and included stakeholders outside of the grant programme of Youth Futures. A breakdown of the stakeholders and topics of the case studies can be found in Table A 4.

Table A 4: Case Studies

Case Studies	Topic	Participating organisations
Case Study 1	Policy making	The DfE, the ERSA, the GLA, the Traveller Movement, YA, the YEG
Case Study 2	Championing and embedding youth voice	The BYC, the CfYI, the FVG, Ubele Initiative, UK Youth, Youth Employment UK
Case Study 3	Learning and Data	The AELP, the NYA, the WMCA
Case Study 4	Capacity Building	The AELP, Cognassist, Money4You, ProudtoBeme
Case Study 5	Networking and Collaboration	The CfYI, EN:able Communities, the ERSA, the Shaw Trust, the Transform Lives Company

Source: RAND Europe.

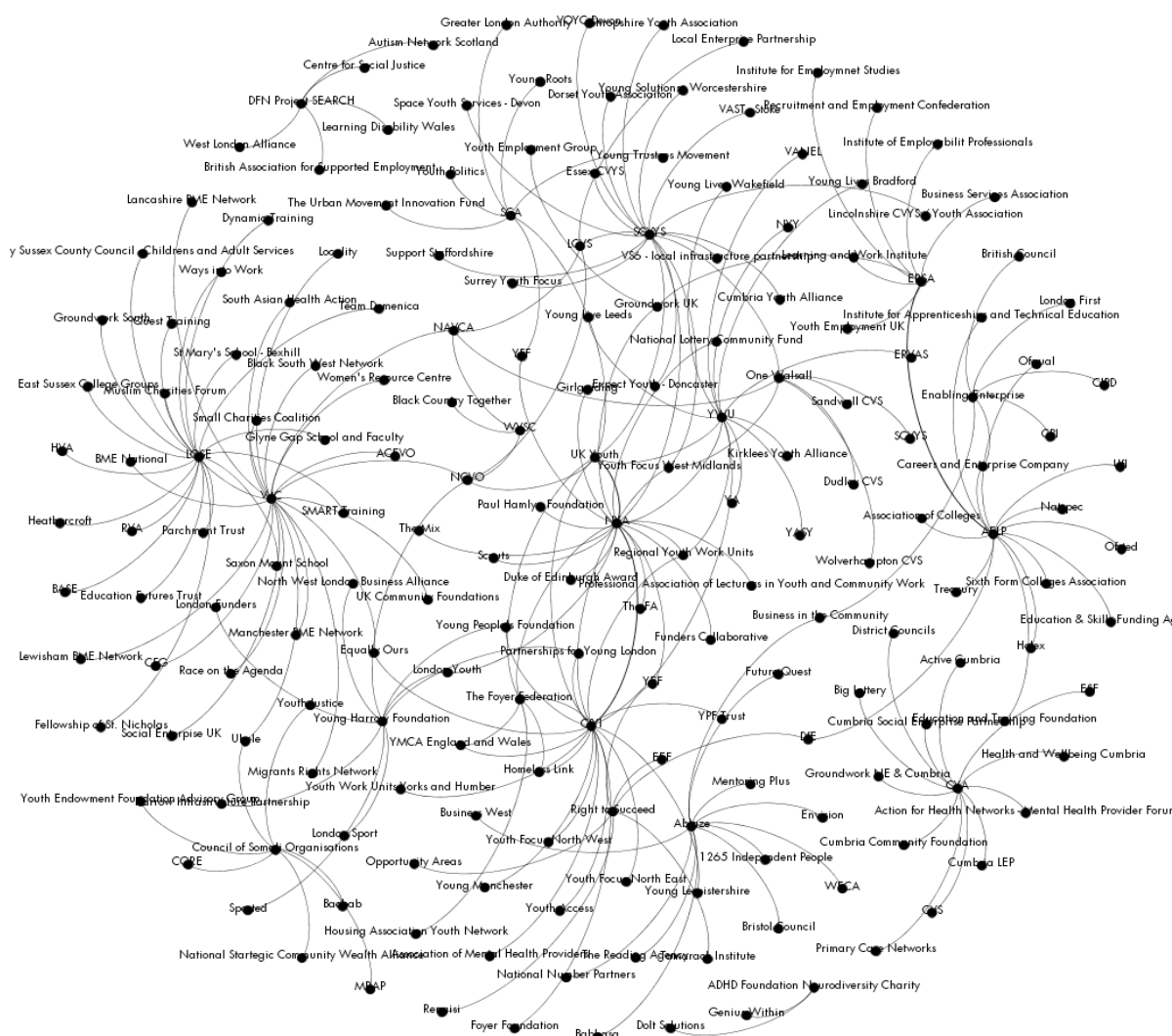
The case studies were informed by semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, and were conducted over Microsoft Teams. For Case Study 2, the research team also conducted a focus group with the FVG to ensure the voices of young people were included in the case study. Interviews and the focus groups worked under the principle of informed consent. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and how the findings would be used in the case studies and the final report in advance.

The case studies set out to highlight the key themes for each of the functions, which barriers and facilitators IOs encountered, and which approaches work well for them to achieve their desired impact. By including stakeholders other than grantees alone, the case studies aimed to have a more balanced view on how other actors see the work of IOs. For this purpose, Case Study 1 included policymakers, Case Study 2 included young people, Case Study 3 included policymakers using the data from IOs, Case Study 4 included FOs and Case Study 5 included direct members of the networks of Youth Futures grantees. The case studies are published separately and can be found in the references section.

Appendix B: SNA results

Figure B-1 provides a visual representation of the connections named by the survey respondents. This shows that, for the most part, IOs were somewhat connected to each other. There are, however, some IOs that are clustered within their own isolated networks, and not necessarily a part of the larger network structure, while others are interlinked and share more connections in common.

Figure B-1: An overview of IOs networks



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Note: Data analysis undertaken using Gephi software, incorporating information from 24 respondents from Round 1. There are 192 black nodes, which represent organisations named in the survey.

To provide more meaningful analysis, we filtered the data to remove the IOs⁵⁴³ that were not connected to the larger network or isolated within their own cluster.⁵⁴⁴ Figure B-2 shows IOs that are connected to more than one other organisation (the core network), and illustrates that some organisations are connected to the larger network structure, while others are somewhat isolated in their own 'hubs'.⁵⁴⁵

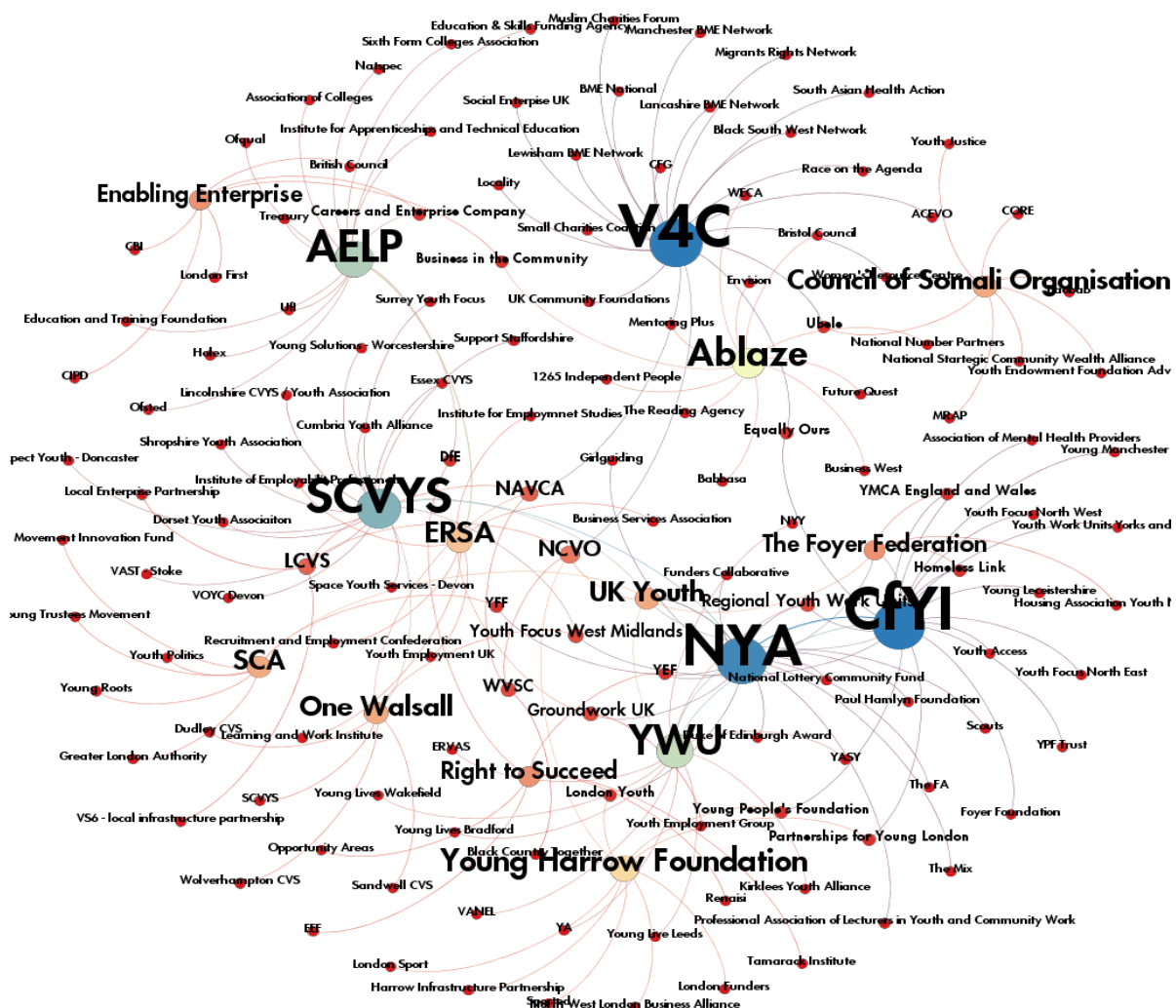
⁵⁴³ Nodes are the circles in the figure representing individual organisations.

⁵⁴⁴ Examples: LGSE, DFN Project SEARCH, and their named connections.

⁵⁴⁵ Organisations in these isolated hubs were not survey respondents: meaning we did not receive further data that would allow us to see whether and how these hubs were connected to the larger structure.

- IOs marked in red have no named connections visualised in the graph (these tend to be IOs that were named by other respondents but who did not respond to the survey themselves). There are 68 organisations in this category: for example, Youth Employment UK, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), and Youth Leads partnership.
- IOs marked in orange and yellow are those that have 5-10 named connections (i.e. they reported having or were reported as having 5-10 connections). Seven organisations fall into this category: Enabling Enterprise, the ERSA, Social Change Agency, One Walsall, Council of Somali Organisations, UK Youth, and Young Harrow Foundation.
- IOs marked in green have more than 11 named connections. Three organisations fall in this category: Ablaze, the AELP, and Youth Works Unit.
- IOs marked in blue have the largest number of named connections (i.e. over 15). Four organisations fall in this category: Voice4Change England (20 connections), the CfYI (18 connections), the NYA (16 connections), and the SCVYS (16 connections).

Figure B-2: Filtered visualisation shows IOs and their connections



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Note: Data analysis undertaken using Gephi software, incorporating information from 24 respondents from Round 1. The larger and darker the node the higher the number of connections with the other nodes, the smaller the node the less connections it has with the other nodes.

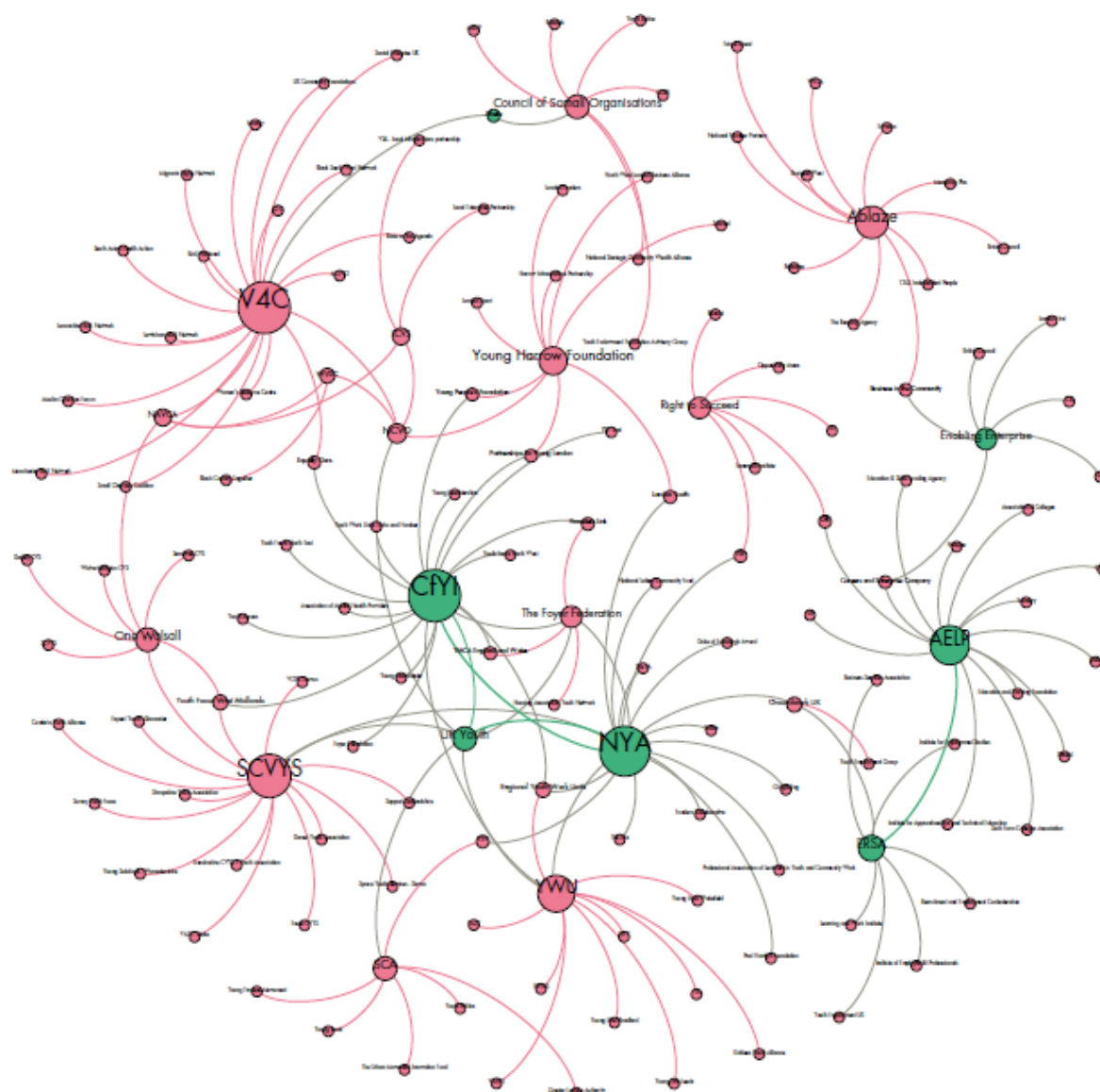
IOs who are Youth Futures grantees tend to fall into two main networks

Figure B-3 shows the networks of IOs that are the recipients of Youth Futures funding: with green nodes denoting grant recipients and pink nodes denoting non-grantees.⁵⁴⁶ Of the 22 'hub' organisations that have more than five connections, seven are grantee organisations.

Figure B-3 shows that there are two main clusters of grantees. Three grantees working mainly in the youth work space are all directly connected to each other (the CfYI, UK Youth, and the NYA) while two grantees focusing on youth employment (the AELP and the ERSA) are connected to each other. These two groups of grantee organisations are connected only by one connection (Groundworks UK).

⁵⁴⁶ Grantees featured on the map include: the CfYI, the NYA, UK Youth, Ubele, the ERSA, the AELP and Enabling Enterprise (Skills Builder Partnership).

Figure B-3: Networks of IOs: grantees vs non-grantees



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the survey (24 respondents from Round 1).

Note: Data analysis undertaken using Gephi software. The larger and darker the node (i.e. the circles representing individual IOs) the higher the number of connections with the other nodes, the smaller the node the less connections it has with the other nodes. Grant recipients marked in green; non-grantees marked in red. IOs not connected to the larger network or isolated within their own cluster are not included.

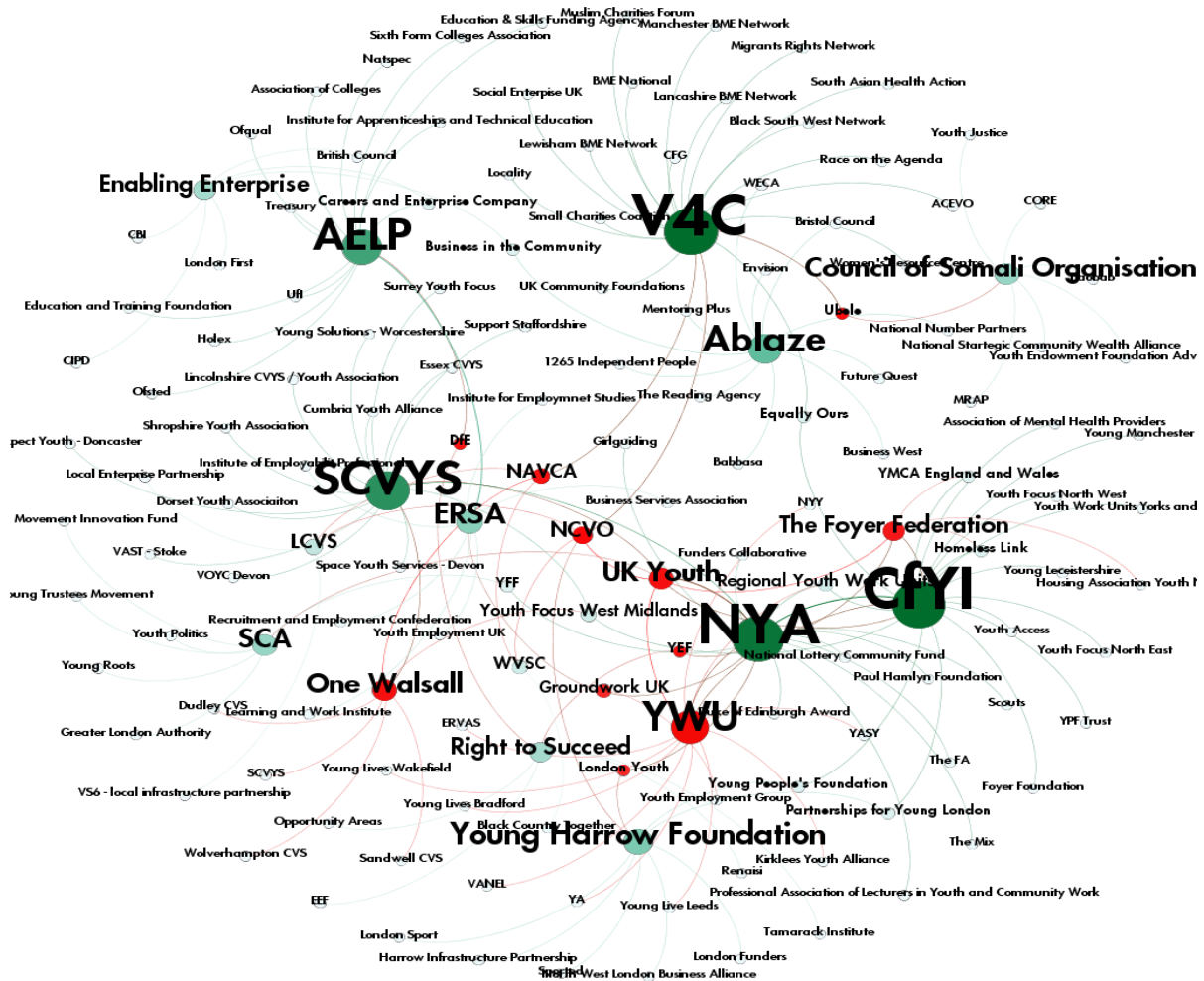
In SNA, organisations that connect otherwise disconnected organisations are referred to as 'bridges'.⁵⁴⁷ Figure B-4 shows the bridges identified in the networks held by IOs (which are coloured in red). Some bridges connect larger (often national) IOs with smaller (often regional) IOs. This is the case with YFWM and London Youth: both of which link organisations with more

⁵⁴⁷ Ahn, *Thresholds and Collective Action*, Science of the Web, 2008.

connections at a national scale with those that have fewer connections and work at a regional scale. YFWM, for example, links the CfYI with two regional IOs (the SCVYS and One Walsall). London Youth connects the NYA with regional IOs such as the Young Harrow Foundation. The Foyer Foundation links the well-connected NYA and CfYI with other national organisations, such as the Housing Association Youth Network and WMCA England and Wales.

The Careers and Enterprise Company, which is a national body for careers education in England, bridges the AELP and Enabling Enterprise, with both organisations working in the employment and skills space. Other organisations, however, may connect organisations working in different spaces. As noted earlier, Groundwork UK, which is a federation of charities that rallies action on poverty and the environment, acts as a bridge between the ERSA and the NYA. Business in the Community, an organisation that promotes responsible business practices, bridges Enabling Enterprise (Skills Builder Partnership) and Ablaze.

Figure B-4: Visualisation of bridges within the network



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the survey (24 respondents from Round 1).

Note: Data analysis undertaken using Gephi software. The larger the node (i.e. the circles representing individual IOs) the higher the number of connections with the other nodes, the smaller the node the less connections it has with the other nodes. Bridge organisations marked in red; other organisations marked in green. IOs not connected to the larger network or isolated within their own cluster are not included.