youth futures FOUNDATION

How to use the Youth Employment Toolkit

Youth Futures Foundation
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Overview – using the Toolkit

The Youth Employment Toolkit presents short summaries of evidence about the impact of different kinds of intervention on youth employment. These are based on a rigorous analysis of the best available international evidence from published evaluations of programmes that include these interventions. This evidence is valuable for planning effective interventions to support youth employment. However, it's important to remember that:

- This evidence should always be considered alongside many other factors, including costs, implementation, and the specific context where you want to make an impact.
- Evidence must be used in conjunction with professional judgement. Good quality evidence can support and inform that judgement but both are important in making decisions.
- Nothing works all the time, for everyone, in every case. The Youth Employment Toolkit tells you how these interventions *have* worked when they were used in particular interventions, in particular places, for particular groups of young people. It doesn't tell you whether or how the same interventions will work for you, now, in your context. And the groups of young people who took part in the studies are likely to be different from the ones who take part in future interventions.
- Evidence improves all the time, and sometimes changes as new studies are published. We will update the Toolkit periodically to reflect this.

The Toolkit is:

- A summary of the best available international evidence for the impact on youth employment outcomes of *seven* different kinds of intervention.
- A good starting point for considering which interventions to use, and what to think about before using them.
- A 'living resource' that will be updated regularly, as we add information about additional interventions and new evidence on the ones that are currently included.

The Toolkit isn't:

- A comprehensive guide to all youth employment interventions. The first edition of the Toolkit includes evidence on *seven* different kinds of intervention. We know there are many others and we plan to add further sections over time. Please **get in touch** to let us know about which interventions you'd like to see in the Youth Employment Toolkit.
- A comprehensive guide to these interventions. The Toolkit summarises the *best available evidence from published evaluations of these interventions, where they have been used in countries that are broadly comparable to the UK*. However, if an intervention hasn't been tried, or if it has been tried and not evaluated, or if its evaluation wasn't published or didn't meet the criteria for inclusion, then that limits the information that we can include in the Toolkit. We know that some interventions that are of great interest to people working on youth employment simply *don't* have enough evidence for us to include (we'll do our best to incorporate new evidence as it is published). We've tried to focus on the highest quality evidence available in our Toolkit, but this inevitably limits the number of studies that are included.
- A comprehensive guide to the impacts of the interventions included in the Toolkit. The nature of the evidence that was available meant that the analysis for the Youth Employment Toolkit could explore *two* kinds of outcome across the interventions, youth employment and education completion. Please **get in touch** if you'd like to tell us about other good-quality evidence and evaluations that could be included.
- A guarantee, endorsement or quality assurance for any particular kind of intervention or example of an intervention or programme. The Toolkit sets out the best evidence for how interventions *have worked in the past*. How they work in the future will depend on a lot of factors including how they are implemented, and how they interact with their new context. And as fresh evidence gets published, that picture of how an intervention has previously worked could change as well.

How to use the Toolkit

Look beyond the headlines

The 'headline' figures for the impact of each intervention are averages across multiple studies. Like all averages, they cover a range of variation that happens when interventions are implemented in the real world. The text for each intervention explains some of the factors that may be associated with that variation. And impact isn't the whole story; it's important to balance this alongside the range and costs of inputs that are needed to implement an intervention, and the strength of the current evidence base for that impact. The headlines must be read alongside the detail about the nature of the evidence, the wider impacts of each intervention, and the role of context and implementation.

Use the Toolkit alongside other kinds of evidence and expertise

The Toolkit tells you about how a particular kind of intervention has, on average, worked in the past. This is just one kind of information that you should use in planning future interventions. It must be used alongside other kinds of evidence and expertise, including:

- Your own professional judgement, and that of your colleagues and partners, about what is likely to work in your specific context, for the young people you support and the situations where you work with them.
- The knowledge and experience of other organisations and experts who know about these young people and their lives; for example, the places where they live, learn and seek work, the challenges they face, and the opportunities and strengths they bring to their search for work and learning.
- The voices of young people themselves, including their reflections on how interventions might work for them.
- Evidence from studies that use high-quality research methods *other than* the kinds of experimental design that underpins the evaluations reviewed in the Toolkit.
- Other publications, resources and guidance, such as those that offer detailed advice on implementation, specialist

information for your sector or field of practice, etc. You can find studies of different kinds of intervention in the **Youth Futures Foundation's Evidence and Gap Map.**

Consider outcomes alongside youth employment

The headline findings in the Youth Employment Toolkit relate to just two outcomes—employment, and educational completion. As the What Works Centre for youth employment, we have focused on these in the Toolkit. Keeping our focus narrow has made it practical to complete the research for this first version of the resource. However, these are not the only outcomes that are of interest to us, and it's very unlikely that they are the only ones that are important to you or the young people you work with. For example, interventions can have an impact on different aspects of personal development, and can help young people to gain different kinds of experience. When making decisions about which interventions to implement, it's essential to consider the range of outcomes that are important to you and to plan programmes that are relevant to all of these.

Tailor implementation to your context

Implementing an intervention well demands a good understanding of the context in which it will happen. If you are planning to use any of the interventions in the Youth Employment Toolkit, it's important to do this in ways that are specifically tailored for the young people who will take part, the place where it is implemented, and the particular opportunities and risks associated with these.

The evidence in the Youth Employment Toolkit is drawn from studies of programmes that were offered to young people who were considered likely to benefit from youth employment interventions. In the majority of cases, these young people had experienced a period of unemployment or of being outside employment, education and training (in the UK context, this is often known as being 'NEET'); they might also have experienced other kinds of marginalisation such as economic disadvantage. The research for the Youth Employment Toolkit also identifies cases where an intervention is particularly effective for young people who face additional barriers in the labour market, such as living with a disability or with other factors that are associated with

the risk of poorer employment outcomes (e.g. prior experience of the justice system or having been in the care system as a child).

As well as evidence from evaluations, good data on all of the above issues can help to plan effective interventions. The **Youth Futures Foundation's Data Dashboard** provides information about youth employment, unemployment and NEET rates, and a range of contextual data.

Like the Toolkit, this will be updated regularly with new datasets and information. Please **get in touch** if you'd like to suggest additional data that you'd like to see in the Dashboard, or if you'd like to let us know about how you have used the Dashboard alongside the Toolkit.
Your 'local knowledge' and understanding of your context will also provide essential information about how to implement these interventions. Key questions include:

- What opportunities and strengths can we build on?
- What barriers and challenges will we encounter, and how can we manage these?
- What partnerships are currently in place, and which new ones do we need to build?
- What has or hasn't worked here previously, and how can we build on this learning?
- How will local economics, social, and/or community factors affect the implementation and outcomes of our intervention?

Plan for implementation and monitor progress

Implementation of an intervention is an extended and complex process. The Youth Employment Toolkit doesn't provide detailed guidance on the steps for implementation, because this will be different for every specific instance. However, some steps will be valuable in most (if not all) cases. These include:

- A clear overview of what needs to be done and who will do it.
- An assessment of how to prepare for implementation; for example, do you need to recruit and/or train staff, build buy-in

and partnerships within and outside your organisation, or bring in additional resources?

- A plan for how to manage unexpected events and challenges.
- To monitor the progress and impact of your intervention, you will need:
- A definition of 'what success looks like'. This might involve both data and qualitative or narrative accounts.
- Information about the 'baseline' from which the information starts.
- Mechanisms that can capture ongoing progress, feedback and learning, as well as data on the outcomes that you want to change.
- A plan for how to interpret, share, and learn from this information, while the intervention is ongoing and when it (or its first phase) is complete.

Make sure you are using the most up to date version of the Toolkit

We will update the Youth Employment Toolkit from time to time, adding new interventions and integrating new evidence for existing ones. Please make sure that you revisit this website and that you are using the most up to date version. Whatever version is live on our website will contain the very latest evidence and information that we have.