

Technical Guide

Youth Employment
Toolkit - second
edition

Sept 2026



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Who is this technical guide for?

This guide is for Toolkit users who want to learn more about the tool's development, including how the underpinning research has been translated into an interactive online resource.

It includes more specialist language and technical detail than the brief explanations and definitions included in the Toolkit itself. The methods used in the underpinning evidence reviews are fully set out in the corresponding reports:

- [Active Labour Market Programmes for young people in high-income countries: a component network meta analysis](#)
- [Active Labour Market Programmes for young people in high-income countries: an implementation and process review](#)

The main reviews were carried out by a team from the Institute for Employment Studies, the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, and Monash University.

Note on terminology

The majority of programmes designed to improve youth employment outcomes for young people include more than one type of activity or component (see p.3 below for further discussion). 'Multicomponent' programmes are more common than 'single component' programmes.

The Youth Employment Toolkit presents evidence that relates to different types of activity that are commonly included in these programmes or 'interventions'. Across the youth employment evaluation literature, the terms 'programme', 'intervention' and 'component' are used in different ways to refer to whole youth employment programmes and the different activities that they include.

In the Youth Employment Toolkit and its accompanying materials (including this guide), terms are used as follows:

- **Youth employment programme** = an intervention designed and intended to improve youth employment outcomes that is offered to young people as a single unified opportunity. Programmes may include one or more components. Young people who take part in the programme will generally take part in all its constituent components, or will have the opportunity to do so. Programmes often have a name or title that is different from the names of its individual components (for example, the Kickstart

Scheme or the New Deal for Youth People). Programmes may be offered to young people within a set time period, geographical area, and/or set of eligibility criteria.

- **Component** = a specific and narrowly-defined activity that is included in a youth employment programme. Activities generally address specific aspects of employability or development for young people, and they may also address specific types of youth employment outcome.
- **Intervention** = an activity that is offered to young people with the aim of improving their employment outcomes. This includes both youth employment programmes and the intervention components within these. The term 'intervention' is also used (mostly in discussions of methods) to refer to any activity that is implemented in a social context with the aim of improving outcomes for a particular group of people.
- **Youth employment outcomes** = outcomes that are directly or indirectly associated with better employment prospects for young people. These include getting a job, engaging in post-compulsory learning and training, getting a school leaving qualification, and improving income from work and/or the time spent in work.

Introduction to the Youth Employment Toolkit

The Youth Employment Toolkit aims to answer a key question about interventions that aim to help young people into employment or learning: *what difference do they make?*

The Toolkit makes findings from the most relevant and reliable research easily accessible for stakeholders. It is a free online resource that presents summaries of evidence for the likely impacts of the various intervention components that make up programmes that seek to improve work and learning outcomes for young people ('youth employment programmes'). These summaries are grounded in robust reviews of evaluations that compare outcomes for young people who take part, or have the opportunity to take part, in an intervention component with outcomes for similar young people who do not.

Youth employment support tends to be 'programmatic', letting young people take part in more than one type of intervention component to improve their prospects for work and training or study. The Toolkit provides information about the impact of different intervention components that are commonly included in programmes to improve employment outcomes. In addition, it indicates the extent of the evidence base for each reported intervention component and outcome. It also presents some considerations for people involved in planning and setting up youth employment intervention components, including information about the factors that determine the cost levels of each intervention component.

The Youth Employment Toolkit summarises evidence from evaluations conducted in 'high income countries' (World Bank, 2026). The evidence base used is international because this draws in information about greater number of intervention components, and types of intervention component, than would be practical using only English or UK evidence. Only evidence from high income countries is included. Reviews of the youth employment literature note systemic variation in both the types of programme and programme impacts between high- and low- or middle-income countries (e.g. White et al., 2025, and Puerto et al, 2022). In addition, this approach uses evidence from contexts with broad similarity to the labour market, economy and education system in England.

The absence of information about any particular intervention component from the Toolkit does not mean that it is not effective. Some potentially effective intervention components have not been evaluated, or have not been evaluated to a level or using a method that supports their inclusion in the reviews on which the Toolkit is based.

The second edition of the Toolkit

What's new in the second edition

The first edition of the Youth Employment Toolkit was published in summer 2023. It presented information about:

- seven different intervention components that are often included in youth employment programmes. Six of these relate to skills development and personal support.
- one employment-related outcome (employment at any point following participation in the intervention component).
- the extent and nature of the evidence on which the 'headline' finding for this outcome is based.
- the relative cost level of the intervention component, and the factors that contribute to this cost.
- the factors that are associated with successful implementation of the intervention component.

An update in early 2025 added one additional intervention.

The first edition was based on two Rapid Evidence Assessments (evidence reviews) by a team from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI), and Monash University. One of the evidence reviews uses a component network meta-analysis (CNMA) to analyse data from 60 studies (Taylor et al., 2023) of programmes that include six of the intervention components included in the first edition of the Youth Employment Toolkit (on-the-job training, off-the-job training, basic skills training, life skills training, coaching and mentoring, and apprenticeships). The other uses a standard meta-analysis to analyse findings from four studies of wage subsidy programmes (Nancarrow et al., 2023). The 2025 update is based on a systematic review of evaluations of summer employment and education programmes which was conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (Muir et al., 2024).

This second edition presents findings from two evidence reviews by the team from IES, CEI, and Monash University. One of these (Taylor et al., 2026) uses a CNMA to analyse data from 157 impact evaluations. The other (Nancarrow et al., 2026) explores implementation and process evaluations of a subgroup of intervention components. These are supplemented by insights from other Youth Futures publications and analysis.

The second edition reflects comprehensive updating, expansion and refinement of the underlying research, presenting information about:

- seventeen interventions or intervention components. *Fifteen* intervention component sections *either* include a substantial update (with all, or most, of the information listed below) *or* are entirely new. Two of these sections are unchanged from the first edition of the Toolkit.
- outcomes at 24 months after the start of the intervention component, for all intervention components. This allows users to compare 'like with like' more accurately and gain a picture of the likely activities of young people at a specific point in time post-intervention component.
- three 'headline' outcomes corresponding to different aspects of 'Education, Employment and Training' (i.e. the opposite of NEET).
- multiple subsidiary outcomes relating to labour market participation and engagement in education and training.
- outcomes relating to work quality (pay, hours worked, and employment duration).
- the extent and nature of the evidence on which the 'headline' finding for each outcome is based, using an updated assessment method.
- differences in outcomes associated with age variation within the 16-24 age group.
- the relative cost level of the intervention component, and the factors that contribute to this, using an updated and expanded approach to cost assessment.
- key considerations for people involved in making decisions about funding and commissioning youth employment programmes.

Alignment with international evidence

The intervention components for inclusion in the first edition of the Youth Employment Toolkit were selected through a process of consultation with Youth Futures stakeholders and staff. The evidence review team worked with Youth Futures to assess which of a 'long list' of intervention components were suitable for inclusion.

Considerations included the relevance of each intervention component to the current context of youth employment programmes for marginalised young people in England, and the availability of evaluations of sufficient quality to underpin a quantitative meta-analysis of data. The team developed 'scoping notes' exploring the extent and nature of the literature on a shortlist of intervention components.

This work was undertaken in early 2022, a period when youth employment remained 'under-reviewed' compared to other social policy fields, with a need for more systematic reviews (White et al., 2021). The [Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map](#)

(EGM) includes just 22 systematic reviews of youth employment programmes that contain evidence from high-income countries.

Prominent within this evidence base are a series of reviews commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (Kluve et al, 2017; Puerto et al, 2022, ILO and the World Bank, 2026). The evidence reviews on which the second edition of the Toolkit is based, and the Toolkit itself, align with these reviews because the definitions of components used here builds on those underpinning analysis in Puerto et al.(2022), and employed in ILO and the World Bank (2026). These definitions are set out in detail below. The current edition of the Toolkit, and the review on which it is based, thus encompass the range of different types of active labour market programme (ALMP) typically offered to young people in high-income countries.

ILO and the World Bank (2026) and earlier international reviews present findings that relate to whole programmes, but differentiate between programmes by their main components, and also by the presence or absence of subsidiary components. In the analysis that underpins the second edition of the Toolkit, Taylor et al. (2026) use a 'component network meta-analysis' method (CNMA, see below) to identify the impact of individual interventions, or components of interventions, that make up the majority of youth employment programmes.

A common finding in earlier reviews is that multi-component programmes are likely to achieve better outcome than programmes that include a single type of activity in low- and middle-income countries (Puerto et al., 2022). The need for more studies exploring the impact of different intervention components is noted in ILO and the World Bank (2026). The review that informs the 'Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa Toolkit' (GDN/Campbell, 2025) also uses a CNMA method to separate out effect sizes for individual components.

Characteristics of the evidence base

The analysis in Taylor et al. (2023) and the first edition of the Toolkit is based on a high proportion of evidence from the USA; 67 per cent of the studies included in the CNMA were American, and just one study related to a programme implemented in the UK. Two of the studies of Wage Subsidies, and none of the studies of summer jobs programmes or apprenticeships, were British.

Taylor et al. (2026) is considerably more international in scope. Just under half (46%) of studies are from the USA, and 11% are from the UK which is the next most represented country. In total studies from 27 countries are included in the analysis.

Almost half (46%) of the studies included in Taylor et al. (2026) are randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Among the non-randomised studies, most rely on selection-on-observables

approaches, with propensity score matching accounting for most of these. Around 10 per cent use design-based identification strategies such as difference-in-difference.

The CNMA incorporated a Bayesian hierarchical approach (see below) which allowed the authors to incorporate study design considerations directly into the structure of the analytical model. Risk of Bias (ROB) was handled in a similar way.

Plans for future updates

The review team developed a very substantial database of effect sizes during the data extraction phase of research for the evidence reviews. The first phase of analysis, reported in this edition of the Toolkit and the accompanying evidence reviews, represents only a relatively small proportion of the insights that are possible from analysis of this body of evidence. The Toolkit will be updated in late 2026 and during 2027 with findings from additional studies drawing on this database.

Focus on young people at risk of marginalisation

Youth Futures' mission is to improve employment outcomes for young people who are at risk of marginalisation in relation to the labour market, or who face additional barriers to entering good quality jobs, training, and learning opportunities.

Most of the studies included in the evidence reviews evaluated programmes for young people with some history of being unemployed or NEET, or with characteristics that increase their risk of these. For example, to qualify for entry to a programme they might have to be out of work, or to have been unemployed for a certain period, . Young people who are unemployed, economically inactive, or not in education or training frequently experience other aspects of economic or social disadvantage (for example NatCen 2023, Powel 2021). Therefore, the overall findings of the research for the Toolkit are likely to be relevant to the young people who are Youth Futures' primary focus.

Some of the evaluations included in the research are explicitly of programmes which are designed and targeted for young people who experience some form of disadvantage, including socio-economic disadvantage, issues related to educational attainment and opportunities, and (as noted above) a history of being out of work and learning. Some studies examine programmes that were delivered mostly or solely to young people identified as having other risk factors associated with poorer employment and learning

outcomes, such as a disability, experience of the out-of-home care system, or experience of the justice system. Future editions of the Youth Employment Toolkit will aim to include subgroup analysis exploring outcomes for young people with different identified risk factors (such as young people with disabilities), across this international evidence base.

Audiences

To effect system-wide change, Youth Futures aims to communicate and engage effectively with multiple audiences to influence their practice and behaviour.

The primary levers of change are **public policymakers, employers and funders**. Other important audiences for Youth Futures are those who act as intermediaries for the levers of change, such as researchers and evaluators, service delivery organisations, media, and the internal Youth Futures employee team.

Reflecting our vision and mission, the Youth Employment Toolkit is designed to be used by anyone involved in commissioning, designing and evaluating programmes to support youth employment. The primary audience are decision makers at national, regional and local levels of government and the teams who support and inform them. There will also be relevance for employers at all scales who are providers of placements including apprenticeships, as well as for researcher interested in the youth employment space.

The evidence can be used to inform existing and new youth employment programmes, helping ensure investment is made in effective, scalable, and meaningful solutions to help tackle the persistent and systematic challenge facing young people in the UK.

The Toolkit is not intended to offer a comprehensive 'how to guide', nor does it present detailed practitioner perspectives, case study insights or practice guidance on how to run a specific programme on the ground.

User research

As an evidence centre, Youth Futures prioritises taking a consistent, 'what works' approach to understanding the performance and impact of its digital evidence tools and strategically identify areas for improvement so they can be used to drive effective systems change for young people.

Youth Futures commissioned user research of the organisation's existing digital tools in January 2025 to understand sector awareness, identify use cases, current successes and sticking points, and scope out opportunities for further development.

The research comprised a comparators review, audience mapping workshops, qualitative interviews and usability testing with representatives of priority groups, and analysis of Savanta's 2023 stakeholder research into brand perception, qualitative survey data, and quantitative engagement and behavioural tracking data from ContentSquare and Google Analytics 4.

The research highlighted that primary users of the Youth Employment Toolkit are government analysts and policy officials, Youth Futures Foundation policy and public affairs teams, human resources professionals and C-suite of providers.

The insights showed users are UK-based and access the resource through email or direct saved links on desktop devices, indicating a professional audience who seek practical, accessible and specific information.

Users value the evidence base in helping to shape policies and develop business cases, and prioritise high-quality information. They use the landing page as a transition area scanned quickly. Some users reported struggling to relate insights to their real-life circumstances.

While the findings indicated that the Toolkit provided the best user experience out of the suite of existing digital tools, 42% of survey respondents identified it as the highest priority to develop further.

Based on the above insights, the Toolkit has been revised to better meet user needs and improve user experience in terms of design and functionality, including making the landing page more intuitive, interactive and discoverable, and reframing the language to make it more accessible and meaningful to the target audience.

The evidence reviews

Active labour market programmes for young people: a component Network Meta Analysis

Taylor et al. (2026) present a review that synthesises evidence from 157 evaluations of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) for young people in high income countries. This study uses a Bayesian hierarchical component network meta-analysis (CNMA) to examine the impacts of fifteen different intervention components that are regularly included in youth employment programmes on a wide range of outcomes related to young people's engagement in employment, education and training.

Background and method

The authors build on earlier meta-analyses examining the impact of ALMPs on employment outcomes for young people. These include studies by Card et al. (2010 and 2018), which concluded that ALMPs have no short-term impacts but bring positive medium-term outcomes, particularly where their aim is to build human capital. Kluve et al. (2017) found that for young people, programmes including skills development and entrepreneurship support were particularly likely to have positive impacts, and that programmes targeting disadvantaged groups were likely to see larger impacts.

Kluve et al. (2017) was updated by Puerto et al. (2022), in a review that identified substantial heterogeneity in ALMP impacts, particularly between high- and low- or medium-income countries. In the former, programmes that include skills training, and sub-national or public sector delivery, are more likely to be associated with positive impacts. Younger participants and – again – those at risk of marginalisation generally see stronger impacts. An update to Puerto et al. (2022), ILO and the World Bank (2026), was published after the completion of Taylor et al. (2026).

All of the earlier studies discuss 'bundled' programmes, where findings relate to combinations of components rather than to the constituent parts of an ALMP. Taylor et al. (2023) adopted a CNMA method, which allowed them to disaggregate selected employment- and skills-focused programme types into their constituent intervention components, with the aim of estimating the impact of these components on employment and education outcomes.

Taylor et al. (2026) builds on and extends Taylor et al. (2023). It substantially expands the scope of the previous review by incorporating the results of updated searches used by Puerto et al. (2022), as well as an (October 2023) update to the Youth Employment

Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) by Apunyo et al. (2022). It also broadens the scope of included intervention components to encompass the full range of different types of ALMPs provided in high-income countries, and provides more granular coverage of outcomes, including labour force status.

The authors use a multivariate hierarchical Bayesian component CNMA approach. This builds on earlier methodological work on component-based evidence synthesis, extended to accommodate multiple outcome domains, study designs, and risk of bias factors within a hierarchical Bayesian framework. They implemented the approach using a bespoke model developed using the R package *brms*.

Bayesian analysis reports the full posterior distribution for the pooled effect, which can be summarised as the probability of that the effect exceeds pre-specified thresholds of practical importance, rather than a single test against a null. A major advantage of this approach is that it communicates uncertainty about the likely impact of a programme in a way that is relatively easy to interpret for non-technical (as well as technical) audiences, and that reflects the reality of implementing programmes in practice. Alongside the probability of each level of impact, the authors also report the median effect size — as the best guess at the true effect — and a 95% credible interval representing how confident they are that the effect falls within that range. .

The value of applying these approaches to the youth employment literature is noted in ILO and the World Bank (2026):

“... future research should substantiate the findings and assess robustness of results by ... incorporating risk-of-bias assessments to account for study quality; and leveraging advanced meta-analytic methods, such as robust variance estimation, network meta-analysis or Bayesian approaches”

As noted above, the evidence base includes a variety of research designs, with less than half using randomised designs. Combining evidence from randomised and non-randomised studies in meta-analysis can be justified, but it is almost always contentious. Given that more than half of the eligible studies for this review were non-randomised, the authors used the hierarchical structure of their model to incorporate study design directly into effect estimates. The model treats randomised studies as the reference category, and enabled the model to estimate whether, on average, effects reported in non-randomised studies differ systematically from those of RCTs. This does not automatically penalise non-randomised evidence, but it does prevent it from being assumed equivalent to that from RCTs. If the data suggest a bias, the model will estimate and adjust for it; if not, the shift remains close to zero. A parallel approach to Risk of Bias was also applied; this is described in detail in Taylor et al. (2026).

The method also allows partial pooling across studies and designs, so that individual study estimates inform group-level effects but are 'shrunk back' towards the shared mean, particularly when they are based on limited or 'noisy' data. This guards against over-interpreting extreme or idiosyncratic findings.

Research questions

The objective of Taylor et al. (2026) was to assess the impact of components of ALMPs on employment and education outcomes for young people (aged 15-35) in high-income countries. The research questions were:

1. What is the impact of individual components of active labour market programmes on **labour market outcomes** for young people aged 15-35 in high-income countries, compared to services as usual?
2. What is the impact of individual components of active labour market programmes on **education and skills outcomes** for young people aged 15-35 in high-income countries, compared to services as usual?

Study eligibility criteria

Population

Inclusion criteria

- Young people and emerging adults (15-35 years old).

This was defined by:

- if the programme's target or served population falls within the range 15–35 years; or
- if the study reports a subgroup analysis for participants aged 15–35; or
- If a study satisfies one of the following criteria: (a) the mean and ± 1 standard deviation (SD) of the mean population age falls fully within the 15–35 age range; (b) if the SD of the mean age is not reported, when the mean age falls within the range is 22–27 years.

Exclusion criteria

- Individuals aged less than 15 and greater than 35.

This included:

- mixed age group samples including over 35s or under 16s, without data for those in the 15-35 age range presented separately, and
- any study whose mean and SD (or mean alone) for age does not meet the criteria specified above.

Interventions

Studies were included if they evaluated an ALMP that includes one or more of the intervention components defined as an ALMP (see definitions below).

Studies were excluded if they solely included other components.

Outcomes

Inclusion criteria

Studies were included if they reported a quantitative measure of:

- Primary outcomes
 - *Employment outcomes* — including: employment, unemployment, hours worked, employment duration or employment quality.
 - *Earnings outcomes* — including: earnings, salary, hourly wage or income.
 - *Business performance outcomes* — including: sales, profits, business creation/survival.
- Secondary outcomes
 - *Education and skills outcomes* — including: educational attainment, cognitive skill measures (e.g., literacy and numeracy scores), non-cognitive skill assessments and measures of job-specific skills or certification
 - *Social networks and relationships outcomes* — including: existence/strength/size of positive work/peer/family relationships

- *Physical and mental health outcomes* — including: physical health, mental health, measures of healthy behaviour (nutrition or substance use) and health literacy and health resilience.

Exclusion criteria

Studies that reported other outcomes and *none* of the above were not eligible for inclusion.

Setting

Studies were included if they were conducted in high-income countries, as defined by the World Bank (2024).

Study design

Inclusion criteria

Primary studies that used causal methods to evaluate the impact of ALMPs. These methods estimate effects by comparing observed participant outcomes with hypothetical non-participant outcomes. Included studies employed one of the following approaches:

- *Randomised experiments (RE)* — this class of methods included those designs where treatment allocation is random or plausibly random including randomised controlled trials (RCTs) at the individual or cluster level, stepped-wedge designs and natural experiments.
- *Selection on observables (SOO)* — these methods allow for causal inference under unconfoundedness and included: regression adjustment, statistical matching and weighting (including propensity score matching, inverse probability of treatment weighting and doubly robust methods).
- *Design-based identification (DBI)* — this class of methods included the use of instrumental variables, regression discontinuity design, synthetic control and difference-in-differences (DiD).

Exclusion criteria

Studies were excluded if they did not constitute primary impact evaluations or did not employ a credible causal identification strategy. This included non-primary studies (e.g., systematic reviews, meta-analyses and literature reviews), as well as qualitative studies,

protocols and commentaries. Quantitative studies without a valid counterfactual were also excluded, for example single group pre-post designs, uncontrolled non-equivalent control group designs, descriptive cross-sectional analyses, and cohort or case-control studies that did not adjust for confounding using selection-on-observables or design based identification methods.

Reviewing systematic reviews

To identify eligible studies, the authors adopted a pragmatic search strategy that leveraged the work of recent high-quality reviews in this field:

- Puerto et al. (2022), which covers studies published between 1990 and 2022
- the evidence and gap map by Apunyo et al. (2022), covering studies from 2000 and updated through to October 2023; and
- an earlier review by Kluve et al. (2017), which spans the period from 1990 to 2015.

Collectively, these sources provide a comprehensive coverage of the literature on ALMPs published between 1990 and October 2023. The research team scrutinised these reviews in detail and screened all of the studies they had identified against the above eligibility criteria.

Supplementary searches

To identify additional grey literature, the authors undertook screening and hand-searching of reports published on the websites of institutions and repositories known to conduct, fund, and synthesise research on this topic. The list of sources reviewed, along with the specific methods employed, is set out in the full report (Taylor et al 2026).

Further detail on approaches to study selection and screening, data extraction and preparation, and assessment of study quality and risk of bias is set out in the main report.

Active labour market programmes for young people: an Implementation and Process Review

Nancarrow et al. (2026) present a review of nine employment services programmes delivered in the UK (England and Wales), USA, and Australia. These programmes feature in varying proportions, the five employment services components examined in the CNMA: Job search preparation, Job search assistance, Employment counselling, Employment coaching, and Financial assistance (Taylor et al. 2026).

The purpose of this review was to explain how employment services components of the ALMPs for young people included in the CNMA were implemented, and to describe the barriers and facilitators that influence the likely impact of employment services components observed in the CNMA.

The implementation and process (IPE) review focused on employment services components as this category of youth employment programmes was extensively referenced in the papers included in the CNMA and had not been covered in the first iteration of the toolkit. The search strategy involved reviewing papers of employment services programmes in the CNMA that included implementation and process evidence as well as using Google Scholar and the Youth Futures Foundation Evidence and Gap Map (EGM; Apuyno et al. 2024) to search for any standalone IPEs of the employment services components included in the CNMA.

For the IPE review, papers were considered for inclusion if they met the following criteria:

- Included employment services components (job search preparation, job search assistance, employment counselling, employment coaching or financial assistance) of ALMPs identified from included studies in the CNMA review
- Addressed, even partially, at least two of the five research questions of the current review or provided considerable depth for one of the research questions.

Research questions

The research questions for the IPE review were based on two commonly used implementation science frameworks. Research questions 1 – 4 explored implementation barriers and facilitators, structured around four of the domains identified by the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) developed by

Damschroder et al. (2022). Research question 5 explored implementation outcomes, using a taxonomy of eight distinct elements, first used in the context of health research by Proctor and colleagues (2011), but now broadly applied across sectors and settings to evaluate how programmes are adopted, implemented and sustained.

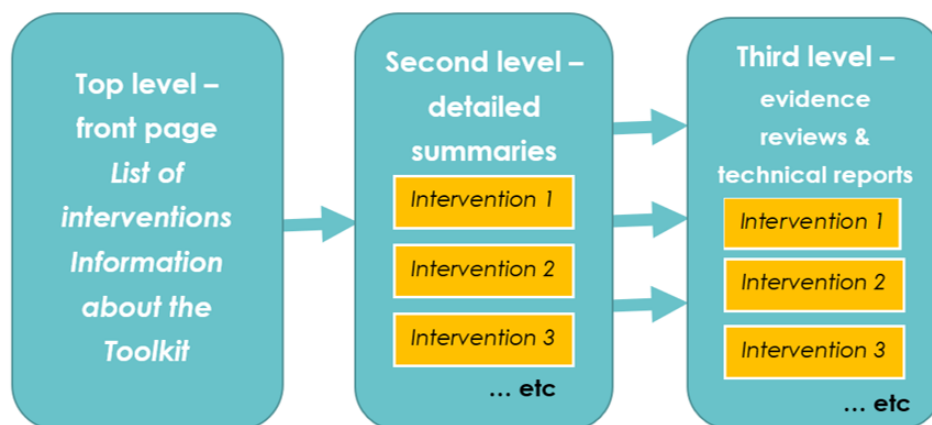
1. What barriers and facilitators **related to the wider context** influence the implementation process and perceived effectiveness of the employment services subcomponents?
2. What barriers and facilitators **related to the delivery context** influence the implementation process and perceived effectiveness of the employment services subcomponents?
3. What barriers and facilitators **related to the individuals involved** influence the implementation process and perceived effectiveness of the employment services subcomponents?
4. What barriers and facilitators **related to the activities and strategies used for implementation**, influence the implementation process and perceived effectiveness of the employment services subcomponents?
5. If available, what do we know about the employment services subcomponents' **acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, reach, feasibility, fidelity, cost and sustainability**?

A summary of the findings from the IPE are presented in the *considerations for decision makers* section of this technical report.

Structure and content of the Toolkit

The Toolkit is organised in three 'levels', increasing in detail from the landing page to the underpinning reports.

Figure 1: Structure of the Youth Employment Toolkit



Top level

The front page of the Toolkit shows a list of all the intervention components that are included in the Toolkit, along with three 'headline' ratings indicating the likely effect associated with each intervention component on key aspects of NEET:

- **Recent employment**, or whether a young person has been employed in the 12 to 24 month period that begins 12 months after the start of the programme that includes the intervention component.
- **Secondary school completion**, or whether a young person has completed a qualification associated with school leaving in their national education system (equivalent to GCSE in England¹), or ISCED level 3.

¹ https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/GBR/GBR_2011_LL.pdf

- **Participation in/completion of a vocational qualification**, or whether a young person has taken part in or completed a course in post-secondary education with a vocational outcome, *not* including study for a Bachelor's degree.

These ratings are based on the median effect size associated with each outcome in the CNMA (Taylor et al., 2026). They are derived from pooled evidence from relevant studies that met the design and quality criteria for inclusion, conducted in high-income countries whose economies and labour markets are broadly comparable with those in England. The impact rating relates to *individual interventions as components of youth employment programmes* rather than to *whole programmes that include this intervention component*. The rating uses a five-point scale that reflects the likely effect size of *any youth employment intervention component*, based on findings from systematic reviews that include quantitative meta-analysis of youth employment programmes.

The method used in Taylor et al. (2026) is an *additive* CNMA. On this basis, the effect size for a multi-component programme should in general be equivalent to the combined effect size of the intervention components that it contains. Variations will arise because of the different 'credible intervals' and likelihoods associated with each effect size (see below), and where particular combinations of components have a larger (or smaller) effect size than would be expected from their addition alone. Future editions of the Toolkit will explore this latter issue. One key issue for Toolkit users is that *the categorisation of effect sizes is based on whole programmes*, and therefore are likely to be *larger* than those associated with individual intervention components.

The front page also shows:

- **The evidence confidence rating**, which reflects the *number of studies* from which evidence is drawn, and the relative degree of precision of each effect size. Note that the effect sizes *already* reflect variations in the type of evidence used in their derivation, so this aspect of evidence confidence is accounted for in the 'headline' figures.
- **The cost rating**, which reflects the *specificity, intensity and complexity* of the inputs required to implement each intervention component. This is based on an analysis of individual studies of programmes that include each intervention component, and of associated theories of change.

Figure 2: The Toolkit front page

OUR TOOLS

Youth Employment Toolkit

Synthesising the available evidence on common youth employment programmes and their components to provide insights that help young people into good work.

[How we define interventions](#)

Showing 17 interventions

Compare impact outcomes

Education
Employment
Training

The headline measure for **employment** is whether a young person has been employed at any point in the 12-24 months after an intervention starts. Every young person has the right to earn, learn and thrive. [Learn more](#)

Self-employment support

Self employment support is highly effective in enabling young people with an interest in entrepreneurship to start working for themselves.

+++ Impact on Employment

++ Evidence strength for Employment

£££ Cost

Apprenticeships

Good quality apprenticeships - delivered to those who are well-equipped to pursue them - can have a positive effect on employment, especially for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

+++ Impact on Employment

++ Evidence strength for Employment

£££ Cost

Financial assistance

Financial assistance can have a positive impact on young people's engagement in employment, education, and / or training, by reducing financial and material barriers.

+++ Impact on Employment

++ Evidence strength for Employment

£££ Cost

Search by keyword

Filter by:
Reset filters

Impact on Employment

☐ +++ High positive

☐ ++ Medium positive

☐ + Low positive

☐ ○ Little or no

☐ - Negative

☐ ? Unknown

Evidence strength for Employment

☐ +++ Well supported

☐ ++ Consolidating

☐ + Emerging

☐ ? Insufficient

How much does it cost?

☐ £££ High

☐ ££ Moderate

☐ £ Low

[How do we measure these?](#)

This first level also includes links to the following information and supporting materials for Toolkit users:

- How to use Toolkit
- About the Toolkit
- This technical guide
- Link to other Youth Futures evidence tools that the Toolkit can be used alongside

Second level – detailed summary

The second level contains detailed summaries of the evidence for each component. In the second edition of the Toolkit, the second level contains seventeen pages corresponding to seventeen interventions. For the fifteen 'new' Active Labour Market Programme components added in summer 2026, the information on these pages is taken from Taylor et al.(2026), Nancarrow et al.(2026), as well as other YFF publications, literature identified in the Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map, and analysis by Youth Futures staff.

Each summary includes, where available,:

- A banner with headline insight, a table for quickly comparing outcomes, evidence strength and cost ratings, and the additionality metric
- One to three key findings, that offer further detail on specific outcomes such as work quality, age effects, or the type of vocational and educational training entered as a result
- Details about the component, including definitions, funding sources and typical features
- Benefits to both young people and employers offered by the component
- A table outlining cost rating considerations
- Considerations for decision makers involved in designing, funding and commissioning youth employment programmes
- Information about the evidence used in the underlying research, including limitations and implications
- Links to additional resources, related research and supporting materials

Figure 3: Sample intervention component page

[← Return to toolkit](#)
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Basic skills training

Basic skills training provides valuable underpinning for entry and progression in work and learning, and can be particularly effective in supporting apprenticeship participation

Last updated: 26 August 2026

Jump to considerations for decision makers

Compare outcomes for...	Impact	Strength
Education	+	+
Employment	+	+
Training	+	+

Cost

£ £ £

3 more young people in work per 100

For every 100 young people who are NEET and take part in basic skills training as a component of a targeted youth employment intervention, around 3 additional young people are in employment 12 to 24 months later compared to similar young people who did not take part. This component could increase recent employment by around 3 percentage points.

Third level – the research reports

The third level presents the evidence reviews that underpin the Toolkit. See above for further detail about these reports.

Interventions in the second edition

This second edition of the Youth Employment Toolkit presents new findings from a component network meta-analysis (CNMA) of data on fifteen different types of intervention components which are frequently included in 'active labour market programmes' (ALMPs) designed to improve employment and related outcomes for young people (Taylor et al., 2026)². The definition of an ALMP, and the definitions for individual components within this, align with those used in previous high-profile international reviews of evaluations of youth employment programmes. Prominent among these are Puerto et al. (2022) and Kluve et al. (2014). The same definitions are used in the more recent publication by ILO and the World Bank (2026).

These follow the OECD's definition of an ALMP:

"[ALMP are] all social expenditure (other than education) which is aimed at the improvement of the beneficiaries' prospect of finding gainful employment or to otherwise increase their earnings capacity. This category includes spending on public employment services and administration, labour market training, special programmes for youth when in transition from school to work, labour market programmes to provide or promote employment for unemployed and other persons (excluding young and disabled persons) and special programmes for the disabled."

Puerto et al. (2022) identify five broad categories of ALMP. This five-domain structure is applied by Taylor et al. (2026), and supplemented with a set of sub-classifications to better capture the heterogeneity of intervention components. This resulted in a taxonomy of 17 interventions/intervention components. The small number of studies from high-income countries of self-employment support means that the three intervention components in this category were treated as a single component. Where an ALMP included additional components that fell outside the scope of these definitions, but could still have an impact on participant outcomes, this is coded as 'other'.

² Data on two additional interventions, apprenticeships and summer jobs programmes, is also presented. These sections of the Toolkit are based on, respectively, an earlier CNMA analysis (Taylor et al. 2023) and a systematic review (Muir et al., 2024).

Figure 4: Intervention taxonomy

Intervention category	Intervention sub-categories
Skills development	Basic skills training Soft skills training Behavioural skills training Job-specific technical skills (off-the-job) training
Employment support services	Job search preparation Job search assistance Employment counselling Employment coaching Financial assistance
Employment experience	Job-specific technical skills (on-the-job) training Paid temporary work experience Unpaid temporary work experience
Subsidised employment	Wage subsidies Public works
Self-employment support	Business skills training, business advisory and mentoring, financial and start-up support ³ .

The definitions used in the second edition are as follows:

³ Data on these components, and their combinations, is treated as a single intervention category in the analysis due to the limited data available.

Figure 5: Intervention taxonomy

Intervention		Intervention sub-categories	
Name	Definition	Name	Definition
Skills development	Skills development includes training programmes offered outside the formal education system to enhance youth employability or facilitate the transition into employment. The training takes place outside a work environment and before the transition to employment.	Basic skills training	Basic skills training focuses on enhancing foundational competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that are essential for individuals to effectively engage in education, training, or employment. These programmes aim to bridge skill gaps from the compulsory education phase and equip participants with the necessary abilities to navigate personal and professional environments successfully. Basic skills training is often targeted towards individuals who may have had limited formal education.
		Soft skills training	Soft skills training concentrates on developing interpersonal skills. These programmes emphasise building competencies in areas such as communication, teamwork, collaboration, problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, and analysis.
		Behavioural skills training	Behavioural skills training focuses on instilling positive work habits, attitudes, and behaviours that are crucial for success in the workforce. These programmes cover aspects such as punctuality, appropriate language, dress and communication, professionalism, and adherence to workplace norms and expectations.
		Job-specific technical skills (off-the-job) training	Job-specific technical/vocational skills training, delivered in an off-job setting, focuses on equipping participants with specialised knowledge and competencies required for specific occupations or industries. These programmes adopt a "train first, then place" approach, where individuals receive intensive, often full-time, training in a classroom or educational setting before transitioning into employment.

Intervention		Intervention sub-categories	
Name	Definition	Name	Definition
Employment support services	Employment services aim to equip young people with the skills to identify work that is suitable and meaningful to them, search for and secure jobs. They can offer targeted provision, including job-search preparation and assistance, job matching, and brokerage. For those most distant from the labour market, employment services may mobilise additional and more extensive support services from subcontractors and the third sector. Employment services often engage with employers to understand their vacancies and skills gaps, with aims to prepare young people to be able to fill these. To support young people's take-up of jobs, financial assistance for travel and expenses may be offered. Employment services will also collaborate with community partners and regional govts to link to wider public services and industry/employer bodies to ensure connection to local labour markets.	Job search preparation	This focuses on equipping young people with the tools and skills to effectively navigate the job search process. They may include workshops or one-on-one support for crafting professional resumes, cover letters and online profiles to showcase skills and experiences.
		Job search assistance	This provides targeted support to help young people identify and pursue suitable employment opportunities. Services may include access to job listings (either online or in-person, public or not-listed), job fairs, and employer networks, as well as personalised assistance in identifying job openings that align with the jobseeker's skills and interests.
		Employment counselling	Employment counselling offers guidance to help jobseekers to assess their skills and interests, and explore suitable employment options. These services may include one-on-one sessions with trained counsellors who help jobseekers understand the labour market, identify potential career paths, and develop a plan to pursue their desired employment outcomes.
		Employment coaching	Employment coaching provides access to guidance and support during the application and selection process. Services may include interview preparation, coaching on workplace communication and etiquette, and guidance on navigating the challenges of starting a new job.
		Financial assistance	Financial assistance offers targeted support to help jobseekers overcome financial barriers that hinder their job search. This may include grants or subsidies for transport to interviews, professional clothing, or other job-related expenses (e.g., getting a driving licence or industry credential needed to secure work).

Intervention		Intervention sub-categories	
Name	Definition	Name	Definition
Employment experience	Employment experience is offered to young jobseekers as a form of work-related training before they secure a competitive job. It is intended to be temporary and roles may not be paid. These programmes can include on the job training for technical and soft skills related to an occupation, or provide a more general insight into the world of work. They all involve attendance at an employers' workplace. Some programmes may be undertaken for employers advertising vacancies who guarantee a job interview as part of the package. The duration of programmes can vary considerably between short periods, of one or two weeks, or longer durations for example up to a year. Some programmes are designed to support particularly vulnerable groups, such as disabled young people. These typically offer additional support to the young person and employer through case worker support	Job-specific technical skills (on-the-job) training	These programmes often have an occupational focus and have relatively long durations, up to six months and sometimes more. The roles are temporary and may not be paid, if the young person is receiving social welfare benefits or other government funding. Young people are placed with employers to undertake tasks associated with a competitive job in those employers. The purpose is to provide training in the specific technical and soft skills associated with the occupation. These types of employment placements may be complemented by short spells of off the job training but the young person will spend the large majority of their time with the employer.
		Paid temporary work experience	These programmes offer paid temporary positions to young people. The duration tends to be much shorter and the purpose is to build insights into the world of work and to 'practise' the behavioural skills needed to sustain work. This could include internships. Some paid work experience programmes may be for employers advertising vacancies. In this case, the employer may guarantee an interview at the end, which may mean the young person can move into permanent employment.
		Unpaid temporary work experience	These programmes offer unpaid temporary positions to young people. The duration tends to be much shorter and the purpose is to build insights into the world of work and to 'practise' the behavioural skills needed to sustain work. This could include internships. Some unpaid work experience programmes may be for employers advertising vacancies. In this case, the employer may guarantee an interview at the end, which may mean the young person can move into permanent employment.

Intervention		Intervention sub-categories	
Name	Definition	Name	Definition
Subsidised employment	Subsidised employment can take place in the private, public and third sectors. There are two main types of subsidised employment: jobs that employment services fund directly with employers, usually in private and third sectors. The aim is to reduce employer hiring risks to encourage them to take on disadvantaged young people. An alternative is to create new short-term jobs in the public sector using government funding. These type programmes are categorised as public works. Both types of program intend to be a short-term measure that enables young people to build the skills and social capital to secure competitive, unsubsidised employment.	Wage subsidies	Financial incentives for employers to support the employment of disadvantaged young jobseekers. Subsidies can take the form of direct payments, tax breaks, reduced payroll taxes, reduced social security contributions, or tax credits. The main aim is to help individuals secure longer-term employment by reducing the financial risks to employers who perceive disadvantaged young people's productivity will be below market standards. The ultimate goal is to facilitate immediate employment, then encourage sustained employment by lowering costs for employers and enhancing the employability of the jobseeker.
		Public works	Government-initiated schemes aimed at providing temporary employment through infrastructure development, maintenance, and other community service projects. They directly employ individuals through government projects, while wage subsidies incentivise private and third sector employers to hire individuals by offsetting some employment costs. Public works programmes are often considered a solution in times of crises, when there is not enough labour demand and thus as a temporary safety net.
Self-employment support	Advisory services and facilitated access to support, finance and markets for the development or growth of youth-owned businesses or self-employment ventures. Services include business advice and mentoring, business skills training, access to markets and value chains, direct credit or facilitated access to credit, monetary or in-kind grants for start-up or growth, and micro-franchising. Self-employment support can focus on entrepreneurship and business innovation or the skills and capabilities to offer craft and service skills through self-employment.	• Business skills training – focuses on equipping participants with knowledge and competencies to start, manage and grow a business or self-employment venture. Programmes cover topics such as business planning, financial management, marketing, sales, and customer service. • Business advisory and mentoring – provides personalised guidance and support to help participants develop and implement their business or self-employment plans. Services may include one-on-one coaching, group mentoring, and access to networks of experienced entrepreneurs or industry professionals. • Financial and start-up support – provides participants with access to capital and resources to launch and sustain businesses or self-employment venture. Includes direct credit, facilitated access to credit, or in-kind grants.	

The intervention components included in the first edition and the analysis in Taylor et al. (2023) are also included in the second edition, but the definitions have been revised and refined to some extent. *Four* categories are broadly similar in both editions, with the following differences:

- **Basic skills training:** The definitions are broadly similar. In the second edition, the definition includes a stronger focus on goals and potential target groups.
- **Job specific technical skills (off-the-job) training:** In the first edition, the authors of the underpinning review note that the intervention components included 'typically' last for 6 – 12 months, and are generally provided on a full-time basis. In the second edition, the authors do not include an observation about length, and note that training is 'often', but not always, full-time. This in practice may mean that the second edition includes a number of shorter and/or less intensive examples. In both editions, training offered as part of the formal education system is excluded.
- **Job specific technical skills (on-the-job) training:** In the first edition the definition included a 'formal arrangement' between employer and training or programme provider. This is probably in place in many, if not all, of the cases in the second edition although it is not specified. The first edition requires that qualifying intervention components last at least six weeks but less than twelve months, partly to separate on-the-job training from apprenticeships. The second edition notes that programmes may last up to six months. The focus on the development of practical skills is common to both editions.
- **Wage subsidies:** In the first edition, findings for 'Wage subsidy programmes' are based on a study examining the impact of *programmes that include a wage subsidy* (Nancarrow et al., 2023). This includes both standalone programmes where the only component of the programme is a subsidy for the wages or employment costs of a young person, and programmes where a wage subsidy is used alongside other intervention components. The second edition, based on Taylor et al. (2026) presents findings for *wage subsidy as a component of a youth employment programme*.

The categories of '**soft skills training**' and '**behavioural skills training**' in the second edition overlap substantially with '**life skills training**' in the first. The categories of '**employment counselling**', '**employment coaching**', '**job search assistance**' and '**job search preparation**' in the second edition also overlap to some extent with '**coaching and mentoring**' in the first, although this is not a full correspondence.

A key difference between the two editions is the extensive use of a component labelled 'other' in the first edition. This, essentially, included *all* intervention components apart from the six broad categories listed in Toolkit 1 (basic skills training, life skills training, off-the-job training, on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring, and apprenticeships). In the second edition, 'other' has largely been

separated out into distinct named components, and the definitions for named components are generally somewhat narrower than in the first edition.

This change means that the second edition presents a considerably more precise account of the effects associated with each intervention component. In the first edition, every component that co-occurred with 'other' had its associated estimate partially confounded with the mix of components included in its particular instance of 'other'. One statistical effect is that each component is identified from a smaller and more idiosyncratic set of contrasts. The hierarchical structure of the model used by Taylor et al.(2026) to some extent mitigates this, but where *direct* evidence relating to a particular estimate is relatively sparse, estimates will be more conservative.

Outcomes in the second edition

Youth Futures' vision is a society where every young person can achieve good work. Its mission is to ensure that marginalised young people can secure and thrive in good work. Youth employment programmes seek to achieve these by supporting young people to get jobs as a result of taking part. Whether or not young people are more likely to get a job following an intervention component is a key measure of its impact.

However, this is not the only kind of outcome that is important. Young people also need to build the skills, knowledge, and capacity for learning that will help them to achieve their ambitions in the labour market, to progress in work, and to achieve stable and well-paid work throughout their careers. For these reasons, skills outcomes are also reported.

Research published by Youth Futures (Addario et al., 2026; Addario et al., 2023) identifies the association between not achieving a qualification at English Level 2, corresponding to a school leaving qualification, and the risk of becoming NEET. Therefore 'school completion' is presented as a headline outcome.

Another important role of youth employment programmes is to support young people into formal or larger-scale training and learning opportunities, which help them to gain skills and qualifications that will improve their longer-term prospects for good quality work. While a short-term programme can support some vocational skills gains (through job-specific technical skills intervention components, or work experience), young people can gain greater benefits if they engage in a longer programme with a recognised qualification. One key factor in the well-publicised difference between NEET rates in the UK and countries such as the Netherlands is in fact its relatively low rate of participation in vocational education and training (Clegg et al., 2026). Vocational qualifications are associated with higher long-term employment rates (Patriagnani and Conlon 2011, Conlon and Patriagnani 2013, Dorsett and Stokes 2021), and with higher incomes and economic benefits. Analysis for the Department for Education identifies 'a strong return on investment' for investment in vocational learning (DfE 2025), an effect that may be stronger for young people with a history of being NEET (DfE 2026).

The second edition of the Toolkit presents the estimated effect associated with each intervention component in relation to *three* key outcomes (on the front page). These are:

- **Recent employment.** A young person has a positive outcome for 'recent employment' if they have held a job at some point in the 12 – 24 months that begin 12 months after the *start* of an intervention component.
- **School completion:** A young person has a positive outcome for 'school completion' if they have completed a qualification at the 'International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011) 3' level. This is generally associated with school leaving. In

England it corresponds to the attainment of GCSEs or other English Level 2 qualifications (UNESCO 2026a and b).

- **Technical and Vocational Education:** This headline figure is based on the *average median effect size* across 5 or 6 categories of post-secondary non-higher education participation and programme completion (ISCED 4 and 5). In England, this corresponds to NVQ Levels 4 and 5, including HNDs and HNCs, and various other diploma courses, as well as some foundation degrees.

All outcomes are standardised to a point of 24 months following the start of the youth employment programme which includes the component. The 24 month point is chosen as a follow-up horizon because it is commonly used in the included studies. It also corresponds to a point by which potential short-run 'lock in' effects of the programmes themselves are likely to have dissipated, meaning that young people are more likely to have entered their next phase of activity after completing a youth employment programme. This next phase may involve employment and/or additional learning or training, which latter in turn supports better long-term employment outcomes.

Where studies reported outcomes at multiple time points, the one closest to the 24 month reference point was identified, and the statistical model then estimates 'slopes' for each outcome domain, to capture how effects change when outcomes are measured earlier or later. This means that all component effects are interpreted as being estimated 24 months after programme start, providing a common anchor point and negating the need to remove studies with different follow-up intervals from the data (and thus to reduce the number of available effect sizes).

The detailed intervention component pages report further findings from Taylor et al. (2026) in relation to different kinds of outcome. Where practical (this generally relates to the availability of data), this includes information on:

- Labour market status:
 - whether young people are NEET at any point in the period 12 – 24 months after the start of the programme.
 - whether young people are employed at the 24 month point after the start of the programme ('current employment'). In practice, this identifies young people at one specific point but would not include young people who may have worked in the preceding year but are not working at this time point.
- Work quality:
 - income from work

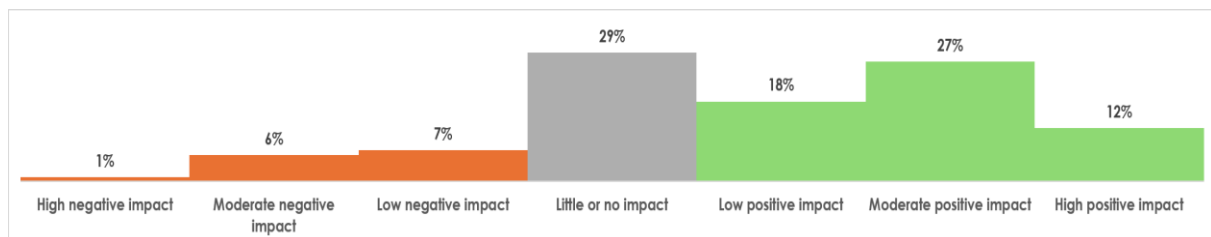
- how long young people who get a job are likely to remain in work ('employment duration')
 - the number of hours worked by young people who get a job
- Engagement in post-secondary and non-higher technical and vocational training:
 - participation in apprenticeships
 - getting an occupational licence
 - ISCED 4 and 5 participation and attainment
- Differences between outcomes for young people of different ages within the 16-24 age group.

Probability estimates

A key difference between the first and second editions of the Toolkit is the use in the underpinning research reviews of different types of CNMA. The first edition reports findings from the *frequentist* CNMA used by Taylor et al.(2023). The second, as well as the median figures used in the headline estimates, includes findings from the *Bayesian* hierarchical CNMA used by Taylor et al. (2026).

The difference between frequentist and Bayesian approaches is about how results are expressed. The Bayesian analysis provides 'posterior probability distributions' for each outcome effect size associated with each component, rather than a single point estimate and an account of whether or not it is statistically significant. Bayesian findings can be expressed as a statement of the probability of the effect size being greater than 0, or exceeding any other chosen threshold. For example, in the case of 'employment coaching', the probability that the effect size associated with 'recent employment' will fall within each of 'high', 'moderate' or 'low' impact ranges is as follows:

Figure 6: Probability of impact at each level (see p. 29-32 for discussion of impact magnitude) of Employment Coaching on recent employment.



The median effect size associated with this intervention component for 'recent employment' is in the 'low positive' range. However, the probability of a moderate positive impact or of little or no impact is actually higher than an impact in that range.

Deriving and reporting the impact estimate

Meta-analysis reports the estimated impact of an intervention component on an outcome as an 'effect size', often in the form of a standardised mean difference (SMD), although others like Odds or Hazard Ratios are also used. This is a kind of summary statistic that allows researchers to report findings from multiple studies that measure the same outcome in different ways, using different scales. In Taylor et al. (2026), SMD is expressed as 'Hedges g', which applies a correction to the standard SMD to correct for a bias that can arise in small samples.

The landing page of the Toolkit reports the scale of the median effect size of each intervention component on three headline outcomes. The scale used corresponds to the following magnitudes of SMD (Hedges g) in the evidence review:

Figure 7: Effect sizes in the second edition of the Youth Employment Toolkit

Effect size	Scale
> 0.2	High
0.19 to 0.10	Moderate
0.09 to 0.05	Low
0.05 to -0.05	Little or no impact
< -0.05	Negative

These figures reflect the level of impact that tends to be associated with youth employment programmes in meta-analyses of evaluation findings. As discussed above, systematic reviews generally report on the impact of *programmes* rather than individual *intervention components* within these, so the headline impacts reported in the Youth Employment Toolkit are generally likely to be slightly *lower* than those in previous reviews. The impact of a multi-component programme is likely to be broadly equivalent to the sum of the impacts of its constituent components; each element contributes towards the impact of the whole.

ILO and the World Bank (2026), a large-scale international systematic review of the literature on youth employment programmes, identifies an overall effect size of SMD=0.06 on employment outcomes for youth employment programmes in High Income Countries (HICs). This is very close to the figure identified by Puerto et al. (2022) and Kluve et al. (2017), and a similar scale is adopted by GDN/Campbell (2025). Similarly, Newton et al. (2020) found that high-quality evaluations of youth employment programmes frequently note an impact on employment outcomes that was smaller than 10

percentage points. This would correspond roughly to the 'high' category used here⁴. For these reasons, we assume that it provides a useful broad indication of what kind of impact a youth employment intervention can reasonably be expected to have.

This scale differs from the interpretation of effect size based on SMD proposed by Cohen (Nakagawa et al., 2017), in which a 'small' effect is defined as $SMD \leq 0.2$, 'medium' as $SMD = 0.5$ and 'large' = 0.8. This scale is widely accepted in the psychology literature. Its use in evaluations of social sector programmes is more limited, however, partly because effect sizes that meet its threshold for 'large' are rare in these fields. However, because effect size distribution varies considerably between fields of study, some authors suggest that 'effect sizes are best understood when interpreted within a particular discipline or domain' (Plonsky and Oswald, 2014, see also Brydges 2019).

The scale used for the Youth Employment Toolkit is more cautious than that adopted in several international reviews. ILO and the World Bank (2026) advocate for the adoption of the more recent practice in the social sciences in which the 'small' category covers 0.00 – 0.05, 'medium' is set at 0.06 – 0.2, and 'large' is defined as it is here (greater than 0.2). Puerto et al. (2022) describe 0.07 as a 'medium' effect size, based on the 'social science meta-analyses of educational outcomes' reported by Kraft (2020). Kraft suggests that 'small' be classified as $SMD \leq 0.05$ and large as $SMD \geq 0.2$. Kraft argues that:

'Researchers commonly interpret effect sizes by applying benchmarks proposed by Jacob Cohen over a half century ago. However, effects that are small by Cohen's standards are large relative to the impacts of most field-based interventions. These benchmarks also fail to consider important differences in study features, program costs, and scalability'

Percentage change estimates – 'difference made' or 'additionality metric'

The intervention component pages include an estimate of the potential percentage change in the rate of employment for young people who take part in each intervention component during the 12-24 months after they start a programme including that intervention component, if that programme were offered to a group of young people

⁴ As this is the typical scale of impact for a youth employment *programme*, and programme impact is broadly equivalent to the sum of the impacts associated with the intervention components that it includes, then the likely impacts shown in the Toolkit may generally be smaller than those associated with whole programmes (because the impacts in the Toolkit relate to individual components of interventions).

who are currently NEET. This is the *absolute percentage change* (also referred to as the 'percentage point change'), which describes the difference in the probability of an outcome occurring under the intervention compared with the baseline rate. Here, it is calculated as the change in probability expressed in percentage points, as well as the equivalent total young people per 100. For example, if the baseline rate is 72% and the estimated probability under the intervention is 75%, then the absolute percentage change is +3 percentage points, or 3 additional young people. Absolute percentage change is useful for understanding the expected magnitude of change in concrete terms, and allows direct comparison across outcomes with different baseline levels.

To transform the effect size to percentage change, Taylor et al. (2026) translated the estimated effect sizes onto the probability scale developed through the Bayesian CNMA. This was applied to a fixed baseline rate derived by Youth Futures from English data, representing the percentage of NEET young people who might get a job 12-24 months after they were observed as being NEET, in the absence of any intervention. Rather than simply converting the median estimate to a percentage change, the researchers derived percentage change estimates by applying the same transformation to every 'posterior draws', or randomly sampled value, from the model of likely effect sizes associated with each component.

Each draw of the effect size was translated to an odds ratio using a standard approximation that places standardised effect sizes on the log-odds scale. This odds ratio was then combined with the relevant baseline rate to estimate the probability of the outcome under the intervention. The difference between this estimated probability and the baseline rate represents the change attributable to the intervention on the probability scale. From this, the researchers calculated the absolute percentage-point change. The reported percentage change represents the median of these transformed values. Because the transformation was applied to all posterior draws, these intervals reflect uncertainty in the underlying effect estimates.

An alternative to the *absolute percentage change*, or *percentage point change*, is the *relative percentage change*. A *relative percentage change* expresses the difference between the old and new value as a proportion of the old one. Relative percentage change is useful for understanding the scale of an impact on a specific outcome compared to how common that outcome is in the absence of any intervention. However, it is sensitive to baseline rates, and where baselines are low a relatively modest increase can appear as a large percentage. For example, if the baseline rate is 72% and the estimated probability under the intervention is 75%, then the *relative percentage change* around +4%. However, if the baseline rate is 4% and the estimated probability under the intervention is 6%, then the relative percentage change would be 50%.

Moderators

The headline effect sizes reported in the Toolkit are averages across all the included studies. However, the impacts of individual examples of each programme can vary considerably.

The evidence review (Taylor et al. 2026) identifies differences in the likely impact of each intervention component on outcomes for young people of different ages within the 16 to 24 age group.

Where relevant, the component pages in the Toolkit include summary information to this effect, indicating whether impacts are likely to be larger for younger or older people within the target age group (16-24). Age differences may reflect different factors relating to the kinds of activity that young people undertake at different stages of their transition to work and/or post-compulsory learning, as well as other factors (which could include social transitions or personal and psychological development) between these ages.

Other factors that drive variations in outcomes include the approaches to implementation, and the ways in which intervention components are implemented. For example:

- The local, regional, national and global context in which it is implemented, and within which young people must seek work.
- Where relevant, alignment between provision and the local economy, including the jobs that are (or are likely to become) available and accessible for young people.
- The socioeconomic context in which it is implemented, including factors such as the compulsory education system and how it prepares the particular cohort of young people who take part for employability-related activities; local community characteristics; and the infrastructure surrounding the intervention component, including transport, digital infrastructure, etc.
- The wider economic and labour market conditions at the time and in the place where the intervention component is implemented.
- Characteristics of its implementation, including the level of funding available relative to the costs of the programme; the quality and nature of partnerships between different stakeholders involved in implementation; its relationship to other youth provision; and the skills and approaches of staff involved in delivering the intervention component which affect implementation fidelity.
- The duration and intensity of delivery.

- Personal characteristics and challenges faced by the young people involved in the intervention component, and the availability and accessibility of support with these, where required.
- The ability and willingness of young people to engage with the intervention component.

And possibly, also:

- The sectors, roles and sites that are its main focus.

The detailed summary section includes discussion of potential moderators in the section on implementation.

The evidence strength rating

The evidence strength rating indicates the level of confidence that can be placed in each estimated finding for impact. The method used to identify a confidence rating is based on an adaptation of the GRADE criteria (Cochrane 2026). This is based on:

- The size of the evidence base for each outcome, in relation to each component.
- The size of the effect for each outcome, in relation to each component.
- The relative imprecision of each outcome, in relation to each component.
- The geographic concentration of evidence for each outcome, in relation to each component.

The CNMA model used by Taylor et al. (2026) incorporates study quality and other elements of risk of bias estimation, so these element of the GRADE system are not applied separately in deriving the evidence strength rating to avoid effective 'double counting'.

The evidence strength rating is derived as follows.

Step 0: Assign all component + outcome pairings a default rating = 5

Step 1: Adjust for evidence base size

- Downgrade by 1 point if <10 studies
- Downgrade by 2 points if <5 studies

This means that estimates based on fewer published studies have a lower rating.

Step 2: Adjust for scale of median effect size

- Add 1 point if median effect size is >0.2 SMD

This means that estimates associated with a relatively high level of certainty of the direction of impact within the Bayesian model have a higher rating.

Step 3: Adjust for imprecision of credible interval

- Downgrade by 1 point if absolute range is >0.5 OR
- Downgrade by 1 point if % showing any impact is <50%

This means that estimates associated with greater levels of imprecision have a lower rating.

Step 4: Adjust for indirectness

- Downgrade by 1 point if no studies are reported since 2010
- Downgrade by 1 point if all studies are from the USA

This means that estimates based on older data or on a high proportion of data from a single nation have a lower rating.

The highest possible score is 6, where a component + outcome pairing is not downgraded in any of Steps 1, 3 or 4, and where a point is added in Step 2. A floor rating of 1 is used where there are studies, although in principle the rating could be –1.

These ratings then map to the framework presented in the Toolkit as follows:

Points assigned		Confidence rating
6		Well-supported
5		Well-supported
4		Consolidating
3		Consolidating
2		Emerging
1		Emerging
0	Insufficient	- this is used in cases where no effect size can be reported because of a lack of data.

The cost rating

To estimate the relative costs for each intervention component, the Youth Employment Toolkit adopts a cost-description approach (also called an ingredients approach). This involves identifying the inputs or resources, and associated activities, required to implement an intervention component effectively, and estimating their relative implications on costs (Parsons, 2025).

Although more narrow in focus than a cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis, one advantage of the cost-description approach is that it helps in assessing the likely difference the estimated costs of intervention component inputs and activities could make to its outputs and outcomes (Parsons, 2025); in other words, the type of inputs required to implement an intervention component well. This approach informed the selection and prioritisation of the delivery resources included in the Toolkit.

Reporting the costs of youth employment programmes is challenging, and many studies do not include relevant information. Puerto et al. (2022) note that data on costs, cost-benefit and/or cost-effectiveness are relatively sparse in evaluations of youth employment programmes published before 2012 (see also Kluve et al., 2017), although this information is a little more frequently included in recent studies. Just over half (53) of the high-income country evaluations reviewed by Puerto et al. (2022) included information on costs, and just under a third (34) included cost-benefit analysis. In the current edition of the Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map, only 43 studies with data for high income countries include any information about costs; this includes several process and implementation studies. Just 27 studies include some form of cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis.

We have deliberately not used absolute figures in our cost calculations for the following reasons:

- Many evaluations do not include information, or detailed information, about the financial cost of intervention components, or about cost effectiveness or cost-benefit.
- Most evaluations that report programme costs do *not* separate the costs of individual components of youth employment programmes.
- The international nature of the evidence base raises challenges for comparing the financial costs of intervention components, as does the use of evidence produced over a relatively long time period.
- Where they are reported, the way in which programme costs are calculated differs between evaluations, with variation in the resources that are included in cost calculations.

Rather than absolute figures, we have provided a framework that decision makers can use to help understand and estimate the indicative costs of delivery, based on context-specific factors and considerations. Low, Moderate and High cost ratings refer to the *specificity* and *intensity* of delivery resources needed. The complexity cost criterion reflects how the characteristics and needs of the target group influence the delivery resources and overall costs required to deliver a programme.

Cost rating framework

The section below explains how the descriptors - *specificity*, *intensity* and *complexity* - were applied to determine the cost rating for each component, and how each one maps onto different delivery resources and the three cost rating categories (Low, Moderate and High).

Specificity of delivery resource type: *Standalone versus Integrated*

The specificity of delivery inputs for a component can influence the overall cost rating. Costs tend to be higher when the delivery inputs (such as task-specific equipment) and activities required for a component are relatively specific to that component, and do not easily overlap with inputs to other components in a programme. For example, on-the-job training requires specialist staff with unique expertise, and delivery settings and equipment such as workplace settings and occupation-specific tools and machinery.

In contrast, components rated as low cost typically involve delivery inputs that can be combined or integrated with other intervention components across different delivery categories, such as staffing, trainer expertise, or delivery setting. Soft skills or behavioural skills training are examples of components where delivery resources such as trainer expertise or setting can be more easily extended to other components resulting in lower overall cost rating.

Intensity of delivery time and effort: *Tailored/Personalised versus Generic support; Long versus Short programme duration*

The intensity of delivery inputs for a component also influences the overall cost rating. Costs tend to be higher when delivery requires substantial staff time and effort, specifically when support is tailored or personalised to individual participants' needs, delivered over a long duration (12 months or more) and with high frequency, or includes follow-up support after a participant gains employment. In contrast, components rated

as low or moderate cost typically involve less individualised or generic support packages over shorter delivery periods (ranging from a few weeks to a few months), resulting in lower levels of staff time.

Complexity of target group circumstances

In addition to the descriptions above on how the specificity and intensity of delivery resources influence costs, indicative costs may also vary according to the complexity of the target group's circumstances. This, in turn, affects the level of staff expertise required, the scale of financial assistance needed to address participants' needs and the targeted nature of recruitment activities for identifying eligible participants. Programmes that work with specific vulnerable groups, such as young people with SEND or those with experience of the criminal justice system may require adapting programme materials and additional work to address specific barriers.

Similarly, programmes that recruit participants from rural areas may require more tailored strategies for recruiting eligible participants beyond standard referrals from the welfare and public employment services. These possibilities have direct implications on staff time, skills and expertise, and overall delivery costs.

Cost ratings based on the specificity and intensity of delivery resources rely on an analysis of a theory of change for each component and the definitions of each component as set out in the Toolkit technical report. In contrast, the complexity descriptor captures considerations that may *not* be inherent to the component itself. Instead, complexity reflects factors that depend or are contingent on programme-specific design choices and priorities. As a result, the same component may be considered 'low cost' in some programmes and 'high cost' in others.

Lastly, indicative costs may also vary according to the proposed **geographical scale** of the programme. Programmes delivered across multiple regions or at national scale are likely to incur higher costs than those delivered within a smaller or more localised geographical area. However, regardless of scale, the complexity of participants' circumstances will likely influence the overall volume of delivery costs, as more complex needs typically require greater staff time, specialist expertise and tailored support.

Considerations for decision makers: Employment Support Interventions

The considerations outlined below are based on the IPE review of nine evaluations of youth employment programmes that include a substantial 'employment services' element⁵, across the UK, USA, and Australia. This represents the included studies conducted in the UK, alongside a small number of closely comparable programmes from other countries.

The analysis of data from the selected nine evaluations followed a systematic data screening process across the CNMA studies, resulting in 20 relevant papers that specified and provided sufficient detail on some or all five employment services components included in the updated Toolkit: job search assistance, job search preparation, employment counselling, employment coaching, and financial assistance.

The review provides evidence on implementation and process findings for employment support programmes *as a whole*, rather than individual components of this programme, for example, job search assistance. This is due to the limited information on component-specific implementation and process reporting.

For the purposes of the technical report, we have categorised key considerations for decision makers into three levels: *programme*, *participant*, and *policy/economic*. These categorisations provide a high-level framework of implementation barriers and facilitators for decision-makers involved in designing and funding employment support programmes for young people.

- Programme-level considerations mainly reflect implementation factors relating to strategic staff recruitment and training, consistent delivery across programme settings, effective monitoring & evaluation and management structures, and support networks for delivery staff.
- Participant-level considerations mainly relate to the delivery approach, participant outreach and recruitment work, and provision of financial assistance.
- Policy/economic-level considerations summarise factors outside the programme and participants that however, influence the implementation process.

⁵ Here, the definition of 'employment services' is the one used in the component definitions above.

Full details on the design of the nine employment support programmes and associated implementation features can be found in the [implementation and process review](#).

Programme-level considerations

Staff capacity, recruitment and training

Low staff-to-participant ratio was identified as helpful for more intensive and personalised delivery of employment support intervention components. This is further reinforced by recruiting staff early on or at programme start rather than mid or late programme start. Early recruitment before programme initiation facilitates initial engagement and familiarisation with prospective participants, crucial for personalised support and building trust between staff and participants.

Trust-based relationships with programme staff is strengthened through strategic recruitment planning involving for example, hiring staff with similar lived experiences as the target population and prior experience of working with young people in the local area.

Early staff recruitment allows sufficient time for staff training before full programme commencement, ensuring staff are well equipped to deliver programme expectations and elements and achieve intended outputs. This enhances programme fidelity and reduces the possibility of an uneven offer of services to young people, whereby early participants may receive limited services (pending or in the absence of staff training) than those who joined late in the delivery timeframe. Late staff recruitment and training can result in high staff turnover, as programme staff may not feel capable of covering the provision for young people due to limited staff capacity and perceived competency.

High staff turnover undermines the continuity of provision, weakens young people's trust in the programme, and disrupts trust-based relationships between key workers and young people that depend on consistent, reliable support from the same member of staff.

Programme performance monitoring and evaluation

Designing monitoring systems to evaluate staff and programme performance was identified as a facilitator of employment services. Clear communication of intended programme outcomes and benchmarks, alongside well-defined staff roles and responsibilities, strengthens staff accountability by helping staff understand how their responsibilities align with programme outcomes. Supporting staff with setting targets and progress goals during the implementation period further helps in clarifying responsibilities and assessing staff performance against intended programme outcomes.

The use of structured and standardised tracking forms enables effective monitoring of participants' job seeking efforts and activities, and the extent to which participants' job seeking efforts are influenced by programme services. Developing programme-specific performance frameworks and milestones deemed relevant and realistic by delivery providers was identified as helpful. This could include for example, a record of the number of participants who entered employment or gained qualifications.

Lastly, incorporating iterative programme design and implementation strategies throughout the programme's timeframe based on insights and feedback from programme staff and participants, facilitates relevant and strategic adjustments of delivery services to improve programme performance and outcomes. For example, changing the intensity, tightening or extending the duration of an element of the programme. Other changes such as introducing an additional programme element could also be considered to better respond to the needs of participants.

Programme geographical scale, management structures, and consistent delivery

Programmes operating at a smaller geographical scale were found to be more effective than those with broader geographical coverage, as their limited scale enable more effective programme management, closer monitoring of programme fidelity and adaptability to environmental changes.

While a programme's geographical scale could be informed by the projected size of the target population and predefined programme mandates, it is important that decision makers carefully design and incorporate management structures applicable to a programme's geographical scale. Programmes that are highly geographically dispersed require a combination of centralised and local management structures with a project director across delivery partners to ensure consistent delivery approach across multiple sites. It is beneficial for both the centralised and local management to have well-defined and unique responsibilities. For instance, the centralised management team could be responsible for designing programme guidelines, measurable benchmarks and outcomes, and training packages while the local management team monitor delivery providers' adherence to programme guidelines to ensure consistent implementation while also ensuring that sensitivity to the local context is maintained.

Smaller scale programmes benefit from a centralised management, responsible for designing programme guidelines and coordinating delivery across delivery sites within a limited geographical area.

Partnership working

Partnerships between delivery providers and local organisations was found to be helpful in expanding programmes' scope of services, which provides supplementary offerings for young people. Local partnerships can help to strengthen and rebuild young people's

ties and sense of belonging to their communities and in some cases, to shift the prevailing perceptions of the population of young people engaging in the programmes. Having established local roots and recognised local presence reduces the time and resources required for collaboration with local partners compared with delivery providers lacking prior experience and knowledge of the area.

Partnership working between delivery providers within a programme was also found to benefit programme implementation by enabling effective sharing of good practices and preventing competition for resources and participants. Such a collaborative environment can be further strengthened through setting up communities of practice across local delivery leaders. The establishment of steering groups representing all delivery partners, which convene at agreed regular intervals could also be considered. Steering groups could be responsible for identifying effective practices and areas of improvements across delivery sites and promoting awareness of partner contributions and collaborative efforts to inspire wider adoption.

Several barriers to effective partnership working were identified. Fragmented delivery models and programme design increased the likelihood of participants enrolling in similar provision offered by different providers. Additional barriers included perceived conflicts of interest, which led some providers to hesitate in referring eligible participants to others for fear of reduced funding, including concerns about reputational risk among local stakeholders (for example, schools) if young people under their responsibility were permitted to participate in programmes, even when eligibility criteria were met.

An example of effective partnership building that facilitates the implementation of job search preparation specifically, involves engaging with local employers to assess their vacancies and skills gap.

Participant-level considerations

Personalised and localised delivery

Findings from the IPE showed that prioritising personalised support improved programme success and was positively received by participants, improving their job search ability, motivation and confidence. Delivery providers can tailor support through personal advisors and co-designing action plans with participants that align with their job-search goals and aspirations, individual circumstances and expected support from the intervention component.

While a needs assessment/case management approach facilitates the effective implementation of employment support programmes, specifically employment coaching and employment counselling, evidence from the IPE point to the likely administrative burden this approach poses on staff and the inconsistency in participants'

use of the individual action plans co-developed with staff. Supporting staff capacity by monitoring low staff-to-participant ratios, may help to facilitate updating participants' individual action plans and improve better tracking of participants' use of action plans.

The complexity and diversity of participants' needs across programmes and delivery providers implies that implementation approaches may vary according to different levels of prioritisation. For example, in some programmes, addressing participants' welfare and emotional needs could be prioritised before employment support begins. Although flexibility in delivery in the form of either adaptations to eligibility criteria, programme activities or timelines, or adapting programme services to fit the needs of young people in the local area facilitates programme outcomes and implementation, it raises the challenge of monitoring programme fidelity.

Programmes can reconcile the tension between maintaining delivery fidelity and accommodating young people with complex needs by assigning local delivery leaders responsibility for monitoring programme performance outcomes using locally developed toolkits.

Localised delivery enables the alignment of programme offerings to local labour markets and fosters collaboration with local services to enhance tailored provision and wraparound support for participants, allowing participants access a wide range of support. Participant barriers to work and education, which are mostly addressed by wraparound support, include additional qualifications for employment, poor confidence, mental ill-health and physical ill-health.

High frequency in-person engagement and flexible delivery settings

The nature and frequency of engagement with young people was identified as a determinant of successful delivery. In-person, high-frequency (at least fortnightly) contact is recommended.

The choice of delivery settings can also influence young people's willingness to engage with the programme. The IPE evidence showed that the choice of a classroom setting for initial programme orientation may discourage interest in the programme. Exploring alternative delivery settings for workshops beyond classroom-based provision and settings is recommended.

Where classroom setting is used, delivery providers should consider incorporating general wellbeing or outdoor activities like sports to counteract possible recall of negative prior schooling experiences.

Early participant outreach and recruitment

Initiating early and preferably in-person contact with the target audience prior to programme start was identified as helpful for facilitating initial programme enrolment and continued engagement, including relationship and trust building between staff and participants. Visiting young people at home is recommended as a strategy for recruiting and re-engaging participants.

Timely recruitment can encourage sufficient time for programme orientation, mitigating the risk of low programme enrolment and participation due to a lack of clarity of the programme's focus and targets. Direct community outreach activities for engaging under-served groups should be considered.

Although proactive and timely participant recruitment is advised where referrals are unsuitable, this approach is only feasible where complete and up-to-date local data on NEET young people and those at risk are available.

Financial assistance and work readiness

Provision of funds for programme participants, preferably on a case-by-case basis is advised. Financial assistance can help participants cope with engagement barriers, particularly around travelling to attend training courses or work.

Combining work-readiness training with certifications boosts participants' confidence and employability, which could be especially helpful for young people who have either received many job rejections in the past or viewed themselves as only being able to obtain low quality or low salary employment.

Policy and economic-level considerations

Government priorities play a key role in shaping which programmes are created, which issues they address and whether existing programmes are reconfigured. At the same time, wider economic conditions influence both the overall cost of delivering programmes and the design choices that underpin them. For example, decisions to target sectors with particularly high demand for skilled labour.

Employment services programmes are especially sensitive to the influence of national and local economic conditions, as the availability of apprenticeships and job opportunities on the supply side of labour directly affects what provision is accessible. In addition, local and regional labour market conditions, infrastructure, and levels of economic activity can shape how programmes aimed at engaging or re-engaging young people in work are implemented.

Updating the Toolkit

Building on the first and second editions, a future edition of the Toolkit will:

- Include a more granular approach to sub-group analysis, going beyond age and gender in the current edition and considering other sub-group characteristics and identified risk factors like being disabled and being care experienced.
- Consider further variations of outcome timings and follow-up intervals.
- Include an interaction CNMA to explore how many combinations of components is feasible given the evidence base and reasonably supported by a theory of change. The interaction CNMA will also aim to examine combinations of components and associated outcomes that are most effective in the UK compared to other international contexts. This will inform future international evidence translation to the English context.
- Consider, where data is available, the impact of overall programme duration and the duration of participant involvement in the programme on the outcomes of interest.
- Include sensitivity analysis to test whether the time of implementation, going by the date of studies, influence outcome findings.
- Expand current outcomes to include mental health outcomes. This is informed by the growing evidence on the link between poor mental health and youth unemployment. Studies in the existing Toolkit international evidence base, including additional studies from our updated EGM will help guide this focus.

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