



Building Futures Test and Learn Delivery: Call for Expressions of Interest

January 2024



Building Futures Test and Learn Delivery: Call for Expressions of Interest

Youth Futures Foundation is seeking to appoint a delivery partner for our new programme, Building Futures.

This funding round will fund the establishment, delivery and evaluation of an initial “test and learn” demonstrator of the Building Futures approach. The demonstrator will run from **May 2024 to July 2025**, with the potential to extend to July 2026.

Our aim is to reach up to **500 young people** aged between 14 and 16 identified as at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

We have allocated a budget of up to **£600,000** for this demonstrator phase.

Youth Futures will use the insights and learning from the demonstrator to inform the development, design and specification of an impact evaluation. During the lifetime of the programme, we have the ambition to reach up to 5,000 young people.

The process for selecting a delivery partner for the demonstrator starts with the submission of an expression of interest. The deadline for expressions of interest is **10am 22 January 2024**.

Successful organisations will be invited to complete a full application. The deadline for full applications will be close of business on **1 March 2024**.



1. About Youth Futures:

Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, established in 2019 to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. We are the What Works Centre for youth employment. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change so that all young people have fair access to good quality jobs.

Youth Futures is pleased to be working in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Education (DfE) and The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) on Building Futures, ensuring that provision is aligned with existing national and local policy, structures and priorities.

2. About Building Futures:

In September 2023, DCMS awarded £15m to Youth Futures for the Building Futures programme to support young people aged 14-16 at risk of becoming NEET.

Our research into the factors associated with higher risk of NEET at age 18-25 has highlighted several issues best addressed at an earlier age, such as school attendance, exclusion and low attainment at GCSE.¹

However, there is limited evidence on what works to improve employment outcomes for young people in this age group, especially in the English context. Our review of the evidence for our Youth Employment Toolkit² found that mentoring and coaching are likely to have a relatively small impact on youth employment. However, the evidence covers a wide range of contexts and approaches, especially in terms of frequency and duration of support. We need to know more about the **kinds of approach to support** that are most likely to be effective.

This is why we want to develop and test a robust, high quality model of targeted support for young people aged 14-16 at risk of becoming NEET. This will be built around personalised, sustained and intensive support from a trusted adult. We will use the core one-to-one offer as the platform for a wider wraparound package of evidence-based interventions.

Our aim is to increase engagement in education and training post-16, to reduce young people's likelihood of being NEET at 18.

Starting in 2024, the programme will deliver a mentoring offer to up to 500 young people. The aim of this initial demonstrator phase is to test and refine the core offer and key delivery parameters. During this period, Youth Futures will also identify appropriate interventions to include in the wider package of wraparound support.

This wider package will be delivered in a future phase, which will be funded through a separate funding round. In total, the programme will support at least 5,000 young people between 2024 and 2029, with evaluation continuing until 2033.

¹ Crowley, J. et al. (2023) Risk factors for being NEET among young people, Youth Futures Foundation. <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/OVERLA2.pdf>

² <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/toolkit/mentoring-and-coaching/>



Learning and insight from the demonstrator phase will inform the scope and design of future programme delivery, alongside questions of large-scale implementation and robust evaluation feasibility that Youth Futures will consider in parallel.

The overall purpose of Building Futures is:

- To develop and test a package of targeted support for young people at risk of becoming NEET and build evidence of what works



3. About this funding opportunity:

We seek to award funding to a delivery partner who can deliver a demonstrator of the Building Futures core one-to-one support offer.

We expect to make one grant award. However, we are very open to partnership proposals that enable organisations to pool their resources and skills and bring in specific expertise to deliver this work.

The core aim of the demonstrator phase is to:

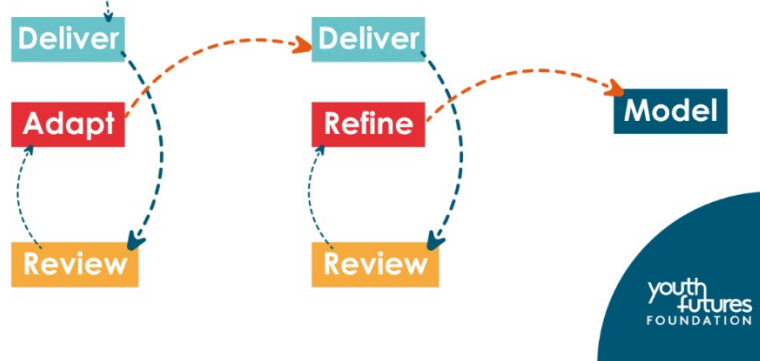
- Develop and refine a model of one-to-one support from a trusted adult to young people aged 14-16 at risk of becoming NEET

At the heart of this model will be a mentor, coach or other trusted adult, offering sustained, personalised support to a young person at risk of becoming NEET, in or out of school settings. Mentors will provide ongoing one-to-one support directly to young people, and act as a gateway to wider services and support.

We expect the delivery partner(s) to take an iterative “test and learn” approach, helping us to develop the most promising model for a future impact evaluation. This will include:

- Initial design and mobilisation
- Early delivery to young people
- Review of learning and adaptation of model in response to feedback and evidence
- Delivery of revised model
- Review of learning and further refinement of model

Design



We want to better understand implementation and acceptability of the core offer, as well as identifying opportunities for improvement and wider wraparound support. The delivery partner(s) will be responsible for design, delivery and adaptation of the approach during the demonstrator, working closely with Youth Futures and other agencies commissioned by us to support this “test and learn” approach.



In total, we expect to reach up to **500 young people** during the demonstrator. We anticipate a budget of up to **£600,000** for the demonstrator. This is intended to fully cover all delivery costs, including design, mobilisation and iteration / adaptation.

The rest of this section sets out our requirements in more detail.

3.1 Delivery requirements:

The delivery partner(s) will be responsible for providing an evidence-based model of one-to-one support from a trusted adult to up to 500 young people aged 14-16 and identified as at risk of becoming NEET. Ideally, this will be within our preferred delivery footprint(s) (see “delivery locations” below).

The successful applicant will work with Youth Futures to:

- Develop a detailed implementation plan
- Identify and onboard participating schools, and work in partnership with them throughout the demonstrator
- Specify an initial support offer including content, timing, duration, location, mentor characteristics and other delivery considerations, based on existing evidence (see “mentoring criteria” below)
- Agree and establish initial eligibility criteria and referral mechanism(s) (see “eligibility criteria” and “referral mechanisms” below)
- Recruit / mobilise appropriate mentors
- Manage and oversee delivery of one-to-one support sessions from September 2024 at the latest, reaching a total of up to 500 young people aged 14-16
- Ensure quality and consistency of support in line with specification
- Review and refine support offer, processes and/or management in light of insight and feedback from delivery, evaluation and learning

The delivery partner(s) will work with an independent evaluator, a service design partner and research partners commissioned by Youth Futures to ensure that the demonstrator maximises our learning for a future impact evaluation (see “evaluation and learning” below).

The successful delivery partner(s) will be expected to be available for a series of co-design workshops with Youth Futures to ensure that the demonstrator is rooted in our best understanding of the evidence, beginning immediately after they have been appointed.

We will establish an Advisory Group for Building Futures, bringing together experts from the sector, government and academia, and we expect the delivery partner(s) to attend regular meetings of this group (anticipated quarterly from April 2024).

If invited to submit a full application, bidders will be required to share an outline plan for implementation (including mobilisation of schools and mentors), support offer and proposed “test and learn” approach which demonstrate their ability to meet these delivery requirements. In the Expression of Interest, we will seek information on bidders’ current delivery and relationships / infrastructure for rapid mobilisation.

3.2 Mentoring criteria:



Youth Futures has carried out a review of reviews, looking at the evidence of what makes for good mentoring.³ We have identified the following key criteria associated with greater effectiveness:

- **Skills and experiences of mentors** – a good fit between their educational, work and life experiences, the aims of the programme and the experiences of the young person receiving support.
- **Intensity** – while evidence on the optimum length of support is mixed, it is important to ensure sufficient time to establish and sustain a productive relationship. This could be through regular meetings over the course of a school year, or a higher intensity model with more frequent meetings in a shorter timeframe.
- **Structure and quality** – structured goals and processes for interaction and relationship-building, with a clear exit process and next steps for the young person. Support should be delivered in culturally sensitive and inclusive ways.
- **Mentor support and retention** – appropriate selection, training, supervision and support for mentors, to ensure that they deliver to the agreed structure and intensity. Ensuring that relationships are sustained in line with the duration and frequency agreed with the young person at the outset.

At full proposal, bidders will be required to demonstrate how their proposed offer satisfies these criteria. We expect that the successful bidder will already be applying these principles in their existing work with young people. In the Expression of Interest, we will seek information on current delivery in relation to these parameters (e.g. intensity, retention).

3.3 Eligibility criteria:

Our preference is that the demonstrator should focus on young people in Year 9 and Year 10, drawing on a wider review of early intervention programmes, which concluded that this represents the best compromise between 'too early' and 'too late' to be effective. However, we are open to proposals targeting young people up to the age of 16.

Young people who receive support should be those identified by schools or local authorities as being at risk of becoming NEET. In the first instance, we anticipate that young people will be identified using one or more of:

- Markers from local Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) system – e.g. attendance, exclusions, SEND
- School / teacher assessment – e.g. predicted GCSE grades or more holistic / personalised assessment of risk
- Other characteristics / risk factors – e.g. young people known to children's services, youth justice system or child and adolescent mental health services

Our current hypothesis is that 1:1 support is likely to be helpful for young people at risk, but unlikely to act as a substitute for specialist support for young people facing the most significant barriers to education, employment or training. The evidence on mentoring for young people with learning disabilities in particular is extremely limited.

³ Review of reviews on mentoring for young people aged 14-16, Youth Futures Foundation (forthcoming)



At this stage, we are not expecting delivery to young people with severe learning difficulties.

During the demonstrator phase, we will work with researchers, the delivery partner(s), schools and other stakeholders to explore the evidence base for different indicators and to identify the most appropriate criteria for a future impact evaluation. As outlined above, we may therefore require the delivery partner(s) to reconsider these eligibility criteria during the demonstrator in the light of emerging evidence and learning.

At full proposal, bidders will be asked to set out their proposed eligibility criteria for initial identification of young people for support.

3.4 Referral mechanisms:

In the first instance, referrals for support will need to come from participating schools. The delivery partner(s) may also wish to establish appropriate referral pathways with local authorities, pupil referral units, health services or other relevant agencies. We expect the delivery partner(s) to work in partnership with the local Careers Hub, and we will work with the CEC to facilitate this relationship if necessary.

At full proposal, bidders should describe their proposed approach to recruitment, engagement and retention of young people, including existing or new referral processes.

3.5 Delivery locations:

Drawing on data on existing volumes of young people who are NEET, and propensity / risk factors for becoming NEET, and our mapping of existing local infrastructure that can support delivery, we have identified four preferred footprints for delivery:

- Black Country - Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton
- Bradford or Leeds
- Liverpool City Region - Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Wirral
- Greater Manchester East - Rochdale, Oldham, Stockport, Tameside

At full proposal, bidders will need to describe their proposed delivery geography (e.g. local authority, city, region, nationwide), and provide a rationale for why they consider this the best approach to meet the aims and requirements of Building Futures. Preference will be given to bids that cover at least one of our identified footprints. In the Expression of Interest, we will ask for information on how much of your existing delivery is within these footprints.

3.6 Equity, diversity and inclusion:

We know that some groups of young people are disproportionately likely to become NEET after completing secondary education. These include:

- Young people from certain minority ethnic backgrounds (Bangladeshi; Black African / British / Caribbean; Gypsy, Roma & Traveller; Pakistani)
- Young people with learning disabilities

It will be essential for equity, diversity and inclusion considerations to be embedded into the design of Building Futures. This will include for example ensuring that support is attractive, accessible and culturally sensitive for young people from marginalised



backgrounds. Equally, mentors and staff should be recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, to ensure the best fit with young people's needs.

At full proposal, applicants will be required to describe their proposed approach to embedding equity, diversity and inclusion into the demonstrator. For the Expression of Interest, we will seek information about the current make up of your governing body, staff and volunteer workforces, and young people receiving services.

3.7 Youth voice and participation

Youth Futures will involve young people at every stage of Building Futures, including design and decision-making. As well as our existing Future Voices Group of young people with experience of being NEET, we will establish a separate group of people aged 14-16 to shape Building Futures, including the design / scope, delivery and learning from the demonstrator.

The delivery partner(s) will be expected to provide information, reports and updates to this group, and respond to their questions and recommendations.

At full proposal, applicants will be required to set out their proposed approach to youth participation within their own delivery.

3.8 Evaluation and learning:

While there is an extensive research literature on mentoring and coaching, there are significant gaps in the evidence base, especially when it comes to **what** effective mentors actually do and **how** they do it.

Through the demonstrator, we hope to generate learning and insights on a wide range of implementation questions that can inform a future impact evaluation, including:

- Key components of 1:1 support – session content, quality standards, what is distinctive compared to other guidance or support provision etc.
- Effective delivery and management of 1:1 support – e.g. matching, training, supervision / quality assurance, managing attrition etc.
- Eligibility – including e.g. age / year group as well as specific criteria.
- Referral mechanisms – e.g. teacher identification, school data, other
- Delivery settings – in- and out-of-school, after school and weekend etc.
- Engagement with the offer – which young people take up support, levels of participation etc.
- Acceptability to young people and possible additional offer(s) to best meet their needs for support.
- Ensuring that our funding works effectively with (and is additional to) existing school-based and statutory support.
- How the support achieves outcomes through its theory of change.

In parallel with the demonstrator, we will be commissioning further research into risk factors for becoming NEET and promising interventions to support young people at risk. We expect the delivery partner(s) to engage fully with this evidence and adapt delivery of the demonstrator accordingly.



As a What Works Centre, Youth Futures develops high quality evidence through robust independent evaluation, assured by independent experts and our advisory groups.

We will commission an independent process evaluation of the demonstrator, with a focus on implementation, as outlined above. This will include review of delivery data (e.g. session attendance, content and outcomes), and the delivery partner(s) will need strong activity monitoring systems for the demonstrator. The evaluation will also gather learning and insights on young people's perspectives and experiences, as well as identifying data on young people to allow us to track longer-term outcomes and model future evaluation.

Alongside the evaluator, we will commission a service design partner to work with young people, schools and other stakeholders to explore what they find engaging, useful and relevant from the support offer, and what else they would find valuable.

We will also be working with independent expert advisors to design and develop our approach to a future impact evaluation. This process may generate questions that we will need the delivery partner(s) to explore, for example in relation to referral mechanisms or data collection.

We expect the delivery partner(s) to work collaboratively and transparently with these organisations, providing them with free and unfettered access to delivery sites and programme data. The delivery partner(s) will need to be fully committed to our approaches to evidence generation, learning and evaluation.

At full proposal, applicants will be required to describe their existing programme activity data and monitoring systems. They will also be asked to set out their current / proposed approach to accessing and managing identifying data on participating young people from schools or local authorities, as well as their commitment to working with our research, evaluation and learning partners.



4. About the application process:

Interested parties should submit an Expression of Interest listing existing activities and delivery capabilities in relation to this age group, along with relevant information about your organisation. This can be completed [here](#).

The deadline for receipt of completed Expressions of Interest is **10am 22 January 2024**.

Following submission of Expressions of Interest, shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Who can apply?

We will accept applications from registered charities, social enterprises (with appropriate asset lock provisions) and mutuals incorporated in England and registered with either Charity Commission, Companies House, CIC regulator or the Financial Conduct Authority (for mutuals).

We can also accept applications from local authorities or other public bodies, although applicants will need to demonstrate clear additionality to statutory funding (see next section).

What can the funding be spent on?

The funding will be provided as a restricted grant to deliver your Building Futures demonstrator proposal. Your proposal can include overheads and core costs to deliver the work.

We will only accept proposals for activities that will exclusively deliver against the aims and activities associated with this funding.

Please note that we will not fund:

- Activities that generate profits for private gain.
- The practice of religion, or any activities that actively promote religion or particular belief systems.
- Activities funded under a statutory duty or responsibility, or that were previously statutorily funded.

How will we make decisions?

Expressions of interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Ability to deliver support at scale from September 2024 at the latest
- Existing delivery of mentoring or other one-to-one personalised support to young people
- Established reach to young people aged 14-16 in school or community settings
- Existing provision to young people at risk of becoming NEET, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds
- Willingness to test and learn, and commitment to evidence and evaluation
- Ability to deliver within one of our footprints of interest (preferred)

We will score Expressions of Interest against these criteria.



The highest scoring applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal, setting out their proposed delivery approach against the framework and criteria set out in section 3. Shortlisted applicants will also be required to provide due diligence information including accounts, financial and data management and controls, safeguarding procedures and references.

A team of internal and external assessors, including young people, will review these proposals against a defined set of criteria that will be shared with applicants along with the proposal format.

A final funding recommendation will then be taken to the Youth Futures Grants and Evaluation Committee for approval. Final decisions will be communicated by email after the Committee's meeting in April 2024.

What information do I need to provide?

For their Expression of Interest, organisations will be asked to provide the following information:

- The name of the organisation applying for funding
- The legal structure and registration number of the organisation
- Contact details for the organisation and for proposed activity
- Information on the lived experiences / identities of the organisation's board and senior leadership

Applicants must also answer the following questions regarding their existing delivery with young people:

1. Ability to deliver support at scale
 - a. How many young people aged 14-16 did you deliver 1:1 support to, over your most recent complete 12 month operating period?
 - b. Please briefly share any statistics or other information you have on participating young people (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability, free school meal status) (max 50 words)
 - c. How many people are there in your current roster / team of adults providing 1:1 support to young people?
2. Ability to deliver additional / new support at pace
 - a. How many mainstream secondary schools did you deliver services to young people in, over your most recent complete 12 month operating period?
 - b. Please briefly outline your existing delivery infrastructure and other relationships that would enable you to move to delivery at pace (max 100 words)
3. Ability to deliver quality support consistently to young people over time
 - a. How many individual support sessions does each young person receive in total, in your (main / largest) 1:1 support programme?
 - b. How long does the programme last (in months)?
 - c. What was the rate of programme completion in your most recent complete 12 month operating period (number of young people completing the programme ÷ number of young people starting the programme x 100)?



- d. Please briefly describe how you ensure a good match between young people and adults, and share any demographic information you have on adults providing support (max 100 words)
 - e. Do you currently provide payment to adults providing 1:1 support to young people?
 - f. If you answered yes to Q3e, please briefly describe your payment arrangements (max 50 words)
 - g. If you answered no to Q3e, please briefly describe how you ensure continuity of provision and manage the risk of adult dropout (max 100 words)
4. Ability to deliver within a footprint of interest to Youth Futures
Our footprints of interest are the Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton); Bradford or Leeds; Greater Manchester East (Rochdale, Oldham, Stockport, Tameside); and Liverpool City Region (Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Wirral)
- a. Which of these footprints are you currently operating in?
 - b. How many of the young people in your answer to Q1a are within these footprints?
 - c. How many of the schools in your answer to Q2a are within these footprints?
5. Willingness and ability to take a 'test and learn' approach in your work with Youth Futures
- a. Are you willing and able to work with an independent evaluation team commissioned by Youth Futures?
 - b. Are you willing and able to work with a service designer commissioned by Youth Futures?
 - c. Are you willing and able to facilitate independent access to programme activity data by these other teams / organisations mentioned in 5a and 5b?
 - d. Are you willing and able to facilitate independent access to young people by these other teams / organisations mentioned in 5a and 5b?
 - e. Are you willing and able to participate in the Building Futures Advisory Group and engage with our youth reference groups?
 - f. Are you willing and able to provide support to multiple different cohorts / year groups within the overall 14-16 population at Youth Futures' request?
 - g. Are you willing and able to operate with multiple different referral criteria / processes at Youth Futures' request?
 - h. Are you willing and able to share learning and insight from your Youth Futures funded work openly and transparently?



What will we do with your data?

If you want to know how we store and use the data in your form, you can read our [data privacy policy](#).

The policy also provides more information on data sharing between grantees and evaluators.

How can I find out more?

If you have further questions, or need help, do check our frequently asked questions on our website. Please contact us if you require further information by calling us on 020 7553 4539 or emailing grants@youthfuturesfoundation.org.

Timeline:

Expression of interest launched	8 January 2024
Expression of interest deadline	10am 22 January 2024
Full applications invited	2 February 2024
Full applications deadline	1 March 2024
Final decision and grant award	12 April 2024



References

Armitage, H., Heyes, K., O'Leary, C., Tarrega, M., Taylor-Collins, E. (2020). *What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary*. Nesta. https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/What_Makes_for_Effective_Youth_Mentoring_Programmes.pdf

Crowley, J., Addario, G., Khriakova, E., Breedvelt, J. (2023). *Risk factors for being NEET among young people*. Youth Futures Foundation. <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/OVERLA2.pdf>

DuBois, D., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J., Silverthorn, N. & Valentine, J. (2011). How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. 12(2): 57-91.

Gaffney, H., Jolliffe, D., & White, H. (2022). *Mentoring: Toolkit technical report*. Youth Endowment Fund. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Mentoring-Technical-Report_Final.pdf

Raposa, E., Rhodes, J., Stams, G., Card, N., Burton, S., Schwartz, S., Sykes, L., Kanchewa, S., Kupersmidt, J. & Hussain, S., (2019). The effects of youth mentoring programs: A meta-analysis of outcome studies. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 48: 423-443. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00982-8>

Taylor, D., Featherston, R., Ott, E., Rowland, J., Newton, B., Shlonsky, A. (2023). *A network meta-analysis of employment and skills interventions designed to assist young people to enter the labour market in high income countries*. Technical Report. Youth Futures Foundation. <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/technical-report-network-meta-analysis.pdf>

Tolan, P., Henry, D., Schoeny, M., Bass, A., Lovegrove, P. & Nichols, E. (2013). *Mentoring interventions to affect juvenile delinquency and associated problems: A systematic review*. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2013:10. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2013.10.

