

Youth Futures Foundation

Call for Proposals

Promoting employer action to tackle ethnic disparities – understanding local opportunities

1. Introduction

Youth Futures Foundation is the national What Works Centre for youth employment. We want to remove the disparities in employment outcomes that exist for young people facing the greatest challenges, and to help them find and keep good quality jobs. We do this by undertaking high quality evaluations, building and sharing the evidence of what works, driving evidence-based change in policy and working with employers and practitioners to improve practice.

Youth Futures was set up with a particular focus on the findings of the Race Disparity Audit in 2017. While our organisational scope is broader than this, addressing the employment disparities that prevail for young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds is a key priority. As part of this commitment, we have recently released further funding through our flagship [Connected Futures](#) programme to develop partnerships in places where youth unemployment is particularly high for those with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage.

This project aims to support our Connected Futures delivery partners through addressing the following research question: *“What are the key opportunities and barriers to employers taking action to address ethnic disparities and tackle racial discrimination? How can identified barriers be addressed?”*

This research should provide our Connected Futures partners with evidence to shape their project delivery. This project will also contribute to a wider research programme exploring how we can promote employer action and behaviour change to tackle discrimination against minoritised young people.

The research will take a place-based case study approach, with questions and approaches being adapted to meet the context of each partnership. In all areas, researchers will need to undertake scoping interviews with delivery leads to help determine the research approach, followed by qualitative research with employers, young people and other expert stakeholders. We are also keen to explore whether it would be feasible to conduct secondary data and document analysis (e.g. of recruitment and retention data and EDI policies) if employers are open to sharing this.

We are open to proposals *either* from a team at a single organisation that brings together the relevant skills and experience, *or* from two or more organisations working in partnership.

2. Context

Connected Futures

Connected Futures Fund is our flagship £16 million fund to support young people to get good jobs through pioneering local partnerships. Through Connected Futures, Youth Futures aims to develop and test new approaches to breaking down barriers and improving access to employment for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

This year, the programme has been expanded to develop partnerships in areas with high levels of unemployed young people with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. These include Leeds and Bradford (led by Hamara Healthy Living Centre), Walsall (led by Aaina Community Hub) and Sheffield (led by Firvale Community Hub). Some of the original Connected Futures areas also have a focus on young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, particularly in Brent (led by Young Brent Foundation). While their planned approaches vary, all partnerships intend to work closely with local employers to address barriers to employment and create employment pathways for young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

All Connected Futures areas undertake research and evaluation activity as part of their programmes. Youth Futures has also commissioned Ipsos Mori to conduct analysis of local labour market data in each Connected Futures area.

Ethnic disparities in employment

Young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds continue to face significant barriers to employment, including racial discrimination in the workplace. Recent analysis conducted by Youth Futures demonstrates that, except for the “white and Asian” ethnic group, unemployment rates¹ are higher for young people in England from minority ethnic backgrounds than for White British young people (Youth Futures, Unpublished)². The NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate for black Caribbean young people (25%) is also over double that of white British (11%) young people, and NEET rates are higher for those from white and black Caribbean (15%), Pakistani (14%), other Asian (12%), and black African (12%) backgrounds when compared to white British young people.

In a recent survey of young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds conducted by Youth Futures, almost half (48%) of respondents said they had experienced some level of prejudice and discrimination at work (Youth Futures, 2024). The majority (79%) did not report this to their employers, since they did not think it would make a difference. As a result of experiencing discrimination, almost three-quarters of respondents were motivated to look for new opportunities at other companies (73%) or even industries (71%). These findings build on those of an earlier survey, which identified prejudice and

¹ Defined as those who are not employed, but are seeking work.

² Data from the Adult Population Survey (APS) was pooled for 3 years (Jan 2020 to Dec 2022) in order to generate high enough sample sizes to allow for detailed analysis by ethnicity.



discrimination based on ethnicity as a key barrier to success in the workplace (Youth Futures, 2022).

The 2021 Census shows that a quarter of England's future workforce will soon come from an ethnic minority background (Youth Futures, 2024). It is therefore imperative that we dismantle the barriers that can prevent these young people from reaching their full potential, and employers have a key role to play in this.

3. Project overview

Aims

This project aims to support our Connected Futures delivery partners through addressing the following main question: *“What are the key opportunities and barriers to employers taking action to address ethnic disparities and tackle racial discrimination? How can identified barriers be addressed?”*

This research should provide our Connected Futures partners with insights and evidence to shape their project delivery. This project will also contribute to a wider research programme exploring how we can promote employer action and behaviour change to tackle discrimination against minoritised young people.

Research questions

Main question:

What are the key opportunities and barriers to employers taking action to address ethnic disparities and tackle racial discrimination? How can identified barriers be addressed?

Sub-questions:

Please note that these questions are starting points, which we anticipate being adapted in different case study areas.

- 1) What actions do employers report they are currently taking to a) recruit and retain more young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and b) tackle racial discrimination against young people in the workplace?
 - Why did they decide to take these actions? What key factors and drivers do they say encouraged them to engage with these issues?
 - How effective do they think these actions have been? Why/why not?
 - What formal EDI/anti-racism/anti-discrimination policies and processes do they have in place? How were these developed/who was consulted? How effective do they think these are/how could they be developed and improved?



- What data do employers collect on the recruitment and retention of young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds? How has this supported them to take action and improve their policies and practice?
 - What roles and functions are felt to have been important in driving action? How do different roles and functions work together?
 - What benefits do employers who are acting to recruit and retain more young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds report?
- 2) What barriers do employers report in relation to a) recruiting and retaining more young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and b) tackling racial discrimination against young people in the workplace?
- How do employers say these barriers are influencing their current policies and practice and/or preventing them from taking action?
 - How do employers think these barriers should be addressed?
- 3) How far do employers recognise and understand the issues in relation to ethnic disparities and racial discrimination in the workplace? Do they recognise the need for action, or is this in itself a barrier to action?
- 4) What further actions do employers say they would like to take to a) recruit and retain more young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and b) tackle racial discrimination against young people in the workplace?
- Why would employers like to take these actions? What are the key factors and drivers encouraging them to take action?
 - What opportunities do employers think currently exist for taking these actions? What opportunities do they think might arise in the future?
 - What barriers do employers think might prevent them from taking these actions? How do they think these barriers could be addressed?
- 5) What actions do young people think employers should take to a) recruit and retain more young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and b) tackle racial discrimination against young people in the workplace?
- What are the perspectives and experiences of young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds in relation to employers' current practice?
 - What different or additional actions do young people think employers should take, and why? How would this support them into and at work?
 - How willing are employers to take these actions, and why/why not? Where they are willing to take these actions, what support, if any, would they need to do this?
 - Where do employers' and young peoples' views and expectations align, and where are there tensions? How might tensions be resolved?



- How far do employers and young people think that young people's voices are considered when addressing these issues? How might this be improved going forwards, and what are the opportunities and barriers?

Scope and themes

This research should focus explicitly on issues related to ethnic disparities and racial discrimination, rather than on recruiting and retaining young people more generally. Intersections (for example, between ethnicity and gender, social class, religion etc.) are also in scope for exploration.

In the research questions above, we explicitly separate out 'recruiting and retaining young people' and 'tackling racial discrimination'. This is because evidence from our recent survey suggests that direct discrimination, such as being subject to racist harassment and bullying, is still an issue for young people. We want to make sure that the research explores these issues as well as issues related to recruitment and retention.

The research should take a place-based approach, considering how employers recruit and retain from *local communities*, and what local opportunities and barriers exist. It will also be important to consider the role of employer characteristics (such as size and sector). However, the research should also identify where there are common findings and themes between different areas and employer characteristics.

We are keen for this research to move beyond simply identifying and reporting employer barriers, towards practical lessons and solutions that can be implemented in the Connected Futures partnership areas (as well as more widely). Understanding the views and experiences of young people and identifying areas of agreement and potential conflict between employers and young people, will be an important part of this.

Method

The research will be conducted in our Connected Futures partnership areas that focus explicitly on addressing ethnic disparities. These are:

- Brent (led by Young Brent Foundation)
- Leeds and Bradford (led by Hamara Healthy Living Centre)
- Walsall (led by Aaina Community Hub) and
- Sheffield (led by Firvale Community Hub).

A summary of these partnerships is provided in Appendix 2. After agreeing a grant, Youth Futures will provide more detail on these partnerships and support with setting up introductory meetings. We have already contacted all these partnerships to inform them about the research and confirm that they are willing to participate.



The research will take a place-based, case study approach, with research questions and approaches being adapted to suit the needs of each partnership area (within the scope of the research aims). Please note that Leeds and Bradford should be treated as two separate case studies owing to the unique characteristics of each area.

In each area, the research partner should begin with a scoping interview with the delivery partner to establish:

- Existing knowledge against the overarching research questions, including findings from any research they have already conducted as part of their Connected Futures planning and delivery.
- Their Connected Futures delivery plans and how this work can feed into and support this agenda.
- Any key areas or issues they would like to explore through this research (within the scope of the overarching aims).
- Which employers and groups of young people they think we should focus on (drawing on their existing knowledge and Connected Futures research, including analysis of local labour market data undertaken for Youth Futures by Ipsos Mori), and how to engage them.
- Any practicalities around facilitating and conducting the research – for example, timescales and opportunities to align research with other planned activities.

Following this, the research partner will conduct qualitative research with employers and young people to address the research questions. This will most likely consist of interviews and/or focus groups, although there may be opportunities to conduct observations of activities being facilitated by the delivery partners if this fits in with the proposed research and timescales.

As well as conducting individual research with employers and young people, we would also like the research organisation to explore ways of bringing employers and young people together to share their views and experiences, with a view to coming to shared understandings and solutions. Again, activities already being organised by partners as part of their delivery may provide the opportunity for this.

The research organisation will need to consider how their research approach will facilitate open conversations around race in the workplace with both employers and young people. Both groups will need to feel that they are in a safe space to share their reflections, and issues of anonymity and safeguarding (of young people) will need to be carefully considered.



We would also like the research partner to conduct a smaller number of interviews and/or focus groups with other relevant stakeholders involved in Connected Futures delivery – for example, practitioners, community organisations or local government representatives. The composition of these interviews will vary according to the partnership area and should be decided in collaboration with Youth Futures and the local Connected Futures delivery partners.

We are keen to explore whether it would be feasible to conduct a small amount of secondary data and document analysis, if employers engaged through this research are willing to share their employment data (e.g. on recruitment and retention) and EDI policies. Owing to timescales, we anticipate small scale analysis of data from employers involved rather than wider local and regional data analysis (which has already been commissioned and is being conducted by Ipsos Mori). Research organisations should set out how they would approach this task, including how they would address confidentiality and data protection considerations, in their proposals.

Ways of working

There are several stakeholders involved in delivering Connected Futures, including the delivery partners, Youth Futures relationship managers, and commissioned learning and action research partners. The research partner will need to work effectively with these stakeholders, and should cost the time needed into their proposal for regular joint meetings and collaborative working. We envisage that the research partner will provide a named contact for each case study area, to ensure consistency for each of the areas.

Youth participation

Youth voice is a key component of Connected Futures delivery, and Youth Futures and the Connected Futures partnerships have a range of youth voice groups and mechanisms. Youth Futures will establish a youth steering group for this project, which will include young people from our Future Voices Group as well as young people from the case study areas once project delivery is underway. We expect that the research partner will engage with these young people at key points across the project lifespan. Our [recent report](#) in partnership with the Centre for Evidence and Implementation provides best practice guidance on engaging young people in research³.

4. Contractor requirements, deliverables, schedule and budget

Contractor requirements

The research team for this project should have:

- Expertise in delivering qualitative research and analysis.

³ Rowland, J., Wills, E., Ott, E. (2024). Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance. Centre for Evidence and Implementation



- Expertise in using research to examine issues related to youth employment. Relevant experience around racial inequalities is highly desirable.
- Knowledge of youth employment issues and policies, particularly in relation to young people who face marginalisation in the labour market.
- Appropriate infrastructure and procedures for gathering, handling and storing qualitative data.
- Appropriate ethical frameworks for the qualitative research in this project.
- Experience of working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders.
- Experience of working with young people as research participants and advisors.
- A clear and explicit commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Research teams should demonstrate a good understanding of the communities who are the focus of this research and the inequalities and disparities that impact them. This should come through either lived or extensive professional experience. Proposals should set out how they will bring this to the project and how this will inform and shape the research.

We are open to proposals either from a team at a single organisation that brings together the relevant skills and experience, or from two or more organisations working in partnership. In the latter case, the project proposal should include details of arrangements for collaboration between partners.

Deliverables

The research team will need to deliver the following outputs:

- An inception report/research plan outlining their approach and strategy for conducting this research, to be delivered after the inception meeting.
- Research instruments for the qualitative research, developed through discussions with Youth Futures and Connected Futures stakeholders.
- Consent and project information documents for research participants.
- A project ethics statement.
- Place-based outputs for each case study area. Exact outputs will be decided in collaboration with Youth Futures and Connected Futures stakeholders, but these may include short summary reports following key research activities, place-based case study reports when the research is complete, and a presentation or workshop in each area.



- So that findings can quickly feed into local planning and delivery, we anticipate that place-based outputs should be produced as (key stages of) research activities in each place are completed, rather than being published all together at the end of the project.
- Once research in all the areas is complete, the research partner should develop a final report and presentation bringing key findings and lessons together. The final draft project report will be peer reviewed by an external expert or experts. The second draft of a report is normally sent to peer reviewers after a first draft is reviewed by Youth Futures.
- We also anticipate the findings from this project being of interest to wider stakeholders, including employers, local government stakeholders and policy makers. We are keen to discuss how key project findings and lessons can be shared more widely once the initial place-based research is complete.

Representatives from the successful research partner will also attend:

- An inception meeting with Youth Futures staff.
- Fortnightly check-in meetings with the Youth Futures project team, Youth Futures Relationship Managers, and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. learning/action research partners).
- Interim and final presentations of findings.

Timescales

The table below outlines proposed timescales for this project. As outlined above, research activities and outputs in the case study areas will be staggered according to their delivery timescales:

Date	Activities and outputs
W/b 12 th August	Inception meeting
W/b 2 nd September	Inception report/research plan and ethics statement
By end of September 2024	Scoping interviews with each case study area
From September 2024 to March 2025 (staggered according to areas' timescales)	Conducting research and delivering place-based outputs
April 2025	First draft of final report
May 2025	Second draft of final report
End of May/beginning of June 2025	Final report for publication



Budget

The total budget for this work is £120,000.

5 Submitting a proposal

Key dates

The schedule for submitting a proposal is:

- **Call for Proposals issued:** 24th June 2024
- **Deadline for submission of questions:** 8th July 2024
- **Question responses circulated:** 12th July 2024
- **Proposal submission deadline:** 19th July 2024
- **Interviews:** w/b 29th July 2024
- **Start date:** w/b 5th August 2024

Proposal requirements

Please submit a short (c. 8-10pp) proposal, outlining:

- Your understanding of the project.
- Your research design, approach, and methods. Your preferred approach, or different options with different budget implications.
- Details of your approach to research ethics, and how you would approach the ethical considerations for this project.
- Details of your experience of and approach to youth participation, and how you would involve youth representatives from the case study areas and Youth Futures' Connected Futures Youth Steering Group in this research.
- Your appraisal of the challenges likely to arise in this research including any risks and mitigations. This could include a formal risk register.
- A timeline / Gantt chart for deliverables.
- At least one example of a relevant project undertaken previously by your organisation *and/or* including at least one of your team leads.
- Short biographies of all team members, their experience and role within the project.
- Contact details of two referees who have commissioned similar work from you.



- Your budget estimate and a full budget breakdown (including the daily rate for different staff leading different elements). Youth Futures will award the successful research organisation[s] a grant to carry out the research and produce final outputs. To the extent that the research organisation[s] believe[s] it is necessary to charge VAT on the Grant Award, this amount will **be inclusive of VAT**.
- Contact details for the project lead, and for all team members.

In addition to your response, we would like you to attach the following policies for every organisation involved in the bid:

- Data protection and GDPR
- Safeguarding

Please note that value for money is a key criterion in the assessment of bids.

Please submit your proposal to research@youthfuturesfoundation.org by 12:00 on **19th July 2024**.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the tender in more depth, please email research@youthfuturesfoundation.org and use the title '**Qualitative research: Promoting employer action**' in your email heading.

References

Rowland, J., Wills, E., Ott, E. (2024). Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance. Centre for Evidence and Implementation. [Youth-Participatory-Approach-Report-Peer-Review-Final.pdf \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#)

UK Government (2017) *Race Disparity Audit*. [Race Disparity Audit - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Youth Futures Foundation (2022) *Narrowing the gap: tackling ethnic disparities in youth employment*. [Youth-Futures-Foundation.-Narrowing-the-gap-tackling-ethnic-disparities.pdf \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#)

Youth Futures Foundation (2024) *Discrimination and work: breaking down the barriers faced by ethnically minoritised young people*. [Discrimination-and-work-report.pdf \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#)



APPENDIX 1 – QUALITY CRITERIA

Quality criteria

Category	Criteria	Score
Expertise and experience (30%)	a) Recent and/or extensive track record of the organisation and proposed team in conducting relevant research projects.	0 - Totally fails to meet the requirement - information not available
	b) Comprehensive understanding of how to effectively and sensitively conduct research to address the questions and issues set out above.	
	c) Experience and expertise in conducting place-based research in local areas, and in co-ordinating with delivery partners in these areas.	1 - Meets some of the requirements - limited supporting information
	d) A good understanding of the inequalities and disparities that impact the young people who are the focus of this research (gained through relevant lived and/or extensive professional experience).	2 - Meets some of the requirements - reasonable explanation
Methodology and approach (35%)	a) A clear research framework that fully meets the project requirements.	3 - Mostly meets the requirements - good explanation, some evidence
	b) High quality, appropriate and sensitive data collection and analysis methodologies that can fully answer the research questions.	
	c) A plan to facilitate and capture policy and practice learning and deliver high-quality, appropriate outputs that can be shared with a variety of research, policy and practice audiences.	4 - Fully meets the requirements - detailed explanation and evidence
Project Management, data security and risk mitigations (15%)	a) A clear project timeline with well-phased deliverables and milestones, supported by strong project management protocols.	5 - Exceeds requirements - extensive explanation and evidence
	b) Robust policies and procedures for collecting and storing personal data from participants. Robust data protection/GDPR policies, procedures and (where possible) industry standards (such as ISO 27001). Experience of supporting a variety of organisations to comply with data protection law.	
	c) Sensitivity to potential project risks and clear strategies to support the mitigation of these.	
Costings (20%)	a) A clearly costed proposal that demonstrates high quality delivery.	
	b) High quality processes, including ensuring sufficient time for analysis, costing for transcriptions and sufficient staff seniority and time to effectively quality assure all outputs.	
	c) Proposed costings demonstrate value for money (number of research days, quantity and quality of outputs, appropriateness of proposed team composition and management).	



APPENDIX 2 – OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY AREAS

Area	Delivery partner	Project summary
Brent	Young Brent Foundation	<p>The Brent Connected Futures partnership includes Young Brent Foundation, Brent Council and three housing associations. It focuses on three estates in the Wembley area (Chalkhill, Church End and Stonebridge). These are characterised by high levels of diversity, deprivation and youth unemployment.</p> <p>During the first phase of delivery, from summer 2022, the partnership delivered a peer research project called Flourishing Futures. This identified a range of barriers to employment for young people, including direct and indirect racial discrimination against young Black people, and a disconnect between young people and local opportunities. During the next phase of delivery, the delivery partner plans to further explore and address this disconnect, focusing on employers in the Park Royal Industrial Estate. This will involve further youth-led research and training young people as Youth Employment Ambassadors to engage with employers and advocate for young people.</p>
Leeds and Bradford	Hamara Healthy Living Centre	<p>This partnership aims to develop new pathways into work and training for young people with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and other British Muslim heritage. To do this, partners will develop and test an employer support package and a new framework for youth employment among South Asian communities, focusing mainly on public sector employers. They will also bring employers and young people together to challenge the recruitment and management practices that create barriers for young people.</p>
Walsall	Aaina Community Hub	<p>This partnership aims to develop a robust strategy to improve employment prospects of young people aged 16-24 from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi community and improve local employers' awareness of and engagement with young people. Key to this will be establishing a Youth Employment Task Force to engage with local employers, undertake diversity health checks, and deliver targeted interventions to</p>



		address identified issues and broker access for minoritised young people. The partnership will also work with employers to develop and sign up to a youth employment diversity charter. Aaina aims to work with public and private sector employers of all sizes.
Sheffield	Firvale Community Hub	This partnership is still in development, but aims to develop new approaches to support 18-25-year-olds experiencing multiple barriers into secure employment with good progression opportunities. The focus is on young people with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and other British Muslim heritage. The partnership is keen to focus on increasing local young people's access to apprenticeships.

