



Strategic Employer Engagement Partnerships; Increasing Apprenticeships Supply Application Guidance

September 2024



Introduction

[Youth Futures Foundation](#) is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people.

We want to see an equitable future society where all young people have the opportunity to be in good work.

Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about system change for marginalised young people:

1. **To find and generate high-quality evidence to better understand England's' youth unemployment and inactivity challenge, and most importantly to learn what solutions work to address this.** We do this through bringing together the best evidence already in existence and build on this by conducting original research and testing and evaluating promising interventions to produce much needed new evidence where there are gaps.
2. **To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers who have the means to make direct impactful change for young people.** We do this through translating the evidence practically for stakeholders to use and understand, and through partnerships and engagement to influence, inform and support them as decision makers to back evidence-based interventions that work.

Throughout our work, we proudly involve the voices, perspectives and participation of young people experiencing marginalisation, through our Future Voices Group, our young Board members and beyond.

We are seeking two strategic Employer Engagement Partners, with large scale employer memberships, to investigate, design and deliver assets, programmes or engagements for employers which will create an increase in L2&3 apprenticeship supply, focussing on driving change in employers' practice and long-term commitment to creating more opportunities for marginalised young people.

Why is this funding for Employer Engagement and Apprenticeship Supply needed?

The world of work is changing, and the hunt to recruit and retain talent for future prosperity, economic growth and resilience has never been more important for employers. Young people are the labour market of the future and are a key asset for employers looking to future proof their workforces. It is vital that employers are motivated and able to recruit young people from marginalised groups and understand they might need more tailored support to find and keep a good job.

The reward for addressing youth unemployment in the UK is large. According to 2023 **calculations from the [Youth Employment Group \(YEG\)](#)**, reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to the same levels as the Netherlands could generate £69 billion in GDP. And retaining a talented and diverse workforce is proven to be beneficial, employers with more diverse teams have 36% better financial returns, according to [BITC's Race at Work Survey 2021](#).

[Youth Futures Foundations Employment Toolkit](#) launched in 2022 suggests that, on average, for **every 10 young people who can take part in an apprenticeship as a targeted youth employment intervention, one will get a job who wouldn't have done so** without the intervention. Whilst limitations remain in terms of the volume of studies available current research does show that apprenticeships could have a **high positive impact** on youth employment outcomes and should therefore be considered by employers looking to change the dial for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

New evidence and analysis by the [CIPD, working with Youth Futures Foundation](#), found that more than half of employers (60%) think that the primary purpose of apprenticeships should be supporting young people to enter the workplace, with just 15% saying it should be used to develop existing staff.

Of the over 2,000 employers polled, Nine in ten* (89%) back the recommendation of an Apprenticeship Guarantee for young people up to the age of 24, ensuring that a Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship place is available for every young person who wants one and meets the minimum entry requirements.

However, we know that there is a mismatch between the aspiration and the current apprenticeship landscape for young people. [Analysis of government data by the London Progression Collaboration \(LPC\)](#) shows that **since 2014/15, entry-level apprenticeship starts in England have plummeted by 72 per cent**, while at the same time starts in higher level apprenticeships, often taken up by older people, have skyrocketed by 400 per cent.

[Research by the Learning & Work Institute](#) found that just over a third of apprentices who drop out of their programme felt that a lack of support from their employer had contributed to their decision to leave. Youth Futures' analysis found that young apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds have lower achievement, retention, and pass rates than their white peers. [This could indicate systemic barriers and unequal access to resources.](#)

But young people from diverse backgrounds are enthusiastic about vocational training. In our recent report on our [Workplace Discrimination Survey](#) we found that young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds favour training and upskilling interventions as ways to overcome disadvantage. **22% wanted to see guaranteed internships and apprenticeship placements for ethnically minoritised young people.**

Why are we investing in strategic partner organisations?

Partnering and funding those who are experts in their field and who have established strong employer relationships is fundamental in us achieving our mission. This portfolio of partners will sit along with others who are working to influence and mobilise employer action and practice, with a focus on creating opportunities for marginalised young people.

Our current partnership portfolio includes Business in the Community, Youth Employment UK and others.

What we're doing

Under our Employer Engagement Strategy, we want our partners to engage and enable employers to think differently about their own Talent Mapping, Workforce Planning and Youth Employment Strategies.

With our funding, partners will invest in exploring and understanding why employers might struggle to match their own supply, with the demand we're seeing for apprenticeships and the aspiration of employers highlighted in [our recent research with CIPD](#). Following a phase of investigation, consultation and learning with employers, our partners will design and deliver assets, programmes or engagements for employers. It will provide a sustained approach by enabling partners to develop or embed practice which will be continued through their wider membership offer.

These assets, programmes or engagements for employers will deliver on increasing supply of Level 2/3 apprenticeship opportunities and starts between 2025 and 2026.

Details of the Strategic Employer Engagement Partnerships – Increasing Apprenticeship Supply

We seek to award funding to strategic partner organisations who can deliver against the aims of our Employer Engagement Strategy.

We expect to make two grant awards for the Strategic Employer Engagement Partnerships: Increasing Apprenticeship Supply. However, we are very much open to partnership proposals that enable organisations to pool their resources and skills and bring in specific expertise to deliver this work.

Our two grants will be awarded to:

- One employer membership organisation with a strong membership of large employers, both corporate and public sector, and across sectors and regions.
- One employer membership organisation with a strong membership or focus on SME engagement.

Through the partnership we aim to enable partners to build a set of tools, assets, programmes or engagements for employers that will support employers to address or redesign their workforce planning activities, increase their supply of level 2&3 apprenticeships, and in doing so, increase our understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by employers. This could include employer training, toolkits, frameworks or templates, resources, campaigns, events or other activity. It is important that these assets, programmes or engagements are co-designed with employers and answer the needs of employers in the membership and beyond –the focus of this partnership is on driving employer change and ensuring that is sustainable and replicable.

We want to work with partners who can demonstrate that they can deliver employer change at scale and will want to see how partners aim to achieve this with targets in terms of numbers of employers engaged and apprenticeships created that would not have otherwise been on offer. During the funding period, we expect that the assets, programmes or engagements should be available to all employers, not limited to paying members or gatekept behind a paywall.

When looking at increasing the scale of apprenticeships we are particularly interested in approaches that improve practice when supporting marginalised young people. A strategic partner will need to work closely with Youth Futures to deliver support that aligns with our evidence on apprenticeships and employers.

Intentions of the Strategic Employer Engagement Partnership for Increasing Apprenticeship Supply:

We are looking for strategic partners that can work in partnership with Youth Futures, to:

- Investigate, understand and report on the challenges and barriers that employers in their membership face, in their workforce planning and talent strategies, specifically related to apprenticeship supply and opportunities for young people.
- Investigate, understand and report on why Level 2/3 apprenticeship opportunities are rapidly decreasing.
- Design and deliver sustainable and free assets, programmes or engagements which will support employers to commit to increasing L2/3 apprenticeship starts between September 2025 and September 2026
- Report and share learnings with YFF and the wider sector on successfully engaging employers and increasing apprenticeship supply.

In addition, the strategic partners will:

- Co-design and deliver a Collective Action Campaign alongside YFF and the other Phase 1 partner, driving wider engagement across the sector and employers, to pledge and enact an increase in L2/3 apprenticeship supply, with intent to ringfence for marginalised young people.
- Work closely with YFF to develop strong policy recommendations on apprenticeships, engaging with our policy activity where there is opportunity to.

Timeline: milestones

Activity	2025				2026		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Partnership start	x						
Partnership end							x
Exploration: conducting investigation/ research	x	x					
Exploration: reporting on findings		x	x				
Design: Assets, programmes or engagements		x	x				
Delivery: Assets, programmes or engagements			x	x	x	x	Cont.
Report: Impact Measurement							x
Co-design: Collective Action Campaign		x	x				
Delivery: Collective Action Campaign				x	x	x	x

What type of organisations 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).

Please note:

- It is desirable, but not essential, for your organisation to have expertise in youth employment. It is essential that you recognise the importance of this agenda, in addition to Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI), and be willing to champion this work to help improve job outcomes for marginalised young people across England.
- It is not necessary for you to be a membership organisation, but it is essential that you have an active following or network of employers in England that you are able to engage and get to deliver change.

A strong track-record is desirable in the following areas:

- **EMPLOYER MEMBERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT:** Captivating, influencing, supporting and nurturing strong relationships with influential employers.
- **APPRENTICESHIPS:** Although it is not necessary to be solely focused on apprenticeships organisationally, a strong expertise or deep pre-existing understanding of the apprenticeship landscape will be required.
- **KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION:** Sharing learning, evidence and research, to inform, transform and develop practice across the sector.
- **PRODUCT DESIGN:** Have the tools, resourcing and expertise to design sustainable assets, training, programmes, tools, resources and engagements which speak to the needs and ideas of the employer audience.
- **TARGET DRIVEN:** Using evidence-based approaches, have a track record of reaching employers and measuring impact of the work.
- **PARTICIPATORY APPROACH:** Co-designing alongside employers and young people for maximum authenticity and impact. Embedding youth voice and leadership across the employment space.
- **COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIP:** Enabling and facilitating collaboration with diverse stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes for young people.
- **CAMPAIGNING:** A strong ability to engage the wider employment sector in collective action, using reputation and presence to inspire a movement for change.

Eligibility criteria

You will need to demonstrate how your organisation meets the following eligibility criteria:

- Have at least 70 active employers in your network, membership, following or movement.
- Reach across England and/or be able to demonstrate how your approach could be replicated across England.

- Have been operating for at least three years.
- Have income of at least £250,000 in your last published accounts and the equivalent of at least three months' operating expenditure in cash reserves
- Align with our mission and target groups of young people (Ethnically Minoritised, Care Experienced, Criminal Justice Experienced, Mental Health, SEND and NEET being an overarching focus).

Key areas against which you will be scored

Full information on the questions can be found below. The criteria against which we will be scoring applications includes:

- Demonstration of how you will reach employers at scale – cross sector.
- Outline of how you will deliver impact on the number of L2/L3 apprenticeship starts available for marginalised young people.
- How you will engage employers throughout the partnership
- Your approach to insight and evidence gathering and activation, inclusive of participatory approaches with employers and young people

What funding is available?

Restricted investment of up to £150,000 per partner, for an 18 month period, to work with strategic partner organisations that:

- meet the criteria set out within this guidance
- can commit to the full timeline and activity set-out under this partnership
- are / will be ready to commence delivery of their proposal by 1st February 2025

What can the funding be spent on?

This is a restricted investment to deliver your proposal, and can include the overheads and the 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.

Our support offering

Alongside the funding needed to deliver on the above, we will be providing support to our partners in the following ways:

Workshop 1: Apprenticeships- the evidence and tools (March 2025)

Workshop 2: Co-designing a collective action campaign (June 2025)

Workshop 3: Embedding evaluation and impact measurement (September 2025)

Each workshop will last 1 day and will invite staff from partner organisations to come together at our offices in London, Birmingham or Leeds to collaborate and learn together. We will invite experts in evidence and co-design to equip you with insights and skills needed to take on the next stage of the partnership.

In addition, partners will have a dedicated project team at YFF, who will support and collaborate with you throughout the partnership, with regular check-ins, problem-solving and connections to our networks.

How to apply

We are inviting eligible organisations to complete [an Application form](#) and provide relevant due diligence information.

You will be required to make an account and complete the application form. Further information about we will ask for in the application form and the required due diligence information is outlined below.

How will decisions be made?

- **Stage 1 - Application assessment:** Your written application will be assessed against the purpose and criteria of this partnership as outlined in this guidance document. Applicants will then be notified on the outcome of your application by email.
- **Stage 2 – Interview:** If your application progresses, as above, we will invite you to meet with us (most likely online) for an interview to support the assessment of your application. Interviews will likely take place at the beginning- middle of October 2024. Ideally, we would like to meet with the project lead, a member of your senior leadership team or committee / Board and anyone else you think would add value to your interview.
- **Stage 3 – Employer case study:** Alongside your interview, we would like to invite 2 of your employer members to have an informal chat with us, where we will ask them to give us a verbal case study of how they've interacted with and benefited from your existing assets and support.
- **Stage 4 - Final decision:** Final decisions will be communicated by email after our Grants & Evaluation Committee has met in late November 2024.
- **Stage 5 – Contracts and due diligence:** Following our decision, we will enter a phase of drawing up legal contracts and funding agreements with our 2 chosen partners, which will lead us to the partnership start and comms launch in Q1 of 2025 (likely no earlier than February 2025)

Organisations will be asked to provide the following information in their application form:

- An organisational profile, inclusive of organisation's legal name, website, address, Charity Registration Number and / or Company House reg (if applicable)
- Key contact details
- Short biographies of management team and board members/ trustees
- Membership information, inclusive of membership criteria, number of active members, full copy of membership list
- Financial due diligence, inclusive of: A full budget projection for this project. If successful, applicants will be asked for further financial documentation, such as a bank statement and cash-flow forecast for the next 12 months- please see application form for details.
- To indicate whether a number of internal policies and insurance policies can be shared if successful in your application.
- 2 employer references from your membership, who we could contact should you get to interview stage.

Applicants will also be asked to answer the following application questions (maximum 400 word limit for each answer)

- 1. Please describe your employer network/membership and detail some of your previous experience of developing and delivering assets, programmes and engagements to serve employers in the employability space. Please tell us:**
 - *About the size and make-up of your membership, including types of employers/ sectors, geographical spread etc.*
 - *What activities, outputs and outcomes have you delivered and achieved?*
 - *If you have examples of delivering this support as part of a broader funding programme please explain how you worked with the funder/s?*
 - *Why your organisation is well placed to deliver and what products do you already offer that this additional asset could fit into?*

This question will be scored out of 5

- 2. Please tell us about your organisation's expertise specifically in the apprenticeship space:**
 - *Broadly, any packages of support have you delivered in the apprenticeship space.*
 - *Demonstrating whether you can offer any unique insights on apprenticeships or certain groups in the apprenticeship space?*
 - *At the first instance, what types of assets, programmes or engagements do you think would support employers to increase their L2/3 apprenticeship supply targeted at young people?*
 - *Please tell us what your organisation's aims are in the next 12 months in regards to building your apprenticeships activity and how this focus on increased supply would fit in with your wider organisational plans.*

This question will be scored out of 5

3. How do you propose to identify and investigate the barriers, challenges and needs of employers with relation to Level 2/3 apprenticeship supply?

- *What would be your approach in delivering this investigation and how would this investigation inform the following design and delivery?*
- *What methods of investigation would you use and with which stakeholders? Would you outsource any parts of phase?*
- *Can you give examples of evidence-based approaches your organization has taken previously?*
- *How will you embed evidence at the heart of design?*

This question will be scored out of 3

4. What outputs and outcomes do you intend to deliver with this funding?

- *What ideas do you have to scale up the L2/L3 opportunities for marginalized young people and how will you know you have been successful?*
- *What evidence have you used to develop your thinking in this area?*
- *How will you share your success and ensure that more employers are able to learn from your approach?*

This question will be scored out of 5

5. What is your approach to generating and sharing learning from this piece of work for the benefit of stakeholders across the Youth Employment sector in a Collective Action Campaign (including but not limited to Youth Futures Foundation, your own network/members, other partners, philanthropic funders, commissioners, other frontline delivery organisations and policy makers)?

- *What learning outputs will you generate of value to your network/membership and the wider youth employment ecosystem?*
- *How will you influence and / or support other organisations or employers to act on the information received?*
- *What organisations will you reach and what is their relevance? How and when will you reach them? How many organisations and how many individuals will be impacted by the Collective Action Campaign?*
- *How will you measure the effectiveness of disseminated learning? What does 'success' look like for this piece of work?*

This question will be scored out of 3



What is the deadline?

The application form will open at 10am on Monday 2nd of September.

The deadline for receiving all applications is 5pm on Friday 4th of October 2024. Please note that if you submit your application after this deadline it may not be assessed.

Further information

If you have further questions, or need help, please contact us if by calling on 020 7553 4539 or emailing

Eleanor.marsea@youthfuturesfoundation.org

Annex

For further reading on statistics on apprenticeships supply, please see our data summary sheet, produced in August 2024.

[Apprenticeships Supply - Aug 2024 Data.pdf](#)