

What works to increase youth employment?

Insights from a mixed-methods review of evidence from OECD countries



Overview

This policy briefing summarises [a mixed methods review of evaluations of youth employment interventions](#) conducted by the Campbell Collaboration. The briefing sets out considerations and implications for policymakers for key commitment areas on youth employment.

What is the review?

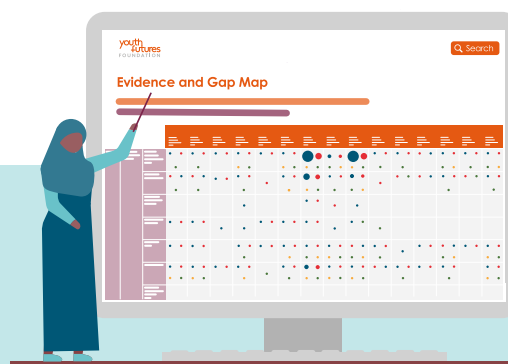
The mixed methods review summarises findings from:

- 1) 80 process and implementation studies from high-income countries in the Youth Futures Foundations' [Youth Employment Evidence and Gap Map \(EGM\)](#).



What is the EGM?

The EGM is the largest index of English language evaluations of interventions to increase youth employment. The current edition of the map contains 1,023 studies, including 393 process and implementation studies.



- 2) robust meta-analyses of quantitative evaluations of interventions to improve youth employment

What is a quantitative meta-analysis?

A method of research where researchers combine and analyse data from multiple different evaluations to get an estimate of the likely impact of an intervention.

What is a process and implementation study?

Process and implementation studies describe how interventions are put in place in different contexts, providing details of how they are organised and run, and of any barriers and facilitators encountered. They may explain which aspects of process and implementation appear to support effectiveness.

It includes information about:

- The impact of interventions on youth employment and other outcomes (such as skills development, wellbeing, earnings, programme sustainability)
- How interventions work
- Key barriers and facilitators
- How to implement them effectively (including eligibility, targeting, recruitment, participation, and retention)

Why is this review useful?

The review provides a wide-ranging overview of the available evidence on youth employment interventions, bringing together diverse types of available insights on factors that influence programme and policy design, delivery and implementation.

As a repository resource for policymakers in national, regional and local government, it can support the development of a range of reforms to meet ambitions for young people.

The youth employment policy challenge and opportunity

The latest ONS figures show that nearly 1 million young people are not in education, education employment or training (NEET), equivalent to one in eight.

Getting young people onto a successful and rewarding path to work is not just an essential step in their wellbeing, but key to our national prosperity.

Youth Futures' research shows that by matching the NEET rate of the Netherlands, which is leading the way within the OECD, the UK could see 500,000 more young people in employment and a £69 billion boost to GDP.

Mapping the evidence

While the review shows us what **existing evidence** is available, it also highlights where there are **gaps**, due to:

Quality	Many evaluations have been assessed as warranting low or medium confidence in their findings. A range of factors drive these 'confidence ratings', including low sample size, insufficient attention to attrition, and the way in which methods and findings are reported.
Number of systematic and summary reviews	<p>The EGM contains only 31 systematic reviews - a low count compared to the total evidence base. This suggests the youth employment literature is 'under reviewed'.</p> <p>Of these 31, many are narrative reviews that do not include quantitative meta-analysis. This means they are less useful in providing an account of which youth employment interventions are most likely to have a positive impact, or of the likely extent of that impact.</p>
Application context	There is a need for more high-quality impact and Implementation and process evaluations (IPE), particularly in the UK context.

Key insights

What are youth employment interventions?

The review identifies the most common types:

- training and upskilling (vocational learning, life skills development, and basic skills training)
- wage subsidies (Kickstart, Future Jobs Fund)
- work experience
- help with finding and applying for jobs ('employment services')
- financial support for young people (such as subsidies for transport or childcare)
- support for entrepreneurship
- mentoring or coaching

Interventions are often provided *programmatically*, where young people take part in a programme featuring two or more types of interventions.

For more detail, see our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#)

What impact do they have?

The review looks across the evidence to understand the effect of youth employment interventions.

It found that:

- Interventions are associated with **small improvements** in employment and other outcomes.
- **Training and upskilling**, and **entrepreneurship development**, appear to have the largest impacts overall.
- **Impacts vary considerably** depending on:
 - how interventions are implemented
 - the groups of young people recruited
 - the wider economic and social context
- An intervention that has a relatively small impact on its own can still offer valuable support to young people as part of a programme. For example, [wage subsidies](#) are most effective when supported by training or mentoring.

While it can be difficult to identify impacts for individual interventions that are delivered as part of a programme, the innovative analysis used in the [Youth Employment Toolkit](#) offers an account of the contribution of different components of youth employment programmes.



Barriers and facilitators

The review highlights common challenges and successes in the design and implementation of youth employment interventions:

Area	Barriers	Facilitators
Recruitment and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient lead times • Poor communication and coordination • Lack of flexibility • Inadequate data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored outreach activities • Flexible programme design • Strong relationships with trusted adults • Collaboration with specialist organisations that support young people and local employers • Initiatives that build trust with young people • Appropriate staff training and strong management capacity • Accessible locations • Sufficient delivery time
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthy procurement processes • Limited or late funding • Delays in distributing funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level government commitment • Stable, long-term, timely funding



Recommended policy responses

Addressing barriers and reinforcing facilitators is critical to improving the impact and delivery of youth employment interventions and initiatives.

To be effective, and reach those who need it most, programmes and interventions need:

Clear targeting and recruitment	Many employment interventions encounter challenges in recruiting and retaining the most marginalised young people, suggesting those furthest from the labour market are at a particular risk of not receiving support. When engaged, these groups often see the greatest benefit. Reaching the most disadvantaged requires deliberate focus in programme design.
Adequate programme preparation and duration	This includes piloting, and possibly a staggered rollout. If programmes are to scale successfully, it is crucial that they are informed by a clear evidence pipeline, starting with formative evaluation through a pilot, followed by efficacy trials, and then effectiveness studies, to ensure they are tested, adapted, and informed by what works.
A customised and flexible approach offering meaningful opportunities	Young people furthest from the labour market often face complex challenges, such as health issues, unstable housing or low education. Customised support and access to relevant services is necessary. Personalised support requires flexibility, a wide range of options and support for community organisations to improve accessibility.
Adequate funding, resources and staffing	To sustain programmes and interventions it is important that they have the resources for successful implementation.
National-led approaches with local flexibilities	While central government can set out the overall strategic direction of youth employment, local approaches will be pivotal in providing tailored customised support.



Implications for current policy priorities

Youth Guarantee Trailblazers	<p>Insights from this review can support strategic authorities and national government to consider design and implementation barriers and facilitators for the 'Youth Guarantee' trailblazers initiative pilot and national rollout, particularly around delivery and working collaboratively in local areas.</p> <p>Policymakers at all levels can draw learning about how to build in systems of evidence, data and continuous learning to improve future iterations of programmes, and new provision.</p> <p>For national policy makers the report can support considerations around ensuring there is foundations in place to gain maximised learning from their implementation to inform next steps.</p>
Work experience	<p>The government has made a commitment that all school and college students will receive a two-week (50 hours) work experience entitlement to boost employability skills.</p> <p>This report provides policymakers with an overview of previous work experience programmes, including information about effective design and implementation, and how to use existing systems, develop partnerships with employers, and tackle barriers and facilitators to employer participation.</p>
Growth and Skills Levy: Apprenticeships reform	<p>This report provides perspectives on what effective non-apprenticeship training looks like and can inform what types of programmes should be available via the new, more flexible levy.</p> <p>Policymakers can also use this report to gain an historical overview of apprenticeship employment programmes, plan the delivery of the new levy, and consider factors that have impacted the delivery of previous apprenticeship programmes.</p>





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