



The Missing Link

The role of trusted adult relationships in tackling the youth unemployment and inactivity challenge

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Policy Briefing

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Introduction

Youth unemployment and inactivity: a stubborn challenge that requires integrated public policy solutions

Sarah Yong, Director of Policy and External Affairs



The UK has a long-standing youth unemployment and inactivity challenge which is growing; in 2024 and 2025 the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) reached the highest level in a decade, equivalent to 1 in 8. Of the nearly 1 million young people who are NEET, nearly 600,000 are 'economically inactive', meaning they are not engaging with mainstream employment services provided by the state. We therefore need to meet the dual challenge of providing a stronger skills and employment offer for young people as well as solving how we identify, reach and engage them into this.

The challenge reflects wider systemic factors, spanning employment, education, skills, health, social care, youth policy, the labour market and more. A systems change approach that moves away from programmatic interventions and towards integrated solutions that cut across often siloed policy areas is needed if we want to meaningfully give young people better futures and reduce the burden on public services and economic growth. Research tells us that if we could reduce the UK NEET rate to match the Netherlands (the OECD's best performer) this would be worth a £69 billion boost to GDP and mean approximately 500,000 more young people could be earning or learning.

Policy development needs to ensure the 'offer' to young people is both universal and targeted to meet specific needs, based on the best available evidence. The Government's Youth Guarantee (which takes its inspiration from the Youth Employment Group's [Young Person's Guarantee](#)) is a welcome start with its emphasis on locally contextualised approaches in the trailblazer areas, but given the scale, stubbornness and likely further growth of the challenge, it requires greater ambition, scope and investment.

It also needs to ensure other areas of policy are leveraged into its intent for young people, including policies within the Make Work Pay initiative, those included in the Pathways to Work welfare reforms, ongoing apprenticeship reforms, and development of the National Youth Strategy and Young Futures Hubs.

Six key areas of the system that we know require attention

First, given their [evidence of additional impact](#), particularly for marginalised youth, boosting apprenticeship access and opportunities is essential through a [rebalancing of the system](#) towards young people. Second, protecting against the 'cliff edge' that so many young people face when they leave education through better transition support is key, especially for those from marginalised backgrounds with worse GCSE attainment.

Research commissioned by Youth Futures and conducted by Demos revealed the mistrust and negative experiences many young people have with the employment support system and the need for a third area; a welcoming 'front door.' This should integrate employment and skills support that can be tailored based on a young person's situation, with opportunities to access skills, training and workplace experience.

Fourth, greater support is needed for those facing additional barriers. More help and investment should be targeted towards young people from marginalised backgrounds – such as those with experience of the care and justice systems, those with learning disabilities and/ or autism, those facing discrimination and those experiencing [mental ill health](#) – now one of the leading reasons why young people are not earning or learning.

The fifth area is improving data availability, sharing and use – whilst it is possible to get a national picture of the number of NEET young people, there isn't the ability to obtain individual or localised information, meaning there is currently no effective way to understand 'who' to direct support and interventions to, especially if young people haven't registered for benefits.

Finally, there is a need to ensure 'youth policy' is integrated with education, employment and skills policy design, so the young person's journey is supported more holistically in what can often feel like a fragmented service environment, with trusted adults being central to this.

Spotlight on trusted adults and youth employment

The role of 'trusted adults' as part of the wider policy response to the NEET challenge has been much less focused on by policymakers and those in the public policy community than the other areas in need of reform highlighted above. This paper is intended to help bridge that gap at an important juncture as the Government's three flagship policy offers for young people become more refined; the Youth Guarantee, the National Youth Strategy and Young Futures Hubs.

There is real opportunity for alignment for young people under a mission-focused Government and this paper seeks to uncover the value of integrated policy thinking across the employment, education, skills and youth space. Although the evidence base showing the impact of trusted adults on young people and their outcomes is limited, it is growing and Youth Futures is helping to expand it through programmes

like Building Futures. In this paper we summarise a collation of the available evidence and research, together with insights from young people and real-life case study examples from our experienced partners delivering and testing interventions with marginalised young people where the role of trusted adults is often central to programme design. Bringing together support more traditionally seen as in the 'youth sector' with employment and skills provision is being explored locally in many of Youth Guarantee trailblazer areas to help identify and engage harder to reach inactive young people, and we feature examples of this thinking here too.

Relational support could provide the connective tissue for young people within the systems approach needed to address the UK's long-standing NEET challenge. Marginalised young people's voices are central to our work at Youth Futures Foundation and they often tell us they experience huge fragmentation when trying to access and navigate support. There is much more we continuously need to understand and learn, but focusing on solving this disconnection and disengagement should be a key principle of the wider integrated response young people need.

DAZO, 24, Future Voices Group Ambassador

"Youth services are more than support – they are our safety nets. They catch us before we fall, they build us before we break, they walk with us through the mess, through the healing, and into growth.

It's that trusted person who listens without judgement and who sees our potential even when we can't. For me, that person didn't always wear a suit or sit behind a desk – sometimes they were a youth worker equipped with the relevant training, who simply took the time to ask: 'How are you, like really?'"

Executive summary

Insights from research and evidence

A growing evidence base suggests that trusted adult relationships – with youth workers, teachers, mentors, and other practitioners – are critical interlockers to:

- Identify and engage “hidden NEETs” not engaging with Government support, through outreach.
- Build confidence and resilience, particularly for young people failed by previous systems.
- Connect young people to education, training, mental health, or employment support.
- Sustain young people’s engagement by helping them to navigate complex services.

Insights from programme delivery partners on the value of trusted adult relationships

- **Rebuilding trust through advocacy and consistency:** Many young people begin from a deficit of trust in support systems, and need sustained, dependable support.
- **Addressing foundational barriers:** Housing, benefits, and mental health challenges often need resolution before education, training or employment can succeed.
- **Coordinating support effectively:** Trusted adults can act as the glue between services, reducing duplication and ensuring warm, timely referrals.
- **Providing personalised, trauma-informed guidance:** Consistent coaching helps young people build confidence, navigate setbacks, and remain engaged.
- **Supporting navigation and sustainment:** Trusted adults can connect young people to opportunities, accompany them through early stages, and provide in-work support to prevent dropout.
- **Embedding protective relationships early:** Guaranteeing access to a trusted adult during schooling strengthens resilience and reduces risk of long-term disengagement.

Advice for policymakers

1. **Shared outcomes:** Use Government’s mission-led framework to build strategic cross-departmental coherence around a shared 10-year vision for young people’s outcomes – with achieving good work as a central pillar.
2. **Embed trusted adults:** Place relational support at the heart of the National Youth Strategy, backed by a clear, cross-sector definition and an Advisory Group.
3. **Enhance the Youth Guarantee:** Support trailblazers and future national rollout areas to overlay and integrate relational practice into delivery to ensure all young people – especially those economically inactive – can access a trusted adult to help them engage in and navigate the employment support offer.
4. **Develop centres of excellence:** Position Young Futures Hubs as cross-sector gateways for relational practice, linking youth services, education, health, and employment.

Trusted adults and youth employment

Today's youth employment challenge is different to the peak following the 2008 financial crisis. At that time, most young people not in education or work were counted among the active jobseeker population. Now, over 60% of young people who are NEET are not economically active. Among them, around 400,000 young people are disconnected from Jobcentres and mainstream employment services because they are not claiming unemployment benefits. They are, in effect, invisible to the system. Building a better employment and skills support offer for young people is essential, but will therefore also need to be accompanied by a strategic approach for engaging 'hidden' NEET young people if the challenge is to be addressed meaningfully.

As highlighted in recent research Youth Futures Foundation commissioned the Learning and Work Institute to do on the Youth Guarantee and the benefits system, dedicated outreach is required to support the high numbers of young people currently at risk of missing out on support altogether.¹ With over half a million young people economically inactive, there is a policy opportunity to enhance the role of the youth and community sector in meeting the Prime Minister's ambition to "eradicate youth unemployment". Youth and community workers have the unique potential to meet young people where they are, build trust and act as gateways into tailored support – especially for those facing multiple and intersecting barriers.

Insights from the programmes Youth Futures funds, tests and evaluates highlight the role trusted adult relationships can play in the successful delivery of interventions to support better youth employment outcomes.

Jacob, 24, Future Voices Group Ambassador

"A trusted adult gave me the confidence to thrive in employment, guiding me throughout the process of a supported internship that helps adults with special needs get into work. During exams, she was always there to provide extra support, ensuring I understood the questions, had extra time when I needed it and making arrangements like a separate room."

¹ Learning and Work Institute and Youth Futures Foundation, [Youth Guarantee and the benefits system](#): 2025

Defining 'trusted adults'

There is no common universal definition of a trusted adult,² though definitions usually include several key elements,^{3 4 5} and the required key characteristics and skills are often similar to that of professional youth work.⁶ According to a definition designed by young people working with YoungMinds, a trusted adult is chosen by the young person as a safe figure that listens without judgement, agenda or expectation, but with the sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a young person's life.⁷

In a young person's journey to good work, a 'trusted adult' is likely to include teachers, youth workers, or mentors amongst others. For those with specific targeted supports needs, others may be incorporated in this definition – such as personal advisors, mental health support workers or youth justice workers. Trusted adults play a crucial role in fostering these relationships, offering multi-faceted support that helps surface hidden struggles and rebuilds trust in systems that may have previously failed the young person. For those with complex or cumulative challenges, trusted adults act as connectors, bridging gaps between services and enabling access to multi-agency support. This coordination can help young people to engage with the right interventions, laying the foundation for them to pursue education, employment, or training opportunities. This is also important for marginalised young people who may find themselves in a precarious cycle of training, insecure work and unemployment.

Right to Succeed

"We firmly believe that social change is both structural and social/emotional and that the latter is often forgotten when it comes to implementing policy changes."

² Whitehead R et al., *The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent health and education outcomes*, Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland: 2019.

³ Ibid

⁴ Pringle, J et al, *The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent outcomes: a protocol of a scoping review*: 2018

⁵ Bellis M A. et al, *Adverse childhood experiences and sources of childhood resilience: a retrospective study of their combined relationships with child health and educational attendance*, BMC Public Health: 2018

⁶ White, C., *EIF Trusted Relationships Summary Report*: 2017

⁷ YoungMinds, *Defining a trusted adult*

Marginalisation and a disjointed system for NEET young people

Youth unemployment does not occur in an accidental or inevitable way – rather it is the result of a complex interplay of economic, social, and health-related factors that are often built into our system. Our [Systems Iceberg](#) model – developed through the Connected Futures programme – reveals how visible barriers often mask deeper systemic issues, including societal beliefs, structural inequality, and underinvestment in support. A recurring theme is the importance of support networks. Marginalised young people often face difficulties navigating systems alone, with limited access to quality careers advice, training, and opportunities. They also report stigma, low confidence, and mental health challenges, all of which can compound disadvantage and therefore risk of becoming 'NEET'.⁸

Forthcoming research Youth Futures commissioned from the Institute for Employment Studies explores the support mechanisms and engagement points for specific groups of young people who face greater challenges transitioning from education or training into quality employment. It highlights the deeply complex landscape of support that young people from marginalised backgrounds are more likely to encounter – navigating a web of statutory and charity/ community provision funded by central or local government.⁹ The report evidences the additional daunting challenges experienced by marginalised young people, particularly those who are disabled, care-experienced and/ or have experience of the criminal justice system. This includes complexities in accessing support, gaps in support, navigating opportunities and the need for knowledgeable trusted adults, such as social workers, youth workers, personal advisers, and mentors to journey with them to achieve successful outcomes. Extending personal support beyond the age of 21 (e.g. to 25 years) is particularly important for these groups.¹⁰

Our 2024 Youth Employment Outlook survey of 2,500 young people highlights:

- 62% believe it is harder to find a job now than a decade ago
- 44% cite lack of skills or training as the main barrier, followed by low entry-level wages
- 31% report having a mental health condition, and of these, 85% say it affects their ability to work

The long-term consequences of early unemployment are profound. Being NEET under the age of 23 is linked to lower lifetime earnings,¹¹ worse health,¹² and increased risk of involvement in crime or substance misuse.¹³ Youth unemployment itself can both cause and result from poor

⁸ National Centre for Social Research, [Risk factors for being NEET among young people](#); 2023

⁹ Institute for Employment Studies and Youth Futures Foundation, *Education to Employment Transitions: *Forthcoming**

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ P.A. Gregg and E. Tominey (2005), 'The wage scar from male youth unemployment', *Labour Economics*, 12, pp. 487-509, and (3) another article by Paul Gregg which finds long-term unemployment associated with unemployment up to 23 (P. Gregg (2001), 'The impact of youth unemployment on adult unemployment in NCDS', *Economic Journal*, 111(475), pp. F623-F653)

¹² The Health Foundation, [How employment status affects our health - The Health Foundation](#); 2024

¹³ Institute of Health Equity, [Local action on health inequalities: Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training \(NEET\)](#); 2014

health – young unemployed people are five times more likely to experience health problems,¹⁴ and the number unable to work due to ill health has more than doubled in a decade.¹⁵

Certain groups face significantly greater challenges. Those with experience of the care system are three and a half times more likely to be NEET,¹⁶ around 24% of young people with special educational needs and disabilities are NEET,¹⁷ and ethnically minoritised young people are among some of the worst affected, particularly Black men and those from Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds.¹⁸

Our analysis has estimated that around half of young people who are NEET for over a year have one or more of the characteristics outlined below:

- Black, Pakistani or Bangladeshi background
- Care experienced
- Contact with the criminal justice system
- Learning disability
- Autism
- Mental health condition

We know that these forms of marginalisation do not often operate in isolation and in fact it is overlaps in these risk factors that compound both disadvantage and likelihood of becoming NEET. NatCen research Youth Futures commissioned shows that five key factors strongly correlate with NEET status: low qualifications, limiting disability, young parenthood, poor mental health, and having special educational needs.¹⁹

¹⁴ The Health Foundation, [How employment status affects our health - The Health Foundation](#): 2024

¹⁵ Resolution Foundation, [Efforts to tackle Britain's epidemic of poor mental health should focus on lower-qualified young people](#): 2024

¹⁶ Dr N. Harrison et al, [Care leaver's transition into the labour market in England](#): 2023

¹⁷ National Centre for Social Research, [Risk factors for being NEET among young people](#): 2023

¹⁸ Youth Futures Foundation, [Youth Employment Data Dashboard](#)

¹⁹ National Centre for Social Research, [Risk factors for being NEET among young people](#): 2023

Delivery Partner Spotlight

Drive Forward Foundation

In 2024 we partnered with Drive Forward Foundation, a charity with 15 years' experience of supporting care leavers into sustainable employment.

The challenge: Young people with experience of the care system face significant hurdles in their journey to employment. A disproportionately high rate (39%) of young care leavers aged 19-21 in England are not in education, employment, or training – a percentage three times greater than their peers without experience of the care system. Disrupted educational experiences and lower educational attainment often create barriers, excluding young people from conventional education, employment, and training pathways.

Objective: Our programme with Drive Forward Foundation aims to robustly evaluate and understand how we can enhance outcomes for these young people and equip commissioners to deliver more impactful support.

Location: Greater London

Programme overview: Drive Forward Foundation's Care to Career programme stands out for its long-term, intensive, and highly personalised support package. Each young person is matched with a dedicated Careers Specialist who provides tailored guidance and one-to-one support.

This comprehensive support extends to professional mentoring, access to ring-fenced employment opportunities with reputable public and private sector employers (such as John Lewis and Thames Water), networking events, practical skills workshops, social activities, and counselling services. This multi-faceted approach seeks to address the diverse needs of care-experienced young people, through helping them to develop essential skills and build vital networks for sustained, fulfilling employment.

Our prior evaluation of Drive Forward Foundation's programme demonstrated evidence of promise. We are now embarking on a randomised controlled trial to assess the causal impact of the Care to Career programme on young people's education, employment, and training outcomes.

Trusted adults and delivery of the Drive Forward programme

For Drive Forward Foundation, a trusted adult is someone who advocates, has your back, and who can be consistently relied upon to listen, provide guidance and act in a young person's best interests. The importance of trust can't be overstated. For care-experienced young people, trust doesn't come easily when it has frequently been broken in the past. This means you're not even starting from a position of zero, you're starting from a deficit, so you have to work hard to build it.

Our Careers Specialists take the time to really get to know a young person and gain their trust, acting as the 'glue' that holds together what is often a complex path to employment. They recognise there is a hierarchy of needs and that base-level barriers – such as mental health challenges or issues with housing and benefits – must be addressed before a young person can thrive in work or education.

Co-location within local authority Care Leavers Hubs is central to our model. By embedding Careers Specialists directly into care-leaving teams, young people can access a range of services under one roof and this helps to reduce the burden of repeatedly telling their story. It also allows multi-agency collaboration, whether that's advocating for discretionary funds to cover simple costs like clothing and travel expenses, or liaising with housing officers and coordinating therapeutic support.

Our team work with young people to help them find the right job for them so it's not just a tick-box exercise – they have to find roles they can be passionate about and sustain. Our practitioners are with them every step of the way, holding their hand until they start work, helping them to stay in work, and making sure they know they can always come back to our services. Trusted relationships are not only about support in the moment – they are also about endings. We place importance on managing transitions positively, so young people understand that professional relationships may change without it meaning rejection, enabling them to build resilience for the future.

Youth Guarantee Spotlight

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

Local authorities: Peterborough City Council; Cambridgeshire County Council

Unemployment rate: 11.1%

Economic inactivity rate: 41.3%

Trusted adults and delivery of a Youth Guarantee trailblazer

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a diverse and largely rural population of young adults who navigate the same complex skills and employment ecosystem as their peers across the UK.

Our developing Youth Guarantee Policy Framework aims to identify and link various disparate support and services, steered by a Programme Board of leading cross-sector institutions and a youth voice forum to provide lived experience. Its building blocks are: Experiences of the Workplace; Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing; Provision; Wraparound Support; Employment Support; Careers Advice; Data; Transport; and Identification and Engagement.

So far, our launched interventions include a Digital Gateway hosted by Youth Employment UK, grants for employers creating paid internships and apprenticeships for young people, grants for frontline providers engaging NEET young people and working with our local authorities to scale up their tracking and analysis capacities. Each of these blocks allows us to bring partners together, identify gaps, test and learn what effective provision involves and present a cohesive and navigable offer to our young residents.

Trusted adult relationships are the primary driver of many young people's journeys through learning and work. Our Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer team is incredibly grateful to be working with 12 young adults with lived experience of being NEET through our Youth Employment Forum, who have shared stories of the trusted adults in their lives.

Our policy framework for the Trailblazer amongst other things identifies wraparound support, identification and engagement and mental health and wellbeing as central pillars for work with NEET young people. Support in these domains often rests with trusted adults: one Youth Forum member told the story of a support officer in their college who created an individual learning plan for them, listened to their mental health challenges and even advocated on their behalf when their course tutor advised that they drop their course due to struggling to keep up with the workload. In this young person's words, their support worker "got me through college".

Several Youth Forum members described experiencing a significant transition in their lives after coming into contact with a charity-based youth worker, counsellor or careers advisor whilst NEET, usually after a referral for a non-employment-related reason, such as being care-experienced, a young carer or in insecure housing. Through signposting and confidence building, these young people have been gradually able to build out their lives and networks, and retain a safe space to return to when the zero to sixty transition "from nothing to something" got overwhelming, preventing a cycle of burnout and dropout.

We are committed to embedding this learning in our policies and programmes. This August, we launched £1.5 million of grant funding for providers to deliver innovative frontline services to NEET 18-21 year-olds, facilitating place-based offers delivered by local organisations who are experts on the needs of the young people they serve. We will also be collaborating with partners in Peterborough to develop our own Youth Employment Hub that is a safe and welcoming place, and will design this in collaboration with the Youth Forum.

What we know from wider research

Although the evidence showing the impact of youth services on young people and their outcomes is limited (often owing to the complexity in evaluating youth work), there is a growing evidence base starting to demonstrate their importance – both in terms of young people's outcomes and economic benefits.

Outcomes for young people, society and the economy

A 2018 scoping review of the relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent outcomes, noted the potential benefits for health, wellbeing and educational attainment despite the sparse formal evidence base.²⁰ The importance of trusted adult relationships is evident across a wide terrain of needs and experiences for young people, in particular those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. In qualitative studies with children and young people, they consistently view relationships with trusted adults as supportive, describing a range of positive impacts, including greater self-confidence, better mental health (and decreasing anxiety) and improved school engagement and achievement.^{21 22 23} Trusted adults are particularly important for young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education and employment, supporting them to navigate and sustain engagement and acting as intermediaries and advocates.^{24 25 26}

These findings support a recent study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies which explored the effects of youth club closures in London on young people's outcomes, with 30% shutting down between 2010 and 2019. It found that teenagers whose nearest youth club had closed performed worse at school and were more likely to engage in crime – speculating that an important implication of the findings might be the role of mentoring from youth workers and their developmental benefits. Those affected by the closures performed nearly 4% worse in their GCSE exams, with an even more severe impact for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds (defined as those entitled to free school meals) where results fell by almost 12%.²⁷ The study further showed that youth club closures had a greater impact on disadvantaged young people compared to their peers and were more likely to lead to young people engaging in offending. These effects on crime showed lasting impacts as young people who lost access to a youth club were 14% more likely to engage in criminal activity in the six years following closure.²⁸

These findings are important given the known negative impacts of these risk factors on likelihood of not earning or learning. One of the five risk factors most strongly associated with a young person being NEET is not having an academic qualification above level 1,²⁹ and

²⁰ Pringle, J et al, [The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent outcomes: a protocol of a scoping review](#): 2018

²¹ Holding E, et al, [Exploring young people's perspectives on mental health support: A qualitative study across three geographical areas in England, UK](#): 2022

²² Whitehead R et al., [The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent health and education outcomes](#), Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland: 2019.

²³ Lester S. et al., [Service needs of young people affected by adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\): A systematic review of UK qualitative evidence](#), Children and Youth Services Review: 2020

²⁴ Offiong A. et al, ["I missed open arms": The Need for Connectedness among Black Youth affected by Parental Drug Use](#), National Library of Medicine, 2020

²⁵ Meltzer A. et al., [The Role of Trusted Adults in Young People's Social and Economic Lives](#), Youth and Society: 2016

²⁶ Relationships Foundation, [Relationships in Alternative Provision](#): 2021

²⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#): 2024

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ National Centre for Social Research, [Risk factors for being NEET among young people](#): 2023

further research has demonstrated the importance of and correlation between good qualifications on NEET likelihood across qualifications at levels 1, 2, and 3.³⁰ Young people with a criminal record are significantly more likely to be unemployed (18-20 unemployed: 74%, 21-24 unemployed: 69%).³¹

For those who have experienced adversity, including serious violence, criminal or sexual exploitation, the youth justice system and care system, trusted adult support can reduce harmful outcomes.^{32 33 34 35 36 37} Even in less commonly considered settings, trusted adults can play a vital role, for example in supporting rural young people,³⁸ or young people with cancer.³⁹

Recent research by the Centre for Young Lives and Alma Economics claimed that greater investment in youth and community spaces and trusted adult support could return at least £2.40 in social and economic benefits for every £1 spent. It suggests that employment and productivity benefits would be felt, particularly through the impact of youth and community work on educational attainment.⁴⁰

Mental health

One of the most critical issues associated with the increase in the NEET rate is the alarming rise in mental health conditions among young people. From the mid-2010s to 2021, there has been a 42% climb in the number of young people (18 to 24-year-olds) crossing the threshold at which they are considered to have a 'common mental health disorder' (such as depression or anxiety), with over a third (34%) of young people now affected.⁴¹ First-of-its kind research Youth Futures recently commissioned, carried out by the University of Manchester and UCL, on the factors behind the decline in young people's mental health has shown that reduction in child and youth services is one of four key drivers of evidential note.⁴² With poor mental health acting as a barrier to employment, the research states that investing in youth services is both a wellbeing imperative and an economic strategy – connecting young people to support, trusted adults, and positive futures.⁴³ Multiple studies highlight the role of trusted adults in promoting good mental health, preventing poor mental health, and helping young people navigate and access appropriate support.^{44 45 46 47}

³⁰ Impetus, [Youth Jobs Gap](#)

³¹ Ministry of Justice, [Offender Employment Outcomes - Statistical Summary](#), Official Statistics: July 2024

³² Frederick J. et al, [Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision](#), The British Journal of Social Work: 2023

³³ Bellis M. A. et al, [Adverse childhood experiences and sources of childhood resilience: a retrospective study of their combined relationships with child health and educational attendance](#), BMC Public Health: 2018

³⁴ College of Policing, [Vulnerability and violent crime interventions](#): 2022

³⁵ Thompson N., ['It's a No-Win Scenario, either the Police or the Gang Will Get You': Young People and Organised Crime – Vulnerable or Criminal?](#), Youth Justice: 2019

³⁶ Alliance for Youth Justice, [Young people in transition in the criminal justice system](#),

³⁷ Lewing, B. et al, [Building trusted relationships for vulnerable children and young people with public services](#), Early Intervention Foundation: 2018

³⁸ National Youth Agency, [Young people and rural youth services](#): 2021

³⁹ Cable, M. et al, [Determining Domains of Practice for Youth Support Co-Coordinator Work in Teenage/Young Adult Cancer Care in United Kingdom](#), Journal of Adolescent Young Adult Oncology: 2023

⁴⁰ Centre for Young Lives, [Ambitious for Young People](#): 2025

⁴¹ Resolution Foundation, [We've Only Just Begun](#): 2024

⁴² University of Manchester, UCL, Youth Futures Foundation, [Understanding the drivers of recent trends in young people's mental health](#): 2025

⁴³ Youth Futures Foundation, University of Manchester, and UCL, [Understanding the drivers of recent trends in young people's mental health](#) [Research briefing]: 2025

⁴⁴ Frederick J. et al, [Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision](#), The British Journal of Social Work: 2023

⁴⁵ Holding E. et al, [Exploring young people's perspectives on mental health support: A qualitative study across three geographical areas in England, UK](#): 2022

⁴⁶ Crouch, E., Radcliff, E., Strompolis, M. & Srivastav, A., [Safe, Stable, and Nurtured: Protective Factors against Poor Physical and Mental Health Outcomes Following Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma: 2018

⁴⁷ Lester, S., Khatwa, M. & Sutcliffe, K., [Service needs of young people affected by adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\): A systematic review of UK qualitative evidence](#), Child & Youth Services Review, 2020

Work readiness

The role of trusted adult relationships and youth employment was examined in a recent policy report carried out by IPPR, and in partnership with Youth Futures Foundation and Impetus. National polling of the general population found that 41% thought that ongoing stable support from trusted adults influence how ready for work a young person is after leaving education (one of the top three factors selected overall). The research also found that two-thirds of people believe enrichment activities improve young people's future employment prospects, and called for the Government's National Youth Strategy to embed trusted adult relationships – and their proven benefits – within a more interconnected youth offer, linked to an expanded Youth Guarantee.⁴⁸

Forthcoming research Youth Futures is undertaking on 'good work' has found that for marginalised young people (particularly those with additional needs such as SEN, neurodiversity, or poor mental health), their relationship with a trusted adult (often a youth worker) located within employability support services/ projects was crucial in developing their confidence and navigating the complex transition into employment. This is particularly important where good quality and secure work opportunities are minimal and young people find themselves churning between insecure work and unemployment.⁴⁵ Recent research commissioned by Youth Futures and undertaken by the Learning and Work Institute evidenced the experiences young people can have through Jobcentre Plus, recommending the need for a consistent and relational approach undertaken by specialist Youth Employment Coaches to better support young claimants to secure sustained job outcomes.⁴⁹

Sharna, 22, Future Voices Group Ambassador

"As a care leaver, I didn't have family guidance, but a trusted adult gave me the confidence and direction to build my future in education and employment."

⁴⁸ IPPR in partnership with Impetus and Youth Futures Foundation, [Towards a universal opportunity for young people](#): 2025

⁴⁹ Learning and Work Institute and Youth Futures Foundation, [Youth Guarantee and the benefits system](#): 2025

Strengthening the evidence base

It must be noted that the positive impact of trusted adult relationships depends highly on the quality of delivery⁵⁰ and the intentional design of services in acknowledging the role that youth work can usefully play in young people's journey to work. Further examination is needed to determine which approaches to delivering the role of a trusted adult practitioner are most effective and the impact on employment outcomes later on.

Through our Building Futures programme, Youth Futures will be strengthening the evidence base on NEET prevention and the role of trusted adult relationships. We will publish a series of rapid evidence assessments this year on the topics of mentoring and NEET risks factors, as well as qualitative case study research on Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI), from which we hope to gain greater insights into which groups of young people are most likely to benefit from a programme of one-to-one support from a trusted adult.

Cumbria Youth Alliance

“We do not feel that the question of whether a trusted adult is a positive addition to a young person's life is the most important one. ‘How’ the trusted adult's model of support is implemented is key to whether they will have the maximum impact on the young person/ people they are directly supporting. Where the model is robustly designed and implemented, it can contribute to the sustainable improvement of the wider system with the trusted adult feeding in their learning around barriers, enablers and ‘what works’ for marginalised young people in their context.”

⁵⁰ Whitehead R et al, [The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent health and education outcomes](#), Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland: 2019.

The missing link

Insights from the programmes we fund, test and evaluate across England show the link between trusted adult relationships and youth employment outcomes when thought about and designed together with intention, often playing an important role in helping to identify, connect and maintain young people with and into the system.

Youth employment and trusted adults

Our programmes show the powerful impact that the role of a trusted adult can have in helping to:

Identify	Connect	Maintain
'hidden NEET' young people who are not receiving benefits or accessing mainstream support services	young people into effective employment interventions	young people's engagement with the system through ongoing advocacy and guidance

Football Beyond Borders

"The relationship that participants develop with a trusted adult is essential for identifying unemployment indicators and safeguarding considerations. Until trust develops with an available adult, young people may withhold information that could highlight an increased likelihood of becoming NEET. This includes things like caring responsibilities, mental wellbeing, information about home/parents and peer relationships."

Cumbria Youth Alliance

“Marginalised young people often face a lack of stable home environments, positive influences and role models. They may also have limited knowledge of the local labour market, career pathways, and available opportunities. Access to reliable public transportation is often scarce, and their school attendance and academic performance tend to be poor. Additionally, many experience financial and emotional hardships, leading to long-term trauma, mental health issues, and social anxiety. They may also be unaware of the support services that could assist them or simply not recognise the need for or benefits of change.”

Right to Succeed

“It is challenging to accurately quantify the impact of a trusted adult relationship, but we know that where young people have an absence of them in their lives, it can be far more difficult for them to successfully develop a credible route map to long term, meaningful employment. For marginalised young people that already face a wide range of structural barriers to the labour market, having a trusted adult to support them in navigating the system's opportunities and barriers on that journey to employment is even more important.”

Delivery Partner Spotlight

1625 Independent People

In 2023 we announced funding for Bristol-based charity, 1625 Independent People (1625IP) and its Reboot West 3 programme.

The challenge: Care-experienced young people are three times more likely to not be in education, employment or training. Unmet emotional and wellbeing needs associated with trauma, disrupted attachments, instability and change, and a lack of support at crucial transition points, increases the likelihood of a young care leaver disengaging from the labour market.

Objective: Our funding aims to evaluate the impact of 1625IP's therapeutic approach and generate evidence on how Reboot West 3 supports young people into positive education, employment and training opportunities.

Location: South West

Programme overview: Working alongside four local authorities and the West of England Combined Authority, Reboot West 3 supports young people aged 16-25 across the west of England. The Reboot support model initially began in 2018 and is based on flexible and holistic long-term relationship-based coaching. Reboot coaches work with young people on a one-to-one basis and in groups in a variety of settings including their homes and out in the community.

Youth Futures Foundation has commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to conduct a randomised controlled trial exploring the impact of the Reboot West 3 programme compared to the usual offer young people would otherwise receive from local authorities. This launched in August 2023, with 427 young people participating in the trial, of which 265 are receiving support through the Reboot programme and 162 from their local authority.

This is the first high-quality trial exploring the impact of a programme of therapeutic support on the employment, education and training (EET) outcomes of care-experienced young people. Alongside this, BIT is also conducting an implementation and process evaluation exploring how, why, and in what conditions the programme may contribute to improved EET outcomes for care-experienced young people, as well as a cost benefit analysis to examine value for money. Findings are due to be reported in early 2027.

Trusted adults and 1625IP's delivery

Many young care leavers have experienced disrupted education, exclusion or trauma. For 1625IP, our starting point is always to meet young people where they are. We take time to understand the challenges they face and the personalised, holistic support they need at that stage in their life.

A central part of our work is helping young people connect with their values and build essential skills, so that the jobs, training or education they pursue are meaningful and sustainable. Our goal is not a quick fix, but the foundations for long-term independence. Alongside this, we prepare them for the realities of the workplace and develop their understanding of expectations, responsibilities, and how to advocate for themselves. This vital learning is often absorbed through family networks that not all young people can rely on.

The role of a trusted adult is about the journey, not the destination, and navigating through trial and error. Coaches celebrate achievements along the way and help to build resilience when things don't go to plan. For those with a history of trauma, setbacks can feel like permanent rejection. We want our young people to know that failure is not the end, but part of learning, and that it's normal to try different things before finding the right path.

Our coaches draw on their knowledge of the local labour market to provide informed guidance, helping young people explore opportunities that align with their ambitions and circumstances. Beyond individual support, our approach involves engaging with employers and offering training in trauma-informed practice so they can feel confident in supporting disadvantaged young people. We also build strong partnerships with education providers and employers, ensuring that if challenges arise, there is a supportive team around a young person.

Identifying 'hidden NEET' young people

In the UK, there are currently around 400,000 'hidden' NEET young people who are unemployed but not claiming Universal Credit and are therefore less visible to support services.⁵¹ A review of the evidence on youth employment interventions by the Institute for Employment Studies emphasises the importance of identifying and engaging young people who have left education and need additional support to get into training and/ or work.⁵² Alongside existing statutory services, many youth service organisations work hard to deliver an array of identification and engagement activities to reach young people who are unemployed and/ or not claiming Universal Credit.

Research commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation and undertaken by Demos on the effectiveness of Youth Hubs that were set up after the pandemic and as part of DWP's Youth Offer, underlined the important role of relational practice in supporting young people who otherwise had had negative engagement with the Jobcentre.⁵³

Identification of young people who need support finding work happens in a variety of ways using different information systems, close working with local partner institutions as well as outreach activities including detached youth work/ youth practitioner engagement in communities. A recent census Youth Futures Foundation supported and conducted by the National Youth Agency examining youth sector organisations found that those organisations delivering Employment, Training and Skills (ETS) were much more likely than other youth sector organisations to offer targeted support, mentoring, detached or street-based youth work, and youth voice activities.⁵⁴ Targeted youth employment interventions designed to support young people into work regularly consider the methods required to identify and enrol young people who meet the entry criteria.⁵⁵ Whilst information systems can provide significant detail required to identify young people, their scope and capability can be limited in the amount of information that is systematically captured, which can often necessitate alternative methods such as outreach activities that provide richer insights and ability to identify young people outside of the labour market – as was the case, for example, in the delivery of the previous Youth Contract for 16-17 year olds.⁵⁶

Identifying young people is the necessary first step in guiding them toward a positive pathway, but successfully engaging them to build a trusted relationship is the critical next step. A Rapid Evidence Assessment Youth Futures Foundation commissioned with the Institute for Employment Studies on supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful employment explored the power and role of 'cultural magnets' employed by effective youth workers and their potential impact to successfully engage marginalised young people:

*"Steer (2000, cited by Newton et al, 2010) led a meta-assessment of relevant research and evaluations and argues that it is **vital that young people at risk are offered opportunities, activities and services that interest them in order to attract them to voluntarily engage with support**. He terms these 'magnets' and suggests these cover: cultural magnets such as music, sports, or arts, and/ or financial magnets for example cash vouchers or payment for regular attendance. He goes on to state that residential trips, use of leisure facilities and access to technology (computers and recording equipment) have also proven as successful magnets, **along with youth workers who have charisma, leadership skills and the***

⁵¹ Learning and Work Institute and Youth Futures Foundation, *Youth Guarantee and the benefits system*: 2025

⁵² Institute for Employment Studies, *Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful employment*: 2020

⁵³ Phillips, A, Malik, N, *Launch Pads: The Futures of Youth Employment Hubs*, Demos and Youth Futures Foundation: 2024

⁵⁴ National Youth Agency, *Youth employment, training and skills research: 2023/24 Census and follow-up survey analysis*: 2024

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ Newton B, Speckesser S, Nafilyan V, Maguire S, Devins D, Bickerstaffe T (2014) The Youth Contract for 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training evaluation, Research Report, Department for Education [cited by Institute for Employment Studies]

ability to relate to young people. Similarly, Walker et al (2017, cited by Newton et al, 2010) report a provision that used 'sport' as a magnet to attract and retain people in a programme of support that went on to deliver welfare and education provision."^{57 58 59}

Whilst often implicit to the work of many organisations supporting young people, it is important to note the role that youth and community services (whether through centre-based activities or detached outreach) play in helping to identify and engage marginalised young people who can benefit from evidence-based youth employment interventions and may not otherwise access them. Reviews of employment support programmes consistently find that outcomes improve when young people are able to build a trusting and supportive relationship with their practitioner.⁶⁰

Right to Succeed

"Detached youth work can be particularly important for those young people furthest away from the labour market. A trusted adult can start to understand the potentially complex range of support needs required for those that may not currently be accessing any other services.

Trusted adults can be a key gatekeeper in enabling access to multi-agency support for young people who may have complex and cumulative issues that require specialist support before they could consider returning to education, employment or training."

⁵⁷ Institute for Employment Studies, [Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful employment](#): 2020

⁵⁸ Steer, R, *A Background to Youth Disaffection: A review of literature and evaluation findings from work with young people*, Community Development Foundation: 2020

⁵⁹ Walker, M., Hills, S. and Heere, B., *Evaluating a socially responsible employment program: Beneficiary impacts and stakeholder perceptions*. Journal of Business Ethics, 143(1), pp.53-70.

⁶⁰ Phillips, A, Malik, N, *Launch Pads: The Futures of Youth Employment Hubs*, Demos and Youth Futures Foundation: 2024

Connecting young people to the right support

When marginalised young people fall out of education or employment, they tell us they lose faith in the system. Trusted adult relationships take a person-centric approach which can build confidence and re-open the door to engagement with support services. Once that engagement has been secured through the building of a trusted adult relationship, youth workers/ youth practitioners can play an important role in connecting young people to the right interventions they need to support them into/ back into the labour market.

This connectivity relies on practitioners having a thorough understanding of local programmes of support and to be equipped to make relevant referrals or act as a 'gateway' into further targeted interventions. Where employment programmes take place external to a youth organisation or within a co-located service such as a Youth Hub, the ability of trusted practitioners to provide warm introductions and connections on behalf of marginalised young people helps to strengthen initial engagement.⁶¹

Cumbria Youth Alliance

“Link workers reach out and form connections with employers to explore and open up opportunities for young people. In-work support for young people and employers can help overcome emerging issues resulting in increased job sustainment. In the early stages of supporting a young person, with the use of our ME Tool assessment and action plan, where required we recognise the importance of going that extra step to support a young person to access external support to address their barriers. This might mean getting on a bus with them and attending a session together while they gain the confidence to go alone.”

⁶¹ Youth Futures Foundation, [Youth Hubs – what works?](#): 2020

Maintaining engagement with the system

The international evidence shows that alongside intensive support, there is significant value in 'personalised information, advice and guidance' when supporting young people furthest away from the labour market.⁶² For unemployed young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, the 'system' of support around them is often complex and difficult to navigate alone.⁶³ The consistent presence of a trusted adult to help young people orient themselves through programmes of support and into employment opportunities can serve as an important stable foundation.

Zoya, 20, Future Voices Group Ambassador

"Having a trusted adult has helped me more than words can express. They have empowered me to face difficulties in times of hardship. Many young people do not have safe spaces where they can express themselves. Therefore, having a trusted adult is of utmost importance for marginalised young people."

⁶² Cited in [Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful employment](#), Institute for Employment Studies, 2020

⁶³ Youth Futures Foundation, [Youth Employment Systems Map](#), , 2021

Delivery Partner Spotlight

Football Beyond Borders

Programme: Building Futures is our flagship NEET prevention programme testing mentoring support for young people in secondary schools.

The challenge: A young person's path to employment starts long before they reach working age. Factors like poor school attendance, exclusion and low GCSE attainment can increase the likelihood of being out of work, education or training later in life. We know that more preventative support is needed to address these challenges at an earlier stage, but little is known about the most effective interventions to support better employment outcomes for young people.

Objective: Building Futures will develop, deliver, and evaluate a mentoring intervention for secondary school students at risk of missing out on further learning or future employment. This initiative places trusted adult relationships and young people's needs at its core, tackling key risk factors by strengthening and combining education, skills development, wellbeing, and enrichment opportunities.

Location: Greater London, Greater Manchester, West Midlands

Programme overview: Football Beyond Borders is the first delivery partner for the initial phase of the Building Futures programme, which will see personalised coaching, mentoring, and wellbeing support delivered to up to 500 young people aged 12 to 15. The multi-year programme will reach at least 5,000 young people from now until 2029, with nine schools from areas with high NEET rates across the West Midlands, North West and London among the first to participate.

Football Beyond Borders (FBB) was chosen because of its successful track record of building trusted relationships with young people in schools from areas of socio-economic disadvantage and its experience in using therapeutic mentoring interventions. The quality of relationships between mentor and mentee has been found to be a key factor in achieving positive outcomes.

Trusted adults and Football Beyond Borders' delivery

FBB has adopted the YoungMinds definition of a trusted adult as a safe figure that listens without judgment, agenda or expectation, but with the sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a young person's life. We see the relationship between a young person and their trusted adult as the key driver of impact for our young people.

We see this impact as driven by two factors. Firstly, that the relationship itself is beneficial to our young person as a tool for developing their self-esteem and confidence along with key social and emotional skills. Secondly, that through this relationship a trusted adult is able to offer tailored support to the unique and often complex needs of a marginalised young person.

Young people on the Youth Futures programme face significant barriers that impact their engagement with education and employment prospects. Our young people are growing up in poverty, and often in overcrowded and poor-quality housing. Many of the young people have a diagnosed special educational need and/ or poor mental health. Additionally, they are attending low-performing schools and growing up in areas of high material deprivation and with a prevalence of poor-quality work.

Providing young people with a trusted adult relationship enables tailored, focused mentoring support with the biggest barriers they face. Additionally, a trusted adult relationship will also be able to link this young person in with wider opportunities and services in the area, and often give these young people the confidence to attend.

FBB's vision is of a country where every young person has a trusted adult throughout their secondary school years. We're calling on the Government to commit to a Trusted Adult Guarantee – becoming the first country in the world where every young person has a trusted adult.

Currently, more than 600,000 teenagers in England say they don't have anyone outside the home that they can speak to when they are struggling. The Trusted Adult Guarantee sets out a three-point plan for providing all these young people with a trusted adult through:

- School level accountability for the extent to which every young person has a trusted adult: To be implemented as part of the revised Ofsted Education Inspection Framework from Autumn 2025.
- National level tracking of the extent to which every young person has a trusted adult: To be implemented through annual school level surveys, with the policy change delivered through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, in line with the amendment proposed by Lord Gus O'Donnell.
- 'Trusted Adult' training of the existing schools and sports workforce, primarily the overlooked pastoral workforce in schools, the PE workforce through the Youth Sport Trust's existing development offer, and the FA's volunteer coaching workforce through its coach development and thriving community clubs initiatives.

We know from extensive academic research that a trusted adult is a significant protective factor for vulnerable young people across a range of factors including mental health, physical health and employability, and that the quality of relationships children presently have is the strongest predictor of their current functioning.

We see the Trusted Adult Guarantee as the critical step for minimising the likelihood of young people becoming economically inactive through school exclusion or mental health challenges, and as a driver of better engagement with existing initiatives targeted at reducing youth unemployment.

Youth Guarantee Spotlight

West Midlands Combined Authority

Local authorities: Birmingham City Council; Coventry City Council; Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council; Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council; Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council; Walsall Council; City of Wolverhampton Council

Unemployment rate: 9.2%

Economic inactivity rate: 43.5%

Trusted adults and delivery of a Youth Guarantee trailblazer

Too many young people are facing a future without a job, training or apprenticeship. We are championing young people through our Mayor's flagship [Youth Employment Plan](#), launched last year – ensuring the West Midlands has a Youth Guarantee that works for residents, with high-quality pathways and careers for all young people including a priority to support 20,000 work experience/ training placements. The region's commitment has led to innovative programmes such as our [Youth Path](#) partnership with Movement to Work and our expanded Path2Apprenticeship collaboration with DWP.

Becoming a Youth Trailblazer as part of the Get Britain Working plan – is a testament to the action and ambition this region has to making a difference in the lives of our young people. Using what works evidence, we have focused on strengthening connections and high-quality employment support for 18-21-year-olds, using models that result in meaningful outcomes, including drawing from international best practice.

We are partnering with employers who want to grow inclusive young talent with funded work experience, aligned to our [West Midlands Growth Plan](#) sectors as pathways to fulfilling careers. We are also providing greater access to successful pre-apprenticeship training opportunities for 18-year-olds to ensure they are not left behind, whilst harnessing the skills of our voluntary and community sector anchor institutions to support young people to engage, navigate and access the available wider youth offer.

To reduce youth unemployment, we know we need to address the fragmented, complex, and inaccessible system that puts off so many vulnerable young people, and their supporters.

Together with partners, our vision is to develop an integrated employment, health, and skills ecosystem, with effective signposting so that young people know what the region has to offer, and they can access the relevant support for them at the point of need.

Key to achieving that will be identifying and harnessing those sources of trusted advice and guidance within our communities, so that our offer resonates with young people's needs, hopes, and dreams.

The Employment and Skills system is complex. It can be difficult for practitioners to articulate but even harder for young people to navigate unaided. With an array of opportunities (often competing), it is important is that young people can access the right support, at the right time, for their journey. Through devolution, WMCA has worked with partners to co-develop hyper-local place-based solutions that are evidence-based, relevant and tailored to meet local needs.

We know from feedback and experience just how pivotal trusted adult relationships are to achieving a positive impact on a young person's journey – especially for our most vulnerable and marginalised groups where a lack of economic, social, or personal capital are barriers that hold them back.

Our [Connecting Communities Employment Support Pilot](#) demonstrated that to increase impact we needed to harness key community partners and the trusted adult status as a springboard into accessing the wider offer. In places without a physical Skills or Youth Hub, voluntary, community, social enterprise, and faith-based organisations can act as important anchors for young people.

Trusted adult relationships can dispel myths and through their advocacy support greater connection with a particular offer, amplifying outreach efforts. In developing an integrated ecosystem, we recognise that this is not just about providing a connection for young people – as important as that rapport is to establishing trust – but also how we support anchor organisations to guide our young people to the available and best-fit offer.

Through our Youth Employment Plan and the Youth Trailblazer, we are intent on simplifying navigation and the offer to make it more transparent and accessible. We are also looking at how we can empower sources of trust to give careers advice, signpost with confidence, and build long-term sustainable capacity within the system to support all young people so that they can thrive.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper highlights the valuable role trusted adult relationships can play in the systems change response required to address the UK's persistent youth NEET challenge. By bridging the gap between youth services and skills and employment support, these approaches can provide enhanced methods of identifying at-risk young people as well as enabling marginalised young people to rebuild trust in the system and the confidence to navigate through it, as well as connecting them to evidence-based interventions. The example programmes from our wide portfolio and regional partners provide a snapshot demonstration of the importance of a well-designed and well-implemented trusted adult model in unlocking pathways to meaningful employment. They reinforce how intrinsically linked youth employment and skills are to wider governmental priorities on youth and community services. We hope policymakers will find our understanding of the system and what works useful in helping to build a coordinated and more joined-up landscape for young people.

Advice for Policymakers

RECOMMENDATION 1: Use the Government's mission-led framework to build strategic cross-departmental coherence around a shared 10-year vision for young people's outcomes – with achieving good work as a central pillar

- Establish a shared youth outcomes framework with common language and performance indicators, enabling departments and delivery partners to align efforts, measure progress consistently, and drive accountability at both national and local levels. A key facet of this framework should be ensuring that young people are supported to achieve and sustain access to good work.
- Harness the collective expertise of youth-focused members of the Government's What Works Network to better integrate and connect evidence on young people's outcomes, supporting the development of a clear national commitment to both intermediate and long-term outcomes.
- Create a cross-government taskforce for young people, reporting to No.10 and the Cabinet Office, to oversee flagship areas of policy for young people, ensure join-up across departments, and embed external expert input into national decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The National Youth Strategy should place trusted adults at the heart of its cross-Whitehall vision for young people, underpinned by a cross-sector, evidence-based definition of what constitutes a ‘trusted adult’

- Government should consider IPPR’s call for the National Youth Strategy to unlock universal opportunity for young people, with trusted adult relationships placed at its core. The strategy offers a key opportunity to show how these relationships act as the connective tissue across the young person’s policy landscape – from the Youth Guarantee to Young Futures Hubs and more.
- The Government should establish a Trusted Adult Advisory Group bringing together youth voice and stakeholder representation across youth services, education, employment, children and young people’s mental health, and youth violence prevention, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Work and Pensions and Home Office, to:
 - Co-create an evidence-based, cross-sector definition of a trusted adult. This should recognise and capture the broad potential of these relationships to improve outcomes across a range of areas that are vital in equipping young people with the tools they need to thrive.
 - Interrogate the additional barriers faced by marginalised young people and the role that trusted adults can play in advocating for them as they navigate complex systems of support.
 - Identify pathways for enabling trusted adults to best support and signpost young people, through additional training and local coordination to effective evidence-based interventions, leveraging current examples of good practice and exploring the interaction with existing professional accreditation for youth workers.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Support Youth Guarantee Trailblazers and future national rollout areas to overlay and integrate relational practice into delivery, to ensure all young people – especially those economically inactive – can access a trusted adult to help them engage in and navigate the employment support offer

- To ensure every young person is meaningfully offered help and opportunities to earn or learn will require support from and join-up locally between youth, community and enrichment provision to 1) identify young people currently unemployed – especially those less visible to services, 2) connect them into the right evidence-based pathways and 3) support their entry into and ongoing navigation through the system.
- To maximise the impact of the Youth Guarantee for marginalised young people, the Government should consider funding and coordination of a national delivery framework that integrates the Youth Guarantee with long-term, relational, place-based support pipelines which will help to prioritise early identification of at-risk young people using existing RONI data and target support accordingly.
- Central to this model should be a longer-term aspiration to ensure every young person has access to a trusted adult – a consistent, trained, and accountable figure who supports their transitions across education, employment, and personal development. The delivery of the Youth Guarantee Trailblazers provides opportunities to pilot this approach to re-engage and support those young people currently disconnected from services.

- Embed relational metrics (e.g. continuity, trust, young person feedback) into national and local evaluation frameworks, and ensure that data collection methods do not undermine the building of trusted adult relationships.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Position co-located services and spaces for young people – such as Youth Hubs and Young Futures Hubs – as centres of excellence for relational practice and cross-sector gateway support

- Young Futures Hubs should be developed as centres of excellence for relational practice, where trusted adult relationships form the foundation of coordinated support for young people across education, employment, health, youth services, and youth violence prevention. Hubs should act as cross-sector gateways, enabling smoother navigation of the system and ensuring young people can be identified, engaged, and supported through interlinked pipelines from youth services into youth employment.
- To maximise impact, the Government should align the regional footprints of Young Futures Hubs, Youth Guarantee Trailblazers and Youth Hubs with other place-based youth initiatives and co-located services, locking in operational links between youth work, careers advice, training, and employment support. This alignment would help to improve identification tools, strengthen service efficiency, enhance system navigation for young people, and help leverage local investment in youth provision to support a stronger, integrated infrastructure capable of re-engaging young people currently disconnected from existing provision and sustaining their journeys into work.



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