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ANNUAL REVIEW 2025

The national What Works Centre for youth employment.



> The essence of Youth Futures Foundation is to find interventions that might enable us to say, **‘we know if you do X, you will get Y’**. Evidence really matters.

Seyi Obakin OBE, Chair

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Foreword from our Chair

Seyi Obakin OBE
Chair, Youth Futures Foundation



With a confident theory of change, Youth Futures cemented its unique position as an expert authority and vital facilitator of needed systems change.

With the unrelenting scale and complexity of the UK's youth employment challenge, 2025 was a pivotal year for Youth Futures Foundation.

Building on the foundations of its first five years working to address systemic employment disparities for marginalised young people, Youth Futures embarked on a purposeful new strategy for 2025-2028. With a confident theory of change, Youth Futures cemented its unique position as an expert authority and vital facilitator of needed systems change.

In 2025, Government committed to 'end long-term youth unemployment.' Youth Futures has made strides in deepening the understanding of this decades-long challenge; and in illustrating the opportunity for an £86 billion long-term economic benefit to the Exchequer if the UK can match the best youth employment rate in the OECD by 2050.

As the What Works Centre for Youth Employment, Youth Futures has played a vital role in ensuring that robust evidence, expert analysis, and young people's perspectives are at the heart of national policy and systems change.

It was particularly encouraging to see the year conclude with significant Government investment in the expanded Youth Guarantee, alongside opportunities to contribute to major policy developments, including the independent Review into Young People and Work, led by Alan Milburn.

£86 billion

long-term economic benefit to the Exchequer if the UK can match the best youth employment rate in the OECD by 2050



2025 was also key for Youth Futures in embedding systems change at a local level, with evolving place-based partnerships bringing together local authorities, delivery organisations, and young people to foster localised solutions to the complex and varying employment challenges for young people across the country.

Crucially, the year saw major progress in Youth Futures' collaboration with employers, as a vital lever in transforming opportunities for young people. With an expanding employer network, including new major partnerships, Youth Futures enters 2026 set to generate groundbreaking evidence on how employers can better recruit, retain, and support marginalised young people.

These developments represent meaningful progress. Together, they strengthen the conditions for lasting change and bring us closer to a future in which every young person can achieve good work.

Introduction from our CEO



Barry Fletcher
CEO, Youth Futures Foundation

I am proud of the ambition and fullness with which Youth Futures has responded to the scale of the youth employment challenge.

At Youth Futures, we are driven by a simple belief: every young person should have the opportunity to achieve good work. Yet for too many young people, that opportunity remains out of reach.

The reality is stark. One in eight young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and one in three of those NEET young people spend at least six months neither earning nor learning. This is deeply concerning, as we know the scarring effect this has on young people's future health, income, and participation in society. Regional disparities remain significant, and the challenges to finding and keeping good work are even greater for the most marginalised young people.

Yet there is growing recognition that this challenge demands a collective response. Across government, employers, practitioners and communities, there is increasing momentum behind efforts to tackle the barriers facing young people and to build a system that works better for them.

I am proud of the ambition and fullness with which Youth Futures has responded to the scale of this challenge. In 2025 we embarked on a new four-year strategy, designed to drive the wide-reaching systems change that's needed to realise a different future for young people.

We set a decidedly bold 'North Star' goal – for England to match the lowest youth unemployment rate in the OECD by 2050, and to remove the gaps in outcomes for the most marginalised young people. This would mean 567,000 more young people in work. Achieving this ambition will require action across the whole system. It is not an ambition we will achieve alone. It is a call to policymakers, employers, funders, and others to work together to create a future where all young people can thrive as part of a more inclusive and prosperous society.

We clarified our focus on audiences best placed to drive change across the youth employment system, recognising that collaboration is at the core of our approach. Our Theory of Change sets out how the evidence of what works in youth



employment is not an end in its own right, but a vital tool for influencing the decisions, behaviours and actions that shape young people's opportunities. Through our audiences, we can translate evidence into widespread, coordinated, and sustainable change in policy and practice.

Moving into 2026, the conditions are aligning for what may prove a once-in-a-generation moment for youth employment. With the conclusion of the independent Review into Young People and Work, led by Alan Milburn, and a growing consensus that change is needed, there is a unique opportunity to reshape the system around what works for young people and place their experiences at the centre of reform.

For too long, young people have had to navigate a system that has sometimes failed to meet them where they are. The opportunity before us is to create something different: a system informed by evidence, shaped by lived experience, and focused relentlessly on helping every young person access and thrive in good work.

If we can harness this momentum together, we have the opportunity to create lasting change and bring a future of good work within reach for many more young people.

> Youth voice is platformed and remains at the heart of Youth Futures' ongoing work to ensure our employment needs are heard by the people who have the power to deliver the change we desperately need.
>
> **Meerah,** youth ambassador



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Introducing our 2025-2028 strategy

We entered 2025 with a stubbornly persistent challenge to help address. The number of young people in the UK who are not earning or learning has been unrelentingly high for decades, with young people from marginalised backgrounds facing the greatest systemic barriers to good work. Across the system, evidence of what works in youth employment is still not always well understood, applied consistently, or routinely used to drive decisions.

Our **2025-2028 strategy** is built from an ambition to break this cycle. It solidifies our dual role as a generator of evidence, and a partner in translating and embedding what works across the system, recognising that evidence matters most when it informs actions.

Our **vision** is a society where every young person can achieve good work.

Our **mission** is to ensure marginalised young people can secure and thrive in good work, by finding out What Works and driving change in policy and practice.



Our North Star goals

By 2050, we want to see:

1. England's NEET rate fall to match the best in the OECD.
2. Gaps in education, employment and training outcomes removed for specific groups of marginalised young people.

The best NEET rate in the OECD is in the **Netherlands**

How we will achieve our goals

As the What Works Centre for Youth Employment, we will generate high-quality evidence and turn it into action by collaborating with policymakers, employers, and funders, and meaningfully engaging young people most affected by the system.

As around half of young people who are NEET for over a year share one or more of the following characteristics, we are particularly focusing our efforts in this strategy on young people with:

- Black, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi heritage
- Experience of the care system
- Experience of the justice system
- A learning disability or autism
- Mental health challenges

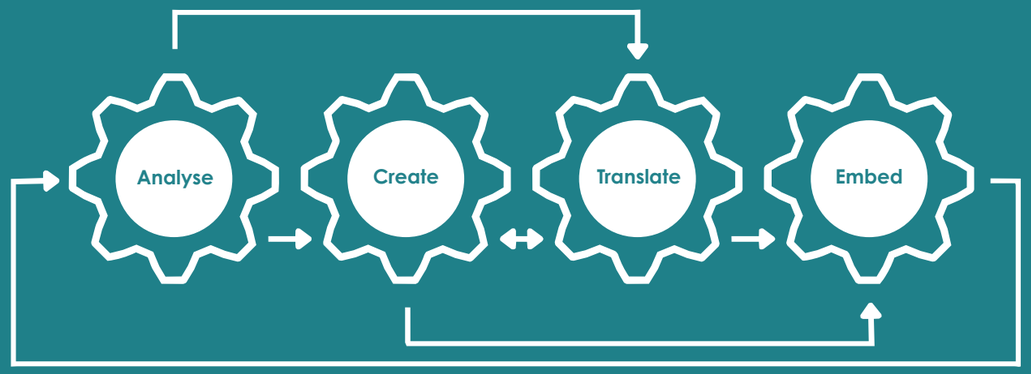
As we move forward with our strategy, we remain attuned to overlapping dimensions of exclusion and we are committed to addressing the broader systems that perpetuate inequality, to ensure every young person, regardless of their starting point, can thrive in good work.

By 2028 we want high-quality evidence to underpin more:

1. Public policy that helps marginalised young people to earn and learn.
2. Funding decisions on the availability and design of youth employment programmes.
3. Employer practice in the recruitment and retention of marginalised young people.

At the heart of our strategy is our Theory of Change

Our Evidence Engine depicts how our day-to-day activity fuels change.



We analyse the information that is out there, to understand the systems young people are navigating.

Once we have a grasp of the landscape, we create new evidence where it is needed.

We present insights so they can be understood and used – finding a balance between accuracy and clarity.

We embed evidence in real-world decision making, through close engagement with our audiences.

Each stage feeds into the next, and then back into the Engine. This collaborative and iterative process enables us to continually build our expertise, strengthen our impact, and deepen our understanding as the What Works Centre for Youth Employment.



> The work of the Youth Futures Foundation has been central to helping all of us committed to urgent and decisive action to support young people to make the most of their lives. Their research and evidence has offered a foundation for Alan Milburn's essential work on getting 16- to 24-year-olds back into education, employment and training.
>
> Having an independent advocate and providing a voice with, and for, young people is a vital part of ensuring that we build a functioning society for the future.
>
> **The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett**



Young people at our heart

Young people are fundamental partners in our vision for systems change.

Throughout 2025, our evolved Youth Inclusion structure enabled young people to contribute to all aspects of our work; from governance, with two **young Board members** serving throughout the year, to programme development, evidence generation and policy influencing.

Our youth ambassadors co-produced a range of outputs, informed decision-making, strengthened our advocacy, and shaped engagement with key audiences. Their lived expertise ensured our work remained grounded in young people's realities. Their insights and ideas are not optional additions, but central to our ability to understand the challenges in the youth employment system and how we can respond to them effectively. In turn, young people developed their skills, confidence and experience.

In 2025:

- We welcomed the third cohort of our flagship youth inclusion programme, the **Future Voices Group**. Representing a diverse range of intersectional identities and lived experiences, members brought vital perspectives on the greatest barriers facing young people in today's labour market.
- Dedicated groups of youth advisors played a key role supporting and shaping our place-based programme, **Connected Futures**, and our early intervention programme, **Building Futures**.

As young people conclude their time on our programmes, they have the opportunity to remain connected through our growing and vibrant **Alumni Network**, and members continued to work closely with us throughout 2025.



> Over the years, I have found Youth Futures Foundation a constructive partner on issues affecting young people's employment prospects. I have particularly valued engagement through the Youth Employment Group, which Youth Futures co-chairs. Its ability to bring together a broad range of voices helps inform policy discussions and drive practical action for young people.
>
> **Mims Davies,** MP for East Grinstead and Uckfield

> Good work is secure and stable, fairly rewarded and inclusive. It supports health, wellbeing and work–life balance. It provides purpose and progression, values diversity and voice, and builds positive relationships, enabling people to thrive.
>
> **Young people's 'good work' definition**

In 2025, our youth ambassadors:

- Influenced one of the Government's flagship policy offers for young people, by sitting on the Youth Guarantee Advisory Panel.
- Explored what 'good work' means for young people, with their reflections translated into a youth-led definition.
- Played a leading role at our Good Work Summit, where they created an interactive game to help delegates engage with the evidence on youth employment; joined a roundtable with the Skills Minister; and participated in panels and workshops.
- Brought our 2025 Youth Employment Outlook to life with an open letter to Government and a spoken-word animation.



Our youth ambassadors sat on **Government's Youth Guarantee Advisory** panel

- Created a short film encouraging employers to partner with us in building the evidence of what works, and a film highlighting the power of youth voice in place-based systems change.
- Contributed to early consultation informing the Young People and Work Review led by Alan Milburn.
- Provided insights for the Work and Pensions Committee's inquiry into Jobcentre reform.
- Provided evidence to support the Social Security Advisory Committee's research on how the benefits system influences young people's decisions about education.
- Appeared across the media, including BBC Breakfast, Radio 4, and Radio 5 Live.
- Spoke at parliamentary events, including sessions organised by All-Party Parliamentary Groups, and key research launches.
- Took part in webinars and other speaking engagements.

Our audiences

Our strategy focuses on three key audiences as levers of change in the system: policymakers, employers, and funders. By equipping these audiences with robust evidence of what works, we aim to drive large-scale systemic change for young people.

Policymakers – national and regional, who set the structural framework for youth employment opportunities.

In 2025, we built policymakers' awareness and understanding of the youth employment challenge and opportunity, ensuring ongoing public policy development and investment is supported by evidence, and by the experiences of young people furthest from the labour market.

We saw our impact in the development of a more ambitious Youth Guarantee – with the Jobs Guarantee and the expansion of Youth Employment Hubs notably informed by our evidence and research. Reforms to the apprenticeship system to better support young people also reflect our policy positions based on international evidence compiled in our Youth Employment Toolkit and through our policy partnership reports and advocacy work.

We closed 2025 building further momentum by offering expert advice to the Young People and Work Review, sharing our evidence, analysis and expertise, and agreeing to run the formal Youth Advisory Panel for the Review.



We saw our impact in the development of a more ambitious **Youth Guarantee**

> We are really reliant at the moment on young people bringing fresh perspectives, skills, and diversity of thought. Working with Youth Futures Foundation, we'll generate the evidence that we need to invest our time and resources where they'll have the greatest impact.
>
> **Alysha Zimmer,** Severn Trent

Funders – from governmental, philanthropic, and corporate sectors, who allocate financial resources that shape the scope, reach, and quality of employment programmes available to young people.

In 2025 we strengthened the case for investment in supporting marginalised young people into good work. The investments in the Autumn Budget were a major achievement. Our evidence also informed decisions by several non-governmental funders who expanded or refocused their commitments in response to the strength of our research and insight.

Employers – from small businesses to large corporations, who provide the jobs and training opportunities available to young people.

We built foundational partnerships with employers in 2025, through which we are now conducting Randomised Controlled Trials to generate much-needed first-of-its-kind evidence on how employers can transform outcomes for young people. With two of these groundbreaking trials in the field, and a further four at the feasibility stage, we look forward to scalable evidence that will emerge from 2026 onwards.

> We have to find Government that talk the talk, and then take them to a place where they can walk the walk. And when we get it right, the young people are enriched, society is better for it. It's a win-win.
>
> **Lord Simon Woolley**

We also proudly convened the Good Work Summit, our largest employer-facing event to date. The event brought together 120 employers, supporting them to engage with the evidence on youth employment, and with our youth ambassadors. Through the Summit we acted as a trusted bridge between employers and policymakers, holding a roundtable with employers and the Skills Minister.



Our thematic focus areas

We set seven key themes of strategic focus for 2025-2028, based on what the evidence tells us, and gaps in existing knowledge.

The themes sit across our programmes of work, covering the broad areas of the system where changes is needed for young people to be better supported into positive futures.



> Building our evidence base is the best way to ensure that funders know where to put their money; that organisations know how to design their interventions to best support young people; and, ultimately, that young people are getting the best support that they can.
>
> **Jess Evans,** young Board member

> Youth Futures Foundation has played a vital role in bringing the voices of marginalised young people into the Race Equality Engagement Group. Their ability to connect lived experience with policymaking helps ensure that the challenges facing ethnic minoritised young people are not overlooked, but are central to the conversations and decisions that will shape their futures.
>
> **Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon**
> Chair, Race Equality Engagement Group



Place-based change

The challenges young people face are shaped, in part, by where they live. Local provision often comes with many complex challenges, including multiple funding streams and the need to coordinate support across different organisations. We are helping local partners better understand their youth employment landscape and use evidence to develop joined-up, locally tailored solutions that improve outcomes for marginalised young people.



In 2025:

- We collaborated with national and regional policymakers to support Government's Youth Guarantee trailblazers, responding to place-based challenges.
- We continued delivery of our flagship place-based systems change programme, Connected Futures. As part of this, we launched a new £347k partnership in Sheffield. We set up this partnership, led by Firvale Community Hub, to examine local barriers to employment and access to apprenticeships for Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people, who experience some of the highest unemployment rates in the city.

£347 thousand

partnership launched in Sheffield



> Youth employment challenges vary hugely in different places. NEET rates vary significantly by region, from 8.5% of young people in the South East to 15.8% of young people in the North East, according to our analysis of the Labour Force Survey (Jan-Mar 2025). These disparities are driven by a range of factors within each region and come together to affect outcomes for young people… Given these differences, **solutions must be highly contextualised** to specific needs and challenges, meaning it is vital that they are locally led and informed by reliable data.
>
> **Ryan Howsham,** Head of Policy - Employment & Labour Market

Spotlight

Connected Futures: young people leading systems change

Connected Futures is built on the principle that lasting systems change happens when young people are trusted to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Across our partnerships, young people bring lived experience to the heart of local decision-making, ensuring services are designed with, rather than for, the communities they support.

In 2025, new research from our East Midlands Connected Futures partnership demonstrated how this principle can be put into practice. The study explored how five young people with learning disabilities and/or autism were supported to lead the commissioning process, helping to identify priorities, shape services, and influence investment decisions to improve employment opportunities for their peers.

The research found that meaningful participation goes beyond consultation. Young people were involved throughout the commissioning process, with trusted adults offering the support, resources, and flexibility to empower young people to lead with confidence. In doing so, the programme not only strengthened services, but has helped to challenged perceptions of what young people with learning disabilities and/or autism can achieve as decision-makers.



The research found that meaningful participation goes **beyond consultation**

The findings provide one of the first evidence-based models of youth-led commissioning in employment support. As Connected Futures continues to grow, these insights will help local partners, commissioners and policymakers to know how to meaningfully share power with young people, creating systems that are more inclusive, responsive and effective.

Watch this short film about the power of youth-centred approaches in local systems change, co-created by youth ambassadors from our partnerships in the East Midlands, Hull, and Brent.



> Connected Futures is about changing how systems work so young people with learning difficulties and autism have a fair chance in the labour market. By bringing together education, employers and local partners, we can ensure the right support and opportunities are in place so that these young people can flourish and contribute.
>
> **Claire Ward,** Mayor of the East Midlands

Early intervention and transition

Early intervention is essential in helping to prevent young people from becoming NEET. Yet too often, support is fragmented or fails to reach those most at risk.

Throughout 2025, we strengthened the evidence base on what works to prevent NEET outcomes and translated this into practical policy and delivery proposals. By working in partnership with policymakers, frontline organisations, and sector partners, we have developed the case for earlier, more coordinated support that enables young people to make successful transitions into education, training, or employment.

- We collaborated with policymakers and other organisations to raise the profile and importance of Trusted Adults as a critical component of effective early intervention. Our policy paper The Missing Link demonstrated how integrated relational support can function as the vital connective tissue that helps young people reconnect with opportunities to earn or learn.
- Through our Connected Futures Partnership in Blackpool, we demonstrated how better local data systems and an employment-enriched secondary school curriculum can strengthen school-to-work transitions. The programme was showcased to the House of Lords Social Mobility Policy Committee and featured in its subsequent report, helping to influence national thinking on effective early intervention.

> 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.
>
> **Sharna,** youth ambassador



- We progressed our early intervention programme, Building Futures, into its next phase of evaluation, testing the impact of one-to-one mentoring with non-clinical mental health components. We also produced rapid evidence assessments on mentoring and NEET risk factors, giving frontline organisations practical evidence to strengthen early intervention.

> Youth Futures stands out as an **authoritative, evidence-led organisation** that consistently ensures the experiences of marginalised young people are reflected and considered across the policy landscape. Its Missing Link report highlights the critical role trusted adults play as the connective tissue helping young people navigate fragmented employment, education and mental health systems, informing policymaking and driving action across the sector.
>
> **Josh Dean,** MP for Hertford and Stortford

> I greatly valued working with Youth Futures Foundation on the Earning or Learning Inquiry. Hearing evidence from young people and stakeholders reinforced the importance of tackling the challenge of being without employment, education or training, and the lasting impact it can have on a young person's life chances, wellbeing, and future opportunities. Action must be taken during this Parliament to correct current failures and ensure every young person has the opportunity to thrive.
>
> **Josh Babarinde,** MP for Eastbourne

Employment support programmes

Evidence is not always used consistently in funding and programme design decisions, creating missed opportunities to maximise impact for young people. We work to increase the use of robust evidence so that resources can be directed towards approaches with the greatest potential to improve outcomes.

Throughout 2025, we strengthened the evidence base to better understand what works in youth employment support and turned research into action. By equipping local and national policymakers, and frontline organisations with robust evidence, we helped shape more effective, sustainable programmes that give marginalised young people a better chance of achieving good work.

- Working with the Youth Endowment Fund, UK Youth and IFF Research, we launched a pilot evaluation of summer jobs as an employment support intervention for young people with experience of the criminal justice system.
- We published the largest synthesis of evidence on youth employment interventions, providing insights on the most effective approaches and how to implement them well. This has given decision-makers a practical foundation for designing and investing in programmes that are more likely to make a real difference to young people's employment outcomes.
- We analysed evidence from across EU and OECD countries to identify interventions most effective at reducing the number of young people who are NEET. By highlighting proven approaches from high-performing countries, we have provided policymakers, commissioners, and funders with actionable insights to inform future policy and investment.

Our research has helped strengthen our role as a trusted source of independent evidence for government, supporting policymakers to have access to the best available evidence when designing initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee.

> As the Chair of Youth Futures Foundation's Mental Health Advisory Group, I saw first-hand Youth Futures' commitment to understanding and addressing the alarming rise in mental health issues among young people. Through our work on the Group which led to the report: Understanding Drivers of Recent Trends in Young People's Mental Health being published, Youth Futures combined rigorous evidence analysis with a clear focus on impact, and how to effect change by helping to shape the policies and support young people need to thrive.
>
> **Baroness Berger** of Barnhill



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Mental health and wellbeing

The number of young people facing mental health challenges in England has increased substantially since 2010. This rise is inseparable from the youth employment challenge. Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of youth unemployment and inactivity.

Unlike after the 2008 financial crisis – when most young people not in education or work were actively looking for jobs – the recent rise in NEET levels is driven in part by growing rates of economic inactivity. Over the past three years, long-term sickness has been the primary driver of the increase in youth economic inactivity, with mental health challenges being the most common health-related cause.

Our goal therefore is to deepen understanding of, and drive improved outcomes in, the interplay between mental health and youth unemployment – by testing, identifying and promoting evidence-based interventions.

In 2025, we conducted a comprehensive research project with the University of Manchester to better understand the root causes of young people's worsening mental health in England.

This research – the first of its kind to explore the population-level rise in youth mental health problems – was supported by our **independent Mental Health Advisory Group**, chaired by Baroness Luciana Berger



Spotlight

Understanding drivers of recent trends in young people's mental health: new insights launched in Parliament

Our flagship report showed that the decline in young people's mental health is not merely a result of increased symptom recognition, greater awareness, overdiagnosis, or reduced resilience. The analysis points to a genuine rise in mental distress among young people, with a range of key contributing factors, most notably:

- Declining sleep quality
- Employment precarity and affordability pressures
- Reduced access to children and youth services
- Smartphone and social media use

The research highlights the importance of listening to young people's experiences and working collaboratively across sectors to improve mental health support.



By bringing together evidence and perspectives from across communities, the report contributes to a stronger understanding of what is needed to create more responsive, inclusive and effective approaches to poor youth mental health – reinforcing the need for preventative solutions that bring together health services, education, employers, civil society and other stakeholders.

Launching the research in the House of Lords, we brought together policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and young people to discuss the findings and consider how evidence can inform action. The event provided a platform for conversations about the barriers young people experience when seeking support, the importance of early intervention, and the need for services and systems to better reflect young people's needs.

> 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.
>
> **Dazo,** youth ambassador



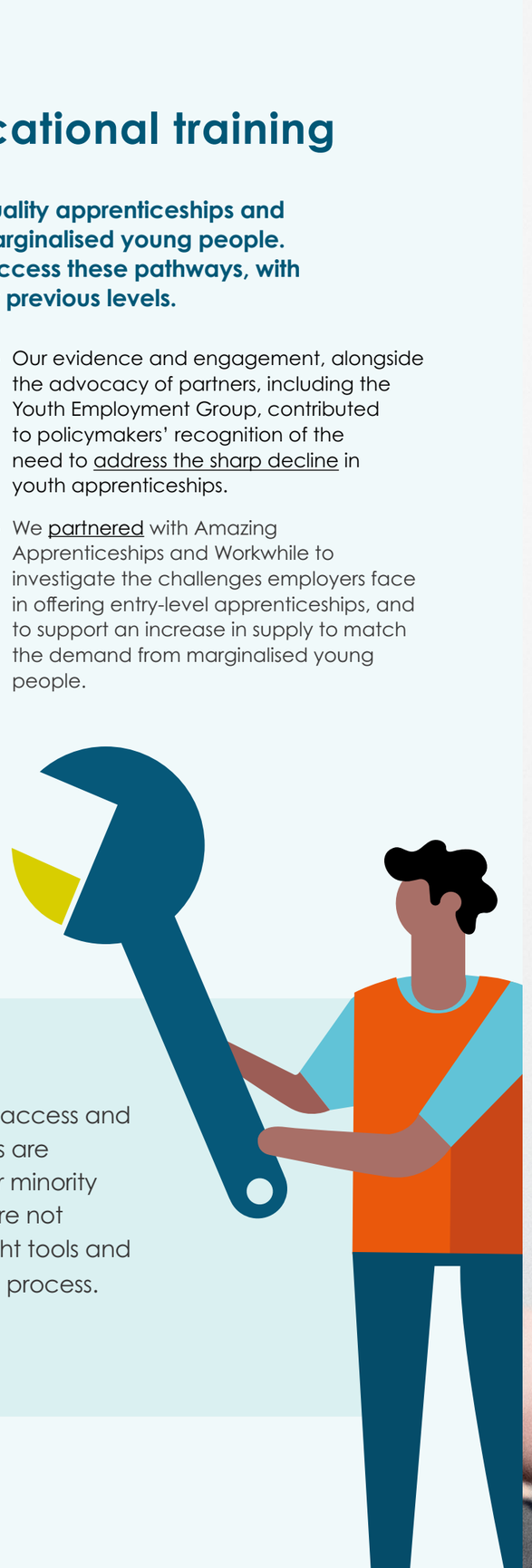
Launching the research in the House of Lords, we brought together **policymakers, practitioners, researchers,** and **young people** to discuss the findings and consider how evidence can inform action

Apprenticeships and vocational training

Evidence consistently shows the impact high-quality apprenticeships and vocational training can have, particularly for marginalised young people. Yet too many young people are still unable to access these pathways, with apprenticeship opportunities significantly below previous levels.

Through 2025, we generated and translated evidence to influence policy and improve practice, and to make the case for an apprenticeship and vocational training system that better serves young people.

- Our research examined disparities in apprenticeship participation and completion between ethnically minoritised young people and their White peers. This has helped to grow understanding of the barriers that exist for these young people, which is important for our work with employers, policymakers and training providers on how we can close these gaps.
- We partnered with Fabian Society and CIPD on the Levying Up report, which set out proposals to reform the Growth and Skills Levy and rebalance the apprenticeship system towards young people.
- Our evidence and engagement, alongside the advocacy of partners, including the Youth Employment Group, contributed to policymakers' recognition of the need to address the sharp decline in youth apprenticeships.
- We partnered with Amazing Apprenticeships and Workwhile to investigate the challenges employers face in offering entry-level apprenticeships, and to support an increase in supply to match the demand from marginalised young people.



> There is a disparity between access and opportunity. Apprenticeships are everywhere, but this isn't the reality for minority ethnic young people because they are not equipped with the cultural capital, right tools and support to succeed in the application process.
>
> **Fathiat**, youth ambassador



Amazing Apprenticeships

Workwhile

We partnered with **Amazing Apprenticeships** and **Workwhile** to investigate the challenges employers face

> I, like many other representatives of employers, am passionate about opening opportunities to everyone. We're **keen to do things differently** but don't often have the evidence of what works to make changes that will really make a difference for young people. The employer trials will test some of the theory in a practical way, within organisations, so that employers have a much stronger understanding of the actions that they can take to make the biggest difference.
>
> **Ruth Busby** OBE



Barriers and discrimination in employment

Marginalised groups of young people encounter entrenched barriers and discrimination when seeking work and within the workplace. Our goal is to identify and expose those systemic barriers and drive evidence-based policy and practice reform to shape a fairer, more inclusive system.

In 2025, we worked to build employers' awareness of the barriers and discrimination faced by young people seeking employment; and to support them to understand their role in addressing this challenge, and the evidence that can help them to do so meaningfully.

- We launched our £2m Evidence into Action programme, supporting eight frontline organisations to embed evidence into the design and delivery of on- and off-the-job training for young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- Through our partnership with Business in the Community, a new youth-focused commitment was added to the Race at Work Charter, which has 1,000 signatories. This is a clear directive for employers to recruit and retain young people from Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and other ethnically minoritised backgrounds.
- We hosted the Good Work Summit, bringing together over one hundred employers with young people and policymakers to explore the barriers young people face to accessing opportunities.

£2 million

Evidence into Action programme supporting eight frontline organisations



Spotlight

Good Work Summit: Bringing employers and young people together to shape the future of work

The Summit focused on the role of employers in tackling structural barriers, including discrimination and unequal access to opportunities. Discussions explored how recruitment practices, workplace cultures and employment pathways can better support all young people to succeed.

By bringing together lived experience, evidence and employer action, the Good Work Summit highlighted the importance of creating a fairer labour market where every young person has the opportunity to access and progress in good work.

Taking place the day after the Autumn Budget, where an additional £820 million investment in employment support for young people was announced, the Summit was a key moment in bringing system actors together.

Facilitating collaboration between employers, policymakers, and young people – including with a roundtable attended by Skills Minister, Baroness Jacqui Smith – the Summit demonstrated how stakeholders across the youth employment system must come together to drive change that will shape the lives and experiences of young people.



£820 million
investment support for young people was announced

> The Good Work Summit was an excellent opportunity to hear directly from business and young people as we press forward with our skills agenda, which aims to meet the needs of industry, equip young people for the jobs of the future and ultimately drive the economic growth our country depends on. Our commitment is clear: whether through apprenticeships, vocational training, or education pathways, **we will work with employers to break down barriers** and create opportunities in every part of the country, so that no young person is left behind.
>
> **Baroness Jacqui Smith,** Skills Minister

2025 in numbers

Throughout 2025, we seized every opportunity to amplify the youth employment challenge and opportunity. To drive action, we need audiences to better understand what's happening for young people and care deeply about it. Here are some of the highlights:

Alongside helping our key audiences to recognise the moral case for action, we built growing recognition for the economic case. There is a potential **£86 billion** long-term economic benefit if England can match the lowest NEET rate in the OECD by 2050. This would support **567,000** more young people into work.

120

employers joining our Good Work Summit.

£820 million Government funding announced for young people's learning and employment opportunities, and a **£725 million** package of reforms to the apprenticeship system.



Launching **2** full randomised controlled trials with employers, with a further **4** at the feasibility stage.

Working with **37** young people. They co-created **6** creative influencing assets and took on a further **44** opportunities – sharing their experiences in parliament and with the media, shaping research, and influencing grant-making decisions.

42

publications, including our second Youth Employment Outlook.

98,000 users on our website and over **530,114** impressions across social media.



Appearing in more than **11%** of all national coverage about youth NEET rates in the UK.



10,000 users of our Youth Employment Toolkit; **3,800** users of our data dashboard; and over **1,000** downloads of our Mental Health research.

Looking ahead

We enter 2026 with youth employment and economic inactivity remaining high on the national agenda, and we progress with momentum into the second year of our strategy, building on our 2025 achievements and learning. We will continue to use our growing profile to drive change at scale, deepening engagement with our key audiences to ensure that robust evidence informs policy, practice and investment decisions.

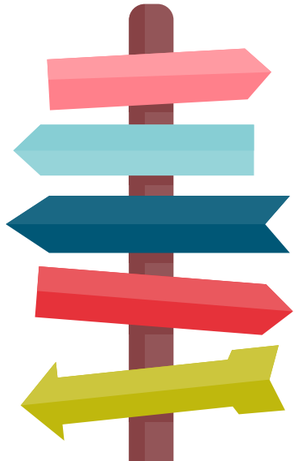
The independent Young People and Work Review, led by Alan Milburn, presents a huge opportunity for ambitious system-wide change. We will contribute evidence, insights, and analysis, and, crucially, ensure young people's voices are at the heart of the conversation. At the same time, we will strengthen our partnerships with employers: generating evidence and driving collective action to support inclusive recruitment and progression for young people.

Our maturing pipeline of evidence will see the wheels of our evidence engine turning steadily to fuel meaningful systems change.

Planned activity:

- Our early intervention programme, Building Futures, will complete its demonstrator phase, providing critical learning to inform future scaling and emulation of approaches for young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- Our place-based systems change programme, Connected Futures, will progress into more advanced phases of systems change delivery and learning in select places, while consolidating insights to inform wider adoption of learning.
- Our Youth Employment Toolkit will be expanded. The Toolkit is a free online resource, and the updates will support decision-makers to improve the lives of young people with more accessible insights on the impact of common youth employment interventions.
- Our groundbreaking wave of trials with employers will begin to generate evidence to support employers across the country to better recruit, retain, and support marginalised young people.
- Our major trials across employment support, early intervention, and summer jobs will strengthen the evidence base on what works to improve employment outcomes for marginalised young people.

Young people with experience of marginalisation in the labour market will continue to bring essential value to our work, as we welcome our fourth Future Voices Group, and ensure youth voice is embedded in the design and delivery of systems change.





Young people with experience of marginalisation in the labour market will continue to bring **essential value** to our work.

youth futures FOUNDATION

Working together

If you would like to work with Youth Futures Foundation to transform employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds, please get in touch with us.

Get in touch:

www.youthfuturesfoundation.org

company/youthfuturesfoundation