

UK YOUTH

State of Youth Work Evidence & Future Priorities

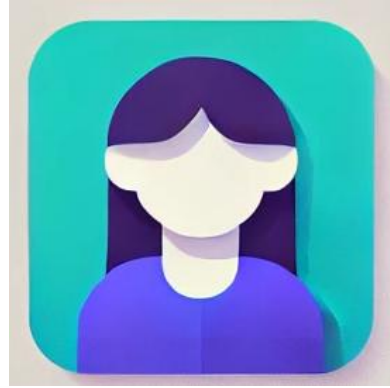
11 March 2026



What
support do
young
people
want?



What
youth work
is on offer?



Who
accesses
youth
work?



What is
the impact
of youth
work on
young
people?



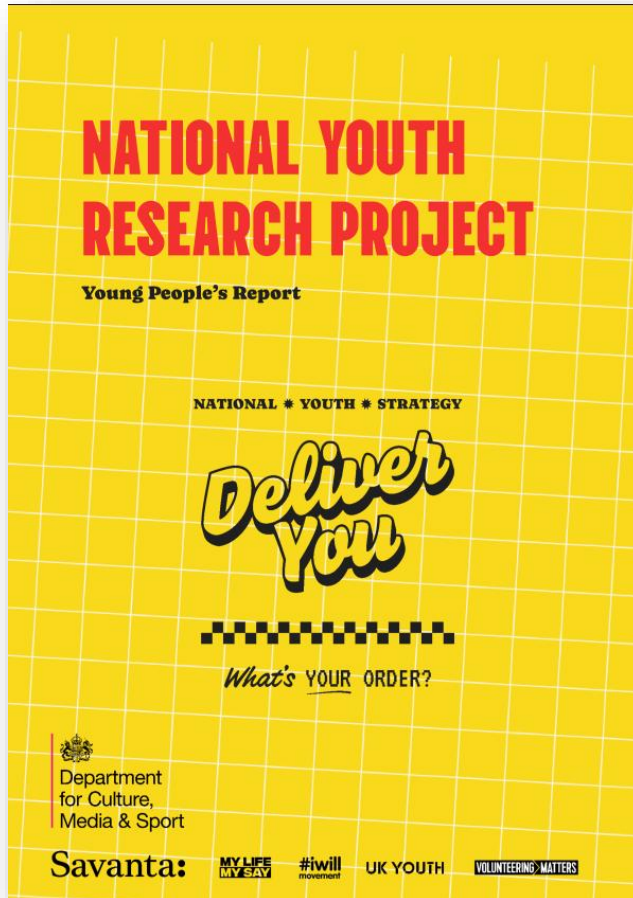
How can
youth work
be
delivered
even more
effectively?



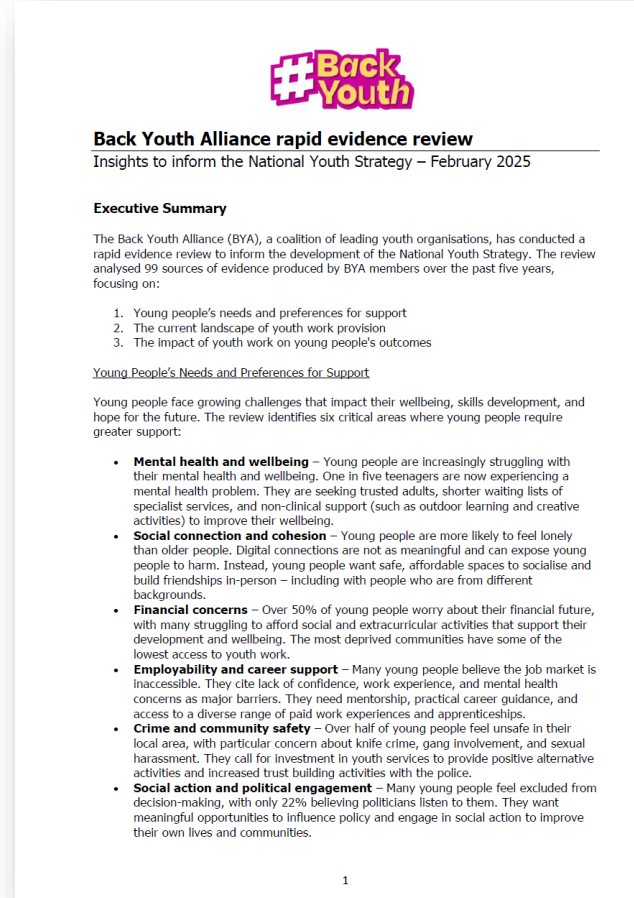
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**What support do young
people want?**

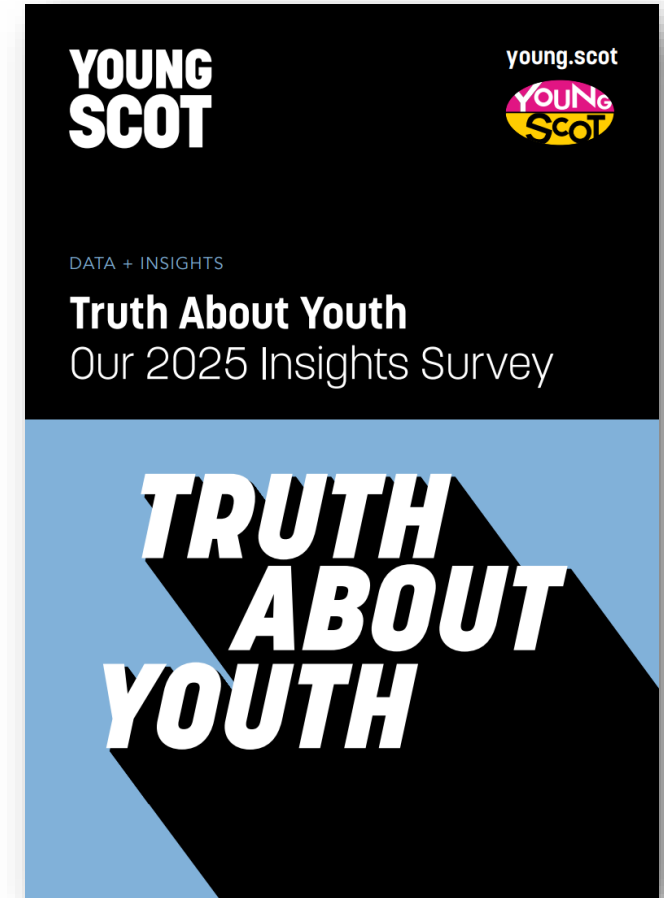
What support do young people want?



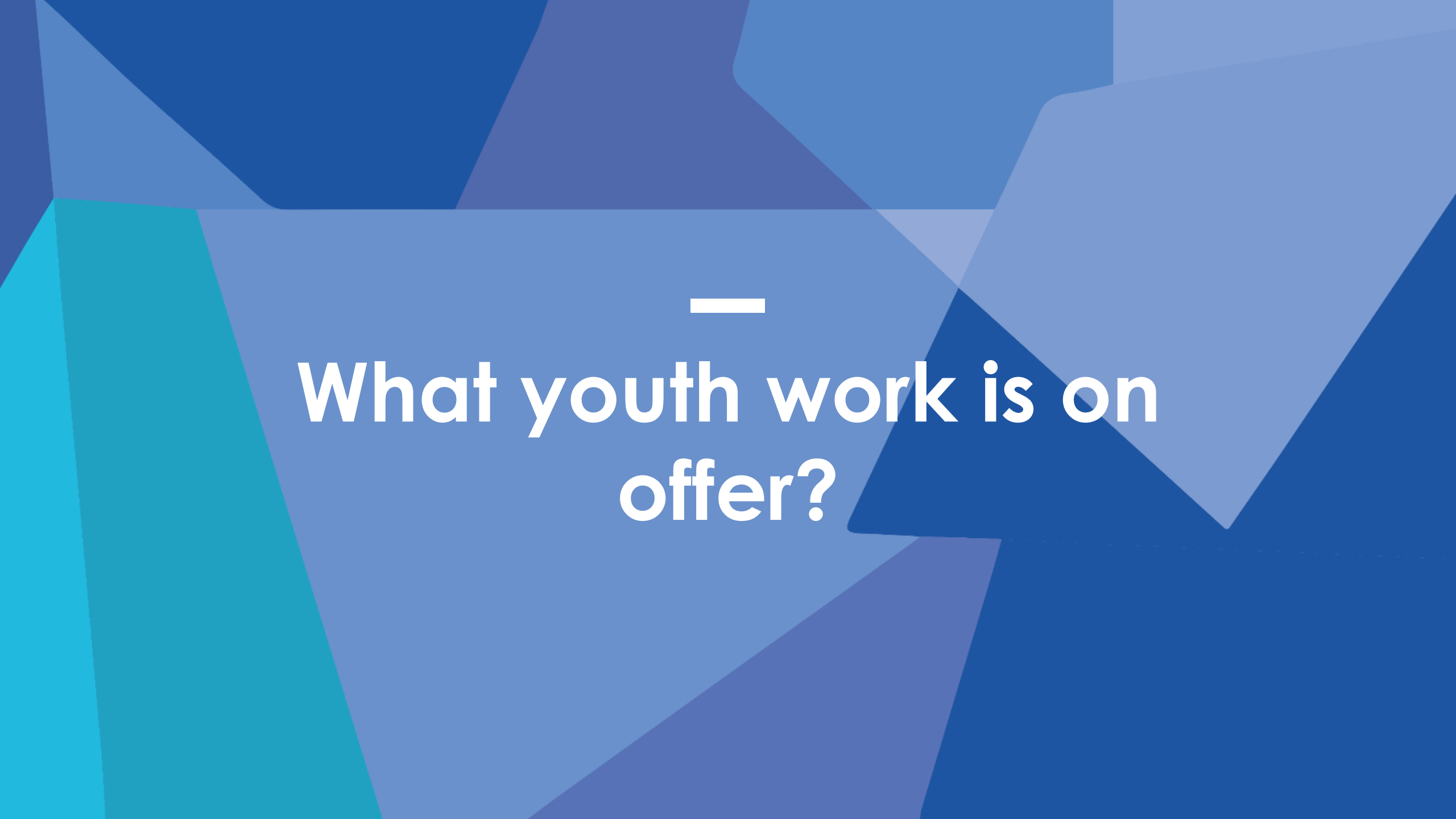
National Youth Strategy
youth consultation report
(Dec 2025)



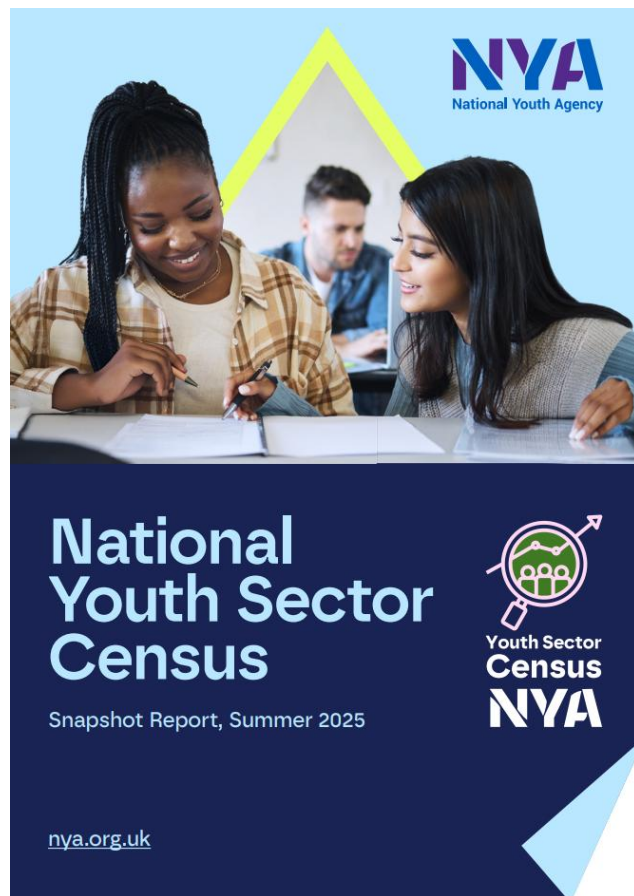
Back Youth Alliance
Rapid Evidence Review
(Feb 2025)



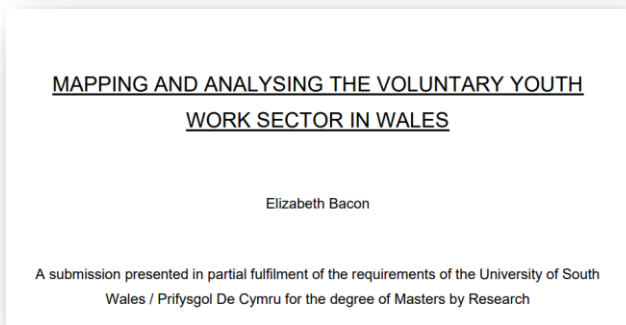
Truth About Youth
Survey
(April 2025)



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**What youth work is on
offer?**



ENGLAND
National Youth Sector
 Census (NYA, 2025)



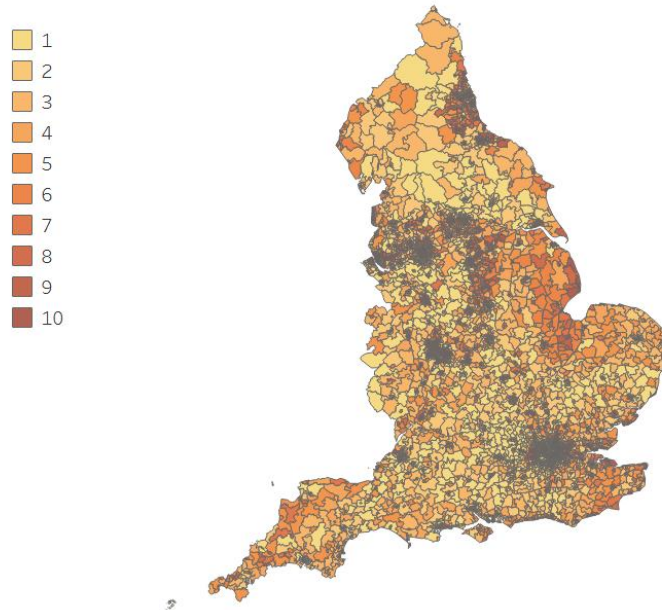
Wales
(Bacon, 2022)
 &
(Welsh Govt, 2025)



SCOTLAND
Youth Work Sector Survey
 (YouthLink Scotland, 2024)

Mapping Youth Provision and Need Across England

Made by: Irtania Ismira Dewi
Supervised by: Alannah Keogh, Christopher Davy, Luisa Cutillo

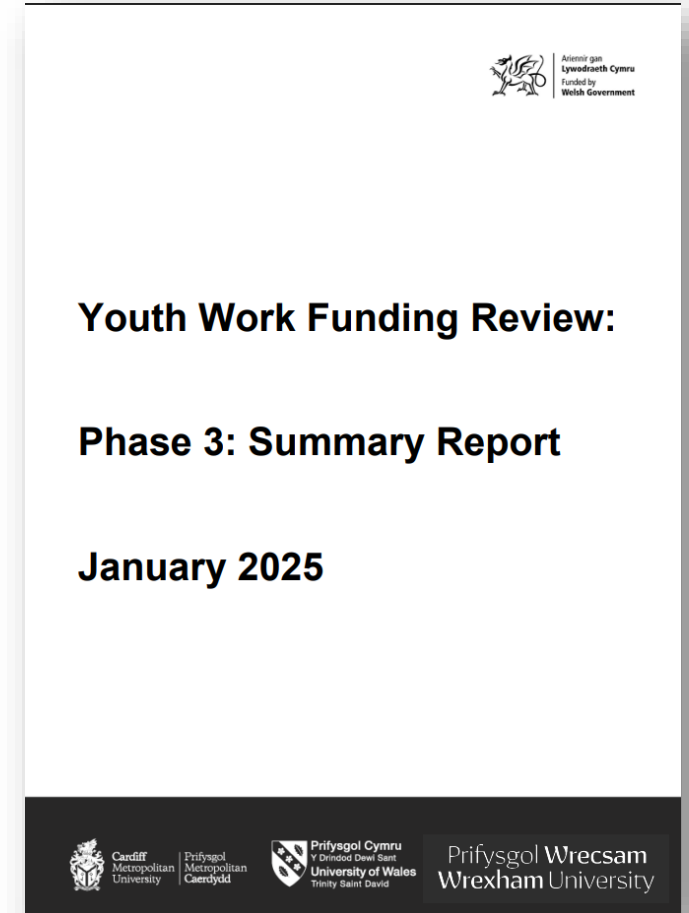


<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/irtania.ismira.dewi/viz/MappingYouthProvisionandNeedAcrossEngland/YouthProvisionSummary>

Changes to local authority funding of youth work (YMCA, 2026)



Welsh youth work funding review (Welsh Govt, 2025)



UK YOUTH

£2bn

annual sector
expenditure



4.4m

young people
engaging regularly



70,000

paid employees



180,000

volunteers



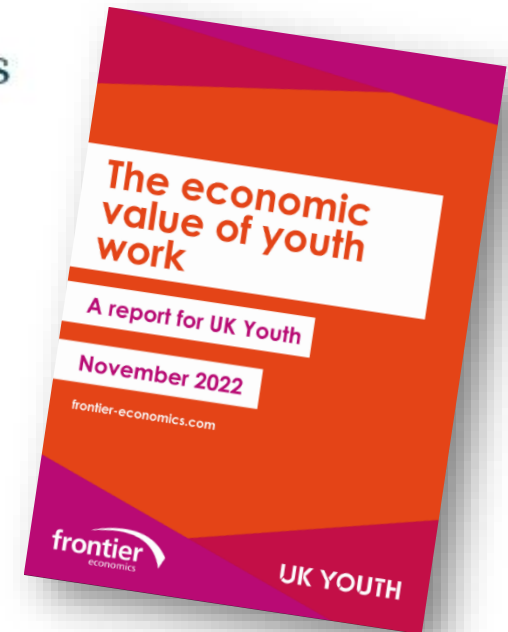
8,500

organisations



Untapped: The Economic Value of Youth Work (UK Youth & Frontier Economics, 2022)

UK YOUTH

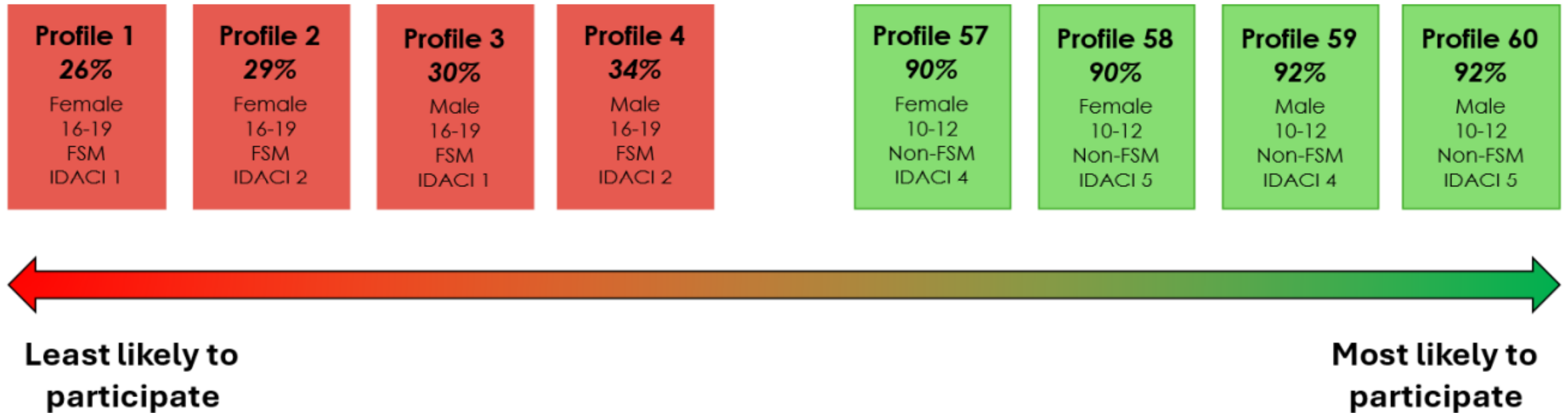




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**Who accesses youth
work?**

Young people's participation



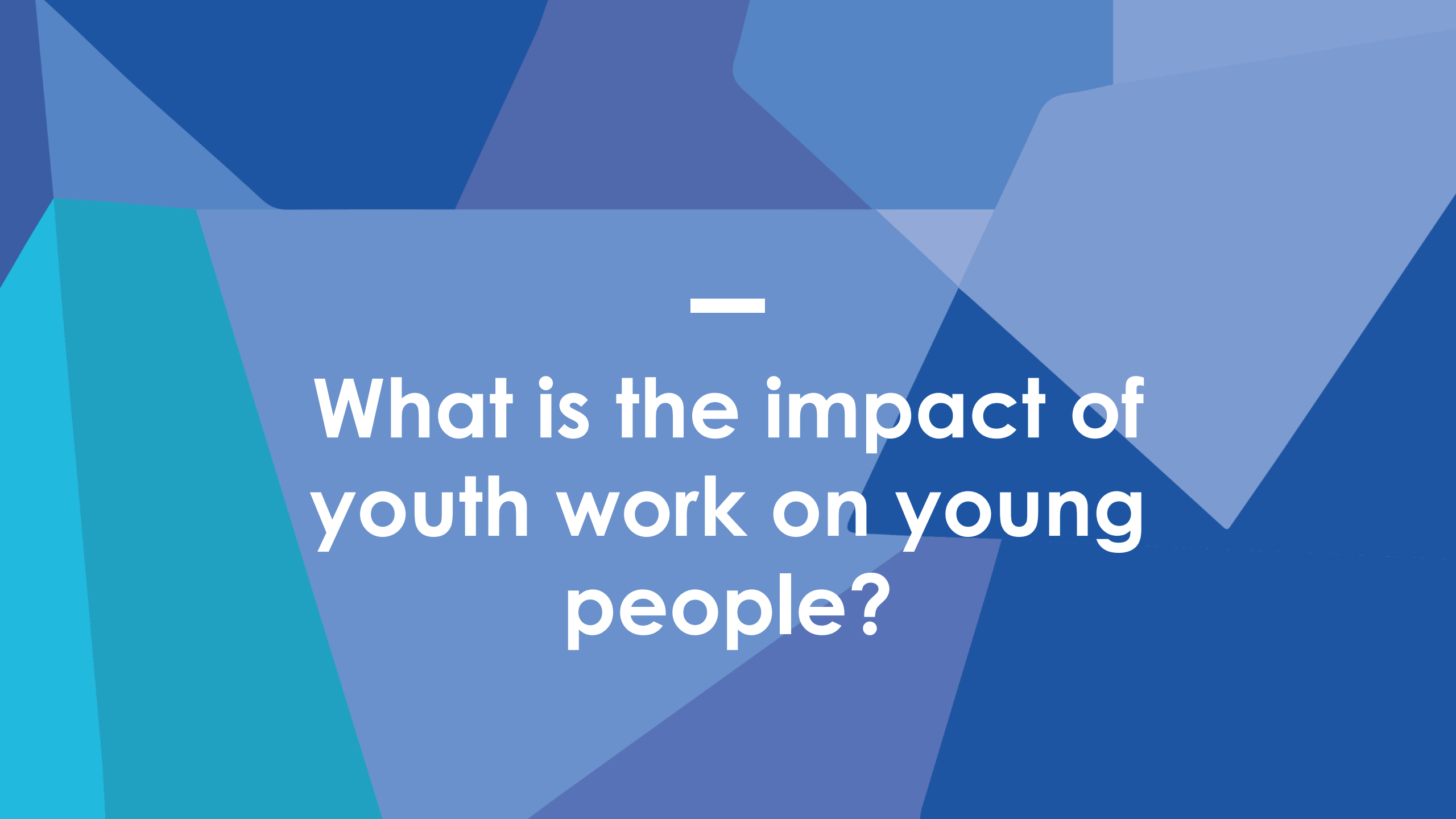
Barriers & Enablers to Participation in Youth Activities
(SQW & UK Youth, 2025)

Young people's participation

Participation in youth work:

- decreases with age
- is higher amongst boys than girls
- is higher amongst young people who are White
- is much higher in more affluent communities





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**What is the impact of
youth work on young
people?**

Systematic literature review for DCMS found that young people who engage in youth work experience important benefits in the short term – with **improved physical health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes.**

(UK Youth, University of Warwick & SQW, 2024)

Investment in youth work £[£]
is currently saving society _____ annually



Read the report:

ukyouth.org/Untapped

Crucially, these young people become **happier, healthier, and wealthier adults** compared to young people from the same background who did not have access to youth work.

(UK Youth, University of Essex & SQW, 2024)

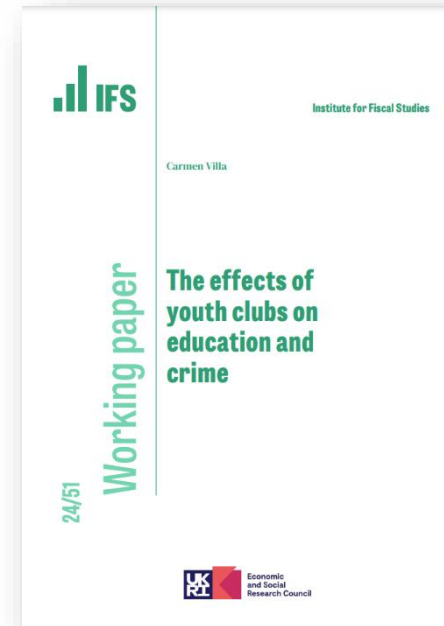
Youth work currently saves the taxpayer at least £3.20 for every £1 spent through decreased crime, increased employment, and reduced pressure on mental health services.

(UK Youth & Frontier Economics, 2022)

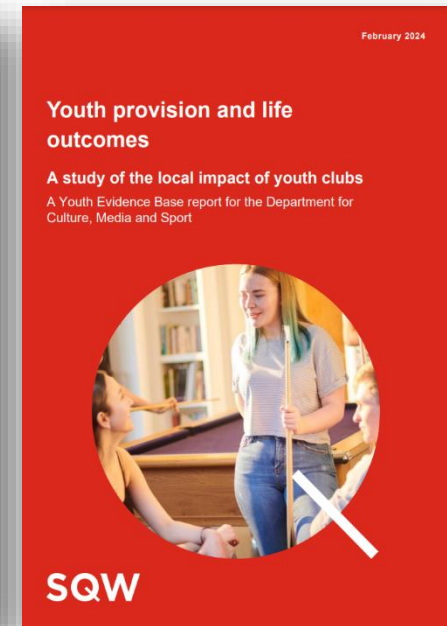
UK YOUTH

Impact of youth centre closures

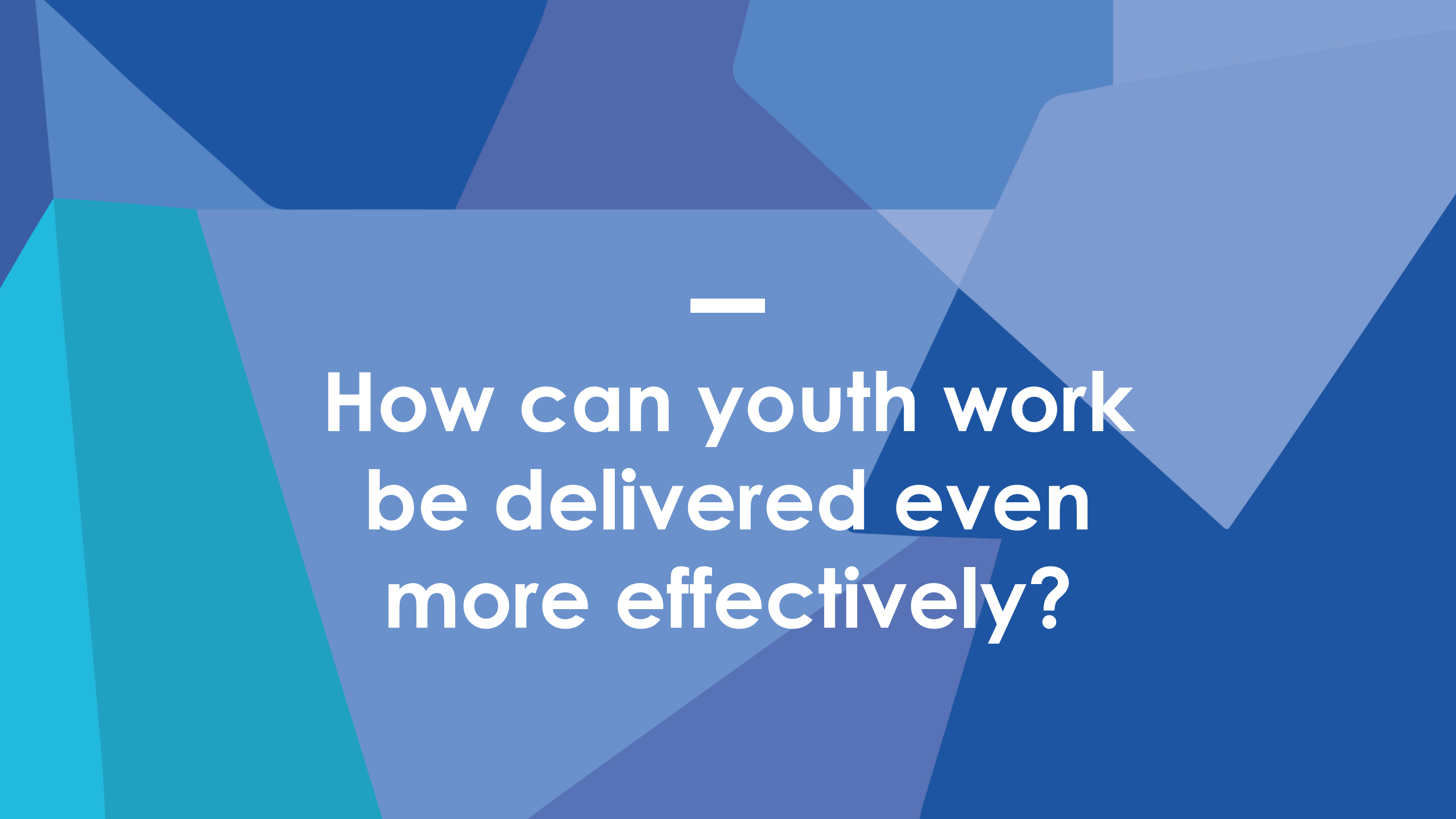
- 95% of local authorities reduced their real terms spending on youth services by at least a quarter between 2011 and 2021.
- The average number of youth work orgs supported has reduced from 14 to 8 per local authority.
- The decline in spending has disproportionately affected universal, open-access provision.
- Reduction in local youth provision is associated with a rise in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Closure of youth centres in a local area associated with a reduction in educational attainment – as much as a whole GCSE grade



The effects of youth clubs on education & crime (IFS, 2024)



Local impact of youth clubs (SQW & UK Youth, 2024)



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How can youth work
be delivered even
more effectively?



Research and analysis

Youth Worker Interactions with Other Sectors: Better understanding multi-agency working to support young people

Published 22 October 2025

Youth worker interactions with other sectors
(UK Youth & SQW, 2025)

Research and analysis

Youth enrichment - discovery phase

Exploratory research examining youth enrichment.

Youth enrichment discovery research
Youth & SQW, 2025)

Research and analysis

Volunteering in the youth sector research

An independent study of volunteers in the youth sector.

Volunteering in the Youth Sector
(UK Youth & SQW, 2025)

Research and analysis

Barriers and enablers to participation in youth activities research

An independent study of the barriers and enablers to participation in youth activities.

Barriers and enablers to youth work participation
(UK Youth & Savanta, 2025)

EMPOWERHER

Around £5 in wellbeing benefits
for every £1 invested

(Pro Bono Economics, 2025)



Developing an RCT to test
whether a proven US model
works in UK to reduce violence

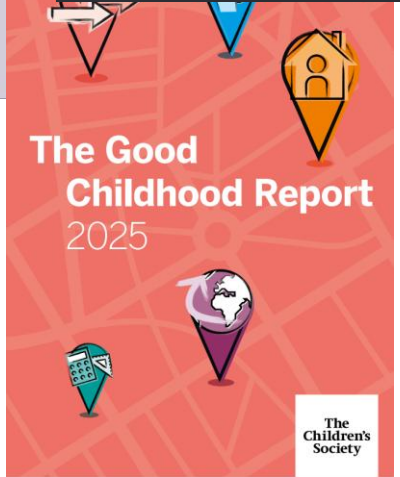
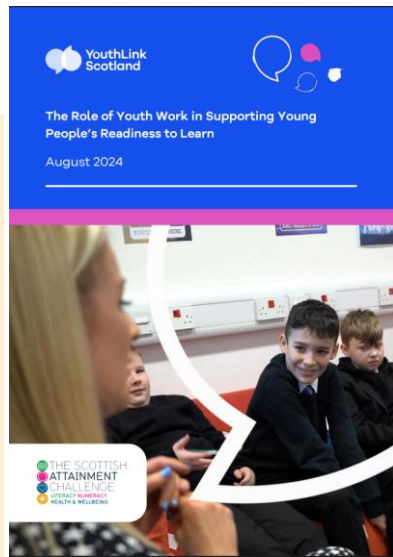
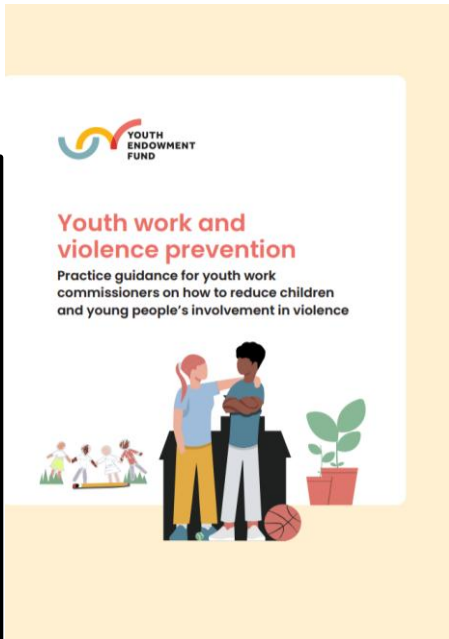
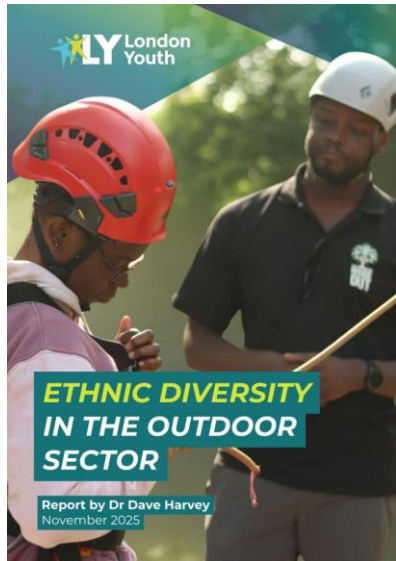
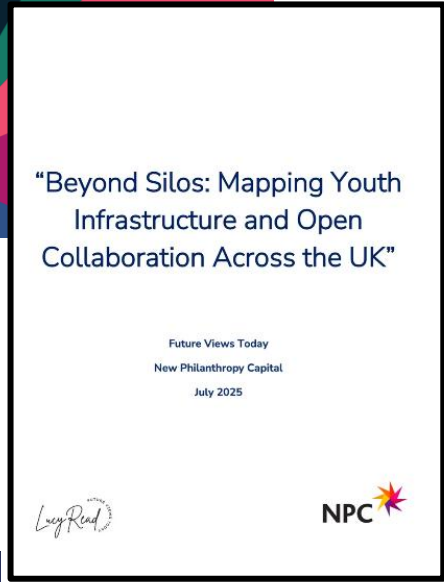
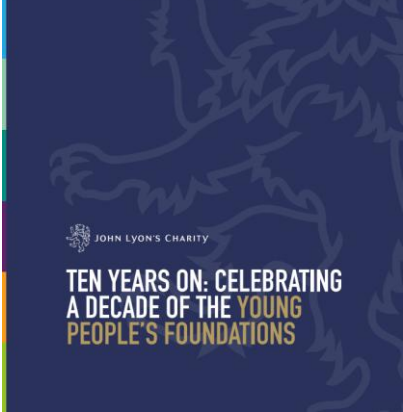
(Ending Youth Violence Lab, 2025)

UK YOUTH



60% of formerly NEET participants
still in paid employment or
training 6 months later

(UK Youth, 2026)





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Future priority setting

Academic	Institution	Email	Research Interests (Short Summary)
Alan Mackie	University of Dundee	Directory of youth work researchers	Sociology of youth; young people’s transitions, identity, belonging, social class, marginalisation; youth work responses; role of place, neoliberal context
Alan Smith	Leeds Beckett University		Research and practice interests include youth work curriculum, professionalisation, critical pedagogy, and policy developments in youth work HE.
Alicja Pawluczuk	University of Leeds		Digital youth work, digital inclusion, gender digital divide, participatory/experimental youth work methods.
Andrew James Williams	University of Edinburgh		Social and cultural determinants of health (especially children & young people); participatory and quantitative evaluation; complexity theory in public health.
Annette Coburn	University of the West of Scotland (UWS)		Works on community and youth work for equality and social justice, young people’s wellbeing, youth work across borders, domestic abuse, and the impact of austerity/Brexit on youth and community practice.
Baljeet Singh Gill	London Metropolitan University		Long-time youth and community work educator and commentator on youth service cuts and the racialised impacts of policy. Work emphasises anti-oppressive practice, race and inequality, youth participation and youth work’s role in challenging structural injustice
Breda Friel	Ulster University		Mental health, suicide prevention, autism, cross-border youth work.
Callum McGregor	University of Edinburgh		Member of Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group; author of “Universal Youth Work: A Critical Review of the Literature” focusing on universal/open youth work in Scotland.
Camelia Baugh	University of East London		Focus on youth provision, participation and engagement of young people using recorded & accredited curriculum delivery.
Cara Booker	University of Essex		Social epidemiology of adolescents and young people: mental health, social media/digital media, inequalities, life-course research involving youth activities.
Carlene Firmin	Durham University		Creator of the concept ‘Contextual Safeguarding’; research on peer-on-peer abuse, youth violence, safeguarding beyond the family home, role of youth workers in safeguarding systems.
Charlotte Clements	London South Bank University		Historian of youth voluntary associations and youth club culture in Britain since 1945. Works on youth services heritage, archival research and consultancy with voluntary youth organisations.

Research priority setting exercise

Young People

Academics

Youth Workers

Policy Makers