

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment Report



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The Impact of Mental Ill Health on Young People Accessing the Labour Market and Quality Work

October 2022 - January 2023



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This report was written by Joshua Knight, Laura-Jane Rawlings and Eilish Peters of Youth Employment UK.

Foreword



Shaun Bailey MP
Chairman
APPG for Youth Employment

I am delighted to introduce the latest report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment, highlighting the impact of mental ill health on young people accessing the labour market and good quality work. On behalf of the APPG, I would like to thank all of those organisations that provided written submissions to this report, as well

as the sector experts and young people we heard from during this inquiry.

Contributors to this inquiry have been clear about the rising numbers of young people facing mental ill health and the impacts this is having on their journey to work. In meetings, we heard expert insight from economists, youth organisations and researchers as well as young people sharing their personal experiences of this issue.

Our conclusions stress the need for greater support for young people experiencing mental ill health at all stages of their journey to work. This means greater access to mental health support in schools; support at key transition points; high-quality careers education, information and guidance to support young people in choosing their career pathway; mental health support services embedded within employment support and a recognition that mental health support needs vary for each young person based on their context and background.

I look forward to seeing even further progress in this area of youth employment, with even greater numbers of young people finding work, flourishing in their roles and fulfilling their career potential.

I also look forward to presenting a copy of this report to the Minister, Rt Hon Mims Davies MP, at our next APPG meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S Bailey', written in a cursive style.

SHAUN BAILEY MP
WEDNESBURY, OLDBURY AND TIPTON

Executive Summary

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment ('the APPG') presents this report from an inquiry into the impact of mental ill health on young people accessing the labour market and good quality work.

The mental health and well-being of young people has been an area of growing concern over recent years: COVID-19, periods of national and local lockdowns and economic instability have all contributed to and exacerbated the existing mental health challenges being faced by young people. At the same time, the UK labour market has seen a growth in the number of young people who are economically inactive, meaning they are not in employment and not looking for work.

This inquiry seeks to understand the impact of rising mental ill health on young people seeking to enter the labour market and the potential long-term consequences that mental ill health may have on future labour market outcomes for young people.

The government has recently announced its plan to lead a review into economic inactivity, its drivers and potential solutions. This report should be considered when conducting this review to understand the impact of mental ill health on economic inactivity amongst young people.

The inquiry heard oral evidence from a range of expert speakers and young people, and received written submissions from expert organisations.

Key Findings

Contributors to this inquiry share concerns about the rising levels of mental ill health amongst young people and recognise the impact this is having on their labour market opportunities and outcomes. There is a recognition that whilst mental ill health amongst young people has been an issue across the last decade the impact of COVID-19 has exacerbated an already worrying picture.

The link between mental health, work and worklessness was also explored in our oral evidence sessions. Young people who are economically inactive are more likely to be experiencing mental ill health than those who are in work or are unemployed. Contributors also shared concerns about the long-term impacts of mental ill health on young people's longer-term labour market prospects, young people who experience economic inactivity in their early lives are at greater risk of long-term unemployment or economic inactivity, leading to a 'scarring' effect on their future employment prospects.

The evidence submitted to this inquiry also finds that particular groups of young people are more at risk of experiencing mental ill health than others and are disproportionately impacted by mental health challenges. Young people with protected characteristics, those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, young carers, and care-experienced young people were all found to be more vulnerable to mental ill health, compounding existing disadvantages and barriers to employment they already face as a consequence of their background.

The inquiry also found that mental ill health is a significant barrier for young people entering the labour market and accessing good quality work. Key concerns highlighted that young people experiencing mental ill health struggled during key transition points in their journey to work; lacked confidence when seeking employment; education and training opportunities; were at greater risk of becoming NEET; struggled to access support services and were at risk of disengaging with support services altogether.

Overwhelmingly, contributors identified early and proactive intervention as key to addressing mental ill health amongst young people. Experts also shared that there were few impact reviews and evaluations of best practice amongst existing employment support programmes and other interventions for what works in supporting young people with mental ill health.

However, a number of contributors highlighted programmes, practices and activities which have been effective in supporting young people experiencing mental ill health make positive steps towards accessing the labour market and good quality work. These include:

- Mental health and wellbeing as a priority in schools through a ‘whole school approach’ where a culture and environment exists to promote the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff.
- Non-formal learning and enrichment activities which build confidence, social networks and employability skills.
- Promoting all education and career pathways to young people so they understand their options and have the confidence to choose the right career path for them.
- Elements of social prescribing; including gym memberships and sports activities.
- Access to work experience to develop confidence to enter the workforce and develop an understanding of what work looks like.
- In-work support for mental health including access to Employee Assistance Programmes and regular mental health and wellbeing check-ins with young staff.

The accumulation and summary of this evidence is explored in further detail in the main body of the report. The full contributions of each organisation is presented in the appendix of this report also. Based on this evidence the APPG for Youth Employment is making the following recommendations to the government.

Recommendations

It is clear that the mental ill health challenges facing our young people in the aftermath of COVID-19 and during a time of economic instability need to be acknowledged. The current landscape for young people entering the labour market has changed since COVID-19, as have the numbers of young people experiencing mental ill health. Policy responses must recognise these changes and adapt existing and future policy interventions to match this change in need.

The government should recognise the long-term risks to both young people and the labour market of not addressing this issue. Rising mental ill health amongst young people has the potential to lock out significant numbers of young people from the labour market and drive up economic inactivity over the longer-term, risking the individual happiness, wellbeing and health of those young people and contributing to a labour shortage in a tight labour market.

To address the rising mental health emergency amongst young people, interventions and support must be holistic, recognising that young people with mental ill health often face additional challenges and barriers in different aspects of their daily lives. Ensuring inclusive

and tailored support responds to the different needs of different demographic groups and those with protected characteristics.

Contributors to this inquiry all recognise the need for purposeful and effective early intervention for young people struggling with mental ill health or wellbeing issues, this means adequate, well resourced and accessible mental health support in schools to address mental health needs before they reach critical or crisis levels and severely impact a young person's opportunities in later life. Support is also required at key transition points to ensure that young people feel able to move confidently throughout their education, training and early careers.

Our recommendations to government are as follows:

National and local services

Work to prevent mental ill health and support young people with mental ill health before it impacts their life chances and opportunities to find good quality work is key to supporting more young people into the labour market.

- Increase funding for NHS mental health and wellbeing services to meet the growing demands and reduce waiting times
- The roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams in schools as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan should also continue with urgency to ensure all young people are supported whilst in education
- Further develop and give responsibility for blended service intervention such as social prescribing, with stakeholders working at local levels in partnership to develop and deliver services
- Ensure that there are opportunities for flexible education and training pathways for young people who are particularly struggling
- DWP to have greater responsibility for young people who are economically inactive and not just claimants. Developing Youth Hubs and Mental Health Hubs and local services to support young people transitioning into employment
- The delivery of Mental Health Hubs should be prioritised and delivered at pace
- Invest in funding to identify what works in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing
- Ensure funded training and employment programmes are gathering impact data of mental ill health challenges and what is working to support those young people
- Ensure that services are targeting and delivering holistic support to those with protected characteristics
- Work with local councils and communities to tackle the drivers of poor mental health

Early intervention in school/In-school mental health support

Proactive and preventative support in schools which addresses young people's mental health needs and ensures they are fully prepared to make positive transitions from education or training into good quality work.

- Increase school-level and local authority level resources and develop front-line support structures so that they have more mental health professionals working in schools, colleges and providers.
- Wellbeing support to be delivered through Careers, Education and Information Guidance, Work Experience and Enrichment activities.

- The government should recognise the important role of non-formal learning and enrichment as means for improving mental health and well-being amongst young people by improving the equity of access to non-formal learning and enrichment activities for all young people.
- All senior leadership staff and staff with pastoral responsibilities should be mandated to complete the [Senior mental health lead training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) and data on completions should be reported to central government.

Role of Colleges and Universities

Colleges and Universities should ensure that they provide effective, quality mental health and well being support so that young people have access to the services they need.

- There should be ring-fenced funding for mental health and wellbeing support
- Mental health and wellbeing support should be offered to all learners with pastoral touch points throughout the academic year
- Mental health provision should be quality assured through data collection points including student voice.
- Young people should be involved in the support design of mental health and wellbeing services to ensure it meets their needs

Early Careers Support

All employers and particularly those benefiting from government funded training should be encouraged to:

- Provide young employees with training and support to manage their mental health and wellbeing at work
- Ensure all young employees have access to an Employee Assistance Programme or signpost to free mental health helplines
- Provide mental health first aid training to line managers of young staff
- Encourage an inclusive culture where staff feel confident to escalate concerns
- Employers should sign up to the Good Youth Employment Charter and embed the principles of good youth employment into their organisation so that all young people experience good quality work.

Targeted support for NEETs

Young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET should be identified as being at greater risk of having or developing mental ill health, proactive and preventative measures should be taken to support this group of young people into work.

- Youth workers and employability coaches should receive mental health training to help support their clients and to better understand the individual challenges they face.
- Mentoring programmes should be considered as an effective tool for supporting young people most distant from the labour market.
- Mental health training should be provided to all stakeholders who work with NEET young people.

Youth Voice

For each of the recommendations above to be effective and respond to the needs of young people any future services, support or policy initiatives should include the opportunity for young people to share their experiences and views so that provision matches need.

- Young people should be included in the co-design of mental health services, including Mental Health Hubs.
- Young people should be able to review and feedback on the services that they experience, what works and does not work
- Young people should be involved in the commissioning of services that are set up to support young people

Introduction

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment was created in 2014 and exists to:

1. promote youth employment in all its forms and the vital role of young people within the economy.
2. to ensure young people's voices are heard
3. to highlight the need for quality opportunities; and to share best practice.

Focus of the inquiry

Mental ill health amongst young people has been an area of growing concern over a number of years with increasing numbers of young people accessing and being referred to mental health services. At the same time, labour market trends reveal that the proportion of young people who are out of work and economically inactive (meaning they are not in a position to work or are not actively seeking employment) has also risen. There is a growing body of research that indicates that mental ill health is having an impact on young people becoming economically inactive and preventing them from accessing the labour market and good quality work. This inquiry seeks to understand the impact that mental ill-health amongst young people is having on their ability to access the labour market and find good quality employment.

This inquiry was open between October 2022 and December 2022 and sought to understand the following question: How is mental ill health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

The inquiry heard oral evidence from guest speakers including young people, experts on the labour market, mental health and youth unemployment. Speakers included:

Louise Murphy, *Economist at Resolution Foundation*

Lauren Mistry, *Director of Impact, Strategy and Communication at Youth Employment UK*

Martina Kane, *Policy and Engagement Manager at The Health Foundation*

Charlotte Jeffreys, *Policy and Public Affairs Executive at Prince's Trust*

Eilish Peters, *Youth Voice and Policy Officer at Youth Employment UK*

Kelsey, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

Gloria, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

Euan, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

Toni-Ann, *Youth Ambassador at Youth Employment UK*

The APPG for Youth Employment invited members, organisations, and individuals to submit written evidence focused on the following questions:

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?
2. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)
3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?
 - a) Examples of evidence and best practice
 - b) What recommendations would you put forward?
4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?
 - a) Are there specific short-term implications?
 - b) What are the long-term implications?

This report brings together the written and verbal evidence presented to the APPG for Youth Employment with the APPG's own recommendations to the Government.

Labour Market Context

The youth unemployment rate (those aged 16-24) in the UK is currently at historically low-levels, 10.5%¹ between August and October 2022, however, this continues to be around three times higher than the all-age rate of 3.7% over the same period. Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveal there are currently 922,000² young people who are economically inactive and not in education. November's ONS LFS data also reveals an increase of over 200,000 young people who are economically inactive on pre-pandemic figures.

This concerning trend of growing economic inactivity amongst young people is also set against a backdrop of historically high levels of job vacancies. In the period September-November 2022, there were just under 1.2 million vacancies, an increase of 391,000 on pre-pandemic figures (January - March 2020)³. 308,000 on pre-pandemic figures (September to November 2019).

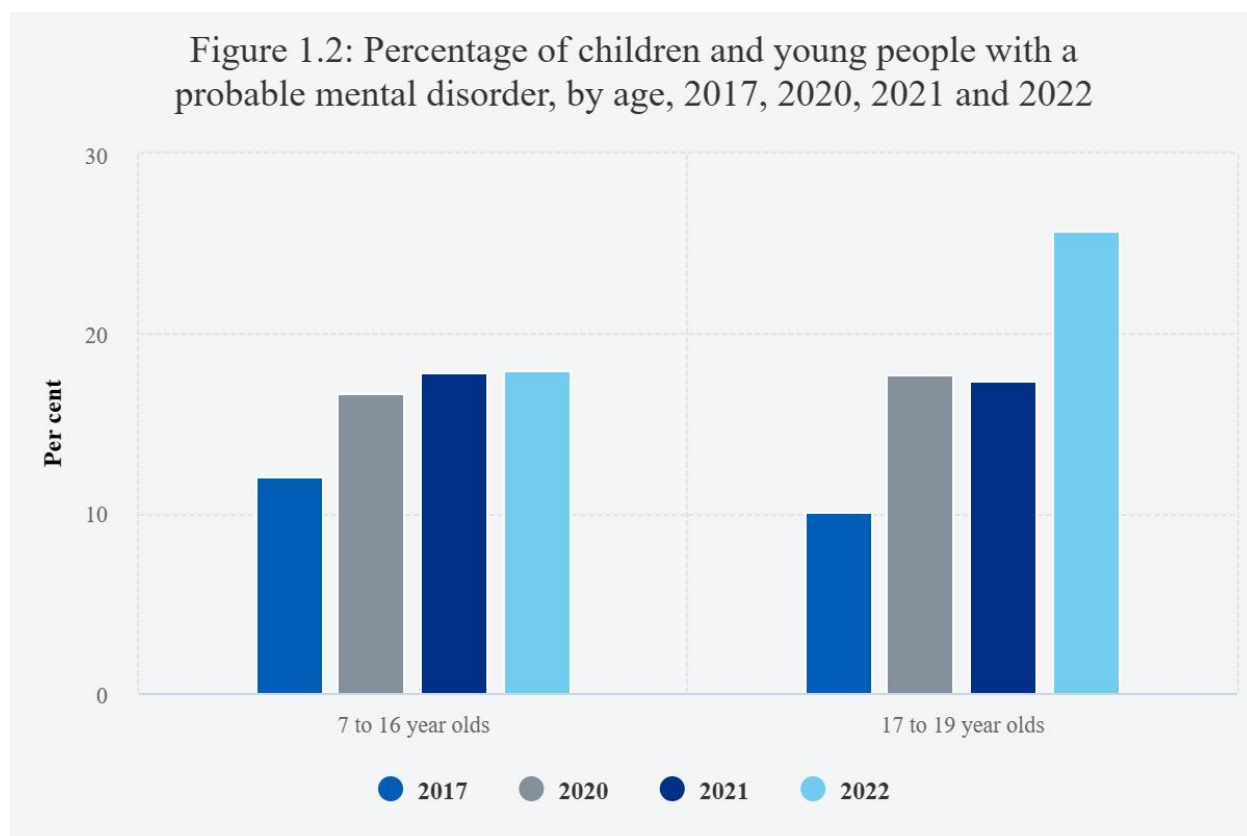
¹ Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market Overview: December 2022* [Labour market overview. UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) December 2022

² Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market Overview: December 2022* [Labour market overview. UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) December 2022

³ Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market Overview: December 2022* [Labour market overview. UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) December 2022

Mental Health Landscape/Context

The prevalence of probable mental health disorders amongst young people has risen over the past five years. NHS Survey findings reveal that In 2022, 18.0% of children aged 7 to 16 years and 22.0% of young people aged 17 to 24 years had a probable mental disorder. In children aged 7 to 16 years, rates rose from 1 in 9 (12.1%) in 2017 to 1 in 6 (16.7%) in 2020 with rates remaining stable in 2021 and 2022. In young people aged 17 to 19 years, rates of a probable mental disorder rose from 1 in 10 (10.1%) in 2017 to 1 in 6 (17.7%) in 2020. Rates were stable between 2020 and 2021, but then increased from 1 in 6 (17.4%) in 2021 to 1 in 4 (25.7%) in 2022.



⁴ Consequently, there is increasing demand for mental health services for young people, the number of referrals to CAMHS/CYPMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services/Child and Young Person Mental Health Services) reached over 760,000 in the year 2020/2021.⁵ Young people in need of this support are struggling to get it, only 24% of referrals during this period were seen within 4 weeks with 38% of referrals being closed before contact was made.⁶

⁴ NHS, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey - NDRS \(digital.nhs.uk\)](https://digital.nhs.uk) December 2022

⁵ NHS, *Children and Young People's Mental Health Services*, <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/online-version/chapter-3-further-progress-on-care-quality-and-outcomes/a-strong-start-in-life-for-children-and-young-people/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services/> August 2022

⁶ NHS, *Waiting Times for Children and Young People's Mental Health Services, 2020-21*, <https://digital.nhs.uk/supplementary-information/2021/waiting-times-for-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services-2020-2021> November 2021

The number of young people aged 18 and under accessing mental health services in May 2022 was just under 690,000 up from 573,000 in March 2021. The number of young people accessing CAMHS/CYMPHS was up 24% in 2021 on 2020, with the 2020 figure up 44% on 2019.⁷ These figures show the increasing demand for mental health services for young people, however, they only paint part of the picture. These figures fail to include those young people who are too old to access CAMHS/CYMPHS (over 18 in most local authorities) and those young people who may be experiencing mental ill health but have not been referred to the relevant services.⁸

The NHS Long Term Plan published in 2019 set out to provide schools and colleges with NHS-funded Mental Health Support Teams to support mental health provision for young people still in education. So far there are 287 mental health support teams that are operational which cover over 4,700 schools and colleges which equates to 26% of pupils in schools and learners in Further Education.⁹ The NHS long-term plan also pledged to create a new approach for young adult mental health services to ensure people aged 18-25 would be supported in their transition to adulthood. An update on this has not yet been presented.¹⁰

These plans and measures are only seeking to support those young people who are in education. Young people in employment, currently unemployed, and those who are NEET are being missed. Mental health support for these young people must be accessed through adult mental health services, which has been expanding under the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Programme) but is not necessarily catered to young people who are at a key transition point in their lives.

For young people in work, there is no statutory guidance for employers concerning the mental health support they should be providing their young workers. The only existing protections come under The Equality Act, through which any employee may request reasonable adjustments to their working practices or environment if their mental health problem has lasted more than 12 months or is likely to.¹¹

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⁹NHS, *Children and Young People's Mental Health Services*,
<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/online-version/chapter-3-further-progress-on-care-quality-and-outcomes/a-strong-start-in-life-for-children-and-young-people/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services/>
August 2022

¹⁰ NHS, *Children and Young People's Mental Health Services*,
<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/online-version/chapter-3-further-progress-on-care-quality-and-outcomes/a-strong-start-in-life-for-children-and-young-people/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services/>
August 2022

¹¹ Gov.uk, *Reforming the Mental Health Act*,
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-the-mental-health-act/reforming-the-mental-health-act#part-1-proposals-for-reform-of-the-mental-health-act> August 2021

Overview of Evidence

The evidence gathered for this inquiry comes from both verbal evidence provided at inquiry meetings held in the House of Commons across the months of October-November 2022 and written evidence submitted online.

First Meeting Overview

In the first meeting of the inquiry, the Chair outlined the purpose of the inquiry and the key questions set out to answer. The Chair recognised the significant challenges young people are currently facing around the rising cost of living, economic uncertainty and continuing to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chair also recognised the unique position of the labour market young people currently find themselves in with historically low levels of youth unemployment (9.04% at the time of the meeting) yet a growing number of young people who are economically inactive, with over 600,000 young people in this category, an increase of over 180,000 on pre-pandemic figures.

Louise Murphy, an economist at Resolution Foundation, shared findings from the Foundations recent research report *“Not working’ Exploring changing trends in youth worklessness in the UK, from the 1990s to the COVID-19 pandemic”* setting out the long-term trends of youth worklessness and the changes in the composition of young people out of work since the 1990s. Murphy began by recognising that much work has been done over the last decade to reduce youth unemployment from the record highs seen in 2011 (22%) to the current rate of just over 9%, which should be seen as a positive achievement considering the context and challenges of COVID-19 and recent economic turbulence.

Murphy told the inquiry that the make-up of young people who are unemployed had seen significant changes in the past two decades, as such policy responses to tackle youth unemployment and economic inactivity must recognise and understand these changes. Changes to youth worklessness included:

- There are 280,000 fewer young women who are now workless compared to the early 1990s and there are 20,000 fewer young men who are workless.
- There are also differences between genders, between 1995-2021 the proportion of young women who were economically inactive has halved, and for men over the same period it has doubled.
- Young people who are economically inactive tend to be workless longer than those who are unemployed. 4 in 5 young people who are economically inactive are still workless one year later, compared to around 55% of those who are unemployed.
- Young people who experience a longer duration of unemployment are at a greater risk of future unemployment than young people who experience short-term unemployment.
- The proportion of workless young men who are workless for more than a year has increased from 56 percent in 1995 to 70 percent in 2021. Young women are less likely to be economically inactive due to family reasons and care reasons. This is partly due to falling birth rates and lower levels of teenage pregnancy but also because there are more young mothers in the labour market too.
- For young men there has been a rise in the number of economic inactivity due to health reasons, this as a reason for economic inactivity has doubled since 2006.
- There have also been more young women economically inactive due to health reasons but this has been largely counterbalanced by other factors moving young women out of economic inactivity at the same time.

Murphy also shared specific concerns relating to mental health and economic inactivity:

- Those who are economically inactive are more likely to have a common mental health disorder
- There is a complex relationship between mental health and work, it is difficult to determine if work is one of the drivers of mental ill-health and worklessness, or if worklessness itself is a driver of mental ill-health - it is likely that it is a combination of the two and they are both contributory factors for each other.
- 2 out of 3 young people who are economically inactive also have a common mental health disorder, compared to 40% of those who are unemployed and 22% of those who are in employment.
- The fact that the majority are experiencing a common mental health disorder suggests that the likelihood of finding work will be affected by their mental health.
- Those who are inactive due to sickness or disability are not only more likely to have a mental health problem, but their mental health problems also tend to be worse than other groups of inactive people.
- Young people with mental health problems are more likely to stay workless for longer.

Murphy summarised by telling the inquiry that the impact of mental health problems on long-term worklessness is particularly worrying due to the rising frequency and severity of mental health problems amongst young people. Murphy also told the meeting that it is too early to say what impact COVID-19 and the pandemic has had on mental health, but we do know that we were already facing a mental health crisis before the pandemic so the pandemic is likely to have exacerbated existing issues.

Murphy told the inquiry that we should reflect on the fact that some policy interventions have already worked to avert a worsening picture of youth worklessness, policies such as Kickstart and the furlough scheme during COVID show that timely interventions and timely policy do matter and can make the difference. Louise made the following recommendations to the inquiry:

- We must recognise that the make-up of youth worklessness is very different from where it was in the 2000s and so policy needs to reflect this change
- There should be greater focus and recognition of the 'hard to reach' group - only a minority of workless young people are claiming Universal Credit, so we need to make sure that any support is not limited to just this group.
- Evaluate the existing provision to see what works and who it helps
- Recognise that many young people in work are struggling with mental health issues who also need support.
- Look at job quality and progression, the security of employment, access to in-work training and qualities of good youth employment.

Lauren Mistry, Director of Impact, Strategy and Communication at Youth Employment UK shared with the inquiry the findings of the 2022 Youth Voice Census. The Youth Voice Census is an annual youth survey, this year the survey was open from 31st March - 21st May for 11-30-year-olds to complete, the survey was completed by over 4,000 young people. Mistry told the inquiry the key findings of the 2022 survey:

- Young people are worried and anxious about their future, those with protected characteristics also feel that difference is the disadvantage, young people do not feel prepared for the future and they did not think they will be able to access good quality work where they live.

- All of these things fed into a cycle of mental health challenges
- Young people have found it difficult to find support networks during the pandemic and for many, the pandemic has acted as a catalyst for mental health problems and existing issues
- Confidence and self-belief for young people is at an all-time low and those with protected characteristics had confidence and self-belief scores at least 10% lower than other groups.
- For those looking for work, COVID-19 continued to have the biggest impact on their mental health with over half (52.6%) stating that their mental health had been impacted 'a lot' or 'a great deal'
- 43.6% of young people said that their motivation to apply for opportunities has been impacted 'a lot' or 'a great deal'
- Anxiety was identified as the biggest barrier for young people accessing work, 51% of young people not in work told us that anxiety was the biggest barrier to them accessing work.
- For those currently in work 52% told us that anxiety was the biggest barrier to accessing a job.
- 25.7% of young people agreed they could get support for their mental health locally
- 28.7% of young people think employers are supportive of hiring young people
- 14.2% of respondents were confident or very confident that there are quality jobs available in their local area.

Mistry summarised to the inquiry that young people are feeling overwhelmed and debilitated by the mental health challenges they are experiencing and that for many this is being exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and economic/political uncertainty. This is making the key decisions for young people about their lives and careers more challenging and difficult to make.

The first meeting also heard key contributions from two young people, Kelsey and Toni-Ann, both Youth Ambassadors for Youth Employment UK. Kelsey told the inquiry that mental health remains a topic that many young people struggle to talk about, particularly with their employers. Kelsey shared with the inquiry the mental health challenges she had faced whilst working for the NHS during the pandemic and the impact this had on her well-being and the well-being of other young people she knew. The lack of certainty about the future, the impact of COVID-19 on job security, the emotional strain of social isolation as well as the threat of serious illness from COVID-19 had all impacted young people like Kelsey in the early stages of their careers. Kelsey told the inquiry that employers should be doing more to support their younger workers in the workplace to deal with and manage their mental health. Kelsey identified mental health first-aid as a tool that had helped her personally whilst at work and would like to see other employers and workplaces provide similar training to ensure all young people are fully supported.

Toni-Ann also shared her personal experiences and challenges around mental health and employment. Toni-Ann told the inquiry that she had found it difficult to receive the support she needs to find work due to her hidden disabilities. As a result, her mental health had been impacted as she struggled to cope with the rising cost of living without employment, she told the inquiry, "I have often felt like I am drowning and unable to cope."

Second Meeting Overview

The second inquiry meeting heard evidence from Martina Kane, Policy and Engagement Officer for The Health Foundation, who gave expert insight on the current NHS mental health services and provision for young people and the relationship between work and health. Kane told the inquiry that the trend of young people's mental health has been one of growing concern and one that has seen increases across all measures. This can be seen in survey data, GP prescribing data, the number of referrals for mental health services, and the use of mental health crisis services. Kane also shared findings from a new longitudinal COSMO Survey, The Covid Social Mobility and Opportunities Study, published in November 2022, which found that 44% of 16-17-year-olds reported elevated psychological distress compared to 35% in 2017 and 23% in 2007. This shows that rising mental health issues predate the pandemic but have been exacerbated by the periods of lockdown, with Quality Watch analysis highlighting a huge surge in demand for children and young people's mental health services – with an 81% increase in referrals in April to September 2021, compared to the same period in 2019.

Kane told the inquiry that whilst NHS services have been expanding to respond to this challenge it has not been expanding rapidly enough to meet the demands of this challenge, leaving a gap in provision. Consequently, mental health services are prioritising those in most severe need with high levels of gate-keeping for secondary services such as CAMHS. In addition, research funded by the Health Foundation has found that the monthly number of prescriptions for mental ill health for under 25s has been growing enormously.

Kane emphasised to the inquiry that the NHS is not designed to tackle this challenge on its own, "causes of mental health problems in young people are complex, but surrounding context is often overlooked in a medical model that emphasises diagnosis and cure. We're seeing a stretched NHS managing to pick up the pieces for a large number of young people in crisis. If we want to pick up more pieces we need to fund the NHS – which is really important. But, if we want to make sure that fewer young people end up in crisis, it is the responsibility of wider society."

Kane also shared insights on the link between health and employment. Kane told the inquiry that there is a reinforcing relationship between work and health. Good quality work offers several things which are good for health, including the potential for a good income, financial stability, security, and a sense of purpose. Conversely, unemployment has a detrimental impact on health and mental health. Unemployment is a source of stress, particularly stress of losing the structure of work, and the difficulties of seeking new work. Unemployment can cause poverty, which itself damages health. In addition, unemployment can harm future employment outcomes, leaving people with a lower earning potential and, therefore, lower future resources.

Kane also told the inquiry that we are at a critical juncture to support young people. In the context of the pandemic and now as we move into an economic recession young people must be supported in their first steps into work. Citing analysis from the Resolution Foundation, Kane told the inquiry that young people who experienced mental health problems after the financial crisis in 2008 were more likely to be out of work 5 years later than those who hadn't experienced problems. As such, it is important that action to help young people with mental ill health and poor well-being into the labour market and access good quality work happens quickly.

The session also heard evidence on behalf of Charlotte Jeffreys, Policy and Research Executive at The Prince's Trust who shared the key findings from the Prince's Trust Annual 2022 Youth

Index and a recent research report by The Prince's Trust and Learning and Work Institute which explores the characteristics of and challenges faced by young people who are NEET.

Jeffreys told the inquiry that there is a strong correlation between not being in employment, full-time education, or training and mental health:

- The Prince's Trust Annual 2022 Youth Index found that almost half of all young people who are NEET said being unemployed made them feel helpless.
- Among young people who are NEET, 1 in 4 report they feel constantly anxious.
- 38% NEET of young people say struggling to find work makes them feel lonely
- In addition, The Prince's Trust Class of Covid report found 49% of young people feel anxious about the future on a daily basis.

Jeffreys also told the inquiry that young people with mental health conditions who want to work must be supported into employment, referencing a recent report from the Prince's Trust and Learning and Work Institute "The Power of Potential", the inquiry was told that there are half a million young people who are ready to work, with the right support. Jeffreys shared the following key findings from the report:

- Analysis of ONS data finds that the main health condition of 16-24-year-olds who are economically inactive due to illness/disability is depression, anxiety, and mental illness
- When asked what caused difficulty finding a job, 38.5% cited mental health/disability.
- 22.5% of young people out of work said they do not have the confidence for work
- 30% of young people who are economically inactive due to sickness/disability say they want to work

Jeffreys told the inquiry that during a time of high vacancies and high economic uncertainty, there is a missed opportunity to support these young people to fill gaps in the labour market. Young people wanted help with building confidence, accessing work experience, and support with mental health and disabilities.

Jeffreys summarised her contribution by telling the inquiry that whilst mental ill health may be a barrier to employment for some young people it is not an insurmountable one. When considering recommendations, Jeffreys told the inquiry that there will be no one size fits all approach, however, she did lay out a number of steps to be considered:

- Supporting young people with mental health conditions into work is an important part of addressing the youth mental health crisis.
- Collaboration between the third sector, employers, educators, health practitioners, and the government is essential to address barriers from all angles.
- It is also clear that mentoring and confidence building is important to young people. Whilst this has been very focused on mental health, a well-being focus for all young people is crucial as improved well-being is preventative for the development of mental illness. Mentoring could play an important role as part of a wider well-being approach.
- Supporting young people with mental health conditions into work is beneficial for all. It helps young people to lead a fulfilling life while creating a more diverse workforce full of new ideas.
- When looking at a labour market with growth markets and challenging skills gaps, Prince's Trust research indicates that young people could have a significant role to play in meeting these needs, provided they receive the support they need.

The inquiry also heard input from two young people and Eilish Peters, Policy and Youth Voice Coordinator for Youth Employment UK. Peters shared her insights from talking and listening to young people about their concerns regarding mental health and good quality work. Peters told the inquiry that young people are still struggling with the impact of COVID-19, remote working, and the absence of social interaction all impacting young people's confidence when meeting new people and integrating with the workplace.

Peters also informed the inquiry that young people are not feeling supported at key transition points in their lives such as moving to university and moving into full-time employment for the first time, leaving many feeling anxious and alone as they navigate the next phase of their lives. Young people are also unsure of how to access support for their mental health, both within the workplace and also when out of work, adding to a sense of helplessness and uncertainty.

Peters concluded by saying, "This demonstrates the need for more open dialogue around mental health in the workplace....we need to make sure it's clear that the systems surrounding young people make them feel supported but also that when they do need additional support they know where to go to and who to turn to."

The inquiry then heard evidence from Euan, a Level 6 Apprentice, and Youth Employment UK Youth Ambassador. Euan shared with the inquiry the lack of support he received from his school when choosing his next steps after Sixth Form, Euan felt pressured to apply to university and did not feel supported in following his preferred choice of applying for an apprenticeship scheme. Euan told the inquiry that this lack of support from his school left him feeling alone and made his transition from full-time education to employment more difficult than he felt it should have been. Euan shared with the inquiry the importance of a positive, supportive culture around mental health in the workplace. Euan told the inquiry that his job is often high-pressure and stressful, however, his employer provides free counselling sessions and this is something that he has benefitted from. Euan recognised that this level of support was not available for all young people in the workplace and urged employers to do more to ensure that their young staff has access to the support they need.

Finally, the inquiry heard from Gloria, a Youth Employment UK Youth Ambassador, who shared her own experiences of mental health challenges whilst in the workplace. Gloria told the inquiry that her initial experiences of full-time work had been challenging as she had struggled to adapt to the pressures of the corporate world. Gloria told the inquiry that she felt unprepared when entering the workplace and would have liked to have received more help and support before entering employment which would have helped her adjust to the pressures of the working world. Gloria also emphasised that young people must have greater access to work experience to ensure that young people have exposure to the routines, expectations, and pressures of employment to ensure they feel prepared for full-time work when they have completed their education.

Inquiry submissions: overview of written evidence

This inquiry received 16 written submissions from:

Association for Young People's Health (AYPH)
Career Connect
COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities study (COSMO)
Digital Innovators
Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO)
Huddersfield University
Learning and Work Institute
Local Government Association (LGA)
National Citizen Service Trust (NCS)
Skillsbuilder
The Girl's Network
The National Lottery Community Fund
Movement to Work
The Prince's Trust
Youth Employment UK
Youth Futures Foundation

This section of the report will summarise the response, written responses to the inquiry are published in full in the Appendices.

Summary of written submissions

The Current Landscape of Mental Ill Health and Young People

The submissions we have received show there is collective concern about the current state of young people's mental health. Numerous organisations have identified young people's mental health as a growing crisis that has been exacerbated by the impacts of lockdowns over the pandemic and lack of suitable services to support young people facing mental health challenges.

The rise in mental ill health amongst young people is borne out in the analysis of Labour Force Survey data, numerous research reports and anecdotal evidence from a range of stakeholders.

Evidence received by this inquiry also suggests the general rise in mental ill health amongst young people is disproportionately reflected by those young people who are not in work. Research by the Learning and Work Institute finds that mental health or a disability was the most common barrier to work cited by NEET young people, findings which were backed up by analysis of Labour Force Survey data which showed that for all young people who are NEET who report a long-term health problem or disability, mental health is by far the most common 'main' condition.

A number of respondents made references to the increasing prevalence of mental ill health amongst young people and the impact that the pandemic has had:

“we are finding that many young people in our NEET 16-18 years client group have been impacted by the pandemic in terms of mental health and well-being” **Careers Connect**

“COVID-19 and the associated lockdown periods had a major impact on the lives of young people and there have been numerous reports of increasing reports of mental health, isolation and loneliness.” **AYPH**

“Although concerns about the NEET population have been an international policy issue for many years, particularly following the global financial crisis of 2008 (O’Reilly et al. 2015), the more recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated fears of a youth mental health crisis, with children and adolescents deemed even more susceptible to mental health impacts (Niedzwiedz et al, 2021).” **Huddersfield University**

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing issues in relation to mental ill-health. This is illustrated in many councils’ local NEET data, which shows a significant growth in the number of young people who are not active in the labour market due to ill-health; with mental ill-health being a prominent factor.” **LGA**

“research from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and IPPR, commissioned by Youth Futures and the Blagrave Trust, identifies evidence that the nature of work and changing working behaviours since the pandemic drive mental health challenges amongst young people” **Youth Futures Foundation**

The evidence submitted to this inquiry also finds that particular groups of young people are more at risk of experiencing mental ill health than others and are disproportionately impacted by mental health challenges. Young people with protected characteristics, those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, young carers, and care-experienced young people were all found to be more vulnerable to mental ill health, further compounding existing disadvantages and barriers to employment they already face as a consequence of their background.

Evidence of these disparities is demonstrated through a sample of responses below:

“Mental health prevalence is known to be higher for specific groups of young people who may be more likely to experience discrimination in society, such as LGBTQ+ young people, a clear example of health inequalities” **AYPH**

“Those who identify as non-binary report higher psychological distress (69%), and are considerably more likely to have self-harmed (61%) or to have attempted suicide (35%) than their peers who identify as male or female.” **COSMO**

“Data from 1,300 16-24 year-olds in the Understanding Society longitudinal survey suggests an increase in common mental disorders among young people during the pandemic, with girls and young women, economically disadvantaged young people and those with special educational needs and disabilities more likely to report difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing” **Learning and Work Institute**

“Research between The Prince’s Trust and EPI found consistent risk factors that can increase the likelihood a young person struggles with their mental health. These include poorer

socioeconomic background, physical activity, social media habits, being bullied, and a feeling of safety in their neighbourhood. NHS surveys found that 1 in 5 7- to 16-year-olds lived in households that experienced a reduction in household income in the past year, rising to more than 1 in 4 among children with a probable mental disorder” Prince’s Trust

“Two in five young people from minority ethnic backgrounds reported that their mental health has suffered with the cost-of-living crisis taking hold. More than 8 out of 10 (84%) young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are worried about barriers or challenges to do with their ethnicity or background when it comes to work/employment and two in five young people have experienced discrimination when applying for a job (37%) and/or at a job interview (36%). The trauma and mental health impact of these lived experiences casts a long shadow, especially if experienced early on in a young person’s career, making support at transition points all the more vital to ensure these young people don’t get locked out of opportunities or left behind.” Youth Futures Foundation

The Impact of Mental Ill Health On Young People Accessing Work

The impact of mental ill health on young people entering the labour force is profound. Evidence received by this inquiry reveals that young people experiencing mental ill health struggle during key transition points in their lives, particularly when moving from full-time education into full-time work. Young people experiencing mental ill health feel less able to make the ‘big decisions’ about their future and struggle to sustain positive destinations such as full-time education or employment. This places young people struggling with mental ill health at acute risk of becoming NEET and falling further away from the labour market which puts them at further risk of long-term unemployment and economic inactivity in the future. For young people at transition points from education in to employment and at the start of their careers, experiences of worklessness can also be a contributor factor to mental-ill health, as evidence submitted by Youth Futures Foundation highlights, “Longer periods of unemployment can have particular negative impacts on mental health and well-being, such as “anxiety, fear of missing out, and lower confidence levels”. As demonstrated above, these effects can create a vicious cycle, where those young people experiencing mental ill-health struggle to get good work, which further damages their mental health – creating a ‘scarring’ effect.”

Evidence submitted to this inquiry also reveals that mental ill health is a recognised indicator of a young person who is at risk of becoming NEET. Young people experiencing mental ill health often lack the confidence to engage with support services and have increased levels of social anxiety which puts them at risk of withdrawal from education, employment or training opportunities and at risk of social isolation. The evidence also recognises the significance of transition points for young people with mental ill health as young people leave existing support networks in schools or college and often find it difficult to find a similar level of suitable support in their next destination.

Youth Employment UK’s 2022 Youth Voice Census found that 51% of young people looking for work thought their anxiety was the biggest barrier to accessing work, whilst for those looking for work COVID-19 had the biggest impact on their mental health with over half (52.6%) stating that their mental health had been impacted ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ and 42.1% saying that their motivation to apply for opportunities has been impacted ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’. It is evident that mental ill health is presenting a significant barrier for young people entering the labour market and securing good quality work.

“Young people with poor mental health can often seem ‘frozen’ at a developmental stage unable to cope with the demands made on them. They can be focused on the very

short-term and are less able to think about or commit to longer-term goals.” **Careers Connect**

“There is evidence of increased levels of social anxiety and a lack of readiness to participate in education, employment or training. Some young people appear to have lower aspirations and are making decisions based on short-term goals, rather than considering longer-term ambitions.” **LGA**

“It’s clear that post-16 transitions are the pivotal next “risk-point for vulnerable learners” and yet, worryingly, the research highlights that there is little evidence about how to best support young people at later transition points, such as moving into post-16 learning. This gap in the evidence base runs the risk of seeing young people disengage from EET and fall through the cracks due to a lack of support at these key milestone moments.” **Youth Futures Foundation**

What works?

Whilst a number of submissions point to case studies and individual examples of programmes that have achieved positive outcomes for young people with mental ill health there is little evidence or reviews of existing employment support programmes or mental health support schemes that measure the impact on young people with mental ill health.

However, despite this gap in evidence and impact evaluations there are opportunities that exist within existing provision to develop our understanding of best practice for supporting young people with mental ill health accessing good quality work. The Learning and Work Institute recognises that, “wrap-around services, pre-employment support and in-work support are effective interventions to help people with mental health conditions get into and remain in work. Such support needs to be person-centred and flexible enough to meet individual needs.”

There is a recognition programmes such as Kickstart, Sector-Based Work Academies and Traineeships have the potential to help young people move into work. However, there is need for a stronger evidence based on the impact of these existing programmes for young people with mental ill health.

The Local Government Association recognised that there is a range of existing provision intended to help young people with mental ill health in to work such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, in school pastoral support, post-16 EET transition services, and transition support from children to mental health support. However, the LGA raises concerns that these existing services are not delivering as effectively as they could for young people:

“The LGA have consistently raised that the current system is failing to deliver effective early intervention. There is a lack of data about the children and young people who are accessing lower-level mental health support and the outcomes these interventions achieve. The responsibilities for providing and overseeing earlier intervention in mental health are unclear. An understanding of what good looks like in terms of universal provision for mental health has not been developed, and the system is incentivised to strive for targets that relate to providing access to specialist support at the acute end of need, rather than assessing children and young people’s long-term outcomes.” **LGA**

Other evidence submitted to the inquiry identifies non-formal learning as an important factor to tackling mental ill health, improving confidence and social and emotional wellbeing, each essential for preparing young people to enter the labour market and access good quality

work. The National Citizen Service shared with the inquiry: “ *here is robust evidence of a causal link between skills interventions and improved social and emotional wellbeing in young people, and prevention of negative behaviours.*¹² *Extracurricular activities can increase feelings of optimism and peer belonging, which can help to improve overall mental health outcomes among young people.*¹³ *Improving equity of access to high quality enrichment provision should be prioritised, equipping young people with skills for life and work, so that they feel confident and prepared for life beyond education.*” **NCS**

A number of contributors also highlighted programmes, practices and activities which have been effective in supporting young people experiencing mental ill health make positive steps towards accessing the labour market and good quality work. These include:

- Mental health and wellbeing as a priority in schools through a ‘whole school approach’ where a culture and environment exists to promote the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff.
- Non-formal learning and enrichment activities which build confidence, social networks and employability skills.
- Promoting all education and career pathways to young people so they understand their options and have the confidence to choose the right career path for them.
- Elements of social prescribing; including gym memberships and sports activities.
- Access to work experience to develop confidence to enter the workforce and develop an understanding of what work looks like.
- In-work support for mental health including access to Employee Assistance Programmes and regular mental health and wellbeing check-ins with young staff.

¹² SkillsBuilder Partnership and The Centre for Education and Youth (2021) [How do essential skills influence life outcomes?](#) Evidence Review.

The Centre for Education and Youth with National Citizen Service Trust (2021) [Enriching Education Recovery](#): The role of non-formal learning, extra-curricular and enrichment activities in driving a transformational catch-up experience for children and young people.

¹³ Oberle, E., Xuejun, R.J., Kerai, S., Guhn, M., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., & Gadermann, A.M. (2020). [Screen time and extracurricular activities as risk and protective factors for mental health in adolescence](#): A population-level study. Preventive Medicine, 141.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear that the mental ill health challenges facing our young people in the aftermath of COVID-19 and during a time of economic instability need to be acknowledged. The current landscape for young people entering the labour market has changed since COVID-19, as have the numbers of young people experiencing mental ill health. Policy responses must recognise these changes and adapt existing and future policy interventions to match this change in need.

The government should recognise the long-term risks to both young people and the labour market of not addressing this issue. Rising mental ill health amongst young people has the potential to lock out significant numbers of young people from the labour market and drive up economic inactivity over the longer-term, risking the individual happiness, wellbeing and health of those young people and contributing to a labour shortage in a tight labour market.

To address the rising mental health emergency amongst young people, interventions and support must be holistic, recognising that young people with mental ill health often face additional challenges and barriers in different aspects of their daily lives. Ensuring inclusive and tailored support responds to the different needs of different demographic groups and those with protected characteristics.

Contributors to this inquiry all recognise the need for purposeful and effective early intervention for young people struggling with mental ill health or wellbeing issues, this means adequate, well resourced and accessible mental health support in schools to address mental health needs before they reach critical or crisis levels and severely impact a young person's opportunities in later life. Support is also required at key transition points to ensure that young people feel able to move confidently throughout their education, training and early careers.

Our recommendations to government are as follows:

National and local services

Work to prevent mental ill health and support young people with mental ill health before it impacts their life chances and opportunities to find good quality work is key to supporting more young people into the labour market.

- Increase funding for NHS mental health and wellbeing services to meet the growing demands and reduce waiting times
- The roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams in schools as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan should also continue with urgency to ensure all young people are supported whilst in education
- Further develop and give responsibility for blended service intervention such as social prescribing, with stakeholders working at local levels in partnership to develop and deliver services
- Ensure that there are opportunities for flexible education and training pathways for young people who are particularly struggling
- DWP to have greater responsibility for young people who are economically inactive and not just claimants. Developing Youth Hubs and Mental Health Hubs and local services to support young people transitioning into employment
- The delivery of Mental Health Hubs should be prioritised and delivered at pace

- Invest in funding to identify what works in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing
- Ensure funded training and employment programmes are gathering impact data of mental ill health challenges and what is working to support those young people
- Ensure that services are targeting and delivering holistic support to those with protected characteristics
- Work with local councils and communities to tackle the drivers of poor mental health

Early intervention in school/In-school mental health support

Proactive and preventative support in schools which addresses young people's mental health needs and ensures they are fully prepared to make positive transitions from education or training into good quality work.

- Increase school-level and local authority level resources and develop front-line support structures so that they have more mental health professionals working in schools, colleges and providers.
- Wellbeing support to be delivered through Careers, Education and Information Guidance, Work Experience and Enrichment activities.
- The government should recognise the important role of non-formal learning and enrichment as means for improving mental health and well-being amongst young people by improving the equity of access to non-formal learning and enrichment activities for all young people.
- All senior leadership staff and staff with pastoral responsibilities should be mandated to complete the [Senior mental health lead training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) and data on completions should be reported to central government.

Role of Colleges and Universities

Colleges and Universities should ensure that they provide effective, quality mental health and well being support so that young people have access to the services they need.

- There should be ring-fenced funding for mental health and wellbeing support
- Mental health and wellbeing support should be offered to all learners with pastoral touch points throughout the academic year
- Mental health provision should be quality assured through data collection points including student voice.
- Young people should be involved in the support design of mental health and wellbeing services to ensure it meets their needs

Early Careers Support

All employers and particularly those benefiting from government funded training should be encouraged to:

- Provide young employees with training and support to manage their mental health and wellbeing at work
- Ensure all young employees have access to an Employee Assistance Programme or signpost to free mental health helplines
- Provide mental health first aid training to line managers of young staff
- Encourage an inclusive culture where staff feel confident to escalate concerns

- Employers should sign up to the Good Youth Employment Charter and embed the principles of good youth employment into their organisation so that all young people experience good quality work.

Targeted support for NEETs

Young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET should be identified as being at greater risk of having or developing mental ill health, proactive and preventative measures should be taken to support this group of young people into work.

- Youth workers and employability coaches should receive mental health training to help support their clients and to better understand the individual challenges they face.
- Mentoring programmes should be considered as an effective tool for supporting young people most distant from the labour market.
- Mental health training should be provided to all stakeholders who work with NEET young people.

Youth Voice

For each of the recommendations above to be effective and respond to the needs of young people any future services, support or policy initiatives should include the opportunity for young people to share their experiences and views so that provision matches need.

- Young people should be included in the co-design of mental health services, including Mental Health Hubs.
- Young people should be able to review and feedback on the services that they experience, what works and does not work
- Young people should be involved in the commissioning of services that are set up to support young people

Appendices: Written Evidence

Appendix i: Association for Young People's Health

How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work? - All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment

Executive summary

- Mental health problems develop in adolescence and are increasing in prevalence
- Access to high quality employment impacts on young people's mental health outcomes. We are particularly concerned about the precarious nature of employment opportunities available to young people
- AYPH has researched, via literature scanning and collecting qualitative evidence, the connection between young people with mental health problems and barriers faced accessing and staying in employment
- There are a range of barriers preventing young people with mental health problems accessing high quality employment, including inflexible and complex systems and discrimination
- Solutions for supporting young people include better link-up between local services supporting young people, long-term and individualised support packages
- We have developed a pathway for supporting young people with mental health problems throughout their employment journey.

Association for Young People's Health

The [Association for Young People's Health](#) (AYPH) works to understand and meet the particular health and wellbeing needs of 10-25 year olds. We want all young people to have the best possible health and equal access to high quality youth friendly services. AYPH convenes the [Young People's Health Partnership](#) (YPHP), a partnership of seven organisations with VCSE networks across England from the youth and young people's health sectors. We focus specifically on young people's health inequalities.

We are experts in understanding the health needs of young people, making us well placed to respond to the APPG for Youth Employment's Call for Evidence. Our [youth health data hub](#) provides a range of data on young people's health, including mental health outcomes. Through our engagement work speaking directly to young people, we have heard how mental health concerns can impact all aspects of a young person's life. Working in collaboration with YPHP members, we conducted a specific piece of research exploring the links between young people's employment and mental health, directly relevant to this work.

Setting the scene: Young people's mental health and employment status

The prevalence of mental health conditions is high for young people aged 10-25. The [peak age of onset of mental disorders is 14.5 years](#) of age. The most common conditions in the teenage years include anxiety and depression, behavioural disorders, eating disorders, and self-harm. Mental health prevalence is known to be higher for specific groups of young people who may be more likely to experience discrimination in society, such as LGBTQ+ young people, a clear example of health inequalities. COVID-19 and the associated lockdown periods had a major impact on the lives of young people and there have been numerous reports of increasing reports of mental health, isolation and loneliness. It is vitally important that there is good mental health promotion in childhood and adolescence and the services

young people interact with must provide positive interactions and opportunities for young people to thrive. Tackling mental ill health in adolescence will prevent ill health in adulthood.

Young people are transitioning through multiple major life events as they gain independence, one of which is entering the labour market. Ensuring a positive experience of the world of work is critical for young people's transition into adulthood and their ability to lead healthy lives. The impact of poor quality work on both physical and mental health has been widely reported. Good quality work is recognised as a "social determinant of health", having a very real impact on health outcomes. Young people's employment was particularly disrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic, with young people being more likely to be made redundant or furloughed compared to other age groups. The number of young people in the UK who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has declined since 2012, with [10.6% of young people aged 16-24 being NEET in 2021](#). Young people from deprived areas are more likely to be NEET. For young people who are in employment, there is a concern that some may be disadvantaged by working practices such as lower rates of minimum wage and zero hour contracts. In 2021, [9.1% of young people aged 16-24 who were in employment were on a zero hours contract](#), representing more than four times the rate of employed people aged 25-65.

Closing the employment gap

In 2019, AYPH and the YPHP were commissioned by Public Health England, NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to review the connection between young people who are affected by mental health problems and barriers faced in accessing employment opportunities. The exercise sought to understand how many young people are affected, whether particular groups of young people are affected, what the issues are that young people face, and what practical solutions are available. The research involved conducting a desk-based scoping review of the literature and carrying out interviews / focus groups with 44 young people, 12 employers and 13 mental health providers. Examples of good practice were also submitted via an open call for evidence. The findings are summarised in a [scoping review report](#) and a [Toolkit for better supporting young people with mental health problems into good work](#). We believe the findings remain relevant in 2022.

Barriers facing young people seeking work

The research exercise revealed that young people with mental health problems face a range of barriers when accessing high quality work. Young carers and young people who are separated from their families were identified as particularly at risk from being excluded from the labour market. The literature identified the biggest challenges facing young people in maintaining steady employment are difficulties adjusting to the workplace and being unable to find the support they need to keep going. The interviews revealed a broad range of obstacles facing young people:

- Inflexible and restricted job roles, terms and conditions
- Discrimination and stigma
- Balancing the different priorities and needs
- Inadequate access to support services
- Fear of disclosure
- Complex systems and processes
- Intimidating culture and environment
- Poorly located and / or inaccessible offices

Solutions for supporting young people with mental health problems

The literature provides a number of actions that can help young people with mental health problems to get and stay in employment. These cover:

- Preparing young people before they tackle the labour market
- Supporting young people through the first few months of their jobs
- Helping young people if the pathway is not clear
- Working collaboratively through cross agency working at a local level to help young people to access work and remain in work.

These points mirror qualitative feedback from young people, employers and mental health providers, who found the most important things for securing employment to be:

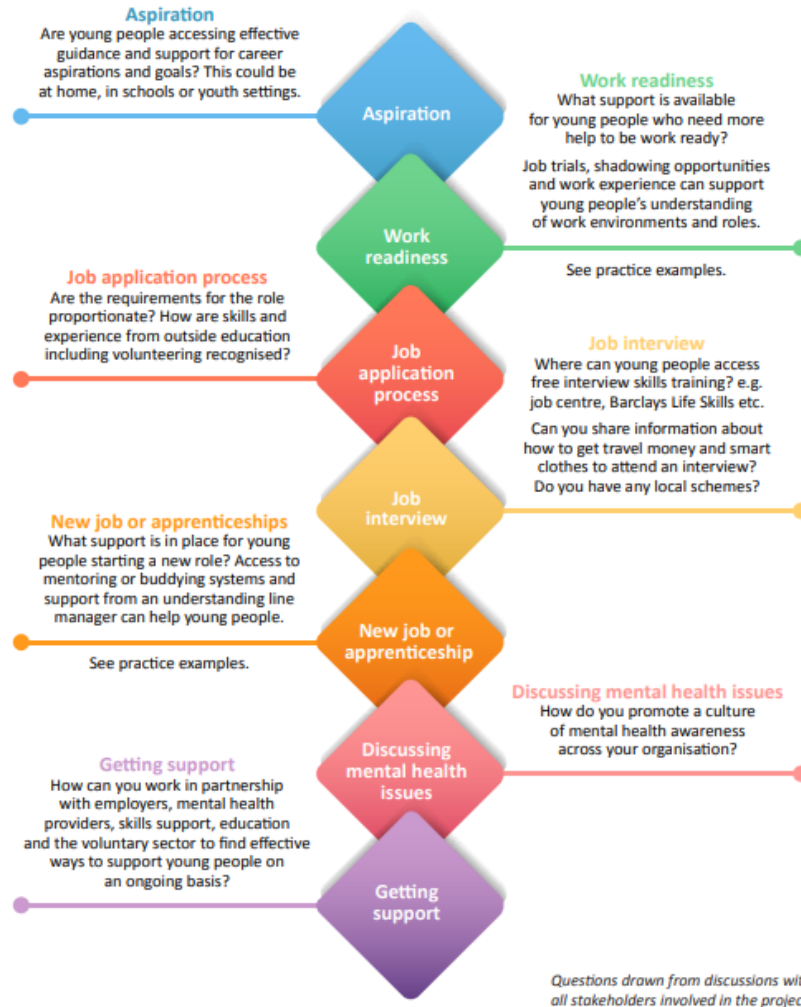
- Clear leadership
- Services that offer extensive, in-depth and long-term personalised support
- Staff with a positive attitude to young people
- Mental health training and awareness
- Flexibility within roles
- Access to tailored 1:1 support
- Importance of involving young people in policy and service developments

The [Toolkit](#) enhances on each of these points in more detail and provides practical solutions for overcoming these barriers. It references to a wide range of resources and best practice examples for further information and consideration. Figure 1 provides a template for practitioners to use when supporting young people with mental health problems into employment. It offers a pathway approach to support the individual young person throughout their journey, with helpful questions and prompts for each stage that were generated through the learning from the interviews and focus groups.

Figure 1: pathway for supporting young people

Supporting young people's pathway into work

Some key considerations for those supporting young people into and at work.



Appendix ii: Career Connect

Written submission to APPG for Youth Employment by Career Connect: How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

About Career Connect

We are a charity committed to helping young people and adults realise their potential. We deliver high-quality and professional careers, employment, and training services in schools, in the community and in prisons. We are passionate about social mobility and helping the most disadvantaged to create a better future.

In 2021/22, we worked with over 67,000 young people and adults to support them in their journey towards education and work.

Our response to the four questions

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment, or training?

National trend data shows a decrease in the number of young people that are unemployed, but a growing number that are 'inactive', and young people with mental health challenges are a substantial component of this group. See <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/events/the-new-neets/> for a detailed analysis of these trends.

In the areas where we work, although we have not yet seen a spike in NEET numbers, we are seeing that a greater number within this cohort have become more difficult to reach, engage and provide support to. The average length of time spent NEET has increased, and we have seen an increase in the numbers of young people we suspect are suffering from mental health difficulties. This very much reflects the national trend data.

In our own work, we are finding that many young people in our NEET 16-18 years client group have been impacted by the pandemic in terms of mental health and well-being. The disruption to their education over the last 2-3 years has often impacted on their social development and they are therefore less resilient, confident, and motivated, particularly when faced with new challenges, new environments, and new people. Our sense is that many young people have undiagnosed ADHD/Dyslexia/Autism.

The transition to post-16 opportunities can always be challenging for some YP, particularly those who are vulnerable and/or have protected characteristics, and the pandemic has exacerbated this in many cases making it even more challenging for young people who were already at risk of becoming NEET.

We know that mental ill health among young people can often lead to a fear of change, withdrawal, and refusal to engage in EET and support services. There is a lower resilience to cope with setbacks, lower levels of motivation and, on a very practical level, there can be anxiety about using public transport and travelling outside of their immediate local area. Leaving the house can be a challenge for many.

While there can often be a willingness to self-acknowledge poor mental health, it can lead to a self-image of a person who "cannot", placing limits on ambitions and mobility.

Many find it difficult to envisage a future of their choice or to make a choice or plan career goals that they can work towards. Young people with poor mental health can often seem 'frozen' at a developmental stage unable to cope with the demands made on them. They can be focused on the very short-term and are less able to think about or commit to longer-term goals. We see the restrictions around Covid as having exacerbated this situation.

For young people with mental ill-health that do make the transition into employment or education, they can often have difficulty sustaining these opportunities. Consequently, there can be a high drop-out rate, often in the first days or weeks. Employers are often not aware of the issues, and unable to provide the support and understanding

Further, poor mental health can often be intergenerational, and across multiple family members. This means that parents are often struggling themselves and unable to support children. They are often not challenging their children to move forward or to think about their career pathways.

2. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training, or employment? How effective is this support? (Which groups does this work for?)

There are a number of services that we work with in Greater Manchester, including 42nd Street, Emerge and M-Thrive, which is community-based, online and 24-hour (with much shorter waiting lists). There are also pastoral teams in FE Colleges, and some training provision has pastoral support. Young people can self-refer to Emerge (16-17 CAMHS), 42nd St, Time to Talk, GP or ask their provider to support with a referral.

Some specific programmes – such as Connect to your Future, that we are delivering with GMCA - offer excellent support. CTYF participants can get immediate access to Health2Employment Framework Provision online, delivered by clinically trained professionals. These types of programmes and initiatives can make a positive difference but require investment over the longer-term.

Outside of specific programmes, access to services can be difficult for young people. CAMHS, Emerge and 42nd Street often have waiting lists upwards of 3-months. Long lead in times for appointments can result in young people missing appointments. There is also something of a 2-tier system developing, whereby families that can pay for services can access them quickly, compared with the long waiting lists for those that are unable to pay.

Mental health conditions and issues may not have been disclosed to employers for fear of jeopardising working position, meaning that support via employers may not be accessed, even when available.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Dialectic Behavioural Therapy can be accessed via a GP referral and can be helpful for some, although young people and parents can often have unrealistic expectations. Waiting lists for therapy sessions can also be long.

Long waiting lists for support can deter engagement by young people, and conditions are often not considered sufficiently serious to justify a more immediate intervention. Chronic or critical conditions often develop in this way.

We see examples where absence of mental health support causes additional stress for already stressful situations, resulting in the relinquishing of traineeships and other employment opportunities.

3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education, or training?

a) Examples of evidence and best practice

b) What recommendations would you put forward?

Generally, extending youth employment programmes, to all young people and not just those on benefits would increase the support offered to young people with mental ill health. For example, programmes like Kickstart, which had a positive impact for young people post Covid pandemic, were limited to those on benefits. Extending to all young people not working would have had a greater impact.

We know that a growing number of those not claiming benefits have mental ill health and see evidence from targeted programmes like Hidden Talent (Manchester) that, with the right support, it is possible to have success in moving young people with mental ill-health towards engagement with EET (see <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/greater-manchester%E2%80%99s-hidden-talent-final-evaluation-2022> for details of the evaluation findings).

Specifically, and in part reflected by the available evidence, there are several things that we think would be effective, including:

- More flexible provision, including around college start dates
- Introduce proactive and preventative mental health support from 11 in schools rather than wait until the problem is manifest in reluctance/inability to move forward after school.
- Look at the potential for careers/employability services to be co-located or jointly delivered with CAMHS, as has been the case with adult IAPT services.
- Focus on Cooperatives – use the cooperative movement to create community type environments for YP in their last year of school.
- Access to funded Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) for young people in the first year of employment
- Programmes that prioritise young people with mental ill-health and offer them immediate access to services, rather than waiting lists
- Mentor programmes to support with the mechanics of the transition into EET while on waiting lists – the Connect to your Future programme in Manchester has been successful in this.
- A change the focus of support programmes from numbers of outcomes to quality of intervention
- Peer support groups like Youth Voice (see CTYF, Manchester)
- Workplace vans or a scooter scheme could ease the travel anxiety that many young people have –.
- Free gym and sports activities – social prescribing – gets good engagement in schools focus on health and wellbeing before qualification outcomes and the outcomes might be easier to obtain – MH is not the priority, although it is addressed it might be better to miss school time to set in place good mental health to last a lifetime before it gets chronic and impacts their early years of EET anyway and leads to self-esteem and poor identity learned helplessness issues that last a lifetime

We are bringing some of these ideas to our work. In Manchester we recently ran a programme with partners from the Youth Zone and others called 'Jump Into'. Our colleagues at the Youth Zone were able to offer very flexible support and work 1-1 with young people to help them individually, refer them for appropriate specialist support (M-Thrive) to overcome some of the challenges they were facing, engage well and achieve the outcomes of the programme.

We are currently designing a new employability and work experience programme to engage NEET young people in the highest NEET neighbourhood in the city and will build mental health services and wellbeing support into the programme through our partnership with M-Thrive.

Another example of good practice is the *He's Punching/She's Punching* programme with Phoenix Training Eccles Boxing Club. This builds relationships between young people while addressing threatening aspects of everyday life for them. It focuses on healthy mind/healthy body/activities, plus strength and confidence build through activity and learning self-protection skills

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

a) Are there specific short-term implications?

b) What are the long-term implications?

Broadly, they would increase the reach of programmes with young people with mental ill-health and would provide more bespoke support that evidence demonstrates will help move them towards employment education and training. In the short-term, these will require investment but evidence from programme evaluations shows that, even in the short-term, these programmes can make a substantial impact in creating pathways to EET for young people with mental ill-health.

More programmes should use intermediary measures that capture 'career readiness' and 'proximity to labour market' to evaluate and understand short-term impact, as well as tracking longer-term trajectories.

More specifically, flexibility from employers, training providers and funding bodies around how, where and when work can be carried out and completed would allow for more vulnerable young people to engage at their own pace, ultimately supporting them to achieve positive outcomes. A greater number of young people would be on a pathway to fulfilling their lives, meeting their needs, and developing confidence and feeling a sense of belonging and contributing.

In-work support for young people with mental ill-health would reduce attrition from EET and a lower level of churn between NEET and EET. They would also contribute to a better skilled and qualified workforce and more career progression for young people.

Longer-term implications are that it could slow down, halt or reverse a growing trend towards young people with mental ill health being economically inactive. This will, in later life, almost certainly reduce dependency on benefits. It would also contribute to better intergenerational prospects, breaking cycles of mental ill-health within families.

Adjacent to this, programmes would likely reduce stress on other parts of the health system, where resources are already stretched.

Appendix iii: COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities study (COSMO)

Written evidence submitted by the COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities (COSMO) study to the APPG for Youth Employment inquiry: 'How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?'

Summary

- Poor mental health among young people has increased by over a quarter since 2017, with 44% of 16–17-year-olds in England reporting elevated psychological distress.
- There is significant variation in signs of poor mental health by gender:
 - Higher proportions of those who identify as female report elevated psychological distress (54%), self-harm (23%) and suicide attempts (11%), compared to those who identify as male, of which 33% report distress, 11% report self-harm and 5% report attempting suicide.
 - Those who identify as non-binary report higher psychological distress (69%), and are considerably more likely to have self-harmed (61%) or to have attempted suicide (35%) than their peers who identify as male or female.
- Young people were also more likely to report elevated psychological distress if they reported having long COVID, 'severe long COVID', or if they had to shield during the pandemic. 66% of those with severe long COVID, affecting ability to carry out daily activities, reported elevated psychological distress.
- Those who experienced major life events during the pandemic, such as being seriously ill or suffering from food affordability issues, were also more likely to report elevated psychological distress.
- Half of pupils from comprehensive or grammar schools rated their school's mental health support as 'not very good' or 'not at all good', compared to just a quarter of those attending independent schools.
- Half of young people said they are now less motivated to study and learn as a result of the pandemic, with those who reported high psychological distress more likely to say so (68% compared to 37% of other participants).
- These findings highlight the need for sustainable and well-funded support for young people experiencing mental health issues, including preventative and early intervention services to prevent future cohorts from experiencing such issues.

The COSMO study

The COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities (COSMO) study is a major national youth cohort study which is examining the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational inequality, wellbeing and social mobility.

The study is the largest of its kind into the effects of COVID-19 on the life chances of a generation of young people, recruiting a representative sample of over 13,000 young people aged 16 to 17 across England who were due to take their GCSEs in 2021, asking them about their experiences of the pandemic, as well as their future hopes and plans. The study will follow them through the rest of their education and into the workplace.

COSMO is a collaboration between the UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities (CEPEO), the Sutton Trust, and the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, with fieldwork led by Kantar Public.

The study's research team have released four briefings so far: [Lockdown Learning; Education Recovery and Catch-up](#); [Future Plans and Aspirations](#); and [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

Introduction

The following COSMO study evidence considers the mental health and wellbeing of young people in Year 11, focusing on the symptoms of mental distress as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12).¹⁴ It uses a sample of almost 13,000 young people, and looks at issues including self-harm; bullying; and how mental health has affected young people's motivations and plans for the future. Insight into student satisfaction with their school's mental health services is also presented.

The evidence presented below can be accessed at the following link: <https://cosmostudy.uk/publications/mental-health-and-wellbeing>

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?

The COSMO cohort is a group that experienced significant disruption to a major transition period in their education (moving through key stage 4 into key stage 5). Their GCSE grades were awarded by Centre Assessed Grades, as they were unable to sit formal examinations. A level exams in the summer of 2023 will be the first formal set of examinations that these students have ever sat.

The findings from this cohort present a sobering picture of young people's mental health and wellbeing in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Overall, poor mental health among young people has increased by a quarter since 2017, with 44% of 16- to 17-year-olds reporting elevated psychological distress, compared to 35% in 2017 (from the Our Future cohort study) and 23% in 2007 (from the Next Steps cohort study).

There were stark patterns in signs of mental health by gender, with those who identify as female reporting elevated psychological distress (54%), self-harm (23%) and suicide attempts (11%), compared to those who identify as male (33% report distress, 11% report self-harm and 5% report attempting suicide). Those who identify as 'non-binary'¹⁵ are more likely to report high psychological distress (69%), and are more likely to have self-harmed (61%) or attempted suicide (35%) than peers who identify as male or female.

High proportions of psychological distress were seen among those who reported having long COVID, or who had to shield during the pandemic. 66% of those with severe long COVID, affecting the ability to carry out daily activities, report high psychological distress.

Those who experienced major life experiences during the pandemic, such as being seriously ill and suffering food affordability issues, were more likely to report high psychological distress. High psychological distress was more likely for those who reported major life events, most notably seeing more arguments between parents/guardians (69%), being seriously ill

¹⁴ The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) involves 12 questions that indicate whether a person is experiencing psychological distress. More information about the measure can be found at: <https://www.gi-assessment.co.uk/assessments/products/general-health-questionnaire/>

¹⁵ Young people who identified themselves as 'non-binary' or in another way in the COSMO study were grouped as 'non-binary+', while recognising that this may not fully capture everyone's preferred gender identity.

(68%), struggling to afford food (67%) and arguing more with parents/guardians (67%). This compares to 30% of those who did not experience the life events listed.

44% of young people with a parent who has high psychological distress also report high distress (compared to 30% of those with a parent who does not report high distress), highlighting an association between a young person's mental health and the mental health of their parents.

To understand how the pandemic affected attitudes to education, participants were asked about their motivation to study and learn, as well as their progress in school and plans for the future. Just over half of all participants (51%) said that they are now less motivated to study and learn as a result of the pandemic, with a quarter saying they feel a lot less motivated. Those who identify as non-binary+ were the most likely to say their motivation has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, at 62% compared to females (56%) and males (46%).

Young people's wellbeing appears to be an important factor in these changes in motivation. 68% of those reporting high psychological distress said they felt that the pandemic's disruption had made them less motivated to learn, compared to 37% of other respondents. Those with high psychological distress were also more than three times as likely to say they feel a lot less motivated (39% compared to 12%).

Those with high psychological distress were also more likely to report negative views on their academic progress due to the pandemic, and to say that their post-pandemic plans have changed:

- 86% said their progress in Year 11 had suffered, compared to 76% of those below the GHQ-12 threshold.
- 45% said they had fallen behind their classmates, compared to 27% of those below the threshold.
- 76% said their education plans had changed in some way, compared to 54% of those with a score below the threshold. Those with high psychological distress were just over twice as likely to say their plans had changed completely, at 12% compared to 5% of others.
- 71% said their career plans had changed in some way, compared to 50% of those below the threshold.

2. What support is available to young people who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)

School mental health support

The COSMO study asked participants about the effectiveness of mental health support within school. While there was no variation in incidence of psychological distress by school type, there was clear variation in satisfaction with schools' mental health support by school type and other characteristics.

Pupils attending independent schools were more than twice as likely to report that their school mental health support was very good (26% vs 10%) and were also more likely to rate the support as fairly good.

Greater proportions in comprehensive schools said support was not at all good (over three times the proportion in independent schools; 19% compared to 6%).

The most and least deprived schools by free school meal eligibility had more students rate their school mental health support as 'very good' or 'fairly good' (56% and 54% respectively)

than students in schools representing the middle bands of deprivation, where just under half of students rated their mental health support in school as 'very good' or 'fairly good'.

Young people with high psychological distress were much more likely to rate their school mental health support poorly, with over double the proportion saying the support was not at all good (26% vs 11%). A further 37% said support was not very good, compared to 23% of other participants.

Parental intervention

Parents of pupils who rated their school's mental health support as not at all good or not very good were more likely to contact their child's school about their wellbeing. More parents of pupils from independent schools also contacted schools about their child's wellbeing, despite these children giving much better ratings of their school's support.

Furthermore, parents of pupils who identify as female (24%) or non-binary+ (37%), and those who have caring responsibilities (27%) contacted their school about their child's wellbeing in greater proportions than parents of male pupils (20%) and those who aren't carers (22%). This might suggest that disparities in mental health scores for these groups translate into increased parental engagement with the schools these pupils attend.

3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education, or training?

Findings from the COSMO study highlight the need for sustainable and well-funded support for young people experiencing mental health issues. Additional support should include preventative and early intervention services to prevent future cohorts from experiencing such issues. Young people should be consulted when designing services to guarantee services are accessible and meet their needs.

More targeted support for non-binary+ and trans students is required that is delivered by professionals who have been trained to understand the needs of these young people. Measures to reduce the risks faced by these groups should be included in both new national self-harm and suicide prevention plans, as well as local plans, with a national framework setting out how to do so.

Local and national strategies should also continue to tackle bullying, particularly dealing with cyberbullying on social media.

The inconsistency in levels of satisfaction with the mental health support offered by schools should be addressed by ring-fenced funding for mental health support in all schools that adequately recognises the scale of support required by students following the pandemic. Additional support derived from this funding should include:

- Implementation of a 'whole-school' approach to wellbeing, where a culture and environment exists that both promotes and protects the mental health and wellbeing of both students and staff alike.
- Having access to an independent counsellor for students.
- Introducing Mental Health Support Teams into every school.
- Implementation of a well-evidenced anti-bullying programme.

Mental health and wellbeing support should also be included in catch-up activities in schools and colleges for all students, with specific interventions for those with existing mental health issues who feel that the pandemic has affected their academic progress.

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

The research clearly shows that student's future study and career plans are affected by poor mental health. Providing additional support to schools as part of a 'whole-school' approach to young people's wellbeing, including access to an independent counsellor, can set students up well for their next steps in education, training, and employment, providing them with the tools to manage their wellbeing and seek further support where necessary.

Appendix iv: Digital Innovators

In response to Question 3 of this inquiry - what additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training? - Digital Innovators has discussed:

- The factors contributing to a state of deteriorating mental health in young people in the UK (United Kingdom) and those of which can be addressed through improved provisions of work experience opportunities and skills development frameworks.
- The need for earlier intervention of opportunities for personal and professional development to increase confidence in young people and improve career prospects, partially addressed by the introduction of T Levels in 2020.
- How skills programmes which incorporate skills development and industry placements can alleviate the demand on employers for T Levels but provide young people with the necessary components for their qualification and wider personal development.
- The importance of collaboration to ensure engagement with young people whilst still in the education system to reduce the probability of becoming NEET and the aftermath this has on mental health and career progression.

The above has been explored in relation to Digital Innovators' experience engaging with approximately 1500 young people in the West Midlands.

Introduction to Digital Innovators:

Digital Innovators is an award-winning training provider on a mission to bridge the gap between education and employment.

We help young people access fulfilling career opportunities by providing them with tangible work experience and key employability and digital skills which will help them to stand out from the crowd in an oversaturated job market.

Our work thrives on a community of collaboration which includes partnerships with education providers, businesses, community organisations and local government.

Our experience facilitating young people's development and their transition into meaningful employment whilst navigating these essential partnerships across multiple sectors has provided an insight into the many barriers which prevent young people accessing the labour market and quality work.

Written evidence on: What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

Since its inception seven years ago, Digital Innovators has engaged with approximately 1500 young people between the ages of 14 and 30 who were either still in education or no longer in education, training, or employment.

There have been several young people within the cohorts who have taken part in the Digital Innovators Skills Programme who were forthcoming with their mental health struggles, notably anxiety and depression, which have impacted their educational and professional careers.

It is likely, however, that a larger proportion of these cohorts were also struggling with mental health as it is something that impacts a substantial proportion of young people in the UK (United Kingdom). According to the Youth Voice Census 2022 “we are now in the midst of an escalating mental health emergency. Young people are feeling debilitated by the mental health challenges they are experiencing, and cannot get the help they need.”¹⁶

But why? Apart from the wider societal and economic issues which are burdening young people such as the impact of COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis, and the uncertainty of political tensions internationally, there are overarching factors which are negatively impacting young people in the UK which can be remedied.

These factors are the lack of self-belief, a lack of opportunities and a lack of work experience.

Not only have these factors impacted young people's progression into employment, but they have also led to a state of deteriorating mental health amongst young people – both of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The question, then, is how can we support young people struggling with their mental health and struggling to progress their personal and professional development?

Young people need to be inspired and nurtured at an earlier stage in their lives.

The provision of careers advice and guidance and exposure to work experience opportunities often comes near the end of or after their academic careers, at which point they have not developed the skills needed to succeed in the workplace or gained the necessary experience to progress their careers in the way they would like to - and are therefore more likely to become NEET.

The government has acknowledged the need for incorporating a concrete focus on careers into the education system at an earlier stage with the introduction of T Levels in 2020, offering a chance for young people to experience the workforce first hand, develop vital new skills and build a relationship with employers in their chosen field.

However, there are significant challenges surrounding the implementation of T Levels, particularly concerning the industry placement. Students are required to complete a minimum of 315 hours of industry placement with an employer, which is a considerable undertaking for all involved.

In addition, a recent report by Engineering UK and MAKE UK uncovered that there was lack of awareness, of understanding and of support around T Levels which was impacting employers' engagement with T Levels and consequently, the probability of them hosting industry placements.

¹⁶ Youth Voice Census 2022 -

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/dev/wp-content/themes/yeuk/files/youth-voice-census-report-2022.pdf>

The result of this meant that only 1 in 10 (9%) of engineering and manufacturing employers surveyed for the report currently host a T Level placement and just 12% plan to in the coming year.¹⁷

At Digital Innovators we help young people to unlock their potential by developing their skills and confidence and providing them with tangible, valuable work experience. This is done through the Digital Innovators Skills Programme which combines specialised training of the skills needed to succeed in the workplace alongside a live business project with leading employers.

A key focus of the programme is to identify students' innate strengths and competencies and enable students to realise the value they have to offer. We believe this is something that is often overlooked in technical education where there is a focus on the ability to understand a topic, rather than build upon the knowledge that is already there.

A proportion of students on our programme are currently T Level students. Through the programme we can facilitate the completion of the industry placement hours needed for their T Level qualification, which is done in both our work-simulated environment and the employers' premises.

However, the programme also provides those not studying T Levels with exposure to the world of work and an opportunity to develop their skills in the same capacity.

Previous participants on the DI (Digital Innovators) Skills Programme have worked with organisations such as HS2, West Midlands Academic Health Science Network, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS (National Health Service) Trust, and more.

Whilst on the programme, participants also have access to 1-1 mentoring, networking opportunities, exposure to their industry of interest, guidance on post-education routes such as apprenticeships and more.

In a recent survey we asked our current cohort of students what they felt they were getting out of the DI Skills Programme, to which 54% responded with improved confidence. Other responses included work experience, exposure to employers, communications skills, and teamwork.

We believe that a main factor leading to this improved level of confidence is contributed to the format of the work experience with employers. This work experience is built around developing a solution to an industry challenge set by an employer. We work with the employer to ensure that whilst this is of value to their business, it also relates to topics that young people can resonate with.

As a result, the work experience young people gain is linked to a challenge that they can empathise with and see the benefits of applying their thoughts to – combined with the confidence boost that comes with being trusted by a leading employer to create a solution on this topic.

Whilst this programme is currently being delivered within colleges, it has previously been delivered with exclusively NEET cohorts with participants between the ages of 18 and 60 during the height of the pandemic. Our experience with NEET cohorts in comparison with young people still in education illustrated the importance of engaging with young people whilst they are still in the education system.

¹⁷ Unlocking Talent: Insuring T Levels deliver the workforce of the future - <https://www.engineeringuk.com/media/318632/unlocking-talent-ensuring-t-level-deliver-the-workforce-of-the-future-final.pdf>

With our NEET cohorts, we encountered several challenges with onboarding and retention over the course of 12 weeks. Not only did we struggle to fill the cohorts despite partnerships with community organisations, local authorities, job centres and charities, but the young people who did enrol demonstrated higher levels of disillusionment, low confidence and mental health struggles in comparison to young people still in education (which were undoubtedly reasons for the onboarding issues in the first place). Another notable challenge was the impact of digital exclusion through lack of access to data and digital devices.

This slowed engagement with the programme, delivered virtually in lockdown, demonstrated through a reluctance to use camera and microphone, to put forward their ideas, and to interact fully with their project team members and their assigned employer.

However, for those who remained on the programme, their confidence significantly improved as they developed their key skills, gained work experience, and delivered a tangible solution for an employer. With this new-found confidence and exposure to the workplace, many participants left more optimistic about their job prospects with some securing full-time employment with the employer they worked with during the programme.

With these positive outcomes eventually reached with NEET cohorts, we can only imagine the impact this provision would have had if delivered at an earlier stage in their lives. If they had developed their confidence, skills, and work experience at a younger age, is it possible that they may not have become NEET?

To summarise, we believe programmes such as the Digital Innovators Skills Programme, which integrate skills development with work experience opportunities and is a vehicle for providing industry placements needed for T Levels, serve to eliminate three barriers impacting young people's mental health and career progression: lack of confidence, lack of opportunities and lack of work experience.

We build confidence in young people, we provide opportunities for personal and professional development, and we facilitate tangible work experience across multiple industries.

This is a replicable, accessible model which thrives on a community of collaboration between businesses, education providers, community organisations, and local government and we believe is essential to inspire young people amid this mental health crisis.

Considering the above, we have some concrete suggestions for additional support for young people who are struggling with their mental health, which would help them get into work, education, or training.

- We ask that the government conducts an inquiry into the challenges which are contributing to deteriorating mental health in young people.
- We suggest that an awareness campaign be created which is aimed at employers to increase understanding around T Levels and the benefits of engaging with young people on industry placements, paired with a campaign targeted at parents and caregivers.
- We recommend that a programme of support be created for employers to help them understand how they can engage and work with young people as for many SMEs (Small Medium Size Enterprises) this is just too difficult to navigate.
- We ask that the government explore alternative provisions of careers guidance, work experience opportunities and skills development for young people which are complementary to the infrastructures already in place, such as T Levels and apprenticeships.
- There have previously been incentives for businesses who provide industry placements and apprenticeships. Is this something which needs to be re-evaluated?

- We suggest that equal importance is placed on the outcomes available to young people engaging with provisions of work experience and industry placements, and where possible this should be framed around topics with which they identify with and care strongly about.

Appendix v: Greater Manchester Center for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO)

How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?

Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent was a youth employment programme working with young people aged 16 – 24, funded by the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund, and led by GMCVO. Delivery took place 14th January 2022 - 30th June 2022. 144 young people were supported.

The programme built on learning from Greater Manchester Talent Match (2013 - 2018) and the first iteration of Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent (March 2019 – March 2021) which supported over 3000 young people who were not and/or hidden to progress towards employment and improve their self-esteem and wellbeing. Hidden young people are not in employment, education or training and not claiming any benefits.

Young people registering to the programme completed detailed background information to enable us to track their progress such as whether they had a mental health condition affecting their ability to work, how they felt they manage and cope with feelings and how they would rate their levels of confidence or self-esteem. From the data collected, the highest number of declared disabilities were mental health (16%) and many young people had characteristics and circumstances associated with major barriers to education, employment, and training. Notably, on self-disclosure, 27% had a mental health condition. Mental health conditions often intersect with other barriers such as being a care leaver, ex-offender, having a disability or being homeless.

Data collected created a 'proximity to the labour market' (PLM) measure which estimates the different factors that contribute positively/negatively to young people who are NEET entering education, training, or employment. Twelve factors were identified (over and above standard demographic information) which the Talent Match evaluators concluded impacted on movement into the labour market. For Hidden Talent (2022), GMCVO collected data about these factors as an additional way to help gather insights about progression of young people that do not fit the standard outcome targets. For the purpose of analysis, scores were grouped into five bands: band one indicates greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market. Some of these factors offered scope for development (e.g., job search skills), others not (e.g., caring responsibilities). Those with a long-term mental health condition travelled the least amount towards the workplace than young people, such as those with a disability, those who are neurodiverse based on the 'distance travelled' indicator as seen below.

Target Group	Average PLM band at Start-up	Average PLM band at Exit	Distance travelled across the bands
Hidden	2.15	3.44	1.33
Economically inactive (including hidden)	2.07	3.32	1.28
Unemployed	2.31	3.21	0.90
Learning Disability	1.25	2.05	0.80
Long term Mental health condition	1.81	2.50	0.69
Neurodiverse	1.84	2.88	1.05
Disability	1.71	2.71	1.00
Women	2.51	3.49	0.98
Men	2.05	3.13	1.11
Ethnically diverse groups	2.2	3.24	1.06
White - British	2.19	3.26	1.09

Of the 27% who reported they had a mental health condition:

- 68% had an additional barrier such as neurodiverse, hidden or ex-offenders.
- 73% had been unemployed for 18 months or more
- 50% reported that their Mental Health condition limited their ability to work
- 13% entered into employment
- 18% into education and training.

2. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)

Within our project we primarily worked with young people who were not in Education, employment or Training (NEET) and also hidden young people (those NEET and not on benefits). As well as supporting the young people towards and into and EET outcomes the support was extended to those who were at risk of becoming NEET and also to enable the transition into work or education with on-going in work/education support.

From previous programmes we knew that approximately 1/3 of the young people on the programme would require 1:1 mental health support. There was a separate budget allocated to mental health support as this is a key barrier to address for young people.

The additional money was available for young people to pay for 1:1 Mental Health support and was allocated as a MH Personal Budget of £350. This was to enable a third of young people to access therapy for between 8-12 sessions. In previous programmes mental health support was provided by one provider and was generic whereas in this program the additional budget allowed for young people to choose the provider, therapy speciality (e.g. bereavement counselling) and location provided.

Despite strong connections with local VCSE MH providers and funding to pay for the 1:1 counselling sessions, there was still a few weeks (sometimes up to 2 months) delay between initial referral and support starting. The delay was due to the current demand on services as well as setting up the referral system. This meant that some young people continued to receive MH support after the Hidden Talent programme ended. Also, there is a complex

sensitivity surrounding the referral of young people to mental health support. The seriousness of concerns about young people's mental health requires urgent action beyond what can be achieved in an employment-focused project.

3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

a) Examples of evidence and best practice

In-work support could be provided once a young person has entered employment or education as best practice to enable the young person to remain in work.

In-work support was provided to young people that moved into employment or education, which was of great value to both young people and employers/education settings. This helped to iron out any hiccups within the first few months and provided a safety net of support without the worry of needing additional support from management/tutors.

b) What recommendations would you put forward?

- For specific training providers and work places to have their own Mental Health support or be able to refer to a mental health support that is holistic and can be longer term than the general EAP schemes which tend to only allow for 6 sessions
- Workplaces/ training providers Open to people accessing the support and that this is private and not reported back on.
- Support for organisations to recognise the difference in low confidence and how this can be built up for someone, a course can be attended etc. against the need for professional support for a longer term mental health condition from trained specialist/therapist etc.

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

a) Are there specific short term implications?

From our findings Mental Health is still the biggest barrier to young people who are Not in Education, employment and Training to gaining employment, education or training.

If the recommendations take place then there will be less NEET young people and more young people into Employment Education and Training. More timely, appropriate intervention will help to remove the biggest single factor hindering young people's employment prospects.

b) What are the long-term implications?

Long-term there will be a sustained workforce for the employer as well as sustained employment for the employee. Similarly with training and education, more people will be able to engage and complete courses.

There would be less pressure on Mental Health services as young people are in work and able to engage within the workplace.

Less pressure on work/training to support young person with MH, focus can be on work

More young people are able to manage their Mental Health or issues to enable them to enter the workplace and remain in employment. They know where to get support and know it isn't their fault they have MH conditions and have been unable to sustain work.

Appendix A – Real Life Examples

In addition, the below real life examples show that although the young people received holistic one to one support to move towards and into EET outcomes, support is still often required from a Mental Health professional. When the two are provided, positive sustainable outcomes can be achieved for the young person.

Real Life Example 1

How Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent support young people with mental health issues

To mark Mental Health Awareness Week, 9th-15th May 2022, we spoke to one of our Talent Coaches, Eva Linder who works at Early Break in Bury, to find out how she supports young people suffering with mental health issues.

Eva highlighted the cycle that negatively impacts young people's mental health from a young age. The young people that Eva works with often drop out of college without finishing their course and become isolated, especially when something such as autism or ADHD goes undiagnosed whilst they are at school:

"When it gets missed at school, and even though some schools are really good, when they go to college it's a different ball game. If it's not been done at school, what often happens is they drop out. Drop out of college, get stuck in their bedroom, and before we know it, they've been stuck in their bedroom for 2, 3 years – even before the pandemic started. The result now is that they can't go out, they can't speak to anyone, they panic – even going for appointments, they can't speak the night before because they know they've got to go somewhere."

"The amount of times lads come in and say, I'm really lonely I just want a friend. I just want someone to talk to. The tears, the desperation, then the confidence goes, the self-worth goes.."

The theme of this year's mental health awareness week is loneliness.

Loneliness is something that is affecting more and more of us in the UK and has had a huge impact on our physical and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eva highlighted the impact that loneliness has on young people, particularly in young men, and how it can begin when young people aren't supported during and after further education:

"The loneliness - it just spirals. That's how it starts. But then that goes into physical stuff. They get up and gotta go somewhere, they're not used to it, they're gonna be physically sick. Thinking they're gonna have a heart attack. It all just snowballs. The thought of anything... I had one lad who said, 'I just sit and cry in my bedroom all the time'. 18."

Eva explain how she encourages the young people she works with to attend group sessions to build up their self-confidence and ability to develop relationships:

"What I used to do, this worked really well, was to work with them one to one then I'd throw them into this group. Well they'd never been in a group before had they. For years they've been stuck in their house, their bedroom. There was a computer in one corner and some games on the table. I'd be in the group with them. They'd maybe sit at the computer, maybe choose some music, and you guarantee that somebody would go up and go, 'I like that one, try this one', or they'll play Uno. They'll talk and have a laugh, but it's nothing personal that they'll ask of each other. And that gave them the confidence then."

“It’s about getting them to understand that feeling, so when they feel like that next time, what can we do to make that better”

Self-harm and young people

Eva supports young people to breakdown the triggers that cause them have negative feelings, and what they can do to recognise and deal with these feelings:

“It’s about them managing their self-harm. Making sure they tell somebody, distract themselves...tackling the suicide idealisation. I’m very upfront with them – do you want to die? People sometimes feel uncomfortable asking that question.”

“(I ask) are you going to hurt yourself? Have you self-harmed this week?... Which was your lowest point this week? I always try to end on, what was your best point this week?... It’s about their mood and how they’re feeling; exploring their thoughts at the time (of the negative feelings), ask them when it was, what happened, when they had that thought, were they at home or school, in their bedroom? Just explore all of them thoughts.”

“Dealing with anger, anxiety... it’s about how you deal with them thoughts. If you can find something that works for one of the unhelpful thought processes and identify it to a feeling, that’s how they should deal with it – so when I feel like that, this is what I need to do...”

“I just think they’re all amazing - every single (young person) ... I’ve seen it over the years. You always find something that they’re really good at. They’ve always got something to offer. Always.”

Entering employment and challenges

The purpose of Greater Manchester’s Hidden Talent is to support young people aged 16-24 into employment, education or training. It’s clear that lots of intensive support is often needed with some young people. Eva spoke about the challenges that young people suffering from mental issues face and why there are often so far from the workplace:

“(Because of) the loneliness (they have) gone into a spiral, have no self-worth – that’s when the mental health input (from a Talent Coach) needs to be done first, and then slowly add things in and build up. You try to put somebody who’s not been out their bedroom for two years into a fulltime job or a part time job. It’s not going to work.”

“All they’ve ever known is school, dropped out of college, maybe gone to college, all of a sudden they’re needed in at 8am... They’re not equipped for that anymore”

Eva also highlighted the importance of finding meaningful employment and opportunities:

“If you can find something that they’re interested in and not just shove them in anything. There’s no point. It’s finding where these jobs are. I had one that wanted to work on the stock exchange and I found this course in Manchester... He’s at Uni now doing finance!”

Greater Manchester’s Hidden Talent advocates for the need for longer term-support, some that Eva also touched upon:

“I think it should be the same person for 12 months, and at first lots of intense support... in that 12-month window, you’ve got time to do 10 steps back, 3 steps forward, 5 steps back, 2 steps forward”.

With longer term support, young people with mental health issues can be more appropriately supported into employment, training or education.

Real Life Example two

Joshua supported to find his pathway forward with support from Stockport Homes

Talent Coach Jamie Hine from Stockport Homes has been supporting Joshua, 18, since March 2022. Jamie met Joshua after a referral from Stockport Family. His confidence was extremely low and he was experiencing bad anxiety that made it difficult to search and apply for jobs, as well as attend interviews. Joshua left mainstream education early and had gone on to complete a level 1 functional Maths and English course with The Growth Company, however, his motivation was suffering.

Since joining Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent, Joshua's confidence has shot through the roof. Jamie referred Joshua to Beacon Counselling, which has helped massively to improve his confidence.

In May, Joshua was able to secure a placement at Stockport Homes Private Lettings through their placement scheme, with the support of Jamie and their Placement Coordinator Maria. During his time on the placement, he has done incredibly well and colleagues have noticed a massive improvement in his confidence. He has developed new skills that will support him going forward and help to grow his experience.

"Josh has been doing really well. He has been very punctual and always happy to have a go at any new tasks allocated to him. I can see his confidence has grown a lot during his placement with us so far" – Suzie Bonner, Stockport Homes Private Lettings Manager

When Joshua first started his placement, he was apprehensive about making phone calls to customers but has learnt to push himself and is now regularly ringing people to book them in for appointments.

"From the start of the programme, I had zero confidence and barely any motivation. I felt I didn't have enough knowledge to secure a role and I was anxious about my next steps. The Hidden Talent programme has massively boosted my confidence, from where I was at the start of the support is incomparable to now. I've found the placement with Stockport Homes and counselling sessions from Beacon Counselling have helped me feel much better and my self-esteem has improved. I'm shocked at how far I've come and amazed at how much I've improved myself." – Joshua

With Jamie's support, Joshua has now applied for an IT apprenticeship with Stockport Homes. They have worked together to develop Joshua's CV and search for training opportunities to help develop his skills further. Jamie has helped Joshua find a pathway forward, and now he hopes to find a role within the IT industry.

"I'm amazed at how well Joshua is doing since starting Hidden Talent. He has absolutely grasped the opportunities presented to him and I've noticed a remarkable change in Joshua's self-esteem. His confidence has grown so much in such a short space of time which is testament to Joshua's will and determination to make a success of the placement. His journey has been inspiring and I'm so happy for Joshua that he's in a better place. I'm confident the skills he has gained will help him achieve his goals in the future." – Jamie Hine, Talent Coach, Stockport Homes

Real Life Example three

How Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent provides support to young people in work

Harriet, 20, Rochdale

When Janet met Harriet in February 2022, she was eager to find work. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic she had been unable to find stable and continuous employment.

With Janet's support applying for jobs and preparing for interviews, Harriet has been able to secure a position as an Administrative Assistant in Rochdale.

Now that Harriet has begun work, Janet is in regular contact to ensure she has settled into her new role. Janet has been supporting Harriet to settle into her new schedule, and is supporting her to deal with anxieties surrounding her new position and, although Harriet isn't settling as easily as she would like, Janet is there to provide support and encouragement.

"(Janet has made) a massive difference, as there is always someone there you can count on for advice"

Janet is able to speak to Harriet's employer, if needed, to ensure both Harriet and the employer are happy with her progress and performance, and can identify where additional support may be needed.

Harriet was also able to use the expenses provided by Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent to purchase work clothes and cover travel costs, which means she can feel more confident in travelling to and being at work.

Adam, 20, Rochdale

Adam is based in Middleton, Rochdale, and before joining Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent wasn't keen to travel outside of the area. He was having a tough time at home, having to move in with his dad since his mother was moving away. Adam wasn't feeling confident about his future, with no previous work experience.

With Janet's support, Adam wrote his CV and a covering letter and started to apply for job opportunities. She also supported him to research housing options.

When Adam had an interview to travel to, he was able to use expenses provided by the programme to pay for a taxi to alleviate some of the anxiety he was experiencing.

When he was successful in securing a Kickstart position with Rochdale Council's Parks and Green Space department, Janet ensured that Adam felt confident in using public transport to travel to his new job since she knew this was a cause for concern for him. She reassured him and ensured he was able to travel to work by providing the necessary emotional support, as well as bus fare and any information he needed. Janet spoke to his employer about his anxieties, so they could support too, if necessary.

Janet stays in regular contact with Adam to ensure that the workload isn't getting on top of him and that he is able to travel to work on time and feels confident using the bus.

Appendix vi: Huddersfield University

Written evidence submitted by Lisa Russell, Ron Thompson, Jo Pike and Jo Bishop

1.Title

Mental Health and its implications for young people vulnerable to becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training)

2.Authors

Professor Lisa Russell (l.russell@hud.ac.uk), Dr Ron Thompson (r.thompson@hud.ac.uk), Dr Jo Pike (J.Pike@hud.ac.uk) and Dr Jo Bishop (J.Bishop@hud.ac.uk)
(School of Education and Professional Development) at the University of Huddersfield

3.Executive summary

The main findings include the following key points:

- Being unemployed tends to incur negative mental health impacts for young people vulnerable to becoming NEET
- Local Authority (LA) representatives are increasingly concerned about young people's mental health in the advent of COVID-19 and the longer term impacts this challenge may have both on the individuals and society at large
- There are concerns around diminishing mental health support services and resources available for vulnerable NEET young people and the increase pressure this is placing on front line services such as schools
- Despite the consideration that mental ill-health should be considered in relation to other 'at risk' factors deemed influential in shaping a young person's education and training pathway, specialised support programmes are still deemed important

4.Evidence summary

Evidence is provided to inform **what impact mental ill-health is having on young people** and **what support is available to young people** when transitioning into education, employment or training, with specific reference to those deemed vulnerable to becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). Findings are derived from an extensive literature review, in addition to data derived from Phase 1 of the research project 'Mapping the provision of NEET early interventions in England', funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by Professor Lisa Russell. This longitudinal project aims to understand the nature and scope of early intervention programmes targeted at young people 'at risk' of becoming NEET. It provides the first comprehensive national picture of early intervention provision, and focuses specifically on the typology of interventions, the processes used to identify young people at risk, and the support available to them. The main corpus of Phase 1 data comprises 60 Local Authority (LA) survey responses and 25 post-survey semi-structured interviews with LA representatives, in addition to seven exploratory interviews with key LA representatives, learning providers and young people who had experienced being NEET. Phase 1 of the fieldwork occurred between November 2021 and November 2022. All LA representatives completing the survey and taking part in interviews had specific responsibilities for managing and co-ordinating the tracking and support of NEET young people, and most were also involved in co-ordinating NEET prevention work and identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET.

The findings discussed below are organised around key literature themes, as well as areas identified by LA representatives and exploratory interview participants as important and related to their perceptions regarding the overall impact mental ill-health is having on young people.

4.1 Unemployment and mental health – an established link

It is well documented that periods of unemployment or inactivity in young people's lives tend to incur negative longer term economic and social costs to both the individual and society at large. These consequences include lower future earnings (Gregg and Tominey 2005), higher chances of being unemployed and dependent on welfare benefits in the future (Kelly and McGuinness 2015), and other negative well-being and health outcomes (Bell and Blanchflower 2011, Ralston et al. 2022).

Links between mental ill-health and youth unemployment have been long established (Thern et al, 2017). More recently, there have been increasing concerns about the intersection between NEET (not in education, employment, or training) status and youth mental ill-health (Garipey et al, 2021). Indeed, much of the literature indicates that mental ill-health is one of

the key contributory factors associated with those young people vulnerable to becoming NEET (Holmes et al, 2021). It has also been identified as a consequence of being NEET for an extended period of time (Robertson, 2019). Although concerns about the NEET population have been an international policy issue for many years, particularly following the global financial crisis of 2008 (O'Reilly et al. 2015), the more recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated fears of a youth mental health crisis, with children and adolescents deemed even more susceptible to mental health impacts (Niedzwiedz et al, 2021).

Relevant literature points to concerns related to their vulnerable developmental stage, their experiences of fear of infection, home confinement, suspension of regular school attendance and social distancing mandates, as well as their knowledge of other existential threats such as further global financial recessions and associated impacts seemed to have further increased current depressive and anxious symptoms compared to pre-pandemic estimates (Samji et al, 2022).

4.2 An increase in concern around young people's mental health in the advent of COVID-19

Local Authority representatives indicated that there has been an increase in concern with regards to young people's mental health in the advent of COVID-19. Twenty-three of the twenty-five post-survey interviews mention mental health and/or anxiety as a key concern regarding vulnerable NEET young people. The LA survey response below is representative of concerns that since the advent of COVID-19 they are managing greater numbers of young people with mental health issues.

'There are greater numbers of young people with anxiety, who lack confidence, who are not ready for full-time employment, education or training (EET)'
(LA survey response)

Interview data below suggests that those young people considered vulnerable to becoming NEET are even more susceptible to experience poor mental health and that providers of education, employment and training provisions are reporting increased numbers of vulnerable NEET young people reporting challenges they are experiencing with their mental health since the advent of Covid-19.

'Mental health's definitely an area we've seen grown. It's, you know, it's common knowledge in the news but, you know, it's a reality, you know, when you start looking at the whole cohort, whether it's looked after children, care leavers, or just general NEET young people, Year 11s (...) I think it's so varied. You know, I think we all look at the pandemic, but I think maybe that was just a trigger. You know, maybe it was, those needs were already there and it's just exacerbated that increase in that population'

(LA post-survey semi-structured interview response)

4.3 Shifting support services

Early indications suggest that Local Authorities are increasingly concerned about the increase in Elective Home Educated (EHE) young people and the link this may have with the increase in young people reporting mental health concerns. Amidst concerns around diminishing resources in the form of mental health support services such as CYPMHS (Children and Young People's Mental Health Services), schools, colleges and other providers that work with young people vulnerable to becoming NEET are under increasing pressure to support young people as a front-line service. Thus, the sorts of support these young people can obtain and do obtain are shifting, with an increasing focus on schools being used as a

basis for that support. One Local Authority representative indicates this in a post-survey semi-structured interview excerpt below.

Researcher: So, but are those mental health issues, I mean is that something you're seeing an increase in?

LA: Oh it's horrendous, yeah. The increase in anxiety is horrendous.

Researcher: What do you put that down to?

LA: It spiked immediately after COVID, so through COVID we continued to work with our schools and they started to increase the number of young people who they would like adding in Year 11, and it's just, I mean it's at least trebled (...) The number of young people who are poor attenders or complete non-attenders, our EHE is going up through the roof. You know, we used to have ten, we've probably got fifty this year in Year 11 who are EHE, and most of those are for mental health reasons. It's not necessarily increasing the number of EHC plans, but it's certainly a massive indicator in terms of young people who are not going to be resilient in transitions, and it's a massive challenge. And our, and I know it's a national issue, but our CAMHS and related support just isn't there. It hasn't been increased, it's, you know, they're struggling like hell. So yeah, so anxiety related has just exploded, and I think at some point we're going to have to consider, you know, if we have a vacancy we might bring somebody in in a specialist role.

(LA post-survey semi-structured interview response)

The DfE (2021) argues that taking a coordinated and evidence-informed approach to mental health in schools and colleges leads to improved pupil and student wellbeing, which, in turn, can improve learning, but with a perceived increase in demand deriving from some of the most vulnerable young people in education comes a greater need to fill that provision at the school level within a wider landscape of diminishing resources. One of the main barriers to mental health treatment is simply a lack of available services caused by a combination of a high demand for treatment and a low supply of bespoke treatment services, which may in turn disproportionality negatively affect those young people and families that want to remain hidden from LA support structures.

'(...) and also lack of services, you know? I mean CAMHS is stretched. How long are you waiting to be seen? What happens, how, you know, schools can be putting in a lot of interventions but that requires a lot of resources. The families may not understand what that is, they may not be willing to engage with it, so then you've got a lack of engagement. You know, it's sort of (...) the perfect storm of you might offer support but they're still not taking it up, they don't want to be found, you know?'

(LA post-survey semi-structured interview response)

4.4 Concerns around the long(er) term effect

Local Authorities use 'mental health' as one of the key indicators in identifying young people as 'at risk' of becoming NEET. With the increase in perceived need following the advent of COVID-19 comes an increased concern about how this will be managed long-term both within the provision itself and beyond it, and also importantly what the long(er)-term effects might be for the young people themselves, as well as the wider economic and social implications.

'I think at risk groups, and that probably links with your second question, is around mental health. We are seeing an absolute, you know, the climb has been immense, and I think there are a lot of young people who are struggling to get back into normality and their mental health has suffered over COVID, and we're still seeing the impact of that now'
(LA post-survey semi-structured interview response)

Many LA representatives feel that the full impact of Covid-19 has yet to be seen and an increasing concern around young people's mental health and what that means for the individual, the professionals working with these vulnerable young people and society at large. When mental illness is left untreated, it can lead to long-term issues with emotional stability, behaviour regulation, relationship difficulties, substance abuse, and even physical illness, which may in turn have a negative impact on vulnerable NEET young people entering and retaining their place in sound quality sustained employment, as well as cause a greater financial burden on societal welfare expenditure in the long(er)-term.

4.5 Support for young people with mental ill-health issues helps young people vulnerable to becoming NEET re-engage with work, education and training

Despite the consideration that mental ill-health should be considered in relation to other 'at risk' factors deemed influential in shaping a young person's education and training pathway, specialised support programmes are still deemed important, especially whereby the young person's relationship with the school, college or provider may have broken down, here specific interventions are considered vital to help young people re-engage and get back on track, since much of the provision is based on building up a relationship of trust. Some, such as this professional working with young people who are NEET explains the importance placed on intervening early in the following interview excerpt.

'I think it's very important that we were able to offer early intervention to young people that could be really marginalised'
(NEET Provider Professional exploratory interview response)

Below a young artist aged 18, depicts in Image 1 how she felt prior to working with provider professionals on an intervention that focused on improving her overall mental health and wellbeing and in Image 2 how she felt afterwards. Both the image and corresponding interview excerpts reveal the benefits she felt from working on this intervention aimed at NEET young people wanting to re-engage with education, training and/or employment.

Image 1 – depicts young person's feelings prior to intervention



'It's a tough piece. I have a love/hate relationship with it because I like it, but I hate what it is. It's like it's messy on purpose, everything was a mess. It's a bit muddy on purpose, because, you know, I don't really know what I'm doing, and no one really did. Everything was tough. I don't know, there's just so much like

weighing me down and holding me back from actually trying things'

(Young Person exploratory interview response)

Image 2 – depicts young person's feelings after intervention



'This is a happier piece, it's a better piece. It's me coming to terms with the fact that, you know, sometimes things wear you down. You know, she's still chained down, she's still suffering, but she's, you know, she's embracing it a bit more. Even though there's still, you know, that darkness, or that sadness, and whatever, she's still striving to do better and be a better person'

(Young Person exploratory interview response)

5. Proposed recommendations for action by the Government or others which the APPG should consider

5.1 Recognise the increase in need and the disproportionate effect on young people vulnerable to becoming 'NEET'

Support for young people vulnerable to becoming NEET should acknowledge the established literature and above evidence that suggests that by looking after these young people's mental health, their chances of securing and sustaining good quality, well paid employment increases, and that this benefits the individual and wider society.

5.2 Acknowledge, document and respond to the change in need in the advent of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health and ability to secure sustained, good quality education, training and employment opportunities is still being revealed, with this change, shifts in the types of support available, to whom and via what means needs to be carefully monitored and managed accordingly.

5.3 Increase school-level and LA level resources and develop front-line support structures so that they have more mental health professionals working in schools, colleges and providers

Resources directed at the front-line level are required in an attempt to further fill the dearth in wider mental health support structures and organisations operating at a wider societal level, but with this a greater need to work across different organisations and agencies in an effective way requires further consideration.

5.4 Develop and support research that can investigate and interrogate the consequences of the Local Authority perceived increase in EHE

Specific attention should be drawn to the increase in Elected Home Educated (EHE) young people and further research should be commissioned to interrogate the perceived link between the increase in young people being EHE, mental health and future NEET status.

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For more information about the research (Leverhulme REF: RPG-2021-144) visit the project webpage hud.ac/MINEHud, follow the twitter feed [@MINEHud](https://twitter.com/MINEHud) or email MINE@hud.ac.uk

Appendix vii: Learning and Work Institute

Evidence from Learning and Work Institute to the APPG on Youth Employment Inquiry into Young People's Employment and Mental Health

About Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy, research and development organisation focusing on lifelong learning, skills and employment. We want everyone to have the opportunity to realise their ambitions and potential in learning, work and throughout life. We believe that a better skilled workforce in better paid jobs is good for business, good for the economy and good for society.

L&W co-chairs the Youth Employment Group, a coalition that helps to design, deliver and evaluate employment support services to improve its impact and shape policy. Over the years, it has looked at good practice in reducing unemployment among young people. L&W is undertaking an evaluation of the Future Workforce Fund, a project that is testing ways to deliver employability support for young people not in employment, education or training in Greater Manchester¹⁸. It has also evaluated projects that provide employment support (including in-work support) for people experiencing mental health conditions¹⁹. L&W's consultation response has drawn on this evidence and other relevant research.

What do we know about the impacts of mental ill-health on young people in relation to work, education or training?

Poor mental health impacts on overall employment and on the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). July -September 2022 Labour Force Survey data suggests that

- 62% of 18-24 year olds were in employment
- 8.5% were unemployed (compared with 3.8% of the overall working age population)
- 32% were economically inactive (compared with 21.5% of the working age population). Economic inactivity is defined as young people not in education, employment or training, and not looking for work.

¹⁸ The Future Workforce Fund is a £12.2 million two-year project delivered by Greater Manchester Combined Authority in collaboration with the Prince's Trust.

¹⁹ Learning and Work Institute (2019) *Evidence review: Employment support for people with disabilities and health conditions*, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute.

From a high of 22.5 % in 2011, the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment had been falling in the UK up to the onset of the pandemic. However, unemployment among 16-24-year-olds is still significantly higher than the overall working age population, at a time when the number of job vacancies is high.

The Labour Force Survey is also used to estimate the numbers of young people who are NEET. Over the July-September 2022 period, there were an estimated 724,000 16-24 year olds in this category, of whom 32% were classed as unemployed and 67% were economically inactive. Some 10.6% of all 16-24-year-olds were estimated to be NEET in this period, an increase over the previous quarter (10.4%). Economic inactivity for any reason now represents 54% of young people who are NEET compared to 41% in 2011

Being economically inactive bars a young person from most types of DWP employment support. There are a number of reasons that NEET young people are classed as economically inactive rather than unemployed. These reasons which include (i) benefit ineligibility – the requirement for a young person to stay in education until they are 18 means that most 16 and 17 year olds are unable to claim benefits (ii) caring responsibilities, either for children or adult family members (iii) illness, health conditions or disabilities, including mental ill-health. L&W research, drawing from a range of data sources suggests that there has been a gradual but continual increase over the past ten years in the proportion of young people who are economically inactive due to sickness or disability, including mental ill-health.

Mental ill- health has been identified as a substantial barrier to employment for young people who are NEET. Mental health problems or a disability were the most common barrier to work cited by NEET young people in a 2022 survey undertaken by L&W (Figure 1). This finding was backed up by analysis of Labour Force Survey data which showed that for all young people who are NEET who report a long-term health problem or disability, mental health is by far the most common ‘main’ condition²⁰. Data from the Labour Force Survey for 2018-2021 shows that over one in four (25.7%) young people who were NEET over this period experienced some form of mental health problems, compared with 8.5% of young people who were not NEET. These findings indicate that mental health problems substantially contribute to the reasons for a young person being or remaining NEET.

While the increasing prevalence of mental health difficulties is an issue for all young people, it should be noted that some young people are particularly likely to report mental health problems. Young people who face particular barriers to learning and work due to their backgrounds and circumstances, such as care leavers and young adult carers, are more likely to experience poor mental health.

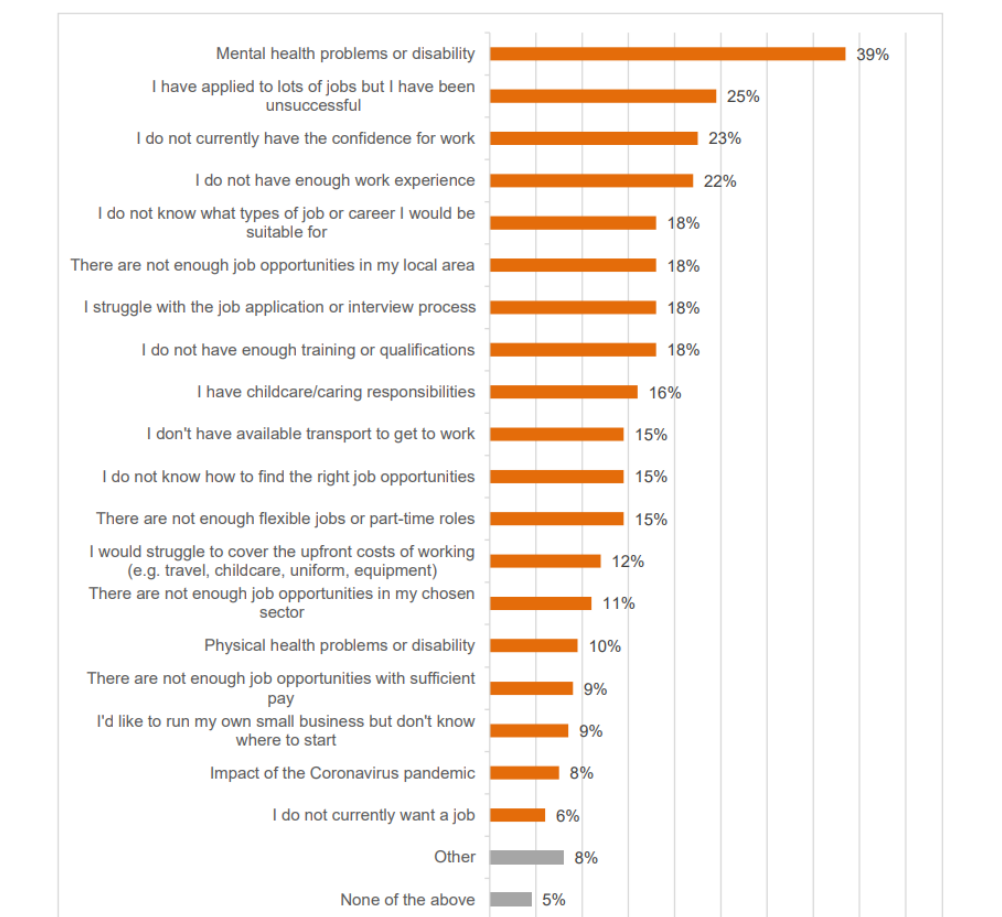
As Figure 1 below shows other important barriers to work included a lack of confidence, a lack of work experience, childcare or caring responsibilities and a lack of flexible work. Poor mental health, low levels of confidence and worklessness are also interrelated conditions, with all these conditions having the potential to worsen the others.

The pandemic has worsened the mental health of many young people. Data from 1,300 16-24 year-olds in the Understanding Society longitudinal survey suggests an increase in common mental disorders among young people during the pandemic, with girls and young women, economically disadvantaged young people and those with special educational needs and

²⁰ Learning and Work Institute (2022) *The Power of Potential: Supporting the future of 'NEET' young people in the labour market*, London: Learning and Work Institute and the Prince's Trust.

disabilities more likely to report difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing²¹. A study undertaken by Learning and Work Institute for the Princes Trust in 2021^{22,23} suggested that pandemic had a more significant impact on the mental health of young people who were not working or whose work was insecure.

Figure 1: Reasons for difficulty finding a job/not currently looking for work by percentage of NEET young people



N=200

Source: Representative survey undertaken by L&W in May-June 2022 cited in Learning and Work Institute (2022) *The Power of Potential: Supporting the future of 'NEET' young people in the labour market*, London: Learning and Work Institute and the Prince's Trust.

²¹ Chandola, T., Kumari, M., Booker, C. and Benzeval M. (2020) 'Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 and pandemic related stressors among adults in the UK' in *Psychological Medicine* Dec 7:1-10.

²² The research included a representative survey of 2,092 young people aged 16-24 and two focus groups.

²³ Learning and Work Institute (2021) *Facing the Future, Employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus*, London: L&W and the Prince's Trust.

What type of support is most effective in helping young people with mental health conditions to enable them to take part in employment, education or training? Is this type of support currently available to young people?

There have been a number of studies that evaluated employment support for people with mental health conditions. This research suggests that wrap-around services, pre-employment support and in-work support are effective interventions to help people with mental health conditions get into and remain in work. Such support needs to be person-centred and flexible enough to meet individual needs. Consistent support from a keyworker, financial support, for example help with travel costs are also factors that underpin successful programmes to help people with mental health conditions get into work²⁴. Evidence from programmes such as Building Better Opportunities also indicates that it is important to incorporate confidence-building opportunities into employment support programmes for young people with mental health conditions.

One-stop-shop or hub services have also been shown to be effective in helping disabled people find and stay in work. Here employment support is offered alongside other advice and help, for example, health and wellbeing activities, financial capabilities and debt advice²⁵ in a flexible, person-centred package of support. As we discuss below, there are a growing number of youth employment hubs, although there is a variation in the way that such services are organised and not all of them involve mental health professionals.

Pre-employment support from a work coach and the opportunity to undertake work placements has also shown to be an effective approach in helping young people with mental health conditions to move into work. In-work support from a mental health support worker or specialised coach has also been shown to help people to stay in work.

Current provision

There is a wide range of different employment support available in England which we set out below and discuss its potential in helping young people with mental health conditions.

Current DWP-led and DfE-led employment support and skills provision: There is a range of employment support available through DWP to 16-25-year-olds with mental health conditions. Non-targeted provision includes Jobcentre Plus advice and coaching support and the Restart scheme. The latter is commissioned by the DWP and delivered by contracted providers. It targets long-term unemployed people over 18-years old who have been out of work between 18-24 months. Restart provides 12 months of more intensive coaching and is the DWP's largest employment support programme. An evaluation of Restart is currently being undertaken, which will include looking at its responsiveness to people with mental health needs. It is important to note, however, that Restart excludes people who are economically inactive, which includes some young people with mental health conditions.

Although not specifically targeted at those with poor mental health, Sector-Based Work Academies (SWAPs) (a DWP-led programme) and traineeships (DfE-led) have the potential to be an effective means to help young people with mental health conditions move into work. Both offer pre-employment support and a work placement. SWAPs are a six-week programme that prepares for work in particular sectors, involving pre-employment training, a work experience placement and a guaranteed job interview. There is a need for more

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<https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/evidence-review-employment-support-for-people-with-disabilities-and-health-conditions/>

²⁵ibid

evidence about the outcomes for young people with poor mental health who have taken part in a SWAP programme.

Traineeships are targeted at young people aged 16-24 (or up to 25 with Education, Health and Care Plans), with 15,500 traineeship starts in the 2021-2022 academic year. Lasting between six weeks and one year, traineeships aim to prepare young people for a job or apprenticeship and include a work placement. Traineeships are a flexible programme, which can be tailored to the needs of individual young people. However, a recent Department for Education policy announcement²⁶ has changed the way that traineeships are to be funded. In future, traineeships will no longer operate as a stand-alone programme, with funding for them integrated into 16-18 funding and the Adult Education Budget, but without a ring fence. In areas where the Adult Education Budget has been devolved, Mayoral Combined Authorities and Greater London Authority will decide on how best to support young adults. L&W believes that the approach used in traineeships, and the flexibility of the programme, could support more young people with mental health conditions. We would also like to see the Department for Education monitor the impact of changes to funding arrangements for traineeships on the uptake of this provision, particularly among vulnerable groups of young people such as those with mental health conditions.

Some DWP employment support provision targets those with mental health conditions, including:

- The DWP-Improved Access to Psychological Therapies Programme, a joint DWP-Department of Health Programme running in England, where employment advice is offered to those receiving NHS support for their mental health. Some £122 million has now been invested in this programme which aims to reach 100,000 people which L&W welcomes. Some healthcare providers have also delivered other forms of employment support alongside this programme, for example, offering supported work placements, although this practice is by no means universal. There is a need for a stronger evidence base on the impact of this programme on young people with mental health conditions.
- The Intensive Personalised Employment Support scheme offers one-to-one support and training to help you into work for people with disabilities. To take part in this scheme applicants must have a disability and also be unemployed. Again, there is a need for a stronger evidence base on the impact of this programme on young people with mental health conditions.

The DWP also provides Access to Work grants for disabled people or those with health conditions aged over-16 to enable them to start or stay in work. These grants can cover the costs of pre-employment support or one-to-one support from a mental health professional to help someone to stay in a job. Evaluations of the scheme generally suggest that it has worked well for people with mental health conditions. However, potential recipients did not always know about Access to Work grants, and the application process was felt to be burdensome²⁷. L&W is also concerned about reports of delays and backlogs in processing access to work grants²⁸, with 25,281 people waiting for a decision in November 2022, up from 14,174 in November 2021²⁹. If people with mental health conditions are to move into or stay in work, it is

²⁶ [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

²⁷ IFF Research (2018) *Access to Work: Qualitative research with applicants, employers and delivery staff*, London: DWP.

²⁸ <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/access-to-work-in-crisis-as-figures-show-massive-waiting-list/>

²⁹ Written answer to parliamentary question, 1 December 2022.

obviously important that Access to Work grants are processed within the one-month target period.

Other DWP employment support specifically targets young people. In 2021, the DWP committed to employing an extra 13,500 Jobcentre Plus work coaches, including an extra 150 specialist youth work coaches. While the number of work coaches is still 23% above pre-pandemic levels, it is 29% (6,220) down from its peak in October 2021³⁰. It is not known how many of specialist youth employment coaches are currently in post.

L&W welcomes the DWP's commitment to youth hubs. The Department is leading on a programme to increase the number of 'youth hubs'. Here DWP coaches work alongside other employment support provision, colleges, youth workers, counsellors and organisations running wellbeing-focused activities. These hubs mean that young people are able to access a range of services in one location. However, existing youth hub provision has taken different approaches to delivering services. Some youth hubs are located in long-established youth clubs, while others are based in colleges or the offices of private or not-for-profit training providers. There are also differences in the type of wrap-around support, including the amount of wellbeing and mental health support. It would be helpful if DWP offered guidance and quality standards for youth hubs, to help drive up the consistency and high standards of provision.

Council and third sector employment support and skills provision: Almost all councils offer some employment support. Often this provision has been organised to fill gaps in Jobcentre Plus and DWP-led provision. Prior to DWP's involvement in youth hubs, councils have often taken the lead in running such hubs, working in partnership with colleges, private and not-for-profit training providers, mental health services and civil society organisations. As already noted, there are differences in the ways such hubs are organised and the services they deliver.

A few council-run youth hubs have been co-funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). Monies from the ESF have co-funded the National Lottery Community Fund's Building Better Opportunities programme. This began work in 2014 and by October 2022, Building Better Opportunities has supported 144,868 people. It is targeted at those furthest from the labour market, including people who are economically inactive. Some 132 projects have been funded, with most offering support to people experiencing poor mental health, including groups such as refugees and young people. Its 2022 data shows that 48% of its participants had a disability and 21% of participants were aged 16-24.

Building Better Opportunities, other ESF funded provision, council-led and third-sector led employment support has often had good outcomes, including among young people with mental health conditions. For example, the evaluation of Building Better Opportunities shows 36% of participants moving into work, 32% into education or training and 12% from economic inactivity into job-search³¹. Its evaluation has highlighted factors that have contributed to its success with young people reporting mental health needs. The flexibility of Building Better Opportunities in responding to participant needs was felt to underpin its success. During the pandemic, most of the projects reported an increasing level of mental health needs amongst participants.

More broadly, the flexible approach of many third sector led employability projects enabled them to create additional packages of support quite quickly to address issues such as anxiety

³⁰ Written answer to parliamentary question, 3 November 2022.

³¹ Ecorys (2022) *Building Better Opportunities Annual Report*, October 2022, London: ECORYS.

and depression during the pandemic. Many council and third-sector led employment projects offered mental health interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy alongside careers advice and work coaching, careers advice and other employment support. Other projects made sure that work coaches and other relevant staff received training about participants' mental health needs. Other projects referred participants to externally-provided mental health provision. Another factor that contributed to their success is that these projects use a key worker approach, where participants are allocated a named member of staff to coordinate their care. Having a relationship with a trusted coach or advisor was found to be key to maintaining participation in the project.

The Building Better Opportunities programme is now winding down and new ESF funding is not available to UK organisations. By 2024-25 the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is meant to be taking over this area of work. The delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund's employment support must learn from and build on the successful approaches of the Building Better Opportunities Fund (and other council and third-sector led employment support) in helping those with mental health conditions to get and stay in work. Between the wind down of ESF-funded employment support and the introduction of the UKSPF, interim funding regimes have been put in place for the 2021-22 to 2022-2023 period, but not at the same level as previous EU funding. L&W is concerned that this will lead to some employment support programmes being unable to continue their work, with a resultant loss of expertise and people being left without help when they need it. It is essential that the Government and the National Lottery Community Fund takes steps to prevent this from happening by making bridging funds available.

Policy changes to help more young people with poor mental health move into work

1. L&W believes that the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training is too high, given the high number of job vacancies. It has argued for a Youth Guarantee where every NEET young person is offered a job, education or training place. We believe this move would benefit significant numbers of young people who struggle with their mental health.
2. L&W recommends that DWP employment support for young people who are not in employment, education or training must be opened up to those who are economically inactive, as well as those who are classed as unemployed. The underspend on Restart programme could be used to fund this additional support.
3. We would also like to see the Department for Education monitor the impact of changes to funding arrangements for traineeships on the uptake of this provision, particularly among vulnerable groups of young people such as those with mental health conditions.
4. One-stop-shop wrap-around support has also been shown to be effective in helping young people with poor mental health move closer to the labour market. We welcome DWPs decision to increase the number of youth hubs, but believe that the Department should produce guidance and quality standards for youth hubs, to help drive up high standards of such provision.
5. The delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund's employment support needs to build on the successful approaches of previous employment support programmes in helping those with mental health conditions to get and stay in work. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should also make bridging funds available to enable successful projects to continue their work in the period between the winding

down of ESF-funded projects and the full roll-out of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2024-2025.

6. Employment support for young people experiencing poor mental health must be informed by the best evidence and underpinned by transparency. L&W would like to see an evaluation of employment support offered through the Increased Access to Psychological Therapies Programme and the Intensive Personalised Employment Support scheme from the perspective of young people with poor mental health. We would also urge the DWP to publish data on the numbers of specialist youth employability coaches currently in post.

Appendix viii: Local Government Association

LGA submission to the APPG for Youth Employment Committee inquiry into “How is Mental Health Affecting Young People accessing the Labour Market and Quality Work?”

9th December

1. About the Local Government Association (LGA)

- 1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We are a politically led, cross-party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales.
- 1.2. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2. Summary

- 2.1** Local government as democratically elected leaders of place play a key role in stimulating local economies and want to ensure that employers have a supply of skilled workforce to meet the current and future business demands in local areas. Councils also want to ensure that every young person, no matter their background, has the tools and support to progress in life and reach their potential.
- 2.2** As part of their wider role in supporting children and young people and in shaping their local skills and employment system, councils have several statutory duties relating to ensuring all young people up to the age of 18 (25 for those with learning difficulties) participate in education or training. Despite having these wide-ranging responsibilities that demand close working with local providers, partners and employers, councils have very few formal levers over commissioning or co-ordination of provision to ensure their statutory duties are met.
- 2.3** [Councils also have a key leadership role and formal mental health responsibilities.](#) Promoting good mental wellbeing and preventing poor mental health is vital to help individuals and communities stay healthy, live meaningful lives, and potentially avoid the need for long term care. More importantly, it helps individuals to secure and sustain employment and training, reach their potential and make a valuable contribution to society and the economy.

- 2.4** To help the number of young people struggling with mental health into employment, it is vital that the Government commits to strong action, backed with increased investment, to meet current, unmet and new demand for mental health support that has built up during the pandemic and tackle treatment waiting times. We are calling on the Government to roll out [early support hubs nationwide](#) to help the increasing number of young people who are struggling with mental health issues. These hubs allow young people to access mental health support in the community without a referral.
- 2.5** The LGA is calling for the Government to develop a [cross Whitehall strategy](#) that puts the needs of children and young people at its centre. This will support all partners that support young people's mental health and wellbeing – including councils and the NHS – to work more collaboratively and effectively, with clear outcomes and roles for all partners.
- 2.6** Government must shift to a whole system approach to prevention, intervention and treatment to improve young people's mental health. This should be backed by investment in all parts of the mental health system, investment in community provision and the wider services that support wellbeing and tackle the socio-economic drivers of mental ill-health, such as housing and welfare support.
- 2.7** Integrating mental health support with employment support is an effective way of supporting people with mental health into employment and further training. Empowering councils with the right powers and flexibilities to expand this support across the country, will be vital to helping young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) to access needed treatment, build their confidence and move into work.
- 2.8** Councils and combined authorities, with the right powers and resources, could do far more to support young people to secure and sustain education, employment and training (EET), by creating an integrated skills and employment system tailored to local needs. [The LGA's Work Local model](#) is a ready-made blueprint for making this happen. By giving democratically elected local leaders the power and funding to work with local partners – businesses, training providers, the education system –to join up careers' advice and guidance, employment, skills, apprenticeships, business support services and outreach in the community, they could deliver improved outcomes for young people at reduced cost. Work Local would allow councils to effectively deliver their statutory duties and provide the wraparound support for those with complex needs and those experiencing disadvantage.
- 3. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?**

- 3.1** Mental ill-health is a significant barrier to education, employment and training. A recent report by the [Prince's Trust](#) identified that the most common reason why NEET young people are struggling to find a job or not looking for work is due to a mental health problem or disability (39 per cent).
- 3.2** [Recent statistics](#) show that one in four young people aged 17 to 19 have a probable mental health condition, up from one in six in 2021.
- 3.3** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing issues in relation to mental ill-health. This is illustrated in many councils' local NEET data, which shows a significant growth in the number of young people who are not active in the labour market due to ill-health, with mental ill-health being a prominent factor.
- 3.4** Councils' family and youth services report that the pandemic had a significant impact on many young people's development, from which some young people have not yet recovered. This has shown up in a variety of ways including more young people finding it

difficult to engage with people outside of their family unit and having poor levels of motivation in school.

- 3.5 Councils also report that there is an increased number of young people who find it difficult to engage on a 1:1 basis with support services. There is evidence of increased levels of social anxiety and a lack of readiness to participate in education, employment or training. Some young people appear to have lower aspirations and are making decisions based on short term goals, rather than considering longer term ambitions. For example:
 - 3.5.1 [Durham County Council](#) - in June 2019, 26.1 percent of 16-18 year olds were NEET. This had risen to 33.0 percent in June 2022. (Department for Education: Local Authority Client Caseload Information System, June 2022).
 - 3.5.2 [Somerset County Council](#) – report that at the start of this academic year 429 young people, nearly 9.0 per cent, (from a cohort of approx. 5,300) have withdrawn from their college courses. Some of these have found new destinations but over 65.0 per cent (283) are now NEET / Not Known. This is an increase from this time last year and the main reasons for withdrawal are mental health/anxiety/not coping with the course. (local college data.)
- 3.6 [Social inequalities](#) are associated with a higher risk of mental ill health, with children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups more likely to experience poor mental health.
- 3.7** Children from low-income families [are four times more likely](#) than those from the wealthiest households to have a serious mental health difficulty by the time they leave primary school. There are also [clear links between poor mental health and health and racial inequalities](#), with rates of mental health problems often higher among [some black and ethnic minority groups](#) than for white people. [Recent research from the IFS Deaton Review](#) identified that mental health inequalities are complex, with intersectional factors such as race, gender, geography and class all playing a role in influencing a young person's chance of growing up mentally healthy.
- 3.8 It is [well established](#) that there is an intergenerational pattern to mental health. Children whose parents experience mental health issues are 2-3 times more likely to experience mental health themselves, than children whose parents do not. [It is estimated](#) that 4 million children in the UK, equating to 1 in 3, have parents with poor mental health.
- 3.9 LGBTQ+ children and young people [report significantly higher levels of mental health problems](#), and often face particular barriers [including bullying](#), and feelings of vulnerability and difference, which impact their emotional health and wellbeing and their ability to engage in employment, education and training.
- 3.10 [Children and young people in rural or remote areas face particular mental health and wellbeing challenges](#), including a higher risk of alienation and social isolation. Children and young people in areas with poor, infrequent or unreliable public transport infrastructure also face particular barriers in accessing support from mental health services, which tend to be centralised in urban areas, and in access training or work opportunities. These barriers are disproportionately experienced by children from low-income families, those experiencing disadvantage and those with complex needs.
- 3.11 Practitioners report that cultural background is a key factor in how young people interact with mental health support services. [Rethink Mental Health states](#) that fear, stigma and lack of culturally sensitive treatment can act as barriers to accessing mental health care for people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3.12 It is also reported by those working with young people that young women are possibly more likely to seek mental health support earlier, with a stereotype for young men to 'get on with it'.

3.13 Many councils have put in place targeted initiatives and developed pathways to successfully support young people who face additional barriers or have complex needs into work or further training. This includes targeted work with young people with special educational needs, young offender backgrounds, those from ethnic minority groups, and those with experience of the care system. Such interventions are additional to standard national initiatives and are typically financed through council funding or through a range of external funding bids. Funding provided at the local level through Integrated Care Systems can also help to provide a localised bespoke support approach to children and young people's mental health services, when this is prioritised. For example:

3.9.1 Hackney Borough Council has designed a number of programmes focussed on [an inclusive approach to employment](#) which engages and supports those experiencing disadvantage in the area, including, care leavers, young people with disabilities, and young black males. This includes their supported internships programme that provides a stepping-stone to employment for young people with SEND. Five years ago, the council also established 'Hackney Council Apprenticeships' to create new placements within the council. The scheme proactively recruits underrepresented groups and ensures that those that may not normally get invited to interview are given a first interview opportunity.

3.9.2 [Devon County Council](#) offers mental health support through the [Devon Youth Hub / Exeter Works](#). The programme provides open access support, 1:1 bespoke support for young people, and group work tailored to LGBTQ young people, young carers, children in care, care leavers, those experiencing mental health issues.

4. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for?)

4.1 [Councils have a key leadership role in promoting positive mental health](#) in their local communities and providing information, care, and support across the life course. Promoting good mental wellbeing through a preventative approach and early help can help individuals and communities stay healthy, live meaningful lives, and can potentially reduce the number of people who require treatment from acute mental health services.

4.2 Supporting good mental health and wellbeing is intrinsically linked with other agendas and is underpinned by wider public services– including housing, welfare, public health, social care, employment, social inclusion, economic development, and community safety. Councils are uniquely placed to connect all parts of the system.

4.3 Councils' roles and responsibilities in mental health include:

- system-wide local leadership through Health and Wellbeing Boards, Integrated Partnerships and place-based care and support systems
- statutory duties and powers related to adult social care and mental health for children and young people and for adults under the Mental Health Act
- the overview and scrutiny of mental health provision
- councils have a critical role to play in reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusion and cohesion within their communities

- councils also provide and commission information and advice on local services that can offer mental health support. Many of these services are culturally specific, such as advocacy.

4.4 There is a mixed menu of support on offer across the country. This can include:

- 4.4.1 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which are supported by both councils and NHS partners, provide mental health services for young people. Demand regularly outstrips the provision of CAMHS services. For example, in Devon County Council there are around 2,000 children and young people currently on the waiting list for services across the County and limited financial capacity to increase provision to meet this demand. [NHS figures](#) earlier this year show “open referrals” – children and young people in England who are undergoing treatment or waiting to start care – reached 420,314 in February. This is the highest number since records began in 2016.
- 4.4.2 In school pastoral support – many areas have an informal and formal school specific offer. This ranges from straight pastoral and in-school guidance and counselling services, through to formal recruitment of counsellors and other health professionals where schools have identified specific areas of concern / concentrations of need. The offer of support is often under extreme financial or short-term funding pressure as they are additional to core budget requirements.
- 4.4.3 Post-16 EET transition service: Between the ages of 16 and 25 young people are expected to make key life-long decisions as they transition to higher and further education, move into jobs, leave home, start relationships and begin families. Councils as part of their NEET statutory duties work with providers and colleges to ensure that there is adequate support in place to help young people transition from school to further education. Mental health advice and support has become an increasingly large part of this, with 1-2-1 advice focused on improving confidence and addressing anxiety and depression as core issues. For example, [Salford City Council](#) and partners have a range of provision to support transitions from pastoral teams in further education colleges to transition mentors who support year 11 and year 12s who have been in alternative provision, with built in wraparound support for the whole family.
- 4.4.4 Transition from children to adult mental health support: councils ensure that children and adults’ mental health services work together, and commission and deliver support to young people transitioning from children to adult services. For young people the transition can mean changes to their treatment, in the people who treat them, where they go for treatment and a change in their support worker. To avoid this process resulting in anxiety and exacerbating mental health issues, it is vital that young people receive the right support at this critical time. [LGA’s improving transition from children to adult mental health services](#) provides best-practice guidance to help councils ensure the right support is in place to ensure an effective transition. For example, [Staffordshire County Council](#) has established a mental health support pathway referral process that provides information about getting advice, where to go for help and getting emergency support.

4.5 The LGA have consistently raised that the current system is failing to deliver effective early intervention. There is a lack of data about the children and young people who are accessing lower-level mental health support and the outcomes these interventions achieve. The responsibilities for providing and overseeing earlier intervention in mental health are unclear. An understanding of what good looks like in terms of universal provision for mental health has not been developed, and the system is incentivised to

strive for targets that relate to providing access to specialist support at the acute end of need, rather than assessing children and young people's long-term outcomes.

- 4.6 Wider community-based services play a critical role in supporting children and young people's mental health and support them to build resilience, for example, youth services. [Access to sport, play, culture leisure activities and other non-academic experiences](#) also support children and young people to be engaged members of their community, improving involvement in education and bolstering their resilience.

5.0. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

- a) Examples of evidence and best practice**
- b) What recommendations would you put forward?**

- 5.1 It is vital that the Government commits to strong action, backed with increased investment, to meet current, unmet and new demand for children's mental health support that has built up during the pandemic and tackle child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) waiting times. We need a whole system approach to prevention, intervention and treatment, to provide young people with timely access to the right interventions that enable them to stay mentally well.
- 5.2 The LGA is calling for the Government to develop a [cross-Whitehall strategy](#) that puts the needs of children and young people at its centre. This will support all partners that support young people's mental health and wellbeing – including councils and the NHS – to work more collaboratively and effectively, with clear outcomes and roles for all partners.
- 5.3 It is essential that the Government recognises the lead role of councils in promoting good mental health and drives a shift away from the current medical model of treating mental health towards a focus on prevention and expanding the availability of mental health support in the community. Focussing on prevention and intervention at an early stage is vital to prevent problems before they escalate and improve children and young people's wellbeing.
- 5.4 To expand access to mental health support in the community, we have long been calling for the Government to roll out Early Support Hubs in every area. These centres, which can be accessed without a referral, bring together various services to support young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing through an early-intervention approach, including youth services; sexual health, drug and alcohol, health and wellbeing practitioners; and mental health practitioners.

Integrating mental health and employment support

- 5.5 Integrating mental health support with employment support, as part of a wrap-around approach, has proven to be effective in supporting those with mental health needs into work.
- 5.6 As conveners of place, who work across and link with other local services – such as mental health, housing, family support and childcare – councils are uniquely placed to lead this approach. Many councils already run devolved or local employment support programmes which include tailored support for mental health. Expanding this support across the country will be vital to helping all young people to access the mental health support they need and build their confidence to move into work. For example:
- 5.6.1 [Greater Manchester Combined Authority's \(GMCA\) 'Working Well'](#) suite of devolved and test-and-learn employment and health related programmes, take a whole-population approach to health, skills and employment. The programme combined physical and mental health support – including talking therapies- and

advice on drug and alcohol problems, skills, education and housing to support people who had been unemployed for more than two years. Each participant had their own keyworker to help them get the right support at the right time, keep them motivated, and develop their confidence and independence. To date, these programmes have supported more than 60,000 people, helping more than 15,500 into work - a success rate of 26 per cent.

5.6.2 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils provide a tailored support offer for young people facing additional barriers to further education, training and employment through a number of initiatives. At [the Thrive Project](#), a multi-disciplinary team of qualified youth workers, teachers, curriculum experts, SEND experts and social, emotional and mental health experts, provides tailored alternative provision with 1:1 mentoring, coaching, personal careers advice and guidance and wider bespoke support.

5.6.3 Bristol City Council has developed Bristol Works, a programme dedicated to providing work experience, mentoring and skills development to children and young people who are most at risk of becoming NEET. The programme has supported the delivery of:

- o Career Coach: a bespoke five-year coaching programme that matches children in care with local employer mentors. It matches volunteer coaches with young people, aged 13 or 14 and looked after by the local authority, with inspirational local professionals, based on their interests and preferred ways of learning.
- o Bristol WORKS for Everyone: tailored provision for SEND young people that starts from year 9 with careers exploration and moves beyond year 11 with progression planning and supported mentoring into paid employment.
- o Realising Talent: provides additional support to SEND 14-16 year olds in need of support to improve their opportunities at, and transitions to Post-16 education and training.

Tackling the drivers of poor mental health

5.7 The cost-of-living crisis is pushing more people into poverty and disadvantage and is already [causing a decline in the population's physical and mental health](#). Without further intervention, this is set to get worse. As a fundamental pillar of a preventative approach, the Government needs to address the socio-economic drivers of mental ill-health, which include poverty, poor housing, food insecurity and insecure and low-paid employment. Crucially, this must include creating a fair and accessible welfare system, boosting the supply of affordable and safe homes, ensuring timely access to healthcare services, reforming social care, and increasing access to green spaces and culture and leisure opportunities.

5.8 Unemployment and economic inactivity is linked to worse mental health outcomes. And while employment is generally beneficial for mental health, [the opposite is true of work that is low-paid, insecure or puts workers' health at risk](#).

5.9 Those with the lowest qualifications are most likely to face insecure or poor-quality employment and unemployment. Therefore, it is vital that the Government remove barriers to supporting young people who may not have got the qualifications they need the first-time round, to access training to upskill or reskill. There must be a cross-Government approach, working with local government, to training, employment support and job creation, to remove existing barriers to training and employment. In particular, the Department of Work and Pensions and Department for Education (DfE) need to work more closely to strategically align their policies and objectives, with the DWP prioritising skills and training more highly within its plan for jobs and employment

support. Government should also reform Universal Credit eligibility rules to enable claimants to continue accessing benefits, including the childcare element of Universal Credit (which should be paid in advance, not in arrears), while undertaking work-related training.

5.10 The wider determinants of mental health should be addressed through a holistic approach. The LGA commissioned a report, "[Our Place: local authorities and the public's mental health](#)", which builds on existing good practice and supports councils to take a 'whole-place' approach to improving wellbeing, reducing inequality and preventing poor mental health at the local level. This includes integrating mental health across all agendas including housing, employment, social inclusion, economic development, and community safety. Local authorities are uniquely placed to connect all parts of the system and knit together local strategies to tackle health inequalities. There are many examples of how this is being effectively implemented:

5.10.1 [Bristol City Council – Thrive Bristol: Thriving at Work](#)

5.10.2 [Camden and Islington Council – Addressing determinants of poor mental health using Making Every Contact Count \(MECC\) and Psychologically Informed Consultation and Training \(PICT\)](#)

5.10.3 [Leeds City Council – Mentally Healthy Leeds: a whole city approach](#)

Youth services

5.11 Youth work has a key role to play in supporting young people pursue positive paths in life and avoid negative outcomes such as [long-term unemployment](#) and [mental and physical health difficulties](#) further down the line. Youth services provide young people with a safe space to go and enable them to foster trusted relationships with adults who can provide advice, guidance and help them to make positive choices, cope with difficult circumstances and improve their wellbeing through social connection.

5.12 Due to cuts to local government funding, councils have had to make extremely difficult decisions about how to allocate increasingly scarce resources, with councils having to prioritise urgent help for children who are at immediate risk of harm. As a result, since [2010/11 youth services have seen their funding reduced by 69 percent](#); more than 4,500 youth work jobs have been cut and 750 youth centres closed. The [availability of open-access universal provision](#) has been particularly hard hit, as resources have been targeted at those in greatest need.

5.13 Despite a very challenging funding picture across the country, some councils are reinvesting in youth provision because they know the value of these services. There are also many best-practice examples of how council services are adding significant value to young people's wellbeing, socio-emotional development, academic attainment, and career and further training opportunities through their work with schools.

5.14 However, greater national support and investment is needed to reinstate vital youth provision in every area, to adequately support all young people with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and through the rising cost of living. The LGA continues to call on the Government for sustainable core funding for local government, to enable all councils to re-invest in youth services and deliver a strong long-term youth service offer and re-instate universal open-access services. This should be backed with a clear national vision for youth services and a workforce strategy.

5.15 The National Audit Office report on [support for vulnerable adolescents](#) found that while departments work together on programmes and initiatives, there is no overall strategic assessment to plan services across an area, which risks gaps or an overlap in provision. To

address this, the LGA has called for better join up across government, working with councils, to support vulnerable adolescents.

Improving youth employment support

5.16 [Young people were one of the groups worst impacted by COVID-19](#), both in terms of their participation in the labour market and the impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Youth unemployment can have significant long-term effects, with periods of unemployment having a '[scarring' effect on young people's future employability](#) and wage potential. Therefore, it is important to ensure that young people can access timely employment support to avoid long-lasting adverse impacts.

5.17 Councils, despite having wide-range statutory responsibilities for young people, have very few formal levers over commissioning or co-ordination of provision to meet them. [Our research](#) shows that the skills and employment system remain highly complex and fragmented – delivered across 49 employment and skills-related schemes or services across England, managed by multiple Whitehall departments and agencies, and delivered over different boundaries by various providers – with no one local point of coordination. This is echoed by a recent [National Audit Office report](#) which highlighted that there are a growing number of national skills programmes which are disjointed and hard for learners, employers and training providers to navigate.

5.18 Funding for skills and employment support is short-term, fragmented and held centrally, and powers to affect change are too remote, unless a council is situated in an area with a devolution deal. This makes it extremely challenging for local government to provide place leadership and coordinate, plan, target and join-up provision, or build in the right wider support for those with complex or additional needs.

5.19 Despite these challenges, councils continue to work hard to support participation in education, employment and training through commissioning devolved and local discretionary provision, and by joining-up and adding value to national schemes. For example:

5.19.1 [South Gloucestershire Council](#) have established its [Community Learning and Skills Service](#) which provides both learning and career coaching and mentoring opportunities for residents. Working closely with other providers and business, and as part of the West of England Combined Authority it is bringing together adult community learning, employment support and post 16 and pre-16 transitions support, to create a coherent local offer which is available for residents of all ages through a 'one-stop shop' model. This approach has proven accessible especially those who are the most vulnerable and those experiencing disadvantage.

5.20 Local government could do much more to support young people and bring together an effective all-age skills and jobs offer around 'place.' [Work Local](#), our plan for a devolved and integrated skills and employment system is the blueprint for making this happen. Work Local would give democratically elected local leaders the power and funding to work with partners, such as schools, colleges, further education providers and local employers, to join up careers' advice and guidance, employment, skills, apprenticeships, business support services and outreach in the community.

5.21 By giving councils the right flexibility and funding, a Work Local approach would enable councils to create services tailored to the needs of their local youth population and build in wraparound support for those with complex barriers.

5.22 The underpinning principles of Work Local are:

- a 'one stop' service rooted in place

- with clear and responsive local leadership
- that is driven by local opportunities and needs
- within a common national framework for devolution of strategy, financing and delivery of employment and skills
- underpinned by Devolved Employment and Skills Agreements (DESA)
- delivering better outcomes at lower cost

5.23 Work Local would enable councils to take a holistic approach to planning and commissioning employment, training, skills provision and integrate it with other services to better meet local needs and close gaps in provision. Using local data and intelligence, councils are well-placed to work with schools, providers, businesses and other partners to join-up the supply and demand side of skills and employment programmes, including identifying and re-engaging NEET young people with early support; providing careers advice and guidance to those who are vulnerable to support effective post-16 transitions and promote the well-being of all children and young people. It would also allow councils to join up progression pathways across their place and align provision with local and national skills demand and job opportunities.

5.24 Good public transport networks are essential to provide all young people with access to education, training and employment opportunities, healthcare and other essential services, as well as facilitating social contact, unlocking leisure opportunities and helping to develop young people's independence and confidence. A Work Local approach, alongside wider progressive devolution and sustainable, streamlined funding for local transport would enable all areas to strengthen whole-place approaches that take into account the public transport links that young people need and deliver the right mix of transport options.

Opportunities in the labour market

5.25 Councils and combined authorities are committed to supporting young people access the training they need to tap into emerging labour market opportunities, for example in the [green](#) and [digital](#) industries.

5.26 The nation currently lacks the right mix of skills to meet future demand. [Skills gap predictions for the LGA](#) revealed that by 2030, there would be an oversupply of three million people with low and intermediate qualifications and 2.5 million too few higher skilled workers compared to jobs generated. These gaps were starker within places than between them, emphasising that 'place' really does need to be factored in when designing and targeting provision.

5.27 There is a fundamental need for a whole systems approach to bring together decisions around infrastructure and capital investment to maximise job opportunities for young people.

6 What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

a) Are there specific short term implications?
b) What are the long-term implications?

6.1 In the short-term, Work Local approach would have a positive impact on young people and employers, who are recovering from the COVID-19-related lockdowns.

- 6.2 For employers, it will provide them with an increased supply of labour, particularly important for those sectors that are experiencing staff and skill shortages. It will also provide them with the reassurance of support for them and their employee if any issues arise during the initial phase of employment. For young people, it will provide them with tailored support at a critical point in transition stage and increase the likelihood of them securing and sustaining their employment and not becoming NEET.
- 6.3 Our independent cost benefit analysis found that for a typical medium sized authority, introducing a Work Local Model could improve employment and skills outcomes by about 15 per cent, meaning an extra 2,260 people improving their skills each year and an extra 1,650 people moving into work. This would boost the local economy by £35 million per year and save the taxpayer an extra £25 million per year. This would be the single most effective intervention to improve the outcomes for young people and NEETS.
- 6.4 A whole-system preventative approach to mental health and wellbeing, underpinned by investment in the services that address the social determinants of poor mental health and investment in community and acute mental health services, would have improve population wellbeing and reduce the number of young people who are out of the labour market due to ill-health. Accessing early support will help young people to resolve difficulties, prevent issues from escalating and develop strategies to maintain their mental wellbeing. This can subsequently help a young person adapt, cope and respond positively to stresses in the education, training and workplace.
- 6.5 Given the [UK's rising labour market and skills gaps](#) and low productivity, investment in measures that can support more economically inactive young people into the workforce balances the long-term benefits to individuals, communities and the economy.

Appendix ix: Movement to Work

Written evidence submitted by Movement to Work – registered charity (1160325) to All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment.

7th December 2022

How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

Executive Summary

Movement to Work is a registered charity that seeks to break the vicious 'no experience – no job' cycle that prevents young people (aged 16-30) not currently in education, employment, or training, from stepping into the workplace. We do this by working with and supporting businesses in providing quality vocational employment and work placement opportunities, helping to drive business performance by diversifying an organisation's talent pipeline and helping to bring about lasting social change by helping more young people into work.

Working collaboratively with businesses and partners - including youth outreach organisations and training providers - to create opportunities for young people, gives us insight into the issues they are facing with regards to their mental health and the challenges this can lead to.

We will focus evidence in response to the following questions:

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training?
2. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

Evidence

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training?

Our recent annual Movement to Work Youth Summit welcomed over 100 attendees of which approximately 50% were young people who are currently job-seeking, on employability programmes, or have overcome barriers with our help to move into work and are now in steady employment. We asked the young people in attendance 'How do we build confidence between young people and employers?'

Findings and recommendations are as follows:

Mental health check

Employers should put mental health front and centre of their approach to recruitment. It would be helpful if employers found ways to assess or check with candidates to find out if they are applying or arriving at an interview with mental health worries, helping young people to feel that an employer is on their side no matter the outcome.

Streamline applications

The application process is highly stressful for young people starting out in the world of work. It would be helpful if employers could make these stages as quick and stress free as possible. For example, it would help if young people had clarity about the format of the interview and the questions they are going to be asked shared in advance. This would enable them to prepare and focus on presenting themselves in the best possible way, helping to reduce anxiety.

Feedback is key

It was noted that at every step in a recruitment process, a young person's self-confidence and mental health is at risk of being negatively impacted, for example, when they don't hear back after investing time in applying or feeling interrogated at an interview. Employers should tell young people how and when they will hear back and even if a candidate isn't successful, it's critical that employers commit to giving helpful feedback.

Diversity

Employers must ensure their recruitment processes and testing methods truly work for those who are neurodiverse or diverse in ability. How do we give diverse people who can't cope with traditional methods the chance to shine? Also, diversity in an organisation is important to young people and something which feeds into their decision-making process whether they choose to work somewhere or not - "If you see it, you know you can be it."

First month cash flow

Young people shared the stress caused by that first month in a job awaiting salary and being unable to afford to cover basic costs. Employers should consider creating ways to remove this early salary pinch.

2. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

We regularly hold **'Youth Action Forums'** that bring together groups of employers and partners from across our network to discuss the challenges and barriers businesses are facing with regards to running work experience/employability programmes and more importantly, potential solutions to help ensure we continue to offer quality opportunities for young people. The forums provide a space for peer-to-peer sharing, collaboration and learning. The most recent session looked at 'how we can combat the emerging mental health emergency affecting young people today'.

a) Examples of evidence and best practice

Feedback and recommendations from the most recent forum include:

Kickstart

Recognition of the benefits of the Government's Kickstart programme, particularly in providing colleagues with guidance on how to handle mental health topics,

Mental health support offered by businesses

Some steps organisations have taken include:

- Introducing a mental health module as part of a young person's induction to an organisation.
- Introducing mental health first aiders.
- Offering 24/7 emergency access to mental health and wellbeing support which includes 6 weeks' worth of counselling via a specialist organisation.
- Other resources include access to therapy and information on coping strategies and journaling.

Other steps organisations have taken

- Reducing the number of young people on a programme, recognising they need more support.
- Assessing young people at the beginning of any programme, and if it's not felt that it's the right time for them to take part, they are signposted to a network of specialist partners.
- Introducing interns/young people to the workplace (e.g. retail store environments) at quieter times to help avoid overwhelming them.
- Funding lunch for interns/young people to help relieve financial stress.
- Recognition that line managers are key in making or breaking relationships between an employer and employee.

b) What recommendations would you put forward?

- Recognition we need to normalise mental health. Building mental health conversations into regular check-ins and reviews with employees. Businesses should also advertise their mental health support as an important benefit (i.e., during the recruitment process, in job descriptions). Young people expect this transparency.
- Taking a step back and looking at how and where in the joining process mental health conversations and initiatives can be incorporated - making mental health and wellbeing feel like an integral part of how a company operates.
- Setting up pairing programmes that help young people when they first start in the company or in a new role, to help them avoid unnecessary stress factors and to set them up for success.

- Incorporating the sharing of experiences from senior leaders into the employee experience to demonstrate the values the organisation is advocating for, by leading from the front.
- Dedicated training on mental health and wellbeing for people managers, buddies, or mentors.
- Creating and running workshops that help young people explore and understand what mental health and wellbeing is, and what they can do to help build resilience. As there are many factors that contribute to a person's mental health, these should focus on key areas and potential stress points such as finance, relationships, health etc.
- Employers can provide access to in-house help, but also signpost to specialist services - charities, public bodies and subsidised or private services that young people can access.

For more information on any of the above please contact: Jan.Palin@movementtowork.com

#YoungPeopleWork
www.movementtowork.com

Appendix x: National Citizen Service Trust

NCS submission to APPG for Youth Employment Inquiry on Mental Health: How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

Written evidence submitted by National Citizen Service (NCS) Trust

Section 1: Executive Summary - key messages and evidence

Mental health conditions and a lack of opportunities to develop skills for life and work are key barriers to youth employment, with long term health and economic impacts

- There are currently 724,000 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the UK.³² Disadvantaged young people are twice as likely to fall into this category than their better-off peers.³³ Yet, almost half a million NEET young people are able and want to work, signalling a huge missed opportunity and untapped potential.³⁴
- An increase in mental health conditions and low self-confidence are key factors preventing young people from entering employment.³⁵ Just 22% of young people say they feel confident in their future career, and 24% worry that they do not have the skills for the jobs that are available to them.³⁶
- This feeling is also shared by UK employers - an estimated 80% believe that graduates do not have the skills they need to be work ready.³⁷ The UK skills deficit will cost the country £120 billion by 2030.³⁸

³² ONS Dataset (November 2022) [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#)

³³ Impetus and Youth Jobs Gap (2019) [Research briefing 6: The long-term NEET population.](#)

³⁴ The Learning and Work Institute and The Prince's Trust (2022) [The Power of Potential](#)

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ The Prince's Trust (2021) [Confidence Crossroads: The Path Ahead for Young People.](#)

³⁷ TechRadar (2022) [Industry and academia can close the UK's digital skills gap.](#)

³⁸ The Learning and Work Institute (2021) [Local Skills Deficit and Spare Capacity.](#)

- Mental health issues are both a barrier to, and a consequence of, youth unemployment.³⁹ The effect of youth unemployment on mental health can also continue into adulthood, independent of later employment experiences.⁴⁰

An enriched education system can increase access to opportunities for young people to develop skills for life and work, and improve their mental health outcomes

- NFL has consistently been found to improve young peoples' mental health. There is robust evidence of a causal link between skills interventions and improved social and emotional wellbeing in young people, and prevention of negative behaviours.⁴¹
- Extracurricular activities can increase feelings of optimism and peer belonging, which can help to improve overall mental health outcomes among young people.⁴²
- In 2019, 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers agreed that candidates with strong 'soft' skills are increasingly important.⁴³
- Ensuring all young people have access to a variety of quality enrichment and skills development activities, as part of a broad and balanced education, can facilitate successful transitions into further education, training, and employment.
- There are significant disparities in enrichment provision and participation across the UK. Determining factors include the schools that children and young people attend, the areas they grow up in, and their socio-economic background.⁴⁴ This results in a "postcode lottery" of opportunities for young people to benefit from enrichment.
- Increasing opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to develop skills for life and work can be a catalyst for social mobility (Sutton Trust, 2017). Investing in young people's skills for life and work can address both challenges of youth mental health and unemployment.

Innovative employability interventions, such as UK Year of Service, support employers and young people to help them get work ready and world ready

- Interventions that prevent young people from becoming NEET in the first instance should be prioritised, to avert this vicious cycle. *UK Year of Service*, an NCS pilot initiative, is one example of a programme that can have a positive impact in this space: transforming young people's lives through employment, training and social cohesion, whilst also filling skills gaps in the economy.
- *UK Year of Service's* 9-12 month programmes include paid work placements of 30-35 hours per week, life skills training, enrichment both within and beyond placement, and support for exit routes into further education or employment.
- Networking is a key aspect of the *UK Year of Service* national training offer. Young people receive coaching to develop their networking skills, and also benefit from long-term career benefits and opportunities of networking in practice. An expanded professional

³⁹ The Learning and Work Institute and The Prince's Trust (2022) [The Power of Potential](#): Supporting the future of 'NEET' young people.

⁴⁰ Strandh M, Winefield A, Nilsson K, et al. (2014) [Unemployment and mental health scarring during the life course](#). Eur J Public Health 2014;24:440–5. doi:10.1093/eurpub/cku005

⁴¹ SkillsBuilder Partnership and The Centre for Education and Youth (2021) [How do essential skills influence life outcomes?](#) Evidence Review.

The Centre for Education and Youth with National Citizen Service Trust (2021) [Enriching Education Recovery](#): The role of non-formal learning, extra-curricular and enrichment activities in driving a transformational catch-up experience for children and young people.

⁴² Oberle, E., Xuejun, R.J., Kerai, S., Guhn, M., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., & Gadermann, A.M. (2020). [Screen time and extracurricular activities as risk and protective factors for mental health in adolescence](#): A population-level study. Preventive Medicine, 141.

⁴³ Lobosco, M. (2019). [LinkedIn Report: These 4 Ideas Are Shaping the Future of HR and Hiring](#) [Blog Post].

⁴⁴ The Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills, and Social Mobility](#). Department for Education and Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath.

network provides social connection and common ground with peers, helping to tackle feelings of isolation and loneliness among young people post Covid.

- By engaging young people in a way that is compelling, and supporting employers and technical training providers to develop underlying essential skills to support them, *UK Year of Service* ensures that young people not only access, but also stick with, long term employment and technical skills development.

Section 2: Enrichment and NFL: equipping young people with skills for life and work so that they feel confident and prepared for life beyond education

Young people with mental health difficulties are more likely to experience lower educational attainment, and be persistently absent from school.⁴⁵ Gender, deprivation, child in need status, ethnicity and age are all associated with increased risk of mental health difficulties.⁴⁶ At the same time, schools and other learning environments can be important sites to identify and offer support for young people's mental health. However, young people need more than good grades to successfully transition into further education, employment, or training. In addition to better links between learning environments and mental health services and providers, improving equity of access to high quality enrichment provision should be prioritised, equipping young people with skills for life and work, so that they feel confident and prepared for life beyond education.⁴⁷

Enrichment and extracurricular activities have a positive impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing

Non-formal learning has consistently been found to improve young peoples' mental health. There is robust evidence of a causal link between skills interventions and improved social and emotional wellbeing in young people, as well as the prevention of negative behaviours.⁴⁸ Extracurricular activities have shown to increase feelings of optimism and peer belonging, which can help to improve overall mental health outcomes among young people.⁴⁹ Annual evaluations of the NCS programme have found positive impacts for young people's wellbeing, including life satisfaction, happiness and anxiety levels.⁵⁰ This is particularly important in the context of the mental health emergency young people are currently facing. 51% of young people looking for work thought anxiety was the biggest barrier to accessing work, and a continued lack of basic support, skills development opportunities, and career confidence among young people.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Lereya, S. T., Patel, M., dos Santos, J.P.G.A., & Deighton, J. (2019). [Mental health difficulties, attainment and attendance: a cross-sectional study](#). *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, doi: 10.1007/s00787-018-01273-6.

⁴⁶ Deighton, J., Lereya, T. L., Casey, P., Patalay, P., Humphrey, N., & Wolpert, M. (2019). [Prevalence of mental health problems in schools: poverty and other risk factors amongst 28,000 adolescents in England](#). *British Journal of Psychiatry*, doi: 10.1192/bjp.2019.19.

⁴⁷ Non-formal learning includes a wide range of extra-curricular activities, outdoor pursuits and trips away from home, music and drama lessons, debating and public speaking, attending a youth club and engaging with a youth worker. This can often be referred to as "enrichment" in an education context.

⁴⁸ SkillsBuilder Partnership and The Centre for Education and Youth (2021) [How do essential skills influence life outcomes?](#) Evidence Review.

The Centre for Education and Youth with National Citizen Service Trust (2021) [Enriching Education Recovery](#): The role of non-formal learning, extra-curricular and enrichment activities in driving a transformational catch-up experience for children and young people.

⁴⁹ Oberle, E., Xuejun, R.J., Kerai, S., Guhn, M., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., & Gadermann, A.M. (2020). [Screen time and extracurricular activities as risk and protective factors for mental health in adolescence](#): A population-level study. *Preventive Medicine*, 141.

⁵⁰ Kantar for DCMS. (2021). [National Citizen Service 2019 Summer Evaluation: Main report](#). DCMS.

⁵¹ Youth Employment UK (2022) [Youth Voice Census 2022](#)

Enrichment and non formal learning can equip young people with the skills they need for life and work

Young people's social connections also continue to be impacted following the pandemic, with implications for their mental health, confidence, and ability to access social networks. 77% of young people spend most of their free time at home, and 41% of young people do not have opportunities to meet new people or make new friends.⁵² Non-formal learning has an important role to play in tackling loneliness and isolation among young people, creating opportunities to build new relationships and engage with their wider community. The skills that can be developed through NFL and enrichment activities (including confidence, interpersonal, and communication skills) are important not only in addressing loneliness and isolation among young people, but are also highly valued by employers.⁵³ In 2019, 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers agreed that candidates with strong 'soft' skills are increasingly important.⁵⁴

High quality enrichment programmes, delivered in partnership with the youth sector as part of a broad and balanced education, can improve young people's mental health and wellbeing, whilst also equipping young people with the skills they need for life and work, facilitating their transition into further education and meaningful employment.

Opportunities to increase equity of access to high quality enrichment provision, leading to positive outcomes for young people's mental health and employability

Despite the many positive benefits of enrichment for young people's mental health and wellbeing, and the development of important skills for life and work, there are significant disparities in enrichment provision and participation across the UK. There is a wealth of experience and infrastructure in the youth and education sectors to provide high quality enrichment - from established national organisations like NCS, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, or Scouts reaching hundreds of thousands of young people per year, to small grassroots youth clubs closely connected to local schools and communities. However, opportunities are not distributed equally. Determining factors include the schools that young people attend, the areas they grow up in, and their socio-economic background. This results in a "postcode lottery" of enrichment provision, and unequal access to opportunities for young people to benefit from the potentially transformative impacts of enrichment for their mental health and wellbeing, and skills and employability.⁵⁵

NCS Trust and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award have identified the following opportunities to ensure every young person can access high quality enrichment. These proposals have been developed through convening, polling and research⁵⁶ led by NCS Trust and DofE, in collaboration with DfE, DCMS, and other youth and education sector organisations.

- 1. An Enrichment Guarantee:** facilitated and enabled by schools, in partnership with specialist youth providers, so that every pupil has access to a minimum level of

⁵² OnSide (2022) [Generation Isolation, Onside Youth Research](#) November 2022.

⁵³ The Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills, and Social Mobility](#). Department for Education and Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath.

⁵⁴ Lobosco, M. (2019). [LinkedIn Report: These 4 Ideas Are Shaping the Future of HR and Hiring](#) [Blog Post].

⁵⁵ The Social Mobility Commission (2019) [An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills, and Social Mobility](#). Department for Education and Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath.

⁵⁶ The Centre for Education and Youth with National Citizen Service Trust (2021) [Enriching Education Recovery](#): The role of non-formal learning, extra-curricular and enrichment activities in driving a transformational catch-up experience for children and young people.

NCS Trust and Scouts (2021) [Enriching Education Recovery](#): Summary of new polling with children and young people, parents and teachers.

enrichment. It will be delivered both in and out of schools, and complement the National Youth Guarantee. This will strengthen collaboration between the education and youth sectors, and improve equity of access to high quality enrichment provision for young people. It could be funded through an “electives premium”, as recommended by The Times Education Commission.⁵⁷

2. **Strengthened partnership, collaboration and coordination between schools and youth providers:** leveraging existing resources and infrastructure to connect young people with quality enrichment opportunities both in and out of school, and enabling the education sector to better support the National Youth Guarantee. This could be achieved through dedicated Partnerships Coordinators, schools as enrichment ‘hubs’, and the establishment of digital platforms where schools can more easily find out about local youth provision.
3. **A framework for the recognition of enrichment achievements and experiences:** which includes a mix of accredited, non-accredited, and certified enrichment activities. This will increase the credit and visibility of young people’s enrichment experiences and achievements, including for employers and FE providers.
4. **Common benchmarks for the impact of enrichment and non-formal learning:** a consistent framework through which to assess, monitor and evaluate the positive impacts of enrichment across a wide range of outcomes. This would allow for better data collection and comparison between a range of NFL programmes and approaches - supporting young people, families, and Government to make informed decisions on where to invest time and resources to deliver the greatest impact.

Section 3: Employability interventions to help young people get work ready and world ready

New analysis by the Learning and Work Institute and The Prince’s Trust finds that an increase in mental health conditions and low self-confidence are key factors preventing young people from entering employment.⁵⁸ Youth unemployment has also been found to lead to an increase in mental health issues, signifying a negatively reinforcing relationship. The effect of youth unemployment on mental health can also continue into adulthood, independent of later employment experiences.⁵⁹

As such, interventions that prevent young people from becoming NEET in the first instance should be prioritised, averting long-term mental health issues that may continue to exclude young people from entering the labour force. *UK Year of Service*, an NCS pilot initiative, is one example of a programme that can have a positive impact in this space: transforming young people’s lives through employment, training and social cohesion, whilst also filling gaps in skills shortages in certain areas of the economy.

Almost half a million (484,000) NEET young people are able to and want to work,⁶⁰ signalling a huge missed opportunity and untapped potential impacting the UK economy, health

⁵⁷ The Times Education Commission (2022) [Bringing Out the Best: How to transform education and unleash the potential of every child](#). Final report

⁵⁸ The Learning and Work Institute and The Prince’s Trust (2022) [The Power of Potential](#): Supporting the future of ‘NEET’ young people.

⁵⁹ Strandh M, Winefield A, Nilsson K, et al. (2014) [Unemployment and mental health scarring during the life course](#). *Eur J Public Health* 2014;24:440–5. doi:10.1093/eurpub/cku005

⁶⁰ The Learning and Work Institute and The Prince’s Trust (2022) [The Power of Potential](#): Supporting the future of ‘NEET’ young people.

services, and labour market productivity. With the right support, young people can be supported into quality employment.

An example of innovative provision: UK Year of Service, an NCS initiative

UK Year of Service is a unique employability programme that helps young people aged 18-24 get work ready and world ready. *UK Year of Service's* 9-12 month programmes have three core elements:

1. Paid work placements of 30-35 hours per week
2. Life skills training
3. Enrichment both within and beyond placement, and support for exit routes into further education or employment.

The service placements are diverse, inclusive and accessible to all young people. They are embedded in the local community, focusing on the healthcare, public service, and green sectors. By engaging young people in a way that is compelling, and supporting employers and technical training providers to develop underlying essential skills, *UK Year of Service* ensures that young people not only access, but also stick with, long term employment and technical skills development.

This is achieved through delivering national cross-employer training and events that support young people and help them develop their personal and social skills, and by providing support directly to employers looking to engage and develop their young talent pipelines. This in turn delivers a triple benefit: personal and professional skills development for young people; increased engagement and talent retention for employers; and social and economic benefit back to society.

Networking is a key aspect of the UK Year of Service national training offer. Young people receive coaching to develop their networking skills, and also benefit from long-term career benefits and opportunities of networking in practice. An expanded professional network provides social connection and common ground with peers, helping to tackle feelings of isolation and loneliness among young people post Covid.⁶¹

"I have also gained so much confidence in myself over the months as I have been supported by an excellent team (...) It has provided me with a greater understanding of what I want to do in the future and has shown me to ignore my self-doubt"
- Ashleigh, Manchester

The first pilot stage placed 278 young professionals into environment, health and social care, and public sector roles. During recruitment, those who faced significant barriers to employability or specific sectors were prioritised. 53% of programme members were claiming government benefits before participating in the *UK Year of Service* programme. 67% were actively seeking employment before the programme, and 26% were from Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority backgrounds. Early outcome trends show around 70% of those leaving the programme are going directly into education, employment or training.

UK Year of Service case study - Luc, 22, Nottingham

Luc signed up to *UK Year of Service* as it appealed to him as a brilliant opportunity to get experience in the charity sector and incorporate his passion around impacting the climate crisis. Luc felt he had missed out on work experience opportunities due to the restrictions

⁶¹ OnSide Youth Zones (2022) [Generation Isolation, Onside Youth Research](#) November 2022.

during the pandemic and noted that connections with peers were hard to maintain during his second and third year at University.

During his *UK Year of Service*, Luc worked with the Youth Engagement Department with the British Red Cross. Throughout his placement, Luc has delivered impact to the communities he has worked with, designing and developing a structured programme to school aged children around climate change and environmentalism. Luc has developed professionally throughout the programme; improving leadership, communication and problem solving skills as well as developing confidence.

- **Do you think schemes like Kickstart/UK Year of Service can help young people into employment?:** *“I think these schemes are very important as they give opportunities many businesses may not be willing to give due to lack of education/experience. It allows many underprivileged young people to gain valuable experience.”*
- **What impact has the programme had on you?:** *“It has given me experience and in-roads into the charity sector that may have been hard to gain without volunteering. It has given me the chance to work with and educate younger people.”*
- **How has NCS helped you?** *“NCS has provided training and brilliant events to connect and meet others on the scheme. In terms of the role, NCS offered the perfect role for me personally, as the description was open, meaning I could follow my interests and incorporate them into my job role.”*

Section 4: About NCS

Since its inception in 2009, NCS has been the country’s flagship youth programme, available to all 16-17 year olds in England. The NCS Trust vision is ‘a country of connected, confident, caring citizens where everyone feels at home’. NCS exists to ensure that young people become world-ready and work-ready, and to build a more cohesive society.

NCS is the government’s arms-length for youth, with a variety of life-enhancing experiences for teens on the cusp of adulthood, helping them become world-ready and work-ready, complementing what they learn at school. The outcome and impact of NCS can be measured by what it gives to young people - increased confidence and resilience, leadership and team skills, improved mental health and wellbeing and greater educational aspirations.

How NCS is making an impact on young people’s mental health, wellbeing, skills and employability - a brief evidence review.

- **Skills and employability:** Two years after doing the NCS programme, participants were still ahead of peers on [key work skills like teamwork, communication and leadership](#).⁶² Two in three NCS participants felt [more confident](#) about getting a job in the future as a result of participating in the programme.⁶³
- **Social mobility,** particularly for disadvantaged young people. In the long-term, the entry rates for NCS graduates into higher education were, on average, 12% higher than for non-NCS graduates, and are [significantly higher for those living in poorer areas](#).⁶⁴
- **Mental health and wellbeing:** Independent evaluations have shown that [NCS has a positive impact on participants’ wellbeing](#). There is evidence of improvements in life

⁶² Ipsos MORI (2017) National Citizen Service 2013 Evaluation – Two Years On: Main Report

⁶³ Kantar and London Economics for DCMS (2021) [National Citizen Service 2019 Summer Evaluation: Main Report](#).

⁶⁴ Jump Projects LTD and Simetrica (2017) [A wellbeing and human capital value for money analysis of the NCS 2015 programme](#).

satisfaction, happiness and anxiety levels, and can show a social return on investment with every £1 spent generating an [estimated economic 'wellbeing' benefit of £3.05](#).⁶⁵

- **Feeling positive about the future - new evidence from an evaluation of the 2021 NCS Summer programme:** 74% of young people agreed that they saw there were more opportunities available to them as a result of participating in the programme. 67% stated that they now [feel more confident about getting a job in the future](#) and 67% felt more optimistic about the future. 84% of participants agreed they got a [chance to develop skills that will be useful to them in the future](#), particularly teamwork (87%), speaking (64%) and problem-solving (60%).⁶⁶

Appendix xi: Skillsbuilder

Skills Builder Response to All-Party Parliamentary Group For Youth Employment Inquiry - How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?

Introduction

Skills Builder Partnership is a not-for-profit social enterprise, established in 2009 with a clear mission: to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to succeed. Our focus is the development of essential skills, the eight highly transferable skills that almost everyone needs to do almost anything: teamwork; leadership; problem-solving; creativity; listening; speaking; aiming high, and staying positive. These essential skills support learning, working and positive mental health.

The Partnership includes 841 employers, education institutions and impact organisations. Partners include the CBI, CIPD, Gatsby Foundation, the Careers & Enterprise Company and Business in the Community. Last year we delivered 2.3 million high quality opportunities to boost essential skills.

Our approach is to work with educators, employers and impact organisations to support the development of essential skills. We have developed [tools](#) to help individuals develop their essential skills as well as the [Skills Builder Universal Framework for Essential Skills](#).

The Framework was developed in collaboration with organisations including the CBI, CIPD and Gatsby Foundation as well as leading businesses, educators and academics. It breaks down the eight essential skills into 16 measurable, teachable, learnable components, from Step 0 to Step 15.

As well as delivering training and working with employers and other partners, Skills Builder Partnership undertakes research. This consultation response draws from two recent reports;

- [How do essential skills influence life outcomes? An Evidence Review](#)
- [Essential Skills Tracker 2022](#)

Our response to this consultation will focus on the question: What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

- a) Examples of evidence and best practice
- b) What recommendations would you put forward?

⁶⁵ ibid

⁶⁶ NCS Trust (2021) Summer 2021 Evaluation

The link between essential skills and mental health and wellbeing. An Evidence review

A [literature review](#) published by the Centre for Education & Youth (CFEY) and Skills Builder Partnership in late 2020 highlighted evidence that essential skills supported improved academic attainment, career progression, and wellbeing.

When looking at the relationship between essential skills and social and emotional wellbeing we identified studies that examined skills interventions and skills relationships, and the impact of these on young people's social and emotional outcomes. One study explored an intervention's impact on young autistic people's social competencies, and one study focused on the development of positive mindsets in diabetic young people.

The review found studies that demonstrated evidence of a link between development of the essential skills and positive academic and employment outcomes. More pertinent to this consultation the literature also indicated that interventions focused on pupils' social and emotional skills, such as teamwork, speaking and listening, can improve children and young people's emotional and social competencies. These competencies support self-regulation and relationship building, and can result in positive outcomes around mental health wellbeing.

Robust studies examining skills interventions highlight a causal link between interventions that support the development of essential skills and improved social and emotional wellbeing among children and young people, as well as the prevention of negative behaviours.

In 2022 Skills Builder Partnership and YouGov worked together to produce the Essential Skills Tracker which maps earnings and demographics to a universal framework of essential and highly transferable skills, developed by Skills Builder Partnership.

The research found that essential skills are correlated with life outcomes, from increased wellbeing and higher earnings to lower probability of being out of work or education. 81% of UK adults who had opportunities to build essential skills at school have above average abilities such as problem solving and communicating. This equates to an annual salary boost of up to £5,900 or just under £500 a month – similar to a graduate premium. Their risk of being not in employment or education is also reduced by more than half.

There is a strong positive correlation between skill score and wellbeing. Each step in skill score is associated with an increase of around 0.35/20 on the wellbeing index. Wellbeing is now – rightly – considered by many to be an outcome as valid as those more traditionally measured such as attainment or income.

Our research outlined above illustrates the positive link between essential skills and building wellbeing. Our approach using the Skills Builder Universal Framework supports mental health by helping individuals build their essential skills and measure their individual skills steps to show their progressions.

We were delighted to see the language of essential skills used consistently throughout a recent House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee Report 'Skills for every young person' as well as some of our research cited. We strongly support the report's repeated emphasis on increasing the availability of skills development opportunities for every young person.

Best Practice

The Skills Builder Partnership includes youth organisations and more than 111 SEND and Alternative Provision educational settings, as well as impact organisations that deliver programmes for children and young people with additional needs or in Alternative Provision settings. We understand first-hand just how impactful high-quality support for learners can be.

The organisations in the case studies below are part of the Skills Builder Partnership. Their work supports young people and those with mental ill-health and focuses on building the essential skills for future employment.

London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)

The London VRU are a team of specialists and external delivery partners who aim to bring London together to understand why violence happens, taking preventative action through early intervention and championing the voice of young people in communities across London. Our work with the VRU has a split focus:

A bespoke programme of essential skills training for their Young People's Action Group (YPAG), a group of 16-24 year old Londoners who ensure the voices of young people are heard by campaigning on youth issues and influencing policy and funding decisions. This involves a series of targeted workshops designed to help the YPAG build and reflect on the eight essential skills, equipping them to demonstrate these through their work with the London VRU and applications through education, employment and wider life.

A series of support sessions with a cohort of grassroots delivery partners connected to the London VRU, helping them to review their current provision, build staff confidence in facilitating essential skill development and work towards attaining Impact Level accreditation for their programmes.

We look forward to supporting partners such as the London VRU to increase the number of quality opportunities for young people to develop their essential skills and lead tangible impact in the youth sector.

Spiral's Engage programme

The 10-session Engage programme helps young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs in Alternative Provision (in PRUs or at risk of exclusion from mainstream) develop 3 key skills: Staying Positive, Aiming High and Teamwork. Spiral believes that these are the 3 foundational skills they need to help them be able to interact positively with others, learn from and overcome challenges and see the point in effort.

These are the foundational skills they need to be able to reintegrate with education, make choices about their future and give them the platform to succeed.

Through interactive games, team-building activities and work based challenges, young people are guided through the programme by trusted and experienced youth workers. Each workshop focuses on key skills and step points (in line with Spiral's Theory of Change and Skills Builder steps). Each skill step is revisited and developed over the course of the programme, and clearly signposted to the young people.

By supporting them to do this, Spiral are helping young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs in Alternative Provision develop the tools to act independently, to be able to interact with exciting professionals (who are not youth workers or teachers) and be the dynamic, driven and aspirational young people we know they can be.

Drive Forward's Mentoring Programme

Drive Forward Foundation enables care-experienced young people to achieve their full potential through sustainable and fulfilling employment.

Drive Forward's Mentoring Programme focus is to provide the empathy and respect to understand how the young people's experiences of the care system has impacted their mental health, and they use the Universal Framework to facilitate reflective discussions and encourage mentees to identify their own strengths and areas for development, as well as exploring core skills such as Staying Positive to understand their own and others' emotional responses.

Mentors will work with mentees to explore essential skills and support them to reflect on their own skills as they move into employment, prepare for work and enter the workplace. Using the Skills Builder Universal Framework, mentors will facilitate reflective discussions and encourage mentees to identify their own strengths and areas for development.

Recommendations

The evidence and case studies show the strong link between developing strong essential skills, boosting mental wellbeing and increased employment opportunities. We would like to see policies that focus on developing the essential skills of all young people to strengthen their resilience and wellbeing.

The Skills Builder Universal Framework can support the positive identification and articulation of skill sets and strengths on an individual basis, as well as bringing a common language and support discussions around mental health. The addition of the Skills Builder Universal Framework into EHCPs as well as Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and informal qualifications such as Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) would build a common language of skills. By using the Skills Builder Universal Framework skills development can be learner-owned and learner-friendly, used regularly.

For essential skills to become a core constituent of inclusive education and a common language in EHCPs, SENCos must be confident in their understanding of essential skills, and be familiar with the Skills Builder Universal Framework. We would like to see training in essential skills and on how to use supporting resources a mandatory part of SENCo training.

Skills Builder has also developed Skills Builder Benchmark and Skills Builder Launchpad. Both these resources are publicly available and free to use and would support SENCos and those with additional needs. We would therefore like to see them signposted in Department for Education resources.

For further information please contact:

Erica Popplewell External Affairs Manager erica.popplewell@skillsbuilder.org

Appendix xii: The National Lottery Community Fund

**National Lottery Community Fund submission to the Youth Employment APPG Inquiry:
How is mental health affecting young people accessing the labour market and quality work?**

December 2022

Executive Summary

The National Lottery Community Fund is the leading non-statutory funder of opportunities for young people. From 2016/17 to 2020/21 we awarded £567m via 4,231 grants to support young people's mental wellbeing and build their resilience, and £358m via 1,940 grants to support them to find work.

Our insight and evaluation work suggests that poor mental health amongst young people does adversely affect their access to the labour market and their ability to find quality work. From early on in our employment programmes mental health issues have been flagged as a barrier to employment and additional measures were required to support the participants needs.

Three of our large scale, multiyear, strategic funding programmes that have supported young people in England with their mental health and employment are HeadStart, Building Better Opportunities and Talent Match.

Our learning from HeadStart shows that:

- Building resilience in young people isn't just about building their internal resources (emotional skills and coping) it is also about embedding support in their immediate environments (schools, communities, and families).
- Complex mental health problems need sustained and multi-layered support.
- Mental health and wellbeing are related but are not the same. It is important to focus not only on preventing or treating mental health problems, but also on improving young people's wellbeing.

Our learning from Building Better Opportunities shows that:

- Long term funding with the ability to retain the participant on a programme for as long as they need support is necessary.
- Projects need to be holistic and flexible in order to meet all of a participant's needs.
- Support needs to be personalised – the key worker approach is recommended.

Our learning from Talent Match shows that:

- The involvement of young people was the key feature of programme innovation and lessons on successful co-production can be drawn from Talent Match for future practice.
- Person-centred approaches and key working were found to be crucial – a trusted person has been fundamental to young peoples' employment journeys.
- Wellbeing was the priority for many participants - both those who did and did not find a job reported improved life satisfaction.

We would be happy to meet APPG members to discuss the areas covered in this submission or any other aspect of our work that may be of interest.

We would also be pleased to organise visits to projects across the country that are improving young people's mental health and helping them access the labour market, providing APPG members the opportunity to see these projects in action and hear from some of the people involved.

Introduction

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK. Over the last 12 months we have awarded £580 million in over 14,000 grants across the UK. We fund over 6,000 projects that support children and young people. From 2016/17 to 2020/21, we

funded 2,499 projects worth £474m helping young people to find a job or set up their own business.

We put young people at the heart of our decision-making and governance. Our Youth Voice Teams bring together young people from projects we've funded; they help shape our work and are valuable ambassadors for their communities and youth organisations.

In this response we will focus on sharing learning from evaluations of the three strategic funding programmes mentioned in our executive summary. The programmes described here worked with those furthest from the labour market, often with multiple needs, who faced significant barriers in entering employment. The person-centred approach was essential and high quality relationships between the participant and support provider were found to be key across multiple programmes. What may be most transferable/replicable is the approach employed by each of these programmes, in combination with specific interventions. For that reason, we present our learning by programme. For each programme we will detail the mental health difficulties that young people were/are facing (question 1), the support provided (question 2) and the impact that this has had (question 3a), along with some recommendations drawn from our learning (question 3b).

- 1) HeadStart was a six-year (2016-2022), £67.4 million programme testing new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.
- 2) Building Better Opportunities (2016 – 2023) is a joint National Lottery Community Fund/European Social Fund programme supporting a variety of local projects including a focus on improving employability.
- 3) Talent Match was a five-year (2013-2018), £108 million National Lottery funded programme which supported young people along the road to employment.

Our funding evaluations have found a significant link between young people's mental ill-health and consequent struggle to find work. For example, in the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme early evaluations flagged an increasing level of mental health needs amongst participants. Respondents to the 2021 participant survey continued to express how their mental health had acted as a barrier to work. Although our survey did not explicitly ask whether mental health was a challenge for participants, almost a quarter (23%, or 59 respondents) told us about their mental health needs unprompted, indicating the scale of the challenge faced for those engaging with BBO to improve employability.

HeadStart (2016 – 2022)

Introduction

Our £67.4m HeadStart programme supported young people aged between 10 and 16, considering how their mental wellbeing is affected by their experiences at school, their ability to access the community services they need, their home life and relationships with family members, along with their interaction with digital technology.

The HeadStart partnerships were located in six local authority areas across England: Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton. Each partnership worked with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design, test and implement different approaches to build young people's emotional resilience and respond to the early signs of common mental health problems. Four of the six HeadStart partnerships are piloting new approaches - mental health support teams in

schools - as set out in the Government's 2017 Green Paper on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health. We work closely with our grant holders to capture the wealth of knowledge, learning and reflections from the communities in order to share examples of good practice.

Impact of mental ill-health on young people

Research conducted by the HeadStart programme indicates that, when looking at children's self-reported difficulties, around one in five report high levels of mental health difficulties. In line with existing literature, HeadStart also found that girls' mental health and wellbeing appears to decline over-time, but boys' mental health seems to stay consistent. The findings highlight the importance of prevention and early intervention to prevent mental health problems escalating, particularly during the transitional period between primary and secondary school.

We also found a moderate link between mental health problems and wellbeing, suggesting that mental health and wellbeing are related but are not the same. We identified factors that are distinctly related to mental health problems (empathy, school connection) and factors that are distinctly related to subjective wellbeing (peer support, community connection). Our findings highlight the importance of not only focusing on preventing or treating mental health problems, but also focusing on improving children's wellbeing. We are likely to get a better picture of how well a young person is functioning if we consider both their mental health and their wellbeing alongside each other.

Support on offer

Young people involved in the HeadStart programme reported that the strategies, advice or instrumental support that their peer mentors or HeadStart intervention leads had given them helped them to deal with their problems or difficulties. These measures included:

- Information about different feelings such as sadness, stress, anxiety and anger in addition to strategies for how to deal with them including breathing techniques and stress balls
- Advice around coping with schoolwork and exams
- Assistance with dealing with peer conflicts and advice for how to deal with bullies
- Advice and strategies for how to think positively about oneself and in positive situations
- Advice about who to talk to when having problems

Without **early intervention** in childhood or adolescence, the likelihood of problems in adulthood such as violence, criminality or further mental health problems increases significantly.⁶⁷ Research from the HeadStart programme shows that interventions which aim to tackle emotional difficulties may prove particularly beneficial to prevent problems escalating. The HeadStart Blackpool partnership provides 'Moving on Up' support for children aged 10 to 11, focused on identifying and supporting those with low or medium resilience. Young people have been supported to feel more confident about their transition to secondary school and helped reduce their anxiety, as well as increase their confidence and self-esteem.

⁶⁷ Romeo, R., Knapp, M. and Scott, S. (2006), [Economic cost of severe antisocial behaviour in children- and who pays it.](#)

While some young people can manage symptoms of an underlying mental health issue, such as anger or worry, others may need more support. HeadStart aims to **raise awareness amongst adults who work with young people**. The partnerships help carers, parents, guardians and other key adults to be aware of the contributing factors, triggers and signs around youth mental health and give them the tools and knowledge to help intervene and support the individual in question. The programme provides a range of resources for schools and communities to intervene early in order to support children and young people who are struggling or showing early signs of mental health problems. For example, HeadStart Wolverhampton have produced a wellbeing toolkit for schools which has been accredited by the PSHE Association. As one teacher who was involved with HeadStart explained, “*Before the training I wouldn’t have had the confidence to approach a young person who was clearly distressed, but, because I’d had the training, I felt confident and the conversation flowed very naturally. The training made the difference.*”⁶⁸

Case Study: Work Ready was a school-based intervention in HeadStart Wolverhampton that supported young people who were at a substantially higher risk of becoming ‘not in education, employment, or Training (NEET)’. A qualitative study that followed the experiences of five adolescent boys found that taking a holistic, ecological approach to understanding and assessing how, when, or why adolescent boys are “at risk” of disengagement has more potential to improve work-related outcomes for young people. Assessment of individual ability should focus less on what the individual is (or is not) doing at that moment in time, but rather on what they are (or could be) capable of with resource, support, and space to recognize and reflect on personal development. Approaches to support employment and transition that place emphasis on what individuals do not have access to (rather than what the individual is or is not *doing*) has more potential for addressing social inequality and work related outcomes.

Impact

Case study: HeadStart Newham’s school based group intervention, BounceBack, produced a statistically significant eight percentage point reduction in emotional symptoms, compared to a control group. Those who participated in eight or more sessions achieved a 23 percentage point reduction in emotional symptoms.

The HeadStart programme reduced exclusion rates across the local areas by 10% in its first year. It prevented approximately 800 students from experiencing a school exclusion in 2016/17. Based on the estimated effects of HeadStart on pupils’ exclusion rates that are statistically significant, the programme saved around £6 million by reducing exclusions in 2016/17.⁶⁹

As a result of HeadStart, by July 2022:

- Over 246,000 young people had access to universal mental health support, including safe spaces and resilience building
- Over 24,000 young people had attended at least one additional support session, such as peer mentoring or talking therapies
- Around 24,000 professionals and volunteers who work with young people had been trained on mental health, resilience and/or trauma-informed practice

⁶⁸ The National Lottery Community Fund (2019), [HeadStart: Building young people’s resilience to support their mental and emotional wellbeing](#)

⁶⁹ The impact of HeadStart on absence, exclusion and attainment | The National Lottery Community Fund (tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)

- 1044 schools had taken part in the programme

HeadStart has been committed to building the evidence base and sharing learning more widely to see what works to build resilience and improve young people's mental health and wellbeing. The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) (a collaboration between UCL and the Anna Freud Centre) is leading a consortium of partners to evaluate and share learning from HeadStart. The final evaluation report is due in Spring 2023.

A key aspect of the evaluation is the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF), a comprehensive and practical package of validated measures that are designed to assess a range of mental health indices in schools, including positive wellbeing, behavioural or emotional difficulties, and will ultimately be used to indicate what works for who and when. It is this framework that has provided the principles and basis for delivery of the #BeeWell survey across Greater Manchester.

The #BeeWell programme has been designed to listen to the voices of as many young people as possible, both within mainstream and other schools. The #BeeWell survey was designed in collaboration with 150 young people in 14 pathfinder schools across Greater Manchester and turned into a rigorous, validated questionnaire by 21 academics, government experts and youth advisors. It was peer reviewed by young people and delivered to young people in Years 8 and 10 by more than 160 secondary schools (93%) across the city region in Autumn 2021, reaching just under 40,000 young people.

As with HeadStart, each participating school is provided with its own interactive online report detailing their pupils' survey results, enabling them to benchmark the wellbeing of their young people against other anonymous schools in the city region as well as against statistically similar schools in terms of size and demographics, a capability which is highly valued by schools.

Different to HeadStart is the fact that this data goes beyond the school gates and can also be viewed geographically at neighbourhood level across the 66 neighbourhoods that make up Greater Manchester, through a neighbourhood dashboard which RAG rates the survey findings in each of the domains surveyed. This is providing a rich source of data for community organisations and young people to shape how they respond to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people at neighbourhood level.

The wider coalition of around 100 partners are responding to the data, with a number of new initiatives announced as a result. To date, Greater Sport, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Young Manchester, Reform Radio and the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership have made commitments informed and inspired by #BeeWell. Nearly 100 partners have signed up as partners, agreeing to a code of conduct in order to do so.

Building Better Opportunities (2016 – 2023)

Introduction

The National Lottery Community Fund is matching funds from the European Social Fund 2014-2023 to invest in local projects tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth. BBO is our largest strategic investment to date with the projects helping thousands of people to get a foot on the job ladder and supporting many others to resolve urgent issues that are barriers to work.

BBO projects have been successful at engaging people with complex barriers to work. For example, 48% of participants were economically inactive when they joined the programme, 63% lived in a jobless household, and 41% were experiencing multiple disadvantages. BBO

projects have also helped those with protected characteristics - 48% of participants have a disability and 23% are people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. The programme has improved the employment chances of over 170,000 people in England since 2016.

The funding is being delivered in 38 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas according to local priorities, which have been set by the LEPs. BBO supports a variety of projects, ranging from improving employability for the most disadvantaged, helping those with multiple and complex needs, to improving financial literacy.

Impact of mental ill-health on young people

Early evaluations in [2017](#) and [2018](#) flagged an increasing level of mental health needs amongst participants, with mental health challenges emerging as more prevalent than the projects anticipated. Respondents to our 2021 participant survey continued to express how their mental health had acted as a barrier to work. Although our survey did not explicitly ask whether mental health was a challenge for participants, almost a quarter (23%, or 59 respondents) told us about their mental health needs unprompted, indicating the scale of the challenge faced for those engaging with BBO.

For many of this group of survey respondents, their needs were significant – for example, several participants referred to having been suicidal when they entered the programme. For others, anxiety and other mental illnesses had prevented them from wanting to leave the house. Projects have responded to the survey results by creating additional packages of support to address issues such as anxiety and depression.

Support on offer

Case study: [Invest in Youth](#) (Lancashire)

- The Invest in Youth project supports young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), including young people at risk of becoming NEET. As of June 2022, the project has supported 1,475 participants.
- On joining the project each young person is assigned a key worker who works through an induction and needs assessment process using the Life Circle tool.
- If mental health or emotional wellbeing are identified as needs a referral is made to Child Network North-West (CANW) a core partner in the BBO project delivering mental health support and therapy. The young person's needs may relate to anxiety; chaotic or lack of routine; low mood; need to build coping skills; or a need to develop a vision for their future and motivation.
- It's important to note that CANW can only accept participants with low to moderate needs; even a specialist partner such as CANW is not equipped to deal with high level needs or mental health crisis. In these circumstances, CANW will work with the key worker to identify a more appropriate service.

Person-centred support is a key theme in the BBO programme. One participant told us that they had taken part in other employment programmes but found that the interventions did not take their individual challenges into account. As a result, they had struggled to move towards work until joining BBO -the participant described how it felt that the BBO key worker cared about them, and that had made a real difference. Indeed, participants experiencing mental health barriers to work commonly flagged the importance of the key worker role; having someone to talk to was often cited as the most helpful thing about the support they had received.

Other participants flagged that they had been able to receive specialist mental health support through the BBO project, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). We know that many BBO projects have developed specialist mental health interventions since the COVID-19 pandemic, but other support, such as encouragement to socialise through joining groups and attending courses, has also been beneficial, particularly to those experiencing isolation.

Impact

The route from unemployment to a job can be complicated. While some people may just need some encouragement, others will benefit from a dedicated, trusted person, who will be with them throughout their journey. The person centred support that BBO projects could offer improved the employment chances of thousands of young people.

The [2022 evaluation](#) shows that as of September 2021, 117,960 participants had left the programme, of which:

- 36% of participants entered employment
- 32% moved to education or training
- 15% moved from economic inactivity to job search

There were indications that participants were moving into sustainable and good quality work. Our survey with BBO participants showed that 4-5 months after leaving BBO into employment, 69% were still in the same job. More than two-thirds of those who were employed were holding permanent contracts, and some respondents showed progression at work; 13% had taken on higher skilled work and 11% had received a pay rise.

BBO projects have monitored wellbeing and confidence in participants. In addition to changes in work skills they have also monitored practical life changes such as financial situation, community involvement, and housing, recognising that all of these have an impact on wellbeing. There were a range of positive outcomes, as of March 2021:

- 31% learnt new life skills
- 46% reported improved wellbeing (to note – this was during the pandemic)
- 74% reported improved confidence, motivation and self-esteem, with reduced social isolation

In addition, BBO delivered a high return on investment. One Project, Make Trax, found the value to the Government and wider economy was £2.43 for every £1 invested. This rose to £6.43 in social value for every £1 invested in another project, Include-IT.

Talent Match (2013 – 2018)

Introduction

Talent Match has some excellent examples of delivering mental health support in practice. It was an innovative employment programme that boosted the opportunities of nearly 26,000 young people aged 18-24 who needed extra support to help them along the path to sustainable employment. A major focus of this funding was helping those furthest from the labour market, including those with ill mental health. Up to a fifth of participants were neither receiving benefits nor engaged in employment, education or training (NEET), meaning that they weren't known to many of the services who could help them.

The programme was launched in 2012 against the backdrop of record levels of youth unemployment and implemented from 2014-18. Funding was distributed to 21 voluntary and community sector led partnerships across England. In 2017 sustainability funding was awarded to Talent Match Liverpool, Black Country, and Humber to continue the model for a

further three years.

Impact of mental ill-health on young people

From very early on in the programme it became apparent that the number of young people facing issues related to their mental health and well-being was a major concern. For example, during the last round of partnership visits conducted in winter 2014/15 many partnerships reported that the level and incidence of mental health issues among beneficiaries was far higher than had been anticipated.

The term "mental ill health" covers a huge range from low levels of anxiety and stress through to severe conditions such as schizophrenia or personality disorder. This is acknowledged in many of the experiences of TM partnerships but particularly prevalent across the 21 appears to be anxiety and depression, which are often linked to low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

Support on offer

Talent Match recognised that different people needed different levels of support to gain employment. The programme focused on helping young people who had been long term unemployed and faced significant and multiple barriers to employment, such as mental health, to find career opportunities. As well as helping young people to find work, Talent Match partnerships provided individuals with the skills and resilience needed to navigate a fulfilling career.

Case study: Daniel

- Daniel was bullied at school from an early age and has a history of anger management issues. At 16 he suffered a relationship breakdown with his family and lost contact with them. He lived in hostel accommodation for a couple of years but "fell in with the wrong crowd".
- After falling into financial difficulties he began to suffer from depression. This caused him to miss his Jobcentre Plus appointments and he was sanctioned, further deepening his financial troubles. He first engaged with a Prince's Trust project for 12 weeks and then got onto the Talent Match programme.
- *"I did counselling, I got anti-depressants, I refused to take them cos I thought I'm not getting hooked on it and gradually over time I worked with the Prince's Trust first and then Talent Match and since coming to this programme it's been like a big dysfunctional family (laughs), so I've been getting loads of support and I feel like I'm not depressed anymore."*
- Gradually Daniel began to address practical issues such as housing and his financial situation. As a result his health improved and he began to feel happy in himself.
- *"I just feel happy, I'm confident, I don't care what anyone thinks, I know where I want to go and how to get there and now I've got my flat, making it my own so I feel a lot better, like someone else, someone better than before."*
- With those practical support issues now behind him his attention had now turned to work. Previously he had not known what he wanted to do and felt pushed into something he did not really enjoy. Through Talent Match he is exploring training and work opportunities and has decided which direction he wants to take.

- *"I want to do retail cos I always loved fashion and since Talent Match I've been looking at retail courses and opportunities, it's like the light bulb's clicked, it's made me realise that's what I want to do."*

Impact

As a result of Talent Match, by March 2021:

- Over 27,000 young people (aged 18–24) had been supported
- Over half of all participants (55%) were classified in the two categories furthest away from the labour market at the start of their time on the programme. This reduced to 35% after six months or more
- Almost 12,000 (46%) secured some form of job, including nearly 4,500 (17%) who secured sustained employment or self-employment
- 81% of participants that received in-work support held onto their job for at least six months, compared to 75% for those unable or unwilling to receive in-work support

Those who secured employment were satisfied with their post, highlighting how it made them feel 'worthwhile'. Most of those in zero-hour contracts (11%) wanted more security in terms of hours and nearly half felt they were underemployed. Overall, they saw their jobs as part of progression to employment more aligned to their aspirations, and they felt the Talent Match jobs helped to clarify their career aspirations and build pathways to better employment.

The jobs have had wider benefits for participants and their families. Participants really value the new financial security, social networks and sense of independence. *"It has helped in every way; I feel that I am doing something worthwhile and it has obviously helped with my financial situation,"* explained one participant. Another added, *"I think it helped me to get my confidence back and get back into a routine, which was good for my mental health and wellbeing."*

The wellbeing of Talent Match participants was generally worse than that for the general population, but this gap, for most participants, closed during involvement on Talent Match. **Most reported improved life satisfaction: 70% of those who found a job and 60% of those who didn't.** Over three-quarters (78%) who initially recorded a low well-being score went on to record a higher score at a later stage. In addition, interviews with young people revealed that some saw improving their wellbeing as their main priority. This highlights the importance of the integrated nature of Talent Match in providing non-work support, which included personal development, social and peer activities and counselling alongside employment-related support. Talent Match has always focused on the journey to employment and the [final evaluation](#) shows that a significant group of young people who didn't find a job felt more 'work ready' after taking part in Talent Match.

In addition, the Talent Match evaluators have monetised the positive social value of Talent Match: it has generated at least £3.08 of public value for every £1 spent on the programme. The large cost of the programme generated a positive return on investment due to greater stability in people's lives, improved life and work skills, greater understanding of career opportunities and increased motivation to improve lives. Up to 28% of young people would not have gained a job without participating in Talent Match.

Recommendations

Based on the learnings from our relevant strategic programmes, we have found the following to be important when supporting young people to improve their mental health and employability:

- Support that not only focuses on preventing or treating mental health problems, but also on improving young people's wellbeing.
- Long term funding with the ability to retain the participant on a programme for as long as they need support.
- A holistic approach to project delivery that can support all of an individual's needs.
- Flexible support that can change and adapt as new needs emerge. It should be tailored to the individual - one size does not fit all.
- A key worker approach - a trusted person for participants to confide in.
- Partnerships with VCSE organisations with reach into communities because they are trusted and are seen as safe places.

In addition to the above, we recommend that any changes in the wider system consider the value of young people playing a leading role in influencing mental health activities and services designed for their benefit.

Involving young people in the design and delivery of support is crucial because they have first-hand experience of the issues they face and are best placed to shape potential solutions. We have our own Youth Voice Teams who help us ensure that young people are a key part of our funding and responses to issues that impact them and their peers. People who've taken part in our mental health and employment programmes have directly influenced the design and delivery of services, helped to change attitudes, and encouraged others to adopt a co-production approach.

The HeadStart programme was founded on co-production, running through all aspects of the approach. Co-production means working together to achieve a common goal and where everyone, including beneficiaries, are involved in every step of the process. HeadStart recognises young people as competent citizens within society and believes that their opinions and views should hold value and influence the systems that they are a part of. As such, involving young people in interventions and services has been central to local strategy development, delivery and programme legacy. Each of our HeadStart partnerships involved young people in the design, commissioning and evaluation of services in that area. They have been engaged in awareness raising campaigns, mentoring, online surveys and advisory groups, and have even been involved in the recruitment of new HeadStart staff and delivering coproduction training to local council employees and VCSE organisations. Our HeadStart Hull partnership, for instance, harnessed co-production to identify the key issues for children and young people and shape the development and delivery of the HeadStart model in the area. Young people who participated also noted how peer relationships provided crucial support and enabled them to collectively design resources.

In addition, young people were involved in every stage and element of Talent Match. The European Commission recognised this as one of 22 promising practices in the field of youth employment and invited us to share our learning with leaders of youth employment policy. One participant was invited as the only young person from Europe to attend a high-level seminar in Luxembourg with heads of youth employment policy from 27 countries. In her presentation, she spoke about Talent Match's approach to working with young people, especially the way in which young people are involved in designing, delivering and evaluating services as equal partners. This was the first time co-production was discussed at an EU-level meeting on youth employment, with Talent Match highlighted as a particularly strong example.

Two of the three decision makers on the closing panel identified the Talent Match approach

to co-production as the single most important piece of inspiration they were going to take back to their home countries. At the beginning, 69% of participants felt that “co-production is something that everyone should be doing”; by the end, 86% chose this statement. Since then, the European Commission has flagged the programme as an example of good practice in several EU reviews into youth employment.

Talent Match provided similar inspiration at a local level. Jobcentre Plus in Middlesbrough established a service user group as a result of the engagement and feedback from the youth panel of their local Talent Match.

It's not just public services that have benefited from the insight of lived experience. Young people from Talent Match have been commissioned by employers like Centrica, Bupa and Unilever to review their recruitment, employment and training practices. They've cut out jargon from their job adverts, improved their recruitment videos, and done some myth-busting about employment of (young) people without work experience. The young people's leadership group for Talent Match Cornwall advised their council on redesigning its services and were paid by local company Ginsters for consultancy work on youth employment.

It is clear from our funding that involving young people with mental health issues can help them to feel empowered and increase the quality, efficiency and outcomes of support. Young people are eager to be, and should be, part of all conversations on what is needed to support their mental health. They are experts with lived experience who can help design future thinking in this space which will, ultimately, help improve their experiences and outcomes.

Further information

Mhairi Holland, Policy Manager, National Lottery Community Fund

mhairi.holland@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk; 0207 211 1698

Appendix xiii: The Girls Network

Evidence provided verbatim:

Zak Kamran	The Girls' Network Ambassador Steering Group Member
Amy Briffitt	The Girls' Network Steering Group Member
Farheen Rahman Khan	The Girls' Network Steering Group Member
Aliya Chaumoo	The Girls' Network Steering Group Member

What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?

As young women, we already face existing inequalities of gender, race and disability, which affect our ability to access the impacting employment market. Lockdown already had a huge impact on girls and young women and with the cost-of-living crisis, it has been made even more difficult. With long wait times for mental health services, it affects girls' and young women's mental health. Demotivation from when things don't happen, even when we try, can have a huge impact; the immense pressure of accessing education, training and employment can have a drastic effect on mental health. It makes you feel like giving up and there is no way out.

When young people transition into a big area of their life, like university or college - they just don't know what to expect, so it's important to have a bit of guidance before making a decision. Having a mentor, for example, can guide people during university for that transition to be smooth; seeking help and guidance from people who have already gone through that process is a powerful tool.

There is a lack of ethnic minority role models and the media portrays certain careers disproportionately, which is not helpful, and this can deter and affect young women's mental health.

Mental ill health prevents young people from applying for opportunities, as they see that they have a low quality of life. This increases their level of apathy. They can also have low levels of confidence in schools and learning environments, impacting their social lives, development, and grades.

Moving from college to university is a huge jump, due to a lack of knowledge and learning, to become more independent. Being unaware of what to expect in a new learning environment and a lack of preparedness both emotionally and financially is daunting, especially without a support system in place.

It is important to communicate to educators of feelings and struggles in accessing further education and employment opportunities. The fear of expressing feelings of anxiety and stress once further training and employment is secured to employers and universities is often based on the fear they will undermine a young person's ability and discriminate against them on this basis. This results in young people feeling insecure, afraid and unable to cope.

The pandemic affected young people who did not have access to laptops and it was hard to communicate this because of the shame and stigma attached to being poor. Those who did not have space at home found it difficult because school and college was where space was identified. The first lockdown for young people who did not sit GCSEs found they had not been able to talk to people about exams being cancelled; online learning was difficult and lack of access to school increased loneliness and isolation. For those unable to sit A Levels, it was a different experience and should not be classified as the same experiences as young people unable to sit GCSE exams.

“Those who did not sit exams have found it difficult to adapt after lockdown and not knowing what exams are like made it difficult to undertake further education with increased levels of anxiety.”

“AS and A Level grades were messed up due to the grading system and that had an effect on pupils, leaving them with constant worry, trouble sleeping and poor concentration.”

The final Year of A Levels, when grades were awarded, was difficult to handle, with social media narratives that young people didn't deserve grades that were eventually allocated. So many young people were made to feel undeserving of their exam results.

Coming out of lockdown without meeting people for a long period of time, into an environment of interaction, has been a difficult learning process for many young people, especially those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The long term repercussions with no counselling support in place has seen a spike in mental health amongst young people, especially amongst minority communities. With no individual space at home for some young people, it makes it incredibly difficult for those trying to access and maintain training and employment.

What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)

Girls' and young women's mental and financial well being is suffering as a result of unemployment and inadequate opportunities, with families struggling to live within limited means. For those on benefits, it can be very difficult and many young women are struggling to live comfortably on the money they receive. This too has an effect on girls' and young women's mental health.

Youth groups and organisations are available that provide weekly community free classes, with workshops aimed at young people with mental health issues. It's effective in encouraging socialising and gaining confidence.

Counselling is available depending on which kind of support is needed. There are long waiting lists for counselling through a local authority, leaving girls and young women without support. However, there are times when colleges and universities have stepped in. Counselling is effective and it also is about having to understand what a person thinks they gain from it. Counselling can be seen as a negative due to labelling the person who is seeking counselling, but it should be seen as something positive. With youth focus groups to collate their experiences, the narrative can change.

“Services are available but the waiting list is super long and it was awful with mental health services - they need to be listened to and not blamed on hormones.”

“Why am I going to bother if this is not going to work for me and those who self harm have been told that they are not ill enough to get help?”

Young people fall through the system due to things like dyslexia and do not get help later; specialist partners are needed to ensure young people are needed. This then impacts their future lives, affecting emotional stability, confidence and self-esteem. Then there are the high achievers who are expected to cope because of their academic success, ignoring emotional and mental needs. For young people, the struggle to speak from a young age and being overlooked is detrimental to their future.

What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

Masterclasses - interview prep - to support young people who are taking care of themselves, as it is overwhelming and they may face rejection from employment, fail to get a place at University or are unable to attend college due to financial hardships.

Additional support could be more accessible with, for example, drama and acting workshops, delivered by professionals, as paying for classes makes them inaccessible, especially for young people. Drama encourages confidence building and networking.

“I'd recommend the NYT and evidence includes my own personal journey from doing Stepping Up.”

The mental health services need to be improved - specialist training for counsellors and therapists - 121 support needs to be personally tailored for young people in need. There are no seamless services for young people which makes it difficult for young people to access help.

“Lack of privacy and confidentiality has affected young people's lives putting trust and respect at risk from shared information in delicate situations to a trusted adult in educational and training settings.”

a) Examples of evidence and best practice

As a Girls' Network Ambassador transitioning from our award winning Girls Mentoring Programme into the Ambassador Community, it is a safe place to access further opportunities to increase life chances. This has included confidence-boosting through planning and hosting workshops and events, participating in reverse mentoring programmes, writing blogs and interviews. Ambassadors can engage as much or as little as they want in what they offer, depending on their interest/need.

College was more helpful than school as the Wellbeing Team was helpful and a better quality of service was provided - trust is critical to ensure better mental health support. Being part of a charity working to empower girls and young women has been rewarding.

b) What recommendations would you put forward?

Investing in the pathways to employment for girls aged 16 plus and young women can be complex, given the network of socio ecological factors that impact choices, agency, and ability to make a safe transition on the pathways towards economic empowerment.

To commit to providing one-to-one support to young people with CV, personal statement and interview preparation through an online employment and skills team/hub/app.

Develop foundational, digital, transferable and job-specific skills.

Work Life Skills' Programme should lay the foundation for preparing for the transition from college to work in the world. Schools need to teach employability skills and things related to the world of work with a focus. There are many things young people do not know from how taxes are worked out on a payslip to what National Insurance is.

Two weeks of compulsory work experience for all students including application, interview and then work experience placement. Not all schools provide work experience opportunities.

Develop confidence so a young person will achieve better communication skills to interact in a professional manner.

Schools focus on academic achievements, but there are young people who are better at vocational and practical skills and need to be supported. Every skill is important in building life skills.

A National Youth Employability Board brings together partners, sponsors and supporters. The board builds the connection between businesses/corporates and the board to stipulate time, skills and resources of the private sector, to help build the capacity of the board providing support to young people to place them into employment in different sectors.

The board makes investing into protected groups - girls and young women, people with disabilities, people of colour, LGBTQ plus - easier, more effective and more rewarding.

What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

Young people are having to purchase textbooks as there is a supply shortage due to lack of funding. This has a long-term impact on young people, who then struggle later in life, hence financial support recommendations will help alleviate the barriers of accessing employment, training and education.

Financial costs for textbooks and educational material needs to be considered for practical subjects.

Financial support for young people to access education, training and employment, from clothing, travel costs, bags and necessary subsidiaries.

a) Are there specific short term implications?

Speaking with someone helps alleviate self doubt; to be able to connect and network is the first step in enabling a young person to be able to build self-esteem. It builds the foundation for improved self-care and emotional well being.

To be berated for not being able to afford shoes, clothes in preparation for further employment. The stigma attached to young people, particularly girls and young women, deeply affects dignity, hence the financial investment into young people's lives to be prepared for further education, training and employment, should begin in secondary school. This preparation is vital - a lifeline for the future.

Many young people with mental and emotional well being issues feel they are punished and shunned. Bereavement affects young people and there should be better support for young people to cope.

"Sometimes you don't need training - just basic compassion, common sense and empathy for young people for their futures, short and long term."

b) What are the long-term implications?

Employment, free training and access to work training to secure financial stability, promoting positive mental wellbeing. Research has shown that 1.5 million young women lost income during the pandemic, became first time benefit claimants, and today face the escalating cost-of-living costs crisis. Building pathways out of this will empower girls and young women.

More young people are moving into jobs and are in need of a more rounded career experience to have a better understanding of the world of work. The narrative of lazy young people needs to stop. Decision-makers must offer services in a world where young people have been affected by the pandemic, cost-of-living crisis and the uncertainty of their lives.

"Young people gaining a positive outlook on life and realising that everything they want to, can be done and achieve a successful start to their careers. Isn't that worth celebrating?"

A much less daunting process for young people - building "work preparedness" amongst young people will not only help a generation of young people affected by mental health but contribute to the national economy.

Appendix xiv: The Prince's Trust

About The Prince's Trust

1. Youth charity The Prince's Trust helps young people aged 11-30 to develop the confidence and skills they need to realise their ambitions, so that they can live, learn, and earn. Since The Trust was founded by His Majesty the King in 1976, we have helped more than a million young people across the UK to date, with three in four of those we supported over the last five years moving into work, education or training. We are committed to enabling even more young people to create a better future for themselves. By helping young people today, the benefits for them, their communities and the wider economy will be felt for years to come
2. Many of the young people helped by The Trust are in or leaving care, facing issues such as homelessness, mental health problems, or have been in trouble with the law. The programmes offered by the charity give vulnerable young people the practical and financial support needed to stabilise their lives, helping develop self-esteem and skills for work and life.
3. The Prince's Trust is a founding member and co-chair of the Youth Employment Group alongside the Institute for Employment Studies, Impetus, Youth Employment UK and Youth Futures Foundation and it now has over 300 member organisations. The group was set up to protect youth employment in the UK following the COVID-19, with a focus on the immediate and longer-term impacts on the employment prospects and participation of young people in the labour market, in particular those facing the greatest challenges. As well as considering the impacts of the pandemic, the YEG is looking at the conditions that have historically prevented young people furthest from the labour market achieving employment- to make sure this group are reached in the recovery.
4. Established shortly after the YEG, the Youth Voice Forum is chaired by young people and meets monthly on a range of topics, providing a space for them to engage in the work of the YEG and share their thoughts, experiences, challenges and ideas and solutions.

This response:

5. Based on our experience of supporting young people into employment – working in close partnership with employers across the country – this response sets out the following key points:

The pandemic has exacerbated a youth mental health crisis that was already distancing young people from the labour market

There are well evidenced measures that could be implemented to support young people into the labour market now

A preventative approach to mental health is important and this can be achieved through improved collaboration

The pandemic has exacerbated a youth mental health crisis that was already distancing young people from the labour market

6. Youth unemployment has been at record lows for most of 2022. As of the latest ONS release, there are now 399,000 unemployed young people⁷⁰. Long term youth unemployment has also stayed low, with around 126,000 young people currently unemployed for 6 months or more⁷¹. This means 31.6% of all unemployed young people are long-term unemployed- significantly down from the peak of the pandemic where 46.4% of all unemployed young people were long-term unemployed⁷².

⁷⁰<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/educationalstatusandlabourmarketstatusforpeopleagedfrom16to24seasonallyadjusteda06sa>

⁷¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/unemploymentbyageanddurationseasonallyadjustedunem01sa>

⁷²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/unemploymentbyageanddurationseasonallyadjustedunem01sa>

7. However, despite an extremely high number of job vacancies, and a consistently high number of young people who are not in employment, full-time education, or training (NEET), the number of young people who are in employment is fairly stable, when we would expect to see it significantly increasing. The latest ONS release finds there are 724,000 young people who are NEET; 490,000 of whom are economically inactive⁷³. A growing challenge in efforts to reduce NEET levels is the increase in economic inactivity, which now represents 68% of young people who are NEET compared to 41% in 2011⁷⁴. Tackling this rise is crucial in reducing the overall numbers of young people who are NEET.
8. Positively, youth worklessness has fallen by 300,000 since the 1990s, largely driven by fewer young women being out of work due to family responsibilities. However, in the same time period economic inactivity among young men almost doubled, and inactivity due to long-term health problems has been rising for both young men and women. Concerningly, young people who are inactive due to long-term sickness or disability have particularly high levels of mental health problems. In 2012-2019, two-thirds of those who were inactive for this reason had a mental health problem⁷⁵.
9. The pandemic disproportionately impacted young people in a number of ways. Although jobs were protected in the short term through emergency employment schemes, the consequences of long periods of worklessness, education loss, and isolation on young people's mental and physical health has long-term implications for the future of youth employment and the support that will be necessary to sustain it. The latest NHS survey findings suggest a probable mental disorder among 18% of seven-to 16-year-olds, 22% of 17- to -24-year-olds, and one quarter of 17- to - 19-year-olds⁷⁶. For 17- to - 19-year-olds, rates of a probable mental disorder rose from 1 in 10 in 2017, to 1 in 6 in 2020 during the period of lockdowns, to 1 in 4 in 2022.
10. The Prince's Trust Annual Youth Index⁷⁷ released in 2021 provides useful insight into the consequences of the pandemic and lockdowns on young people's mental health and wellbeing. This research showed that since the pandemic began, one in five young people (21 per cent) had experienced suicidal thoughts, rising to 28% for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). NEET young people were found to have increased struggles with their mental health across the measures in the index, suggesting that this group is particularly vulnerable.
11. There is no one cause for mental ill health, but research between The Prince's Trust and EPI found consistent risk factors that can increase the likelihood a young person struggles with their mental health⁷⁸. These include poorer socioeconomic background, physical activity, social media habits, being bullied, and a feeling of safety in their neighbourhood. NHS surveys found that 1 in 5 7- to 16-year-olds lived in households that experienced a reduction in household income in the past year, rising to more than 1 in 4 among children with a probable mental disorder⁷⁹.
12. The Prince's Trust 2022 Youth Index findings reinforce the observed link between employment and mental health. Almost half (46%) of young people who are NEET said

⁷³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneettable1>

⁷⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneettable1>

⁷⁵<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/not-working/>

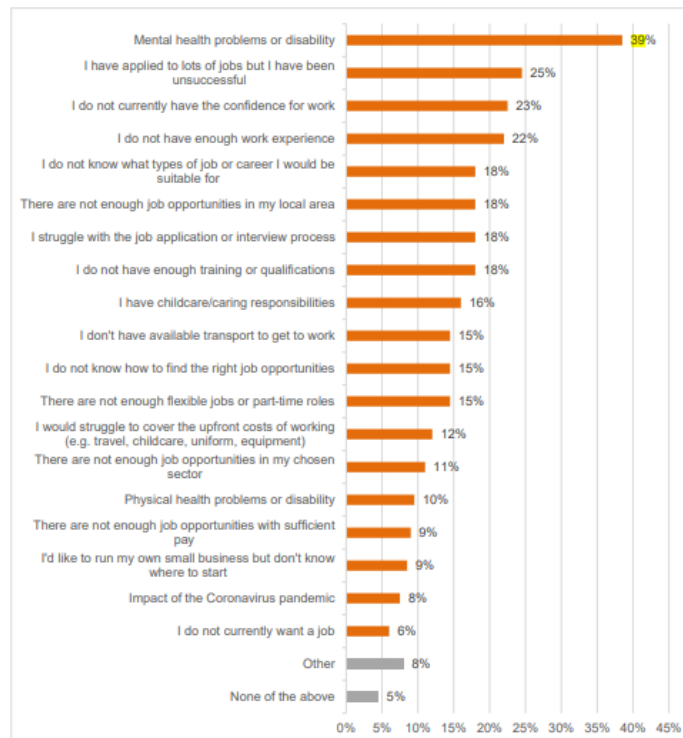
⁷⁶<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey#>

⁷⁷The Princes Trust (2021). Youth Index Report. <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2021>

⁷⁸https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EPI-PT_Young-people%E2%80%99s-wellbeing_Jan2021.pdf

⁷⁹<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey#>

Figure 10: Reasons for difficulty finding a job/not currently looking for work by percentage of NEET young people



being unemployed made them feel helpless and 38% said struggling to find work makes them feel lonely⁸⁰. Among young people who are NEET, one quarter report that they feel constantly anxious, compared to 16% overall- these figures speak to high incidences of mental health problems for young people who are NEET, but also for young people more widely. **A focus on supporting young people into work and education alongside provision of mental health support could help to prevent them becoming trapped in a negative cycle.**

- We investigated the changing support needs of NEET young people in our recent *Power of Potential* report with the L&WI. The report highlights the opportunity for almost half a million young people without a job to start work, if given the right support. Analysis of labour market data for this report found the proportion of out of work young people reporting a mental health problem increased from 11% in 2011 to 30% in 2022. When polled about their barriers to employment (**see figure 10**), the most common response, cited by 39% of respondents, was mental health problems or disability. This was followed by unsuccessful job applications (25%), a lack of confidence for work (23%) and insufficient work experience (22%).

- In meetings of the Youth Voice Forum, young people have shared their fears for the future and the 'unknown'. Following the pandemic and resulting poor job security in sectors where young people have historically been overrepresented, young people have spoken

⁸⁰

https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/princes-trust-natwest-youth-index-2022?gclid=Cj0KCQiA7bucBhCeARIsAIOwr-9Ot5Z3oG7-iTsOZ6-VcbC_eVoQBq3lI0jT6caIbp_DuGCI654l2eb0aAoWKFALw_wcB

to the forum about the need to have a “future proof job” and the effect this has had on their job searches. In The Prince’s Trust’s annual Youth Index, over a quarter (28%) of young people surveyed state they want their job to be pandemic proof⁸¹. It is therefore important to support young people into jobs they feel secure in, but also to work with employers to increase the attractiveness of roles which have been impacted by the pandemic and which continue to see high vacancy levels.

There are well evidenced measures that could be implemented to support young people into the labour market now

15. The focus for policy makers must now be on how we support inactive and long-term unemployed young people into work – whether for the first time, or to re-engage in employment. It is clear that in the current labour market, where unemployment is low and vacancies are high, those who remain unemployed or inactive are likely to require additional support to help them engage in work – and there is a role here for organisations like The Prince’s Trust who can provide the pre-employment and wrap-around support.
16. In our *Power of Potential* report⁸², polling identified mental health and addressing social and emotional barriers to work as key support needs. Encouragingly, young people surveyed reported that rather than looking for a job in a particular sector or career, they plan to find a job that is flexible, well-paid, has mental health support, and is in an area that interests them. This flexibility is promising as we look to the future labour market, as it suggests that with the right training opportunities and work conditions, young people are perfectly poised to fill the jobs of the future.
17. Given the specificity of these support needs, it is important that Work Coaches have the capacity to tailor the support they provide young people, particularly those with mental health conditions. The increase in the number of work coaches by 13,500 deployed during the pandemic was very welcome and helped to support those young people who were not protected by the furlough scheme. While we know that this increase has not been maintained, research has shown that lower staffing numbers can limit the time available to Work Coaches to develop tailored knowledge of the job seeker they are working with, as well as the time required to support new skills development. **The DWP should consider this when setting staffing and recruitment targets in the future.**
18. Youth Hubs can provide a youth-friendly alternative to job centres that have good potential for outreach due to their proximity to spaces young people are normally in. The combined provision available, such as through the presence of mental health support, means they have the potential to make a huge difference to young people by being able to address multifaceted support needs. However, we believe more can be done to improve their accessibility to young people, for example through expanding the eligibility criteria beyond young people claiming Universal Credit and publicising a centralised list of locations so young people can find them. **A dedicated Youth Hub budget would help Hubs to build local partnerships; their capacity for outreach; and training of staff. This fund could run alongside, or be incorporated with, a proportion of the Flexible Support Fund in each JCP district to fund additional programmes of support for young people facing specific barriers to work.**

⁸¹

https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/princes-trust-natwest-youth-index-2022?gclid=CjwKCAiAs8arBhA1FiwAgREdw4kuGy3v6Tk49jzth5c9fi1MxJt_5ko9QvikH8HupOYAMJflrwW8RoCg0cQAvD_BwE

⁸² <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/the-power-of-potential-supporting-the-future-of-young-people>

19. As mentioned above, a strength of Youth Hubs is their presence in places young people can access. The Prince's Trust Centre in Manchester is currently co-located with a Youth Hub, to great success. Trust staff let them know what courses are available and the JCP advisors refer young people onto our programmes where applicable. The set-up aids smooth transitions as The Trust is on hand to answer any queries and to meet the young person straight away to move them onto a programme, which we hope will boost retention.
20. We believe that funding for employability support programmes should have a clear focus on engaging those young people furthest from the labour market who may need additional interventions to succeed in the labour market. **This might include additional outreach arrangements, confidence boosting and personal development activities, as well as ongoing support when they move into the workplace to ensure retention.**
21. Apprenticeships can provide a great route into work – but this needs to be a well-paid and realistic option for all young people in order for the system to be accessible for all. **We believe that over time, the minimum apprenticeship wage rate should be increased to be equal to 80% of the NLW for adults – acknowledging the time that apprentices spend on off-the-job training, while still fairly recognising their contribution.** This would help to ensure that these opportunities are fairly paid across all sectors and regions, and they remain accessible to individuals from all backgrounds.
22. We also believe that work is needed to ensure that the apprenticeship system overall has a clear focus on young people – rebalancing incentives and funding to ensure that the opportunities for those starting out in careers and building new skills remain a central pillar of the landscape. As a part of this, **setting clear targets for the proportion of apprenticeship starts for young people and for new hires would help to rebalance the system towards creating opportunity. We suggest targets of 75% for all apprenticeship starts under age 25 and 50% of all apprenticeship starts to be new hires with the employer.**
23. It is important to create jobs and opportunities for young people, and it is also essential that these are good quality. A survey of young people found that 62% of people feel the pandemic has made it harder to find high-quality work⁸³. Mental and physical health were cited as the biggest barriers to finding high-quality work. The quality of work has significant implications for young people's health and wellbeing⁸⁴, and it is therefore important that this is considered when creating vacancies.
24. To ensure good quality of work for young people, employers should be encouraged where possible to use youth friendly practices and provide contracts with guaranteed hours, living-wage pay and stable employment opportunities – something that we know provides benefits to the individual but also the employer through increased engagement, with good quality work a strong predictor of employee retention⁸⁵

A preventative approach to mental health is important and this can be achieved through collaboration

25. Prevention is about creating the conditions that are conducive to healthy psychological development and functioning. This means policies that go beyond the immediate, to

⁸³ [Not just any job, good jobs! Youth voices from across the UK | Institute for Employment Studies \(IES\) \(employment-studies.co.uk\)](#)

⁸⁴ [Young People's Future Health Inquiry | Institute for Employment Studies \(IES\) \(employment-studies.co.uk\)](#)

⁸⁵ [Not just any job, good jobs! Youth voices from across the UK | Institute for Employment Studies \(IES\) \(employment-studies.co.uk\)](#)

include economic and social factors, the upstream determinants of mental health – also known as a mental health in all policies approach. Research suggests that half of all mental health problems are established by the age of 14, underlining the need for early intervention alongside this broader focus in policy making⁸⁶

26. The findings of our report with EPI demonstrate that socio-economic circumstances, according to both objective measures and children's perceptions of their family's socio-economic position, are strongly predictive of children's wellbeing⁸⁷. Investment in personal development interventions in schools that address socio-emotional skills' gaps could also be useful to tackle the existing consequences of inequality identified in our research. But this should come alongside **the development of a cross-government and cross-sector strategy that focuses on addressing family poverty- an issue that is increasingly challenging in the current economic circumstances.**
27. In our report with EPI, we found that mental health established at a young age can remain stable throughout a young person's life, meaning it is important to foster good wellbeing and mental health from a young age. One way to do this is through schools. As described in our report with EPI⁸⁸, a strong collaborative relationship between schools, colleges, and specialist health services is a positive way of supporting young people with mental health issues to thrive. These relationships are key to ensuring young people receive care appropriate to their needs, whether it's ongoing support from their school or college, or timely access to more specialist services.
28. Youth services such as those delivered by The Prince's Trust drive positive outcomes for young people. The characteristics of young people who regularly come into contact with youth services (for example those who are NEET or from poorer households) are also associated with poor mental wellbeing. A lot of the work done on youth programmes is reactive, helping young people who are identified as needing additional support. At the same time, work such as that carried out by The Prince's Trust is also preventative, because by helping young people with employability, confidence, and learning, they are then better equipped well into the future. Over the last five years, the outcomes rate has remained stable with three out of four young people moving into education, employment, training or volunteering three months after completing a Trust programme. It is therefore important that youth workers have good mental health literacy.
29. Young people have spoken to the Youth Voice Forum about the accessibility of job support and the need for greater information sharing. Several young people have spoken about the need for peer networks, so they can learn from each other. Time and time again, young people have stressed that the current approach to signposting opportunities is not sufficient and that they don't know where to go for support. While we know improving signposting is always on the agenda for government departments, it is clear that more needs to be done to increase outreach. **One way to achieve this, for example, could be through the co-design of Youth Hubs and strategies with young people.**
30. Following our work supporting young people through the Kickstart scheme, The Prince's Trust is looking to build on the successes of the programme by implementing a new model of in-work support, designed to provide ongoing employability support, help

⁸⁶ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>

⁸⁷ https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EPI-PT_Young-people%E2%80%99s-wellbeing_Jan2021.pdf

⁸⁸ https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EPI-PT_Young-people%E2%80%99s-wellbeing_Jan2021.pdf

young people build skills, and to support them with sustained employment and in-work progression. Whilst helping young people move into good quality jobs is critical, many young people with the greatest barriers to employment will need additional support to stay and succeed in a new job. As part of efforts to improve the retention of young people in the labour market, employers could be encouraged to implement this support-partnerships with third sector organisations like The Prince's Trust could help make this a reality.

31. It is important to raise awareness of accessibility at the employer level alongside efforts to increase provision and signposting towards young people. One way to do this could be through Government funded programmes like Access to Work and the Disability Confident Scheme, which could be improved to provide greater support to employers on what accessibility looks like in the workplace. Awareness raising can encourage employer engagement, increase supply, and destigmatise reasonable adjustments for young people experiencing barriers. This is important because mental-health-related stigma negatively impacts help-seeking by young people⁸⁹ and such steps could increase outreach and uptake. Improved employer engagement would help young people already in work, and young people looking to get into work who are increasingly prioritising mental health support in the workplace.

**The Prince's Trust
December 2022**

Appendix xv: Youth Employment UK

About Youth Employment UK

Youth Employment UK is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment. Today we are one of the leading youth employment experts in the UK, supporting young people, employers, government and policy makers. Youth Employment UK is the Secretariat to the [All-Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) for Youth Employment](#),⁹⁰ a Co-Chair of the [Youth Employment Group](#)⁹¹, and has led a number of independent research projects including the annual [Youth Voice Census](#)⁹².

We are actively tackling youth unemployment by:

- Giving young people a voice on the youth employment issues that affect them
- Supporting young people with the skills and careers support they need to progress
- Supporting employers to develop and be recognised for their youth-friendly employment practice
- Connecting young people to Youth Friendly Employers
- Providing expert insight across all youth employment policy areas

⁸⁹ <https://www.vmc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/IAMWHOLE-v1.1.pdf>

⁹⁰ APPG Youth Employment, About Us, <https://appgyouthemployment.org/home/about/#:~:text=The%20primary%20objectives%20of%20the%20APPG%20for%20Youth%20quality%20opportunities%3B%20and%20to%20share%20best%20practice.%20>

⁹¹ Youth Employment UK, The Youth Employment Group <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/about-us/youth-employment-group/>

⁹² Youth Employment UK, Youth Voice Census Report 2022 <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census/>

Our response

This response is drawn up with evidence from our work with the [Youth Employment Group](#) and its Youth Voice Forum, the Youth Voice Census and our wider policy and research work. We believe it is hugely important to ensure that young people are able to have their views and experiences heard on this issue.

It is clear to Youth Employment UK that young people are in a mental health emergency. The findings from the [2022 Youth Voice Census](#) paint a stark picture of how young people are feeling right now. In addition to the findings from our annual youth voice survey, through speaking to our Youth Ambassadors, and other young people from across the country, it is clear that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising cost of living as well as economic and political uncertainty are all impacting young people's sense of stability, their confidence about the future and in making their next steps.

Young people want more support and access to services that will help them make positive transitions to the next phase of their lives, at all ages and stages young people do not feel prepared for their future. The 2022 Youth Voice Census shows us that for the last 17 years, young people have not had consistent access to high-quality careers advice or work experience to develop their employability skills and personal confidence to make positive steps from education to employment. In addition to these barriers, young people with protected characteristics, carers and care-leavers face additional disadvantages which places them at greater risk of being out of education, employment, or training and at greater risk of feeling less confident and more anxious about their future. The emerging mental health crisis that we are seeing is compounding these barriers to employment and leaving some young people vulnerable to long-term unemployment and at risk of economic inactivity.

The government must respond quickly to this emerging crisis by equipping schools and education providers with the right tools to support their young people experiencing mental health challenges. The government must also consider how it ensures that all young people in education are accessing high-quality careers information and guidance to give them confidence when making their next steps. Whilst there is a role for government to play in providing adequate support for young people facing mental health challenges and equipping young people with the tools and confidence to move into the world of work, there is also a role for employers to play in ensuring they adopt youth-friendly practices which recognise the lived experiences of young people, their needs and the barriers they face in accessing good quality work. The steps needed to tackle the mental health crisis facing young people need to happen collectively and must listen to the views and experiences of young people to ensure their needs are met.

Methodology

Our evidence has been taken from the following sources:

- [Youth Voice Census 2022](#) - The Youth Voice Census is a weighted and representative annual survey conducted by Youth Employment UK. It explores the views and experiences of young people in the UK between the ages of 11 - 30. The 2022 Youth Voice Census was completed by over 4,000 young people and was open between March and April 2022.
- Youth Voice Forum - The Youth Voice Forum is chaired by four young people within the founding organisations of the Youth Employment Group. It is a space where

young people can discuss current topics with other young people. The purpose of the Youth Voice Forum is to gain young people's perspectives and give them the opportunity to support the work that the Youth Employment Group does.

- Youth Ambassadors - Youth Employment UK Youth Ambassadors provide first-hand experience of issues surrounding young employment and give a voice to young people. Youth Ambassadors regularly share their experiences and expertise in both formal and informal settings to ensure that young people's voices are heard.

Response to Inquiry questions

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?

Transition points are always anxious moments in a young person's life, however, it is clear that young people are feeling more overwhelmed at these key transition points than ever before. The additional stressors of COVID-19, the cost of living and the uncertain political landscape here and further afield are building such high levels of anxiety and fear in our young people that even a small step forward or decision point can be debilitating. The findings from the [2022 Youth Voice Census](#) show that young people at all ages and stages are struggling with their mental health, well-being and anxiety:

- 28.5% of young people told us that they had 'social, emotional and mental health challenges, in addition throughout the free text commentary boxes, young people continued to link back to their feelings of anxiety and mental health challenges more than we have seen before.
- Young people were at least 10% more likely to state that they are 'not confident' or 'not confident at all' in their self-belief and related skills than all other skills, with 36.6% of those in education scoring this way and 29.8% of those out of education.
- The effects of COVID-19 are staying with young people; 52% of those in education feel that their education has been disrupted 'a lot' or a 'great deal'.
- 49.1% of respondents thought that exams and assessments impact their mental health negatively, and those with protected characteristics feel this more acutely.
- 51% of young people looking for work thought their anxiety was the biggest barrier to accessing work, 32% thought anxiety was their biggest barrier.
- For those looking for work COVID-19 had the biggest impact on their mental health with over half (52.6%) stating that their mental health had been impacted 'a lot' or 'a great deal' and 42.1% saying that their motivation to apply for opportunities has been impacted 'a lot' or a great deal'.
- Young people currently in work told us their biggest barrier to accessing work had been anxiety (52%)

Young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers were more greatly impacted by change and uncertainty. At every stage of their journey, and when we explore the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 these young people are always more likely to feel that they have been (or will be) impacted most negatively.

- Self-belief, confidence and staying positive scores were more likely to be at least 10% lower than other groups.
- 100% of non-binary respondents had the most extreme response stating that COVID-19 impacted their mental health 'a great deal' compared to 50% of boys and

- 27.3% of girls.
- 80% of Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents, respondents from Other ethnic groups and respondents from Mixed or multiple ethnic groups said their mental health was impacted by COVID-19 'a lot' or 'a great deal' at least 30% higher than all other race and ethnic groups.
- 60% of those with additional needs stated that their mental health has been impacted by COVID-19 'a lot' or 'a great deal' compared to 42.9% of those without.

In the free text commentary questions, young people shared the impact that COVID-19 has had on their mental health and well-being, when asked *"Please tell us how much, if at all, COVID-19 has impacted your education/work"* we had the following responses:

"I have a great deal of social anxiety as a result and struggle to acclimatise to the office/hybrid working nature of most jobs, which are open to graduates/young professionals with little experience."

"I had to take a year out from study because my mental health declined- partly due to covid"

"Online school was monotonous and exhausting. My mental health suffered greatly, and I found myself at an all-time low. "

When asked if there was anything they were worried about over the next 12 months a number of young people shared their concerns about their mental health and well-being in the free text commentary:

"mental health relapsing and having no support about that"

"The lack of social and emotional support I have heard of for students taking GCSE exams, especially with the disruption that has been caused by COVID"

"I am extremely worried about finding employment when my Kickstart scheme ends this week. There are hardly any jobs in my local area that I believe I am capable of doing - all the while, I am on a very long waiting list for mental health treatment."

"Not having support with my mental health and my struggles with ADHD when I leave school"

"I haven't got any mental health support, I have very little support as an unpaid carer. I have no support or advice to move out and eventually live independently."

In addition to our [2022 Youth Voice Census](#), we heard from young people through discussions and roundtables about their mental health.

In November 2022 the [Youth Voice Forum](#)⁹³ met to discuss young people's experience of mental health and well-being when trying to access work and in work. The Youth Voice Forum is chaired by four young people within the founding organisations of the Youth Employment Group. It is a space where young people can discuss current topics with other young people. The purpose of the Youth Voice Forum is to gain young people's perspectives and give them the opportunity to support the work that the Youth Employment Group does.

From the discussion young people highlighted transition points such as leaving university

⁹³ Youth Employment UK, The YouthVoice Forum: Mental Health
<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-forum-mental-health/>

and trying to access work at a time when their mental health suffered. Young people explained that they were unsure of where to go and who to turn to for mental health support. “the biggest struggle for me was when I finished university and had to transition into some form of employment, that was where my mental health really struggled. I didn’t know who to turn to at that stage.”

In a [round table held in September 2022 with the RT Hon Jonathan Ashworth MP](#)⁹⁴, Youth Ambassadors said they struggled with the hiring process for some jobs they tried to apply for. They struggled to understand some of the language in job specifications and what skills and attributes the roles required. This resulted in one Youth Ambassador saying “I felt I couldn’t be myself in an interview.”

2. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)

Young people are able to access mental health support through CAMHS/CYPMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services/Child and Young Person Mental Health Services), and mental health support systems in schools, colleges, and universities. For those looking for work, there are a number of employment support programmes that have the potential to support those young people experiencing mental ill health, such as Sector-Based Work Academies and traineeships and the DWP-led Improved Access to Psychological Therapies Programme, a joint DWP-Department of Health Programme running in England.

However, young people’s perceptions of the services they are able to access reveal that they do not feel adequately supported to deal with their mental ill health to make positive next steps, access the labour market and find good quality work.

The 2022 Youth Voice Census found:

- 25.7% of young people think they can access support for their mental health problems locally.
- 19.3% of young people thought there were enough opportunities to share their voice on important issues: – Care leavers and registered carers were most likely to think they had opportunities to share their voice.
- 51.8% of those who were unsure/questioning ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that they could access support locally compared to 47.4% of those who are non-binary, 43.8% of transgender respondents’, 33.3% of those who prefer not to say, 28.1% of girls and 17.4% of boys.
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents and Mixed or multiple ethnic groups were twice as likely to ‘strongly disagree’ that they can get support for their mental health problems locally.
- Care leavers were at least 5% more likely to agree that they can access mental health support locally (28.6% compared to 23% of those currently in care and 20% of those with no experience of care).
- Those with no experience of being a carer were most likely to agree that they can access support for their mental health problems (21.2% compared to 15% of unregistered carers and 14% of registered carers)

⁹⁴ Youth Employment UK, Young People and the Cost of Living: Roundtable with Jonathan Ashworth MP <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/young-people-cost-of-living-jonathan-ashworth-mp-roundtable/>

This clearly demonstrates that young people, especially those from marginalised groups, are not feeling confident that they will be able to access the right support services to help them, regardless of age or education, employment or training status. The fact that only 1 in 4 young people think that they can access support for their mental health problems locally shows that more needs to be done to give young people confidence that the systems around them are there for them. This is even more important for those young people from marginalised groups such as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, mixed or multiple ethnic groups, who are least confident that they can access mental health services locally.

There is also a clear disparity in how and where young people are accessing support for their mental health. The [2022 Youth Voice Census](#) reveals that parents most commonly take the role as the main supporter with school/education providers following closely. The NHS is providing the majority of support for physical, mental health problems and substance abuse. For those who are accessing support locally, we asked where they were accessing it, the responses show clear differences between different groups:

- For those with additional needs we saw that they were 8% more likely to be getting support for all issues from their parents over other sources.
- Young people with English as a second language were least likely to be using their parents as a support network.
- Registered carers were least likely to be seeking support from their parents.
- Gay or lesbian, bi and transgender respondents are twice as likely to be using private providers for their mental health problems than other gender groups.
- 23% of care leavers were using private providers for support with their mental health problems compared to 5.6% of those currently in care and 9.3% of those with no experience of the care system.
- Registered carers were around 20% more likely to be getting support from a private provider for physical health problems, mental health problems and substance abuse.
- Young people with additional needs were 8% more likely to be getting support for their mental health from the NHS.

These differences reveal that young people do not have a consistent service to support them with their mental health challenges, leaving different groups of young people reliant on a mosaic of provision which is likely to leave those most vulnerable young people without access to support networks at greatest risk of receiving no support at all. This mismatch of demand and supply or support poses great risks for our young people at a time of crisis. The implications of this are feeding into the rising number of young people who are economically inactive and NEET.

In the responses to free-text commentary questions in the [2022 Youth Voice Census](#), we also saw concerns about losing access to mental health services when reaching the age of 18. Is *there anything you are worried about or not looking forward to in the next 12 months? "No longer being able to access CAMHS as I am worried that I will no longer be supported with my mental health after my 18th birthday."* This response shows the cliff-edge of support that some young people face, adding to their sense of instability and anxiety about the future.

We also heard that young people felt that support for mental health amongst those currently out of work was difficult to access: *Do you think there are any gaps in the support that is available for those unemployed, and if so, what are those gaps? "There are gaps for those with undiagnosed mental health issues, it is very difficult to get the support because everywhere requires a phone call and for those who have anxiety around phone calls, it's very hard to make the call and get the support needed."*

During our [Youth Voice Forum meeting in November 2022](#)⁹⁵, young people explained how they have seen a great increase in the number of employers offering mental health first aid training. They have seen more mental health assurance plans put in place in workplaces. The young person went on to explain that this shows greater awareness of mental health in particular in the workplace. However, they went on to explain that this wasn't consistent in all organisations and as young people highlighted in the discussion they didn't always know who to turn to for mental health support. More needs to be done to highlight where young people can turn to for mental health and well-being support in the workplace.

A young person at our Youth Voice Forum meeting said the biggest thing her employer does is “ask the three big words, are you ok?”

In June 2022 Youth Employment UK held a discussion with Youth Ambassadors about mental health and the support they would like to see. Youth Ambassadors were split on whether they would discuss mental health with an employer or work colleague. One Youth Ambassador expressed that they “think it really does depend on the organisation and the people you are surrounded by. Managers in the past who were open about accessing free counselling and stuff like that make you feel incredibly safe.”

3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training?

When considering the additional support that young people with mental ill health may need to get them back into work, education or training, it is essential that we listen to their voices and hear their lived experiences. Throughout the [2022 Youth Voice Census](#), it is clear that young people would like to see greater support for well-being, anxiety and mental health in schools. In addition, young people would like to see a careers education system that presents a wide range of options for their next steps and supports them through whichever pathway they decide is best for them, free from pressures to opt for academic routes over vocational pathways. The young people in the [2022 Youth Voice Census](#) told us they would like to see the following support

From schools:

“Emotional support if someone has something like social anxiety or they are just nervous and shy around other people or have trouble making new friends.”

“Support with managing stress and other mental health concerns. Less pressure on academic achievement.”

“Properly informed mental health support. Not just basic self-care tips, more support for young people's mental health when transitioning from high school to college as it wasn't very easy. “

“Mental health support because they talk about it a lot but not everyone can access the support”

“Focus more on mental health and well-being and general life skills rather than just pushing academic pathways”

⁹⁵ [Youth Voice Forum: Mental Health \(youthemployment.org.uk\)](#)

From sixth-form and college:

“More life skills e.g. coping skills and mental health, financial management. Also more diverse information about post-college options besides just university.”

“Provided more academic and mental health support.

“Assist with mental health”

These responses show the importance of support services that feel accessible and readily available to young people. The young people we have spoken to and who have completed the Youth Voice Census often acknowledge that there are some support services for mental ill health available and that the dialogue around mental health over recent years has allowed them to speak more openly about their own mental health challenges, however, it is clear that whilst discussions around mental health may have opened up this is not the case for support services.

At the [Youth Voice Forum](#) meeting held in November 2022 on the topic of mental health and well-being, young people told us about the support they would like to see. One young person was asked what attracted them to their current employer and they responded that they *“saw the respect they had for people and you saw from the way they trained people they were constantly considering the feelings of their staff.”*

Young people expressed that *“competency-based interviews are really unhelpful as they don’t usually disclose the questions before, which makes young people feel anxious and fuels a lot of this anxiety.”* One young person said in regard to having to answer competency-based questions at an interview *“it’s the fear of making yourself look stupid.”*

Young people have told us when asked *how educators, employers, and the government support young people with their mental health* that *“they need to be better connected and education needs to be centered around supporting young people with soft skills.”*

Young people explained that whilst in a job *“they need more understanding and encouragement from line managers.”* Young people also expressed the importance of creating a safe and positive environment in the workplace, which was important in supporting their mental health.

Recommendations:

In response to the above evidence Youth Employment UK makes the following recommendations:

- Make youth voice consultation a statutory requirement in key national and local government policy areas including mental health.
- Ensure that existing commitments to extending CAMHS to those aged 25 and under, Mental Health Support Teams in Schools and investment in Mental Health services is delivered in full and at pace.

- Recognise [Good Youth Employment Charter](#) as best practice for youth-friendly employment which can support young people with mental ill health into employment and good quality work.
- Build an evidence-base of best practice by reviewing what works in supporting young people experiencing mental ill health into employment, education or training.
- Equip systems supporting young people to ensure they are fair for all and compensate those with protected characteristics
- Improve funding levels for youth services to ensure that all local authorities can deliver the services the young people need in their communities, including services that support young people's mental health and well-being.
- Recognise mental health as a potential indicator for a young person at risk of becoming NEET and ensure adequate intervention is put in place to support that young person into a positive destination.
- Recognise and promote the [Young Professional](#) and the [Careers Advice Hub](#) from Youth Employment UK as tools that young people should be signposted to build their knowledge, skills and confidence and better understand how to manage their mental health through education to work and where to get support with escalating issues

Appendix:

All- Party Group for Youth Employment:

<https://appgyouthemployment.org/home/about/#:~:text=The%20primary%20objectives%20of%20the%20APPG%20for%20Youth,quality%20opportunities%3B%20and%20to%20share%20best%20practice.%20>

Good Youth Employment Charter:

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/the-good-youth-employment-charter/>

Youth Employment Group: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/about-us/youth-employment-group/>

Youth Employment UK Roundtable with Jonathan Ashworth MP

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/young-people-cost-of-living-jonathan-ashworth-mp-roundtable/>

2022 Youth Voice Census: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census/>

Youth Voice Forum on Mental Health:

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-forum-mental-health/>

Appendix xvi: Youth Futures Foundation

Written evidence submission by Youth Futures Foundation

Introduction to Youth Futures

Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with an initial £90 million endowment from the Dormant Assets Scheme to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Its aim is to narrow

employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

Executive summary

Youth Futures is submitting evidence to this important inquiry as mental health is one of the key challenges that is being reported in our research and work with young people, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. This impact on mental health, and the existing structural issues of this emergency, only compounds the multiple barriers to good quality employment that young people from marginalised communities face.

The evidence submission below outlines the significant impact that mental ill-health has on young people's employment prospects, particularly for those most at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and those most marginalised.

Much of the evidence submission and recommendations below are pulled from the 2022 report Youth Futures Foundation funded EDSK to undertake on *Finding a NEET solution: How to prevent young people from falling out of our education system.*

The submission highlights:

- Those most vulnerable generally are most at risk of disengaging from EET at transition points, and there is limited evidence on this at post-16 level compared with primary and secondary school.
- Worsening mental ill-health and barriers to education, employment and training have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, with Youth Futures and Savanta ComRes' ethnic disparities youth voice survey⁹⁶ revealing the extent of the impact on young ethnic minority groups.
- There is a strong case for awareness raising and a review of the services currently on offer as young people have reported in youth voice discussions that they don't know where to go to receive mental health support (both in education and employment) and that young people need more personalised support.

Below is a summary of the submission's recommendations:

- 1) **The Government should adopt a youth opportunity guarantee** so that no young person is not learning or earning for more than six months;
- 2) **The role of Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression should be expanded to cover across the DWP, DfE and DCMS** to ensure accountability and responsibility for young people between Government departments;
- 3) To create a stronger evidence base regarding what contributes to a successful 'transition' at ages 11, 14 and 16, **the DfE should fund research trials that aim to identify the most effective practices and approaches at each transition point**, including a focus on mental ill-health and 'risk-points for vulnerable groups';
- 4) **The Government should invest an additional £80 million in 2023 to support those with the most complex needs** and improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services for young people;

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https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Youth-Futures-Foundation_Savanta_Ethnic-Disparities-Survey-report_final.pdf

- 5) **The Government needs to re-evaluate the funding directly supporting young people** and increase funding for the 16-19 Bursary to £225 million a year from £150 million;
- 6) **The DWP should commit to sustained funding and rollout of Youth Hubs, including a campaign to raise awareness of this support to young people, reforming eligibility criteria beyond Universal Credit claimants – to ensure those most marginalised are not excluded from the support on offer – and the DWP should explore implementing walk-in and self-referral policies** to allow more young people to access these co-located services.

Evidence submission

1. What impact is mental ill-health having on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training? Are there any differences for young people with protected characteristics?

Mental ill-health is having a significant impact on young people when transitioning into education, employment or training (EET), and particularly so for marginalised groups who face multiple barriers and complex layers of disadvantage when attempting to access opportunities.

Youth Employment UK's Youth Voice Census 2022 highlighted a mental health emergency, with 52% of those in work citing anxiety as their biggest barrier, 31.2% of young people in work reporting struggling with their wellbeing and 51% of young people aged 19+ stating that they thought mental health challenges were their biggest barrier to accessing work now or in the future.⁹⁷ Further, research from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and IPPR, commissioned by Youth Futures and the Blagrave Trust⁹⁸, identifies evidence that the nature of work and changing working behaviours since the pandemic drive mental health challenges amongst young people. Particularly, it finds that young people are over-represented in precarious work that may negatively affect mental health (young workers in temporary jobs are 29% more likely to experience mental health problems than those in permanent jobs) and that the pressures of modern work – e.g. an 'always-on' culture – lead to young adults neglecting their mental health (55% of young adults reported neglecting their mental health due to the pressures of work). This research indicates a concerning challenge both in terms of recruitment and retainment of young people.

Earlier this year, Youth Futures Foundation published its *Finding a NEET solution* report with EDSK⁹⁹ which highlighted that, in about two-third of cases, a young person's overall labour market trajectory can be predicted correctly based on four main 'risk factors' at age 16:

- 1) Low educational attainment
- 2) Low self-confidence/self-esteem
- 3) Early pregnancy
- 4) A disadvantaged family background

⁹⁷ [Youth Voice Census 2022 - Youth Employment UK](#)

⁹⁸

<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/A-Better-Future-Transforming-jobs-and-skills-for-youth-people-post-pandemic-0.pdf>

⁹⁹ [EDSK - Finding a NEET solution \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#), p.1

The report found¹⁰⁰ the transition from primary to secondary school is known to be a “risk-point for vulnerable learners”, with a poor transition associated with “deleterious effects on self-esteem, depression and academic attainment at age 18”. It’s clear that post-16 transitions are the pivotal next “risk-point for vulnerable learners” and yet, worryingly, the research highlights that there is little evidence about how to best support young people at later transition points, such as moving into post-16 learning. This gap in the evidence base runs the risk of seeing young people disengage from EET and fall through the cracks due to a lack of support at these key milestone moments.

The proportion of young people who are NEET has stayed roughly the same over the last two decades, indicating deep-rooted systemic issues in the education system and wider society that are preventing tens of thousands of young people from making the transition into the next stage of EET every year. Prevalence data shows that approximately 21.3% of young people who are NEET had a mental health condition in 2021, contrasting with:

- 7.7% of NEET young people in 2012, and
- 14.4% of all young people (aged 11-19) in England.¹⁰¹

Moreover, the impact that mental health support can have on young people is clearly demonstrated in Youth Futures Foundation’s Youth Employment System Map¹⁰², created through workshops with young people to map out the youth employment system. The System Map highlights the positive feedback loop that good mental health has on a young person’s capacity to manage work and life and their ability to meet basic needs (including secure housing). Emotional distress and poor mental health were shown to have a negative impact on levels of self confidence and a knock-on effect on both quality of life and employment, reinforcing the pivotal importance of effective mental health support for young people as early and as preventatively as possible.

All of this has longer term consequences. The 2022 Youth Employment Index¹⁰³, from Youth Futures and PWC, highlighted that evidence shows that “youth unemployment is significantly connected with poorer mental health”. Longer periods of unemployment can have particular negative impacts on mental health and well-being, such as “anxiety, fear of missing out, and lower confidence levels”. As demonstrated above, these effects can create a vicious cycle, where those young people experiencing mental ill-health struggle to get good work, which further damages their mental health – creating a ‘scarring’ effect.

It is important to emphasise that many young people from marginalised groups face multiple barriers, and further layers of disadvantage than their better-off peers, and need bespoke and targeted support to address this. Youth Futures’ recent ethnic disparities survey with Savanta ComRes¹⁰⁴, on behalf of the Youth Employment Group’s (YEG) Ethnic Disparities Subgroup, found that two in five young people from minority ethnic backgrounds reported that their mental health has suffered with the cost-of-living crisis taking hold. More than 8 out of 10 (84%) young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are worried about barriers or challenges to do with their ethnicity or background when it comes to work/employment and two in five young people have experienced discrimination when applying for a job (37%) and/or at a job interview (36%). The trauma and mental health impact of these lived

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.6

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.59

¹⁰² [Youth Employment System Map - Youth Futures Foundation.](#)

¹⁰³

<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PwC-Youth-Futures-Foundation-Youth-Employment-Index-2022.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ [Youth-Futures-Foundation-Narrowing-the-gap-tackling-ethnic-disparities.pdf \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#)

experiences casts a long shadow, especially if experienced early on in a young person's career, making support at transition points all the more vital to ensure these young people don't get locked out of opportunities or left behind. Isha, Ed and Roshan of Youth Futures' Future Voices Group, a group of youth ambassadors at the heart of the organisation's strategy and activity, produced a video on the experiences (and mental health impact) of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds accessing and navigating the labour market, demonstrating the significant mental health barriers to navigate through short case study answers to questions. Answers covered exclusionary workplace practices, feeling the need to "white-wash CVs" to increase the chance of employment, as well as hair discrimination in interviews amongst many other barriers explored.¹⁰⁵

2. What support is available to young people with mental ill-health who are currently in education, training or employment? How effective is this support? (which groups does this work for)

In Youth Futures Foundation's forums with young people, participants have said time and time again that they don't know where to go to access mental health support in education or employment. One young person in the Youth Employment Group's Youth Voice Forum session on 22 November 2022 said "there needs to be more personalised support for young people, which meets their individual needs" and where to go to access support has "always been a grey area, it's never been clear-cut where I would go for support when it came to school and college". Another said that their biggest mental health struggles occurred when they didn't know who to turn to when leaving university and transitioning into employment.

Much of the support on offer requires proactivity and knowing where to look and many young people do not know what's on offer to them or how to seek help. A prime example of this is that none of the young people we work with have known what a Youth Hub is and young people have spoken to the stigma around Jobcentre Plus and the lack of bespoke support.

Within employment, young people have also reported a mixed bag depending on the employer and their support offering, so there is much work to be done at an employer level to share best practice of support measures such as mentoring, progression routes, mental health support etc. that are working effectively.

It's worth noting that Youth Futures' report with EDSK highlights more broadly that, while the Government has attempted to address mental health support, its aim to have 400 mental health support teams in a third of schools in England by 2022-23 has been criticised as 'lacking ambition' and the deadline it has set of 2025 to offer training to senior mental health leads in every state school and college also lacks urgency.¹⁰⁶

More evidence and data is needed on what works to support young people with mental ill-health in education, training or employment, as well as a measure of how effective this support is and which groups it works for.

3. What additional support could be offered to young people with mental ill-health to get them into work, education or training? a) Examples of evidence and best practice b) What recommendations would you put forward?

¹⁰⁵ [Ethnic disparities - Youth Futures Foundation.](#)

¹⁰⁶ [EDSK - Finding a NEET solution \(youthfuturesfoundation.org\)](#), p.62

To help young people with mental ill-health access work, education or training, Youth Futures would recommend the following:

- The Youth Employment Group¹⁰⁷, of which Youth Futures is a founding co-chair, continues to call for a guaranteed job, training place or education route for all young people who have been out of work for 6 months or longer.¹⁰⁸ This would ensure those that may have disengaged from the labour market or full-time education due to mental ill-health have the opportunity of a guaranteed route back into EET to stop our future workforce, and those most marginalised, being left behind.
- To create clearer accountability and responsibility in government for preventing young people from becoming NEET, and supporting those most at risk / currently experiencing mental health issues, the current role of 'Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression' should work across DWP and DfE to ensure cross-departmental responsibility for youth employment and the systems young people navigate, key education/employment transition points and the barriers that disadvantaged groups face.
- To create a stronger evidence base regarding what contributes to a successful 'transition' at ages 11, 14 and 16, the DfE should fund research trials that aim to identify the most effective practices and approaches at each transition point, including a focus on mental ill-health and 'risk-points for vulnerable groups'.
- To improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services for young people, the Government should invest an additional £80 million in 2023 to support those with the most complex needs. A further £75 million should be invested to accelerate the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams in education settings, with a new target of half of schools being supported in the academic year 2023/2024.
- The Government needs to re-evaluate the funding directly supporting young people and increase the number of young people who are eligible for financial support in their final education years by increasing the 16-19 Bursary Fund from £150 million a year to £225 million a year for the start of the academic year 2023/2024. There is currently insufficient funding to directly support young people, with the 16-19 Bursary Fund providing a quarter of the funds that were available through the Education Maintenance Allowance.
- The DWP should commit to sustained funding, rollout and effective evaluation of Youth Hubs. To facilitate this, they should consider:
 - a campaign to raise awareness of this support to young people
 - wrap-around mental health support in schools and employability services, and
 - reforming the eligibility criteria for Youth Hubs to include those not on Universal Credit, to ensure those who are most marginalised are not excluded from the support on offer (see the Youth Employment Group's recommendation on Kickstart in the Opportunity Guarantee for an example on how reforming eligibility could work).¹⁰⁹ A walk-in policy, operated on an ad hoc basis by some youth hubs already, and self-referrals, as seen in Fedcap's model as a Prime contractor in Scotland, could also be implemented across the board to allow more young people to access these co-located services.

¹⁰⁷ <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/our-work/ignite/youth-employment-group/>

¹⁰⁸

<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Opportunity-Guarantee-FINAL-PUBLISHED-16-July-21.pdf>

¹⁰⁹

<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Opportunity-Guarantee-FINAL-PUBLISHED-16-July-21.pdf>, p.6

4. What are the likely impacts on youth employment should these proposed recommendations take place?

a) Are there specific short term implications?

b) What are the long-term implications?

The likely impact on youth employment, should these proposed recommendations take place, would be:

- Better cross-departmental join-up on youth and clear accountability and responsibility for young people to avoid silos and fragmentation.
- Increased investment in mental health services and direct funding for young people will help to prevent young people from disengaging from EET, reduce stigma and financial barriers (which can lead to mental health issues), and better equip schools and employability services to effectively implement key support for young people.
- DfE research trials into youth transition points will help to identify risk factors and prevention strategies in the long-term to help reduce youth unemployment and the number of young people who become NEET, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable young people, as well as acting as a basis for learning when introducing new education or employment initiatives to create a more joined-up system.
- Continued investments and rollout of Youth Hubs will ensure co-located youth-friendly services that don't have the same perceived stigma as Jobcentre Plus and are more accessible in the place where a young person lives. Information raising around the support on offer will ensure that young people know how to access the help on offer which will, in turn, increase numbers utilising Youth Hub services and result in better opportunities and prospects for young people. Reforming the eligibility criteria, and increasing the accessibility of Youth Hubs, would have the positive long-term implications of reaching more young people from disadvantaged groups who are currently locked out of support, as well as playing a part in reducing youth unemployment and NEET rates.

In the short term, the recommendations will require some increased spending, but the return on investment will be clear to see in the long-term. The 2022 Youth Employment Index¹¹⁰ highlighted the potential £38 billion gain to UK GDP if it lowers NEET rates to German levels – investing in interventions to support the hardest to reach groups is not only a moral but an economic imperative. Greater data on transition points, increased departmental working, and continued investment and awareness raising of youth hubs and mental health services will help to plug gaps in the system, identify what works and ensure young people – and particularly those most marginalised – know what support services are on offer to them and are, consequently, less likely to disengage from EET and be prevented from making an economic contribution to the labour market.

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<https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/PwC-Youth-Futures-Foundation-Youth-Employment-Index-2022.pdf>, p.6

Contact Information

Youth Employment UK is the Secretariat for the APPG for Youth Employment
Contact : Laura-Jane Rawlings, CEO and Joshua Knight Senior Policy & Research
Lead, Eilish Peters Policy & Youth Voice Coordinator

Youth Employment UK CIC

Britannia House

Station Road

Kettering

NN15 7HJ

01536 513388

info@youthemployment.org.uk

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/about-us/appg-for-youth-employment/>

Shaun Bailey MP Wednesbury, Oldbury & Tipton, is the Chair of the APPG for Youth
Employment

shaun.bailey.mp@parliament.uk