

## Research Briefing

12 May 2025

By Laura Abreu

---

# Youth Services in the UK

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

## Summary

- 1 Youth services in England
- 2 Youth services in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland
- 3 Research and reports about youth services
- 4 Further information.

### **Contributing Authors**

Rachael Harker, Funding Youth Services in England and Wales, 1.3 & 2.1

### **Disclaimer**

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### **Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff**

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### **Feedback**

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Youth services in England</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Statutory duties	6
1.2 Government policy in England	7
Conservative Government 2019 -2024	7
The Labour Government from July 2024	10
1.3 Funding youth services in England	13
The Conservative Government	13
The Labour Government Youth Strategy Funding	14
Local authority spending on youth services in England.	14
Publicly funded youth workers in England	17
<b>2 Youth services in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Wales	19
Statutory duties	19
The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, 2019	19
New statutory guidance	21
Funding Youth services in Wales	21
2.2 Scotland	22
Statutory duties	22
National Youth Work Strategy	23
2.3 Northern Ireland	24
Statutory duties	24
Priorities for Youth	25
<b>3 Research and reports about youth services</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 The state of youth services, benefits and funding impacts	27
All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs	27

Times running out: National Youth Agency (NYA) and the YMCA England and Wales	29
YMCA Youth funding reports	30
Better Together: Youth Work with Schools report	30
Generation Isolation Report 2024	31
<b>3.2 Youth work, youth crime and violence</b>	<b>31</b>
The effects of youth clubs on education and crime, The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS)	32
The Social costs of Youth work cuts, National Youth agency	32
The Youth Violence Commission	33
Prevent Knife Crime	34
The Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Serious youth violence, 2019	34
<b>4 Further information.</b>	<b>36</b>

## Summary

Youth services (also known as ‘youth work’) cover a broad range of activities for young people outside of formal education, including youth clubs and centres, uniformed and voluntary organisations, youth counselling, outreach, and drug and alcohol services. These services may be open to all young people (universal services) or aimed at specific groups (targeted services).

Young people are commonly understood to be those between childhood and adulthood, but age definitions vary by country. [The UN, for example, defines young people for statistical purposes \(PDF\)](#) as aged between 15 and 25.

The countries of the United Kingdom tend to consider people aged between 11 and 19 (25 for those with special educational needs) to be young people.

Youth services is a devolved policy area throughout the UK. In England, Wales and Scotland local authorities (LAs) have most of the responsibility for providing youth services. In Northern Ireland the [Education Authority](#) has responsibility for youth services. Local authorities are usually not obliged to fund these services and there is limited dedicated funding from central government.

In November 2024 the Labour government announced the “[development and coproduction of a National Youth Strategy](#)” and that “[an ambitious and wide ranging consultation](#)” would take place over the coming months. The National Youth Strategy is to be published in the Summer 2025 with an interim report in the spring.

The benefits from youth services can be difficult to identify and even harder to quantify. However, it has been argued that benefits may include improved mental health and self-esteem, friendship, skills and experiences, improved employment prospects, and reductions in youth crime and violence. Section three highlights some of the research into the benefits of youth services, the impact of spending reductions and the links with youth crime and violence. This briefing summarises the statutory duties and government policies in different parts of the UK. Section one looks at England and contains information about funding in England. Section two covers Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

---

# 1 Youth services in England

Youth services is a devolved policy area throughout the UK. This section focuses on England and section two covers the other countries of the UK.

## 1.1 Statutory duties

The statutory framework for the provision of youth services in England is provided by [section 507B of the Education Act 1996](#) (as amended).

The provision places a duty on local authorities, “so far as is reasonably practicable,” to secure that “qualifying young people” in their area have access to:

- “sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being; and
- sufficient facilities for such activities; and
- sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities”.<sup>1</sup>

“Qualifying young people” means those aged 13 to 19 years inclusive, and also those aged 20 to 25 years inclusive who have a learning difficulty or disability.<sup>2</sup>

The term “sufficient” in relation to activities or facilities, means “sufficient having regard to quantity”.<sup>3</sup>

Local authorities also have a duty to:

- secure access to sufficient youth work activities
- ascertain young people's views on positive activities
- publicise positive activities<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [Education Act 1996, s507B\(1\) \(as amended\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Education Act 1996, s507B\(2\) \(as amended\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Education Act 1996, s507B\(3\) \(as amended\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Statutory guidance for local authorities on services and activities to improve young people's well-being](#), September 2023

Further information is provided in statutory guidance published by the government: [Statutory guidance for local authorities' youth provision \(2023\)](#).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This guidance was updated in 2023, following a consultation in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Government policy in England

The main responsibility for youth provision sits with local authorities. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for out-of-school youth policy and programmes and providing support to the youth sector to deliver high quality services to young people.<sup>8</sup>

### Conservative Government 2019 -2024

Under the Conservative Government the DCMS funded the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme for 16 & 17 year olds.<sup>9</sup>

They created the Youth Investment Fund (YIF) a government (DCMS) fund mainly for capital investment in youth clubs and other projects.

- [Phase 1](#) was a £10 million fund for “left behind” areas of England for small scale capital projects. Launched in January 2022, the grants needed to be spent by 31 March 2022, it was administered by [BBC Children in Need](#).<sup>10</sup>
- [Phase 2](#) was a £368 million fund to provide grants for 300 facilities in [eligible areas](#) by 2025. Phase 2 was launched in August 2022 and is being administered by [Social Investment Business](#), in partnership with the [National Youth Agency \(NYA\)](#), [Key Fund](#) and [Resonance](#).<sup>11</sup>

### Youth review

The Conservative Government made a commitment to review their approach to youth services in the 2020 Spending Review.<sup>12</sup> DCMS formally launched the Youth Review in February 2021, looking at all aspects of DCMS’ out-of-school youth services provision to “set policy direction for the out-of-school youth agenda,” particularly focusing “on addressing regional differences in

---

<sup>5</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Statutory guidance for local authorities on services and activities to improve young people's well-being](#), September 2023

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, [Statutory Guidance to Improve Young People's Well-being](#), June 2012

<sup>7</sup> [Statutory guidance review for local youth services: have your say](#)

<sup>8</sup> The Department of Education is responsible for activities in school time, these may have links to youth services.

<sup>9</sup> WeAreNCS, [National Citizen Service](#), (accessed 06/05/2025)

<sup>10</sup> Gov.UK, [Applying to the youth investment fund phase 1](#), February 2022

<sup>11</sup> National Youth Agency (NYA), [Youth Investment Fund Phase 2](#), 1 August 2022

<sup>12</sup> [HC Deb 25 November 2020, c865](#)

opportunities for young people”. The review considered the next steps for “the Youth Investment Fund and the NCS programme”.<sup>13</sup>

During the review the government engaged with six thousand young people, 170 youth sector organisations as well as academics, researchers, and government departments.

The [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#) was published in February 2022. The review found that young people’s priorities were:

- Regular clubs and activities
- Adventures away from home
- Volunteering opportunities which give back to the community
- Activities that support mental and physical wellbeing and skills development<sup>14</sup>

The youth sector itself, and academics involved in the review, emphasised the need for quality data:

Whilst there is some positive evidence around the impact of youth services, this needs to be strengthened to help drive greater investment into the sector and so that funding can be targeted to what works.<sup>15</sup>

There was a consensus that funding needed to be long term and resource focused. Also, they recommended a “clear strategy for youth services,” including the youth workforce.<sup>16</sup>

### Youth guarantee

The government responded to the review with a Youth Guarantee that “By 2025, every young person will have access to regular out of school activities,” as well as “adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer”.<sup>17</sup>

Towards this the government committed to investing “£560 million of funding over the next 3 years” and that it would have “a firm focus on levelling up”.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth sector engagement exercise](#), February 2021

<sup>14</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), Young people’s priorities, February 2022

<sup>15</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), The youth sector and academics, February 2022

<sup>16</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), The youth sector and academics, February 2022

<sup>17</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), Government response, February 2022

<sup>18</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), Government response, February 2022



The guarantee was to be “underpinned by 3 key strategic aims”:

1. Levelling up and expanding access to youth provision
2. Supporting the youth sector
3. Listening to young people’s voices

The government proposed “supporting the youth sector” by:

- building a skilled and trained youth workforce
- maximising investment
- reviewing the statutory duties of local authorities (see section on statutory duties above)
- strengthening the evidence base.<sup>19</sup>

### Youth provision and life outcomes research

As set out above, as part of the response to the [Youth Review](#), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) committed to “strengthen the evidence base”.<sup>20</sup> In February 2024 DCMS published reports from research projects it had commissioned. The [Youth provision and life outcomes research](#) consisted of three reports:

1. [Youth provision and life outcomes - a study of longitudinal research \(PDF\)](#)

The research looked at five different longitudinal datasets to assess the outcomes in later life of participation in youth clubs as a young person. The study found that there was a “clear association between” taking part “in youth provision and positive short-term outcomes” to “physical health and wellbeing, pro-social behaviours and education.” It also found “strong evidence that these short-term outcomes are sustained over decades.”<sup>21</sup>

2. [Youth provision and life outcomes - systematic literature review \(PDF\)](#)

This study reviewed international evidence to understand “the impact of different youth activities on young people, and to identify what makes programmes effective.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), February 2022

<sup>20</sup> CYP NOW, [Moving Forward with Youth Work: An Agenda for Change](#). Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP and Ben Bradley MP, March 2024,

<sup>21</sup> SQW, [Youth provision and life outcomes](#) (PDF), February 2024, pi.

<sup>22</sup> SQW, [Youth provision and life outcomes - systematic literature review \(PDF\)](#), February 2024 pii, para2

Findings included “convincing evidence” that youth activities had “beneficial impacts” on young people including “personal, social, educational, and economic” benefits.<sup>23</sup>

### [3. Youth provision and life outcomes – a study of the local impacts of youth clubs \(PDF\)](#)

This research looks at the impact of reduced spending on youth services on local communities. It found the following:

- “Targeted youth work” had been prioritised over activities which were open to anyone.
- Greater involvement of the “Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in strategic direction and service delivery”. However the “VCS spend reported in local authority data” was only about “4% of all spending” and local authority spending dominated “(at over 85%)”
- Local authorities were employing fewer professional youth workers and using more volunteers instead.
- Where youth work took place had changed. “Anecdotally, fewer local authority facilities are available” and there had been an increase in “modes of delivery such as detached youth work”.<sup>24</sup>

## The Labour Government from July 2024

### Young Futures Hubs

In its manifesto for the 2024 general election, the Labour Party committed to a “Young Futures programme” which would involve a “network of hubs reaching every community”. The manifesto said the aim of the hubs would be “to support young people’s mental health and avoid them being drawn into crime.” It added that the hubs would have “youth workers, mental health support workers, and careers advisers” to support young people. The manifesto committed to allocate £95 million to the Youth Futures Hubs.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, the manifesto committed to putting “youth workers in A&E units and custody centres, and youth mentors in pupil referral units” with an allocation of £20million.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> SQW, [Youth provision and life outcomes - systematic literature review \(PDF\)](#), February 2024, pi, para1

<sup>24</sup> Detached youth work is youth work that does not take place in a youth centre or other institution. The [National Youth Agency Detached youth work guidance, 2020 \(PDF\)](#) describes it as taking place “Primarily, but not exclusively,” ...” in the street, but also in parks, cafés, shopping centres, and other spaces young people have chosen to be.”; SQW, [Youth provision and life outcomes \(PDF\)](#), February 2024, pi,

<sup>25</sup> Labour, [Change Labour Party Manifesto 2024 \(PDF\)](#), July 2024,

<sup>26</sup> Labour, [Change Labour Party Manifesto 2024 \(PDF\)](#), July 2024, p129

In August 2024 as part of a Guardian interview, Yvette Cooper, the Home Secretary, announced she was “initiating a new cross-government ‘young futures’ unit to be based in the Home Office, as part of the ambition to halve violent crime in a decade”.<sup>27</sup>

[Full Fact](#), an independent organisation that fact checks policy and other information, published an analysis, [Is the government on course to introduce a network of ‘Young Futures hubs’?](#), in March 2025. They concluded:

The final design and development of the hubs remains ongoing but the rollout will be preceded by a series of early adopter hubs. The government says it will set out more details in due course.<sup>28</sup>

In a Lord’s debate on Knife Crime in May 2025, Lord Hanson of Flint said:

The main focus of the Government’s new investment on preventing knife crime is the Young Futures hubs. We are starting to experiment with a couple of pilot schemes, which will draw in voluntary organisations and others around them to look at how we can best intervene on young people and their families accordingly. Those pilots will be undertaken very shortly, and I hope that we will roll out a number of Young Futures hubs nationwide once the pilots have been operational. Those hubs would then be the best opportunity for other organisations to work with them to secure resources and contribute to reducing knife crime.<sup>29</sup>

## A Youth Strategy

In response to [an oral question, on 17 October 2024](#), Lisa Nandy, Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport, committed the government to a strategy for young people.<sup>30</sup> This was followed on 12 November 2024 with an [oral statement made by Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport](#), in the House of Commons:

When I became Secretary of State, I was shocked to find that there was no single strategy in place for young people. I am absolutely determined to put that right.<sup>31</sup>

The oral statement was accompanied by a [written statement](#) and a [press release published by DCMS](#).

The following aims for the strategy were set out:

- prioritise the delivery of better coordinated youth services at a local, regional and national level

---

<sup>27</sup> The Guardian, [Yvette Cooper says today’s teenagers have it “much, much harder”](#), 17 August 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Full Fact, [Is the government on course to introduce a network of ‘Young Futures hubs’?](#),

<sup>29</sup> [HL Deb 6 May 2025 c1454](#)

<sup>30</sup> [HC Deb 17 October 2024 c 965](#)

<sup>31</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 653](#)

- ensure decision-making was moved from a “one-size fits all approach” to one which handed power “back to young people and their communities”<sup>32</sup>
- rebuild “a thriving and sustainable sector”<sup>33</sup>

In [response to a debate on youth provision on 11 February 2025](#), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Stephanie Peacock, said that, while the national youth strategy is being led by DCMS, “increasing access to universal and targeted youth provision is a shared mission across Government.”<sup>34</sup>

On 5 March 2025, the government [launched a “national listening exercise”](#) to give young people an opportunity to feed into the strategy’s development.<sup>35</sup> In a PQ response on 7 May, Stephanie Peacock, Minister for Youth, gave an update on consultation undertaken on the strategy:

We developed a toolkit for organisations to run their own consultation workshops with young people to feed in their views. In addition to this, we have run a wide-ranging survey, workshops, focus groups and ‘hacks’ to give young people the opportunity to develop solutions.<sup>36</sup>

The survey was opened until 16 April and ‘Hacks’<sup>37</sup> were run throughout April and May 2025.<sup>38</sup>

The [government has said](#) it expects to publish the strategy in the summer, with an interim report published in the spring.<sup>39</sup>

### **National Citizens Service to be wound down**

The secretary of state also announced that the government would “wind down the National Citizen Service programme”<sup>40</sup>

The Secretary of state acknowledged that “the NCS has provided over 1 million young people with opportunities.” And that it had “played a hugely important role in supporting young people to build their confidence and bridge social divides”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> WS 210 [on [Launch of Youth Strategy](#)], 12 November 2024

<sup>33</sup> WS 210 [on [Launch of Youth Strategy](#)], 12 November 2024

<sup>34</sup> HC Deb [11 February 2025 c97WH](#)

<sup>35</sup> Gov.UK, [Government partners with young people to help develop new national youth strategy](#), 5 March 2025

<sup>36</sup> PQ 48513 [on [Young People: Rural Areas](#)], 7 May 2025

<sup>37</sup> [National Youth Strategy Deliver You. Hack locations](#), (accessed 10 May 2025)

<sup>38</sup> [National Youth Strategy Deliver You. Hack locations](#), (accessed 10 May 2025)

<sup>39</sup> [HC Deb 16 January 2025 c469](#)

<sup>40</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 653](#)

<sup>41</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 653](#)

But went on to say, “The world has changed and we need a youth strategy that reflects that.”<sup>42</sup>

### Local Youth Transformation Fund

The Secretary of State also announced the launch of “a local youth transformation pilot” which would

support local authorities to build back lost capability and provide tools, guidance and funding to improve their youth offers and empower young people in every community<sup>43</sup>

[Guidance on applying for funding](#) for the pilot was published on 9 April 2025<sup>44</sup>.

## 1.3

## Funding youth services in England

There is no national government budget for youth services in England. Instead, publicly funded youth services are mostly financed through local government revenue. This revenue comes from central government funding from the local government finance settlement and locally raised revenue from business rates, council tax and income from fees and charges. Individual local authorities then determine how much is allocated to youth services. In most cases, local authorities are not obliged to fund these services. Details of funding provided by local authorities in England are shown later in this section.

### The Conservative Government

Under the Conservative Government DCMS provided some funding through the Youth Investment Fund and the National Citizens Service.

DCMS spent £1.1 billion on the youth sector between 2015 and 2021 and planned to spend over £500 million delivering a “Youth Guarantee” by 2025.<sup>45</sup>

DCMS also funds “the National Youth Agency (NYA) to set professional standards, qualifications and a curriculum for youth work.”<sup>46</sup>

As set out above, in its response to the Youth Review in 2022, the Conservative government committed to investing “£560 million of funding over the next 3 years”<sup>47</sup>. It also detailed how the funding would be spent:

---

<sup>42</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 654](#)

<sup>43</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 654](#)

<sup>44</sup> Gov.UK, [Applying to the local youth transformation fund](#), 9 April 1995

<sup>45</sup> PQ 20610 [on [Youth Services: Finance](#)], 16 April 2024

<sup>46</sup> PQ 20610 [on [Youth Services: Finance](#)], 16 April 2024

<sup>47</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), Young people’s priorities, February 2022

- a) £171 million for the National Citizen Service over three years
- b) £368 million through the Youth Investment Fund to “level up” youth infrastructure in “left behind” areas. Capital grants were planned to create 300 new youth centres over the three years, and revenue grants would support 45,000 extra youth activities per year.
- c) £22million to offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme to every state-funded secondary school in England, to eliminate waiting lists for [Uniformed Youth](#) and for the [iwill fund](#) to create new youth volunteering opportunities.<sup>48</sup>

## The Labour Government Youth Strategy Funding

In her [oral statement on the National Youth Strategy](#), in November 2024, Lisa Nandy, Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport committed to

increase the total funding for other Department for Culture, Media and Sport youth programmes to ensure that young people can continue to access opportunities, no matter where they are from<sup>49</sup>

and announced “over £85 million of capital funding to places where it is most needed” this included “at least £26 million” to launch “the new better youth spaces fund” which is “for youth clubs to buy new equipment and do renovations”<sup>50</sup>.

The government also announced that £100 million of dormant assets funding would be used “to deliver youth outcomes between 2024 and 2028, supporting the provision of services, facilities and opportunities for young people across the country”. The government has said further detail on what funding from dormant assets could support would be set out “in due course” in a forthcoming dormant assets strategy.<sup>51</sup>

## Local authority spending on youth services in England.

Details of local authority expenditure on services for young people is published by the Department for Education.

[The most recent data is for the 2023/24 financial year](#), when net expenditure (spending minus any income from grants or fees) on youth services was £349 million.

Most of the expenditure, 59% (£207 million), was spent on targeted services. Targeted youth support covers specific, tailored interventions for young

---

<sup>48</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), Young people’s priorities, February 2022

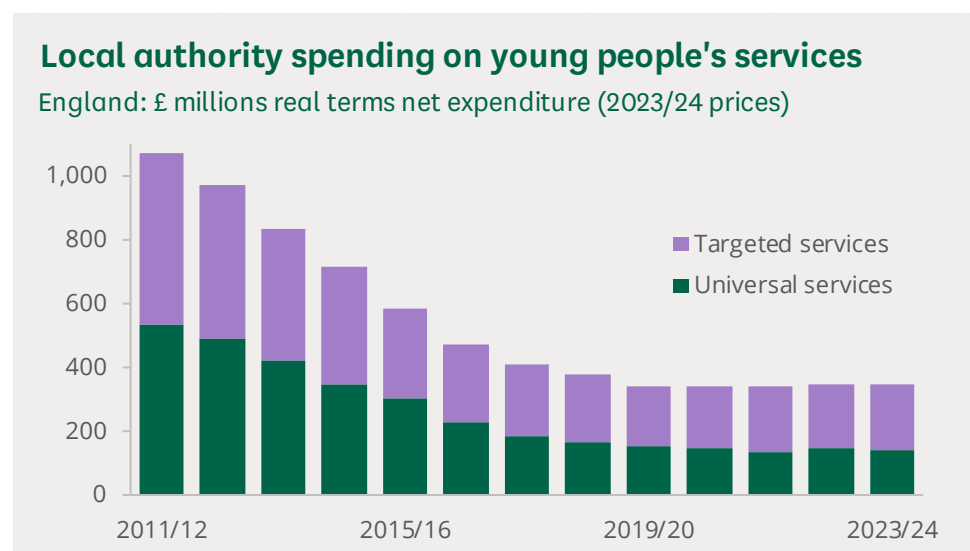
<sup>49</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 654](#)

<sup>50</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 654](#)

<sup>51</sup> [HC Deb 12 November 2024 c 655](#)

people (and their families) who need extra provision on top of universally provided services.

Real terms spending on youth services fell by 68% between 2011/12 and 2023/24, down from £1,074 million to £349 million (in 2023/24 prices). The decrease over this period was more pronounced in universal services (-73%) compared with targeted services (-63%).



Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and HMT [GDP deflator March 2025](#)

Expenditure on youth services shows considerable variation between regions of England. To effectively compare expenditure between areas, we can look at the amount spent per 11-19 year old.<sup>52</sup>

London showed the highest overall spending on young people's services per 11-19 year old in 2023/24, spending £81 per 11-19 year old.

The East Midlands had the highest spend on targeted services per 11-19 year old (£46 per 11-19 year old). The lowest targeted services spending was observed in the West Midlands (£19 per 11-19 year old).

Yorkshire and the Humber showed the highest rate of spending on universal services (£46 per 11-19 year old), while the West Midlands had the lowest universal services spend (£10 per 11-19 year old).

<sup>52</sup> Youth services usually cover all young people within the secondary education age range (ages 11–19). Support is extended up to age 24 for those with learning difficulties, but for the purposes of this analysis the age group is restricted to 11-19 year olds.

<b>Local authority spending on young people's services</b>			
2023/24: £ per 11-19 year old			
	Universal services	Targetted services	Total
London	£41	£40	£81
Yorkshire and The Humber	£46	£27	£73
East Midlands	£14	£46	£60
South East	£15	£41	£56
North West	£23	£30	£53
North East	£24	£22	£46
South West	£16	£30	£46
East of England	£13	£32	£45
West Midlands	£10	£19	£29
<b>England</b>	<b>£23</b>	<b>£33</b>	<b>£56</b>

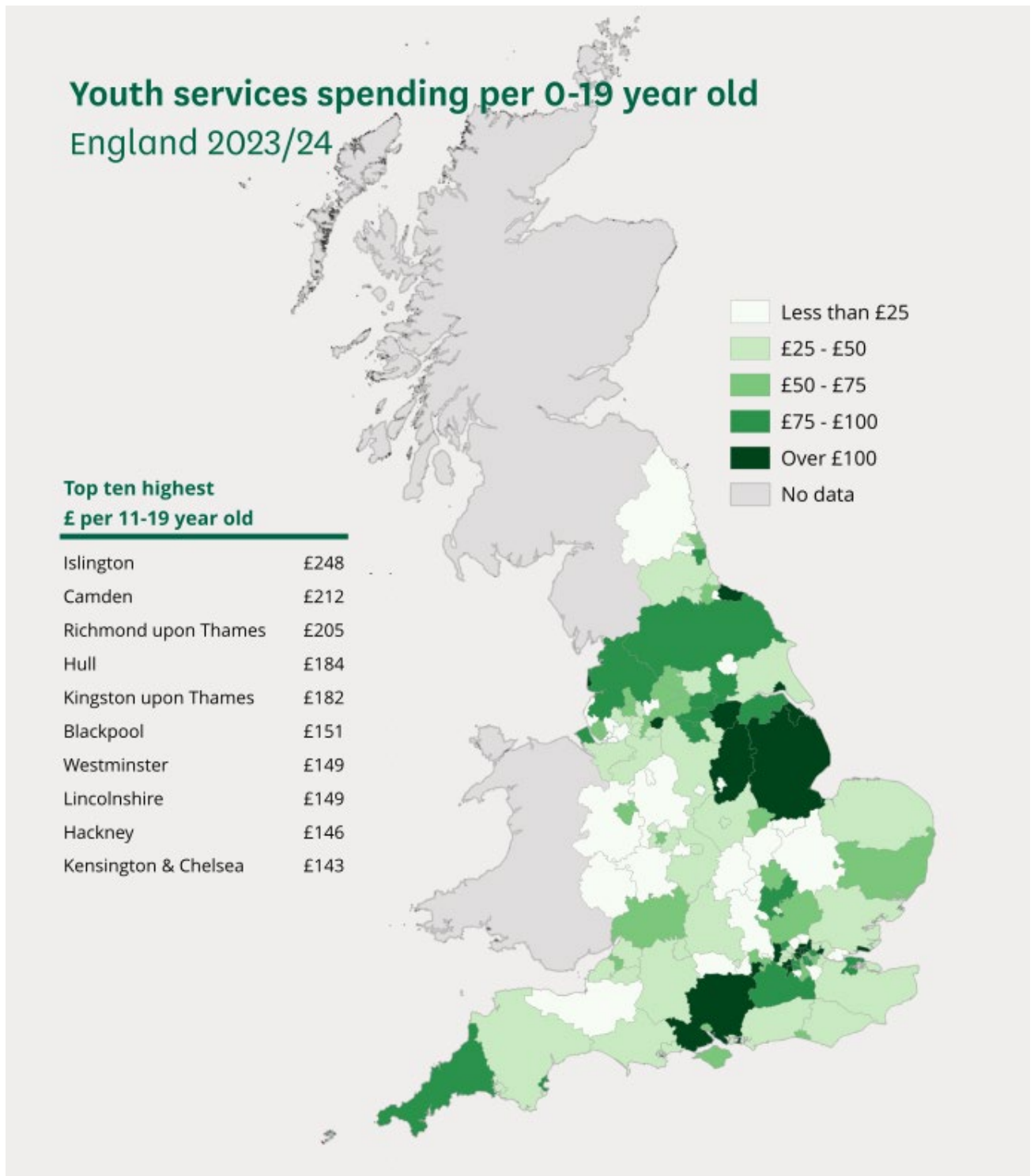
Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and ONS population estimates

Expenditure per 11-19 year old also shows variation at local authority level as shown in the map overleaf.

Among local authorities with recorded 2023/24 expenditure,<sup>53</sup> spending per 11-19 year old ranged from £4.21 in Somerset through to £287 in Hull.

<sup>53</sup> Data was not available for two local authorities for 2023/24 expenditure on young people services.





Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and ONS population estimates

## Publicly funded youth workers in England

There are no statistics available of the number of youth workers. The absence of a common form of youth service across England makes it difficult to collect and collate such figures.

While some organisations have attempted to gather information through Freedom of Information requests (see for example from [2019 Unison report on youth services](#)) factors such as varying response rates and potentially different interpretations of what constitutes a youth service mean such estimates should be treated with caution.

The [National Youth Sector Census – NYA](#) has been commissioned by DCMS to begin to gather data around youth services in England. However, information about the youth service workforce is not yet available.

---

## 2 Youth services in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland

### 2.1 Wales

#### Statutory duties

[In Wales, the statutory duty for youth support services](#) comes from [The Learning & Skills Act \(2000\) Section 123](#).

The National Assembly for Wales may direct a local authority: (a) to provide youth support services; (b) to secure the provision of youth support services; (c) to participate in the provision of youth support services.<sup>54</sup>

“Youth support services” are services that the National Assembly believes will help and encourage “young persons” to “participate effectively in education or training”, “take advantage of opportunities for employment,” or “participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.”<sup>55</sup>

Section 123 defines young persons as those “who have attained the age of 11 but not the age of 26.”<sup>56</sup>

#### The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, 2019

The Welsh Government published [The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales](#) in June 2019. The five aims of the strategy are:

1. Young people are thriving
2. Youth work is accessible and inclusive
3. Voluntary and paid professional youth work staff are supported throughout their careers to improve their practice
4. Youth work is valued and understood
5. A sustainable model for youth work delivery<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> [The Learning & Skills Act \(2000\) Section 123](#)

<sup>55</sup> [The Learning & Skills Act \(2000\) Section 123](#)

<sup>56</sup> [The Learning & Skills Act \(2000\) Section 123](#)

<sup>57</sup> Welsh Government, [Youth work strategy 2019](#), p9

The Welsh Government published [Implementation of the youth work strategy](#) in October 2019.<sup>58</sup>

In September 2021 the Interim Youth Work Board published: [Interim Youth Work Board: final report](#). They had been “tasked with developing recommendations for a sustainable model for youth work in Wales”.<sup>59</sup>

The report made recommendations split into two sets. The first set covered governance issues and the second focused on the delivery of effective youth work services. The recommendations included:

- a youth led governance structure
- a stronger legislative basis for youth services
- a cabinet minister with a portfolio dedicated to youth work services
- increasing the availability of youth services in Welsh
- developing “the youth work profession with a career structure offering progression”<sup>60</sup>

The Welsh government [responded to the report in a statement](#) on 20 December 2021. The minister for Education and the Welsh Language announced that recruitment for a new Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board would start in January 2022 and specific funding of 11.4m over three years would be allocated to take forward the implementation of the board’s recommendations.

The minister said the board’s recommendations: “...are ambitious and several stretch beyond youth work,” that they exemplified “youth work as an important strategic service, cutting across many areas.” They added that “cross-government working” would be needed “to identify the full scope of them.”<sup>61</sup>

Youth Work is one of the Welsh government’s priorities and interacts with other government policies as explained in the [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#): “Youth workers play a key role in identifying and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET [not in education, employment or training] or homeless.”<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Welsh Government, [Implementation of the youth work strategy](#), October 2019

<sup>59</sup> Welsh Government, [Interim Youth Work Board: final report](#), September 2021, p1

<sup>60</sup> Welsh Government, [Interim Youth Work Board: final report](#), September 2021, pp2-3

<sup>61</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Statement: Update on the Interim Youth Work Board’s recommendations, 20 December 2021](#)

<sup>62</sup> Welsh Government, [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Overview, September 2022](#), Section: Alignment with other Welsh Government priorities, Youth work

## New statutory guidance

The Welsh Government published new draft statutory guidance on youth work for consultation in October 2024, [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people \(draft guidance\)](#).

The new statutory framework for youth work incorporated “the following key elements”<sup>63</sup>:

- a definition of youth work as part of wider youth support services
- the introduction of a new youth work entitlement for young people
- a revised strategic planning and reporting mechanism for youth work<sup>64</sup>

The consultation ran from October 2024 to January 2025 and [a summary of responses document](#) was published by the Welsh Government in April 2025. It said “a significant amount of feedback has been received in response to the consultation exercise”<sup>65</sup> and

Feedback received in response to the consultation questions will be taken into account in informing the final framework, with Welsh Government continuing to work closely with representatives from across the sector and other key stakeholders on refining our proposals.<sup>66</sup>

## Funding Youth services in Wales

Details of local authority expenditure on youth work services in Wales is published by the Welsh Government.

[The most recent data is for the 2023/24 financial year](#), when total expenditure on youth services was £45.5 million.

Real terms spending on youth services fell by 24% between 2011/12 and 2022/23, from £59.6 million down to £45.4 million (in 2023/24 prices).

The decrease over this period was more pronounced up to 2018/19 when spending was at its lowest point at £36.0 million. Since then expenditure has increased, although real terms spending in 2023/24 remains lower than in 2011/12.

---

<sup>63</sup> The Welsh Government, [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people \(draft guidance\)](#), 7 October 2024

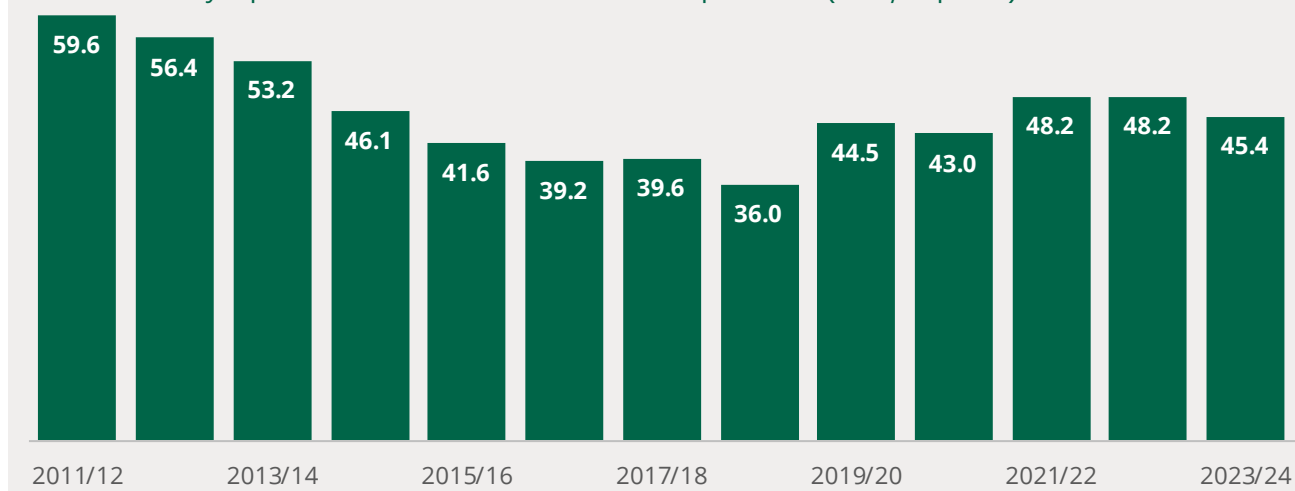
<sup>64</sup> The Welsh Government, [Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people \(draft guidance\)](#), 7 October 2024

<sup>65</sup> The Welsh Government, [Consultation - Summary of responses, Youth work in Wales: Delivering for young people](#), 9 March 2025, p17

<sup>66</sup> The Welsh Government, [Consultation - Summary of responses, Youth work in Wales: Delivering for young people](#), 9 March 2025, p17

## Expenditure on youth work services in Wales

Local authority expenditure: £ millions real terms net expenditure (2023/24 prices)



Source: StatsWales [Youth work expenditure summary](#) and HMT [GDP deflator March 2025](#)

## 2.2

## Scotland

### Statutory duties

The statutory basis for youth services in Scotland comes from [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013](#). Under the regulations, local education authorities are “required to initiate” and “maintain and facilitate a process” to secure “community learning and development” in their area and that they do the following:

- identify “target individuals and groups;”
- consider “the needs of those target individuals and groups” in the “community learning and development”;
- assess if “those needs are already being met”.
- identify “barriers to the adequate and efficient provision of that community learning and development.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Regulation 2 of [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013](#),

Scottish Government guidance states that local government and Community Planning Partnerships should aim to deliver Community Learning and Development outcomes through a variety of services, including youth work.<sup>68</sup>

## National Youth Work Strategy

The Scottish Government set out its aims for youth services in its [National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19](#) (PDF). This publication explained how the government, YouthLink Scotland (the national agency for youth work) and the Education Department would work with various partners to encourage and develop youth services.

The five ambitions of the strategy were:

- Ensure Scotland is the best place to be young and grow up
- Put young people at the heart of policy
- Recognise the value of youth work
- Build workforce capacity
- Measure the impact of youth work.<sup>69</sup>

A progress report was published at the end of the strategy, [National Youth Work Strategy Progress Report 2014-2019](#) (PDF). This report followed on from the [National Youth Work Strategy Interim Report - July 2017](#) (PDF) which identified key priorities for 2017-2019.

This report was to feed into the development of the next strategy originally planned to be for 2020-2025.

The Scottish Government commissioned research to pull together pandemic experiences and to identify opportunities, challenges and lessons for the future. The results were published in a report [Youth work's role during and in recovery from Covid-19](#) (PDF).<sup>70</sup>

[YouthLink Scotland](#) says that a national youth strategy for 2023-2028 is in development “with 1,000s of young people and youth workers”. The strategy has not yet been published.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Scottish Government, [The Requirements for Community Learning and Development \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013: Guidance for Local Authorities](#), 2013, para 4.3 and [Scottish Government, Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development, 2012](#), para 3.4

<sup>69</sup> The Scottish Government, Youth Link Scotland and Education Scotland, [National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19 - Our ambitions for improving the life chances of young people in Scotland](#), April 2014, p8.

<sup>70</sup> YouthLink Scotland and Northern star, [Youth work's role during and in recovery from Covid-19](#) (PDF)

<sup>71</sup> Youthlink Scotland, [National Youth Work Strategy \(2023-2028\)](#). (accessed 11 May 2025)

An Independent review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) was carried out in 2024, the report [Learning: For All. For Life. A report from the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development \(CLD\)](#) was published in July 2024 and gave a number of recommendations to the Scottish Government. CLD covers adult education, youth work and community development in Scotland.

In response to a [Parliamentary question, in January 2025](#), Graeme Dey, Minister for Higher and Further Education in the Scottish Government, explained his government's commitment to youth work:

[...] Each education authority is responsible for securing Community Learning and Development (CLD) in their area under the Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013.

In addition to the block grant given to local authorities, and in a challenging fiscal context, the Scottish Government has continued to fund Youth Scotland and YouthLink Scotland in 2024-25 in support of high quality youth work as part of CLD. Overall funding remains broadly consistent with previous years and reflects the priority that the Government attaches to support community-based youth work.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.3

## Northern Ireland

### Statutory duties

The Department of Education in Northern Ireland has overall responsibility for the youth service.<sup>73</sup> The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 is the main statutory provision for the youth service. Under the order, the Education Authority has a duty to<sup>74</sup> “secure the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities” and this includes:

- establishing, maintaining and managing “facilities”;
- organising “activities”;
- assisting others “to establish, maintain and manage any such facilities or to organise any such activities”;
- “provide, or assist” “in the provision of, leaders for such activities”

---

<sup>72</sup> [WA 13 March 2025 S6W-35317](#)

<sup>73</sup> Department of Education (NI) [About the Department of Education](#), (accessed 11 May 2025)

<sup>74</sup> The Order actually says “board” meaning an education and library board, however in April 2015 the five Education and Library Boards were replaced by the Education Authority, under the [Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#)



- “contribute towards the expenses” people “taking part in” “activities”.<sup>75</sup>

The Education Authority is also responsible for securing the provision for youth services, under the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.<sup>76</sup> Most youth services are delivered by the third sector.<sup>77</sup>

## Priorities for Youth

The policy framework document [Priorities for Youth : Improving young people's lives through youth work \(2013\)](#) sets out the overarching policy framework for the delivery of the youth service. The five headline priorities were:

1. Raising Standards for all
2. Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality
3. Developing the non-formal education workforce
4. Improving the non-formal learning environment
5. Transforming governance and management of non-formal Education<sup>78</sup>

The process for implementing the priorities is shared with the [Education Authority](#) and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.<sup>79</sup>

The Education Authority publishes the Regional Youth development plan, a three-year, strategic, regional plan which out “outlines the key targets to be achieved by the Education Authority Youth Service.”<sup>80</sup>

The [Regional Youth Development Plan \(2020-2023\)](#) was developed following the publication of the [Regional Assessment of Need for 2020-2023](#)<sup>81</sup>. An [Annual Review of Regional Assessment of Need 2024 \(PDF\)](#)<sup>82</sup> was published in April 2024.

---

<sup>75</sup> [The Education and Libraries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1986](#), s 37, pt III

<sup>76</sup> [The Education \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2014](#)

<sup>77</sup> Department for Education (NI), [Youth Service](#), (accessed 11 May 2025)

<sup>78</sup> Department of Education Northern Ireland, [Priorities for Youth](#), 2013, section 4.

<sup>79</sup> The Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNi) is a statutory body which was established under The Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. Appointments to the council are made by the Minister who is the Head of the Department of Education. Since 2019 when the Youth council members appointments ended there was no Minister as Head of Department so no new appointment were made and the Youth Council has effectively not existed. The department has continued to consult with a range of groups and organisations on youth policy (see [An Update on the Youth Council for Northern Ireland](#), (accessed 11 May 2025) for more information.

<sup>80</sup> Education Authority Northern Ireland, [Regional Youth Development Plan \(2020-2023\)](#), 2020, Summary.

<sup>81</sup> Education Authority Northern Ireland, [Regional Assessment of Need for 2020-2023, 2020](#)

<sup>82</sup> Education Authority Northern Ireland, [Annual Review of Regional Assessment of Need 2024 \(PDF\)](#), April 2024



---

## 3 Research and reports about youth services

The benefits from youth services can be difficult to measure but it is argued that they may include improved mental health and self-esteem, friendship, skills and experiences, improved employment prospects, and reductions in youth crime and violence.

This section highlights selected research and reports since 2018 that attempt to evaluate the benefits of youth services and the impact of spending reductions on these services.

### 3.1 The state of youth services, benefits and funding impacts

#### All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs aims to:

raise the profile of issues that affect and concern young people, encourage dialogue between parliamentarians, young people and youth services, and encourage a co-ordinated and coherent approach to youth policy making.<sup>83</sup>

YMCA England and Wales provide the secretariat for the APPG.

#### Youth Work Inquiry 2018-2019

The APPG published a report into the state of youth work in 2019.<sup>84</sup>

The report made the following recommendations:

1. A minister responsible for young people.
2. Greater investment in youth work
3. A clear statutory duty and guidance that defines a minimum and protected level of youth service.

---

<sup>83</sup> All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs, [Youth Work Inquiry Final Report](#), April 2019

<sup>84</sup> All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs, [Youth Work Inquiry Final Report](#), April 2019.

4. A lead role confirmed in each local authority responsible for discharging the statutory duty.
5. A workforce strategy with expectations for the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers.
6. A standardised and national system for evaluating the sufficiency and suitability of youth services and quality of youth work provision.<sup>85</sup>

### Progress Review 2021

[A progress review was published in July 2021 \(PDF\)](#). This reviewed the state of youth affairs and the progress towards statutory and voluntary youth services considering the impact of the pandemic. Evidence was taken over the summer and the following draft recommendations produced:

1. Consideration should be given to the youth lead being a dual role jointly held at DCMS and DfE, or for a cross-departmental committee to be chaired by the minister.
2. The statutory guidance for local authorities to secure local services and youth provision must be strengthened with a clear understanding of what is a “sufficient” level of youth services for a local area.
3. Local youth partnerships should be established or developed and incorporate young people in consultation and decision-making.
4. Long-term funding is needed for the workforce plan
5. A ‘light touch’ inspection arrangements for youth services is needed to ensure the quality of youth provision, including safeguarding and equity of access by young people.<sup>86</sup>

### APPG’s Empowering Youth for the Future of Work report.

The APPG carried out an inquiry to look at the barriers to youth employment, the skills gap and potential solutions.

The report, [Empowering Young People for Work \(PDF\)](#), was published in July 2023. The report made several recommendations, including to:

Invest in Youth Services to provide extracurricular activities to support young people’s development and strengthen partnership, collaboration and coordination between schools and youth providers.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs, [Youth Work Inquiry Final Report \(PDF\)](#), April 2019, p8.

<sup>86</sup> All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs, [Review of Youth Work in England: Interim report \(PDF\)](#), July 2021.

<sup>87</sup> All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth affairs, [Empowering Youth for the future of work: Addressing challenges and enabling opportunities \(PDF\)](#), July 2023,

## Times running out: National Youth Agency (NYA) and the YMCA England and Wales

The National Youth Agency (NYA) and the YMCA carry out a lot of research on youth services. The National Youth Agency is the national body for Youth Work in England.

The NYA and YMCA report [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people , September 2021 \(PDF\)](#) highlights the benefits of youth services. The report stated that youth services “have wide and popular appeal, and engage with any young people regardless of socio-economic status or where they live.” They also “provide the opportunity for personal development” and “education and socialisation,” supporting “skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing”. Importantly “they include a range of safeguarding and early intervention support services which are vital to many vulnerable or disadvantaged young people”.<sup>88</sup>

The report considered the Covid-19 pandemic had increased the need for youth services; “The pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need for quality youth work and services for young people,” youth work was “classed as an essential service.”<sup>89</sup>

The report’s findings included concerns about developments in youth services in since 2010:

- 500 qualified youth workers have been lost from the frontline<sup>90</sup>. There is a significant shortage of volunteers to fill the gap this has left.
- Recruitment of qualified youth workers had dramatically declined, “with less than 300 a year for a system that is geared for an annual in-take of up to 2,000 undergraduates.”<sup>91</sup>
- 8,500 youth charities and community groups ‘with perilous finances and a greatly reduced base of support for young people.’<sup>92</sup>

The report also said the impact of spending reductions was not even across the country and that “total youth service spending in deprived areas was down by nearly twice as much per head as the least deprived”,<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para b.

<sup>89</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para c.

<sup>90</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para d.

<sup>91</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para e.

<sup>92</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para g.

<sup>93</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p8.

The report concluded that (combined with the pandemic) there could be an impact on:

- Number of vulnerable children
- Safeguarding referrals
- Educational recovery
- Mental health
- Exploitation of young people
- Young people's voices being heard<sup>94</sup>

The report recommended that funding for youth services should be prioritised and be long term and ringfenced.<sup>95</sup>

## YMCA Youth funding reports

The YMCA produce an annual report on the state of youth services.<sup>96</sup>

The YMCA report, [Beyond the Brink: The state of funding for youth services](#), was published in January 2025. This report found that funding had remained flat in England over the previous year. In Wales spending fell by 6% year on year, however, falls in spending were much lower in Wales than England over the previous 13 years.<sup>97</sup>

There are some problems with the methodology used in this report; there was a major shift in spending classification in 2011 so the appropriate baseline for youth services spending is 2011/12 not 2010/11. Also, the categories of spend applied in England and Wales differ so they cannot be directly compared.

## Better Together: Youth Work with Schools report

The NYA published research it had commissioned into the impact of Youth work delivered with schools in June 2023: [Better Together: Youth Work with Schools report](#). It made the following recommendations:

1. a dedicated Minister for Young People at the Department for Education to drive forward a National Youth Strategy joining up education and youth services

---

<sup>94</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p5.

<sup>95</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p8.

<sup>96</sup> YMCA, [Publications - YMCA England & Wales](#), February 2024.

<sup>97</sup> YMCA England and Wales, [Beyond the Brink: The state of funding for youth services](#), January 2025, p4.

2. dedicated, stable and joined-up funding is required that is supported by greater accountability from strengthened statutory guidance at national and local levels to put youth work on a surer footing with schools and facilitate more cross-sector working
3. an enhanced Ofsted inspection framework with further measures and metrics to assess quality, consistency and longevity of external partnerships that aim to support the personal wellbeing of young people
4. a joined-up approach for training and workforce planning between schools and youth work, such as integrating youth work values and approaches into initial teacher training and CPD training, and offering a transition pathway from teaching to youth work for recently qualified teachers who leave the profession <sup>98</sup>

## Generation Isolation Report 2024

In November 2024 OnSide and [YouGov](#) published results of an online survey of over five thousand young people: [Generation Isolation Report: OnSide's annual study into young people's lives outside school](#) <sup>99</sup>.

[OnSide are a national youth charity](#) that has network of 'Youth Zones' (a type of youth club) across the country.

The survey results found that 75% of young people spent most of their free time at home with 48% spending most of their free time in their bedrooms. Only 13% spent most of their free time with their friends in person and 19% spent most of their free time communicating online with friends. <sup>100</sup>

The survey also found that 85% of young people did not attend a youth centre but there had been an increase of those that did attend a youth centre from 9% in previous year's survey to 15% in 2024. <sup>101</sup>

## 3.2 Youth work, youth crime and violence

The following reports focus on the influence of youth work on reducing youth crime and violence.

---

<sup>98</sup> NYA, [Youth work with schools](#), 19 June 2023

<sup>99</sup> OnSide, [Generation Isolation Report](#), November 2024

<sup>100</sup> OnSide, [Generation Isolation Report, November 2024](#)

<sup>101</sup> OnSide, [Generation Isolation Report, November 2024](#)

## The effects of youth clubs on education and crime, The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS)

In November 2024 the Institute for Fiscal Studies published a working paper by Carmen Villa, [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#).<sup>102</sup> Which found negative impacts of youth club closures on education and crime.

This research made “use of new hand-collected data” it exploited the “geographic variation in youth club closures to provide credible causal estimates of their impact on crime and education.”<sup>103</sup> It compared

offending rates and exam results among teenagers who live in an area where all local youth clubs within a 40-minute walk closed, with those among teenagers whose nearest youth club stayed open.<sup>104</sup>

The research confirmed “that youth club closures did reduce the likelihood of local youths attending after-school activities,”. It then went on to employ “a range of cutting-edge empirical techniques to estimate the impact of losing access to a youth club on crime and education”.<sup>105</sup>

Two significant conclusions are reached by the research:

1. Teenagers whose nearest youth centre closed did worse in school. “Teenagers in areas affected performed nearly 4% worse in national high-school exams” (GCSEs).<sup>106</sup>
2. The closure of youth clubs led to an increase in offending. “Youths aged 10 to 17 became 14% more likely to commit crimes.”<sup>107</sup>

## The Social costs of Youth work cuts, National Youth agency

In the summer of 2023 National Youth Agency began a review looking at the impact of youth work on young people in contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>108</sup>

The report, [The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work](#), was published in November 2023. The report found the “the costs associated with young people’s involvement in the youth justice

---

<sup>102</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#) , 12 November 2024

<sup>103</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education](#), 13 November 2024

<sup>104</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education](#), 13 November 2024

<sup>105</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education](#), 13 November 2024

<sup>106</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#) , 12 November 2024

<sup>107</sup> The Institute of Fiscal Studies, [The effects of youth clubs on education and crime](#) , 12 November 2024

<sup>108</sup> National Youth Agency, [The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work\(PDF\)](#), November 2023, p2



system remain staggering” .After reviewing evidence from 74 academic studies they found that youth work produces “a social return on investment of up to £6.40 in savings to the taxpayer for every pound spent” and “evidence that reductions in funding for youth provision and the closure of youth centres lead to an increase in crime rates among some young people.”<sup>109</sup>

The report made the following recommendations for the government:

- restore the £1.2 billion investment in community-based youth work out of schools. This will ensure that young people have access to diversionary activities to prevent offending and offer young people opportunities to move on to positive futures.
- include the youth work sector and statutory youth justice services in integrated commissioning partnerships, recognising and working in partnership with the third sector and non-statutory services to support young people through multidisciplinary teams.
- encourage cross-sector workforce development by prioritising activities designed to increase understanding and mutual trust between the youth work and youth justice sectors.
- prioritise and invest in youth work research to evidence its impact within the youth justice system. This will require better and more joined up data collection within the youth justice system, particularly within the secure estate. Funding bodies should support this by ensuring that programmes they fund adopt a consistent approach to impact measurement.<sup>110</sup>

## The Youth Violence Commission

Set up in 2016 by a cross party group of MPs, the Youth Violence Commission took evidence on the root causes of youth violence from academics, young people and practitioners.

The commission published a report with its findings in 2018 which was updated in July 2020 to take account of the extra pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic: [2020 Final report Youth violence commission](#) it contains a section about the impact of youth services:

Across all of the evidence sessions, Commission witnesses linked the scale and impact of youth service cuts to escalating violence between young people.<sup>111</sup>

The commission also found that short term, inconsistent funding made it more difficult to sustain services, particularly for smaller groups and charities who did not have the resources to spend on bidding for funding:

---

<sup>109</sup> National Youth Agency, [The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work\(PDF\)](#), November 2023,

<sup>110</sup> National Youth Agency, [The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work\(PDF\)](#), November 2023, p11

<sup>111</sup> Youth violence commission, [Youth Violence Commission Final Report - Public Health, Youth & Violence Reduction](#), July 2020, p28

The evidence sessions revealed a picture of youth services characterised by short-term and inconsistent funding and planning cycles, which follow the agendas set by electoral politics and a small number of influential funding bodies. This hampers the ability of youth services and particularly grassroots organisations to engage in long-term, early stage intervention that builds consistent relationships and trust with vulnerable young people<sup>112</sup>.

## Prevent Knife Crime

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction carried out an inquiry into the role of youth work in tackling knife crime. The report [Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime](#) was published in March 2020. The APPG asked local authorities how funding cuts had impacted their youth services provision. Of the authorities that responded they found:

- there had been a 51 percent reduction in the number of youth centres between 2010/11 and 2017/18.
- 87 percent of local authorities had seen one or more youth centres shut since 2011.<sup>113</sup>

The investigation also found “a strongly negative association between a decline in the number of youth centres and an increase in knife crime in the same area”<sup>114</sup>.

## The Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Serious youth violence, 2019

In 2019 the Home Affairs Committee investigated serious youth violence.

Chapter six, prevention, early intervention and youth services, examined the evidence of the role of youth services and found:

The current epidemic of youth violence has been exacerbated by a perfect storm emerging from cuts to youth services, heavily reduced police budgets, a growing number of children being excluded from school and taken into care, and a failure of statutory agencies to keep young people safe from exploitation and violence. Young people have been failed in the most devastating way, and they are losing their lives as a result. This country is full of resourceful, intelligent and energetic young people who need empowerment, opportunity, something to strive for, a safe space to spend their free time, and trusted adults to turn to when they need help or advice.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Youth violence commission, [Youth Violence Commission Final Report - Public Health, Youth & Violence Reduction](#), July 2020, pp29-30

<sup>113</sup> APPG on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction, [Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime](#), March 2020, p8

<sup>114</sup> APPG on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction, [Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime](#), March 2020, p8

<sup>115</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Serious youth violence](#) (PDF), 18 July 2019, HC 1016 16-1 2017-19, para 192

The report said there was a consensus that more youth services were needed:

Witnesses to this inquiry were almost united in their calls for more youth services, but local authority budgets are being increasingly consumed by statutory services, such as social care.<sup>116</sup>

The report said that any additional funding programmes were ‘far too fragmented and small-scale.’ As well as being:

not at all clear how they fit together, where the strategic responsibility for youth interventions in each area lies, or whether communities and councils will get stuck in an endless bidding process to different departments simply to maintain existing services.<sup>117</sup>

The report recommended:

The Government needs to introduce a fully-funded, statutory minimum of provision for youth outreach workers and community youth projects in all areas, codesigned with local young people. This would be a national Youth Service Guarantee, with a substantial increase in services and ringfenced funding from central Government. It should include enhanced provision in areas with higher-than-average risk factors linked to serious youth violence, such as under-25 knife crime and school exclusion. It must also be coupled with proper mental health provision for young people, informed by an understanding of the impact of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Serious youth violence](#) (PDF), 18 July 2019, HC 1016 16-1 2017-19, para 193

<sup>117</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Serious youth violence](#) (PDF), 18 July 2019, HC 1016 16-1 2017-19, para 193

<sup>118</sup> Home Affairs Committee, [Serious youth violence](#) (PDF), 18 July 2019, HC 1016 16-1 2017-19, para 194

## 4 Further information.

- The National Youth Sector Advisory Board's [Roadmap to a National Youth Strategy \(PDF\)](#), October 2023
- Library briefing for Debate, [Trends in funding levels for youth services](#), February 2024
- HC Deb 28 February 2024, [Funding for Youth Services](#), WH C131
- The Youth Select Committee Inquiry into youth knife crime, [Our Generation's Epidemic: Knife Crime](#), 2019
- HC Deb 11 February 2025 [Youth Provision: Universal and Targeted Support](#), WH C97

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)