

[Home](#) ▾ [Society and culture](#) ▾ [Young people](#) ▾ [Uniformed Youth Fund evaluation reports: 2022 to 2025](#)



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Research and analysis

Uniformed Youth Fund evaluation reports: process report

Published 11 September 2025

Applies to England

Acknowledgements

This evaluation of the Uniformed Youth Fund would not have been possible without the support and contributions of many individuals and organisations. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all who have assisted in this important work.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

We are grateful for the support from the DCMS for funding and guiding this evaluation and for their commitment to expanding access to youth provision. Specific thanks to: Sam Burthem, Natasha Fuyane, Hedvig Friberg-Jonsson, Jake McBride, Kirby Swales, Anya Valli, and Michaela Wragg.

Participating uniformed youth organisations

We extend our deepest thanks to the eight uniformed youth organisations that participated in this evaluation. Their willingness to facilitate fieldwork was crucial to the success of this project. We are especially grateful to the staff and volunteers who took the time to participate in interviews and focus groups, providing invaluable insights into the delivery of the fund and its impact on the ground.

Youth Advisory Board

A special thank you goes to the members of the Youth Advisory Board. Those who wished to be named here included:

Jerusalem Edward Amaeshi, Katie Ellis, May Hussain, Sharlize Munro-Labuda, Maisie Pollard, Kaivan Shah, Jason Tao. This group of dedicated young people, drawn from a range of uniformed youth groups, provided essential feedback on our data collection tools and materials, ensuring they were accessible and relevant for young people. Their contribution has been instrumental in shaping a youth-informed evaluation.

Young people

We would also like to thank the young people who shared their experiences and personal journeys with us. We are grateful for their trust in us to represent their views accurately.

Dartington Service Design Lab

We would like to acknowledge our partners at the Dartington Service Design Lab: Rachel Bromley, Leanne Freeman, Finlay Green, Julie Harris, Sean Manzi, Cristina Preece, Zhenni Qin, Katie Upsdale, and Hannah Wilson. Their expertise in youth-centred research and their work in establishing and collaborating with the Youth Advisory Board have been invaluable to this evaluation.

Ipsos UK colleagues

Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues at Ipsos UK who were instrumental in the successful delivery of this project. We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of the data collection and analysis teams: Grace Atkins, Marzieh Azarbadegan, Sally Barber, Kim Bohling, Raynette Bierman, Akshay Choudhary, Evie Cogley, Catherine Crick, Catherine

Fenton, Facundo Herrera, Joel Hooper, Jessica Ozan, Alex Pangalos, Kristen Taylor and Jack Watson.

Executive summary

About the Uniformed Youth Fund

Ipsos UK and Dartington Service Design Lab were appointed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver an evaluation of the Uniformed Youth Fund (the Fund). The Fund's objectives were to increase the capacity of eight Uniformed Youth Organisations (UYOs), which provide opportunities for young people to take part in structured activities to build skills and relationships, often while wearing a uniform. The Fund provided £18.3 million over 2.5 years (2022 to 2025) to eight organisations: Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Girlguiding, Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade (JLGB), Marine Society and Sea Cadets, Scouts, St John Ambulance and Volunteer Police Cadets. The Fund aimed to increase opportunities in areas with unmet demand, open new groups in disadvantaged areas, support UYOs to sustainably scale delivery, and improve the wellbeing and skills development of young people. The work to increase opportunities was particularly targeted in deprived areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 1-5 Local Authority areas or Youth Investment Fund places).

The evaluation had two components: a process evaluation to explore how the Fund was delivered and to what extent it achieved its objectives, and an impact evaluation^[1] exploring the impact of participating in uniformed youth groups on young people. This report is for the process evaluation.

Evaluation aims and methods

The evaluation focused on the following research questions:

- 1 Did the Fund improve the recruitment and retention of adult volunteers to uniform youth groups?
- 2 How was the Fund delivered on the ground in terms of creating new spaces? (setting up new groups, expanding capacity at existing groups, reducing waiting lists)
- 3 To what extent were created places concentrated in deprived areas?
- 4 What types of young people took up the opportunities created by the Fund?
- 5 Did the funding improve the long-term sustainability of uniformed youth group places?

The process evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the Fund's implementation. Quantitative data was gathered from quarterly monitoring reports submitted by the eight participating UYOs, providing insights into volunteer recruitment and places created. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with Fund delivery stakeholders, UYO central office staff, and volunteers, exploring delivery effectiveness and recruitment strategies. In-depth case studies were conducted with new units in each UYO, involving interviews with staff, volunteers, and young people, along with observations of activities.

Learning events hosted by the Youth United Foundation, where UYOs shared best practices, also contributed valuable data. Surveys and interviews with young people, primarily for the impact evaluation, provided additional insights into recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities.

Findings

The findings from the evaluation are discussed by four overarching themes: fund set-up and management; recruitment, retention and training of staff and volunteers, creation of new units and places, and engaging young people to fill new places. Overall, the combined efforts of the funded UYOs exceeded the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set for the three years of the Fund in terms of volunteers recruited, new leaders trained, units created, and places created.

Fund set-up and management

As part of the application process, UYOs set out how they would deliver against the aims and contexts of the Fund with approaches varying depending on their primary needs and targets. Most UYOs reported little change to their initial aims, showing consistency and alignment with original objectives. However, some did shift their organisational delivery aims, reallocated resources and adjusted plans over the course of the Fund. DCMS appointed Groundwork UK and Youth United Foundation to provide ongoing support to the UYOs, which was generally reported by central UYO staff to be beneficial for problem-solving and sharing best practices.

Recruitment, retention and training of staff and adult volunteers

Overall, UYOs nearly doubled the target for adult volunteer roles created. By the end of FY24/25, a total of 4,894 new adult volunteers were recruited, well exceeding the overall target of 2,408. Further, all organisations met or exceeded their overall targets. UYOs engaged in various strategies to attract new volunteers and staff. UYOs tended to use a phased recruitment approach - building their staff leadership teams first, thereby establishing a strong foundation before expanding. Many UYOs

experienced challenges finding enough people with interest and capacity to volunteer, particularly during the period affected by the cost of living crisis. UYO staff and volunteers placed a strong emphasis on the importance of retention of volunteers and deployed a variety of approaches, such as offering increased early support, flexible opportunities, and rewards and recognition. In order to meet the aim of increasing the reach of existing provision, most UYOs considered training volunteers or staff to support new units/groups as part of their strategy. A total of 3,301 new leaders were trained across the time span of the fund, significantly exceeding the overall target.

The following recruitment strategies were used and found to be effective:

- **National and large-scale recruitment campaigns**

These were generally found effective to swiftly fill numerous open positions for both staff and volunteers.

- **Online advertisements and utilising social media (e.g Facebook)**

Approaching recruitment in a more informal and relaxed manner, through social media, was particularly beneficial for recruiting volunteers who were seeking flexible commitments.

- **Internal advertising**

A strategy to capitalise on existing talent and experience. This was seen to be a cost-effective approach, ensuring applicants were already aligned with organisational culture.

- **Building and maintaining local relationships**

Establishing and sustaining relationships with relevant local stakeholders, such as schools and community organisations. This approach was also deemed successful in enhancing diversity and inclusion.

- **Local Growth Officers**

The Scouts implemented the use of Local Growth Officers, who were hired from local communities to boost engagement and retention. The officer's role was to locally support recruitment and retention of volunteers, support opening of new units and help strengthen local Scout activities.

- **Drawing on existing UYO connections**

Recruiting volunteers who had some existing connection with the organisation - for example, parents of a current member or people who had previously been a member.

UYOs were also focused on retaining their volunteers, particularly to ensure sustainability of new units and places. Some key strategies deployed included:

- **Early support for staff and volunteers**

Providing comprehensive initial support, such as standardised and tailored training, and a specific focus on the volunteer journey.

- **Flexible volunteering opportunities**

Offering flexible options to fit volunteers' varied commitments and availability, including remote opportunities that do not require a physical presence and offering shifts during evenings, weekends, or at different times of the day.

- **Appreciation**

Publicly acknowledging volunteers through events, awards, at meetings and through newsletters.

- **Reward and recognition**

Providing volunteers with forms of recognition for their skills attainment, such as vocational qualifications and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) credits.

- **Specialised skills training**

Providing access to digital skills training and specialised skill development, such as working with young people with additional needs, provided additional incentive to stay.

Creation of New Units and Places

A total of 798 new units were created across all participating UYOs over the course of the Fund. The process for establishing new units was described by central staff as multi-faceted and UYOs deployed a range of methods and techniques for deciding where these units will be located. An overall target of 18,177 new places was set, which was exceeded by 5,574 places. Of these new places, 56% were in areas of deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD1-5) in line with the aim to increase opportunities in these areas. Despite increasing capacity at new and existing units, the size of waiting lists did not typically reduce, and in many cases, continued to grow. This reflected increased demand following increased outreach efforts, and was also found to be a good indicator of sustainability for the newly added units and spaces, indicating that there would be ongoing demand for the programme.

The main facilitators in enabling the creation of new places included:

- **Community embedding**

Hiring local staff and embedding them in communities, allowing for tailored approaches and immediate addressing of local needs.

- **Existing organisation infrastructure**

Leveraging existing infrastructure such as finance and HR systems helped to support efficient establishment and management of new places.

- **Resource availability**

Providing tools like ‘unit resource boxes’ helped new units to get started with the necessary materials for preparing engaging youth activities.

- **Proximity and presence**

Being physically close to other units in a district aided in building relationships with volunteers and enhanced community outreach to recruit new young people to fill these places.

- **Central support teams**

These teams offered consistent support, oversight and set safe-to-operate standards that empower local forces to create new places with confidence.

- **Use of strategic funds**

The dedicated fund has facilitated with recruitment and training, enabling volunteers to effectively engage in community outreach and promote new unit and place openings.

“The main thing that has enabled us to create new places is our presence in the district and our proximity to volunteers. We can go and meet with them and share resources to help them get established, open and engaging young people”

(Central staff, St John Ambulance)

Engaging young people and filling new spaces

Just over half of the newly created places had been filled by the end of FY24/25 with a total of 13,023 young people joining. The significant proportion of places not filled should not be viewed as a lack of demand or a waiting list issue, but rather as an indication of the time required to develop suitable infrastructure. Additionally, new units launched in emerging areas are unlikely to have existing waiting lists to fill the newly available places.

Stakeholders expected these places to be filled over time. In line with the aim to create places in deprived areas, UYO's had a particular focus in attracting young people in these areas, and some had observed higher than expected rates of participation. Some UYO's had focused outreach strategies which included a range of young people including teens (aged 13 to 16), homeschooled young people, and young people with disabilities.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, DCMS to deprioritise waitlists as a measure of success and instead focus on new units and places created. Second, UYO's to strike a balance between creating new places and maintaining the sustainability of existing ones. Third, UYO's draw upon the impact evaluation findings to support recruitment of volunteers, members and community partners. Fourth, UYO's to continue to prioritise staff and volunteer development as key in ensuring organisational success and delivering positive outcomes for young people. And finally, future evaluations to specifically focus on underserved communities to understand what does and does not work to establish new units, engaging staff, volunteers, and community partners and members. Further research could also be done with young people (particularly those from hard-to-reach backgrounds) to understand best practice for recruitment, retention and removing barriers to access. The Fund has been extended for another year and some of the above recommendations have already been implemented and will be observed in the next year of the evaluation.

1. Introduction

Ipsos UK and Dartington Service Design Lab were appointed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver an evaluation of the Uniformed Youth Fund (the Fund). The Fund's objectives were to increase capacity of Uniformed Youth Organisations (UYOs) in areas with unmet demand, open new groups in disadvantaged areas, support UYOs to sustainably scale delivery, and improve the wellbeing and skills development of young people.

The evaluation had two components: a process evaluation to explore how the Fund was delivered and to what extent it achieved its objectives, and an impact evaluation exploring the impact of participating in uniformed youth groups on young people.[\[2\]](#) This report is for the process evaluation.

Ipsos UK and Dartington Service Design Lab were appointed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver evaluation work related to the Uniformed Youth Fund (the Fund). The evaluation findings are divided into two reports as there were two distinct lines of inquiry. This report explores how the Fund was delivered and to what extent it achieved its objectives. A separate report provides an evaluation of the impact of participating in uniformed youth groups on young people.

1.1 Overview of the Uniformed Youth Fund

1.1.1 Context and rationale of the Fund

In 2022, the UK government released its 'Levelling up the United Kingdom' White Paper, committing to investing £560m in young people for new and improved youth facilities, services, and experiences.[\[3\]](#) The National Youth Guarantee was launched, which aimed to provide all young people in England with opportunities for regular out-of-school activities, adventures away from home, and volunteer opportunities by 2025. As part of the government's levelling up agenda, the National Youth

Guarantee focused on the most disadvantaged areas of England in order to tackle inequalities in access to youth services. These have been exacerbated by reduced funding whereby over the last 10-12 years, youth sectors have lost about a billion pounds a year in local authority funding,^[4] resulting in less provision for young people. Furthermore, many youth organisations were forced to close or reduce their reach during the Covid-19 pandemic, given that their typical activities could not take place in a virtual format and/or organisations lost volunteers.

At the same time, young people were often experiencing negative outcomes, for example anxiety levels among young people were at a 12-year high in 2021.^[5]

The Uniformed Youth Fund was a significant component of the National Youth Guarantee and formed part of a broader investment programme in youth services. Uniformed Youth Organisations (UYOs) were well-positioned to support the government's commitment to young people and the levelling up agenda, as they were already providing many key components of the National Youth Guarantee on a large scale. The groups are run by thousands of adult volunteers, and activities include in-person sessions, camps, international trips, and community-based social projects. Each organisation has its own programme which usually includes skills development, accreditations (such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, first aid certificate, and BTEC qualifications) and social action (e.g. 'when people give their time and other resources for the common good, such as volunteering, community-owned services, community organising, and neighbourly acts').^[6] There are also accreditations and programmes that are unique to the organisations' background and remit – for example, Marine Society and Sea Cadets offer accreditations in British Canoeing Union and Royal Yachting Association.

Previous research has shown that participation in UYOs leads to a variety of positive outcomes for young people. A quasi-experimental study (using difference-in-difference) found that

participation in UYOs led to improvements in life skills and character traits, such as communication skills, empathy, and resilience.^[7] Research by the Youth United Foundation in 2018 found that UYOs encourage social mixing among young people.^[8] The report, based on an online survey of uniformed and non-uniformed young people (n=2015, non-experimental) and 52 qualitative interviews with young people, their parents/guardians, and volunteer group leaders, found that UYO members are at least 10 percentage points more likely than non-UYO members to say that they spent time with people of a different ethnicity, socio-economic status, or religion.

1.1.2 Aims of the Fund

The objectives of the Uniformed Youth Fund were to:

*** Increase the capacity of UYOs in areas with unmet demand, with an initial aim to create more than 23,000 new places for young people aged 10 to 18 by March 2025.**^[9]

The fund sought to enable UYOs to improve the reach of existing provision and prioritise eliminating waiting lists in deprived areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 1 to 5 Local Authority areas or Youth Investment Fund places)^[10] and reducing waiting lists in other parts of the country. UYOs were expected to achieve this in ways that work best for their individual organisation and area, which was likely to include investment in recruitment and training of volunteers and staff.

- **Open new UYO groups in areas of disadvantage where no existing groups exist.**

At the time of the business case, UYOs were concentrated in areas of least deprivation. The fund aimed to support the creation of approximately 2,200 places in areas of disadvantage.

- **Support UYOs to build their internal capacity to sustainably scale their delivery and maintain it beyond the lifetime of the fund.**

This work was anticipated to focus on volunteers – developing

new training resources and digital tools, as well as improving the overall volunteer journey.

- **Improve the wellbeing of young people and support their development of life and work skills by expanding the reach and range of activities for young people that drive these outcomes.**

The fund aimed to increase the number of opportunities young people have to engage in regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home, and opportunities to volunteer, which will lead to improvements in social, emotional and practical skills.

This fund consisted of two funding tranches: £1.5 million for the 2022/23 fiscal year to establish new uniformed youth groups in deprived areas, and £16.8 million being distributed between the 2022/23 and 2024/25 fiscal years to reduce waiting lists for existing groups.

1.1.3 Eligibility, application process and delivery of the fund

The eligibility for the fund included non-military UYOs in the Youth United Network who support activities for young people aged 10-18 in England. UYOs could apply for up to £5 million, with up to 10% of the funding available to support eligible organisations for developing internal capacity for longer-term sustainability. A total of eight UYOs received funding, as shown in Table 1.1 along with the amount of funding each organisation received in total.

Groundwork UK was selected as the grant administrator; they had oversight of the distribution and delivery of grants following a commercial procurement competition. They worked in partnership with the Youth United Foundation (YUF) as delivery partners for the Fund. YUF provided ongoing support to each of the UYOs, as well as learning events that brought the organisations together to share best practices and challenges on topics such as volunteer recruitment and data collection and

management.

Table 1.1: UYOs and total amount of funding awarded through the Uniformed Youth Fund

UYO	Amount of funding awarded
Boys' Brigade	£1,265,650.91
Girlguiding	£1,957,339.79
Girls' Brigade	£344,125.34
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade (JLGB)	£965,017.61
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	£1,204,574.96
Scouts	£5,997,932.49
St John Ambulance	£2,227, 028.51
Volunteer Police Cadets	£1,077,256.10

Source: Quarterly reports from UYOs

1.2 Process evaluation aims and questions

The process evaluation aimed to understand how the Fund supported UYOs to increase opportunities for young people by reducing waiting lists, setting up new groups and improving capacity at existing groups. The research questions addressed were:

- 1 Did the Fund improve the recruitment and retention of adult volunteers to uniform youth groups?
- 2 How was the Fund delivered on the ground in terms of setting up new groups?
- 3 How was the Fund delivered on the ground in terms of expanding capacity at existing groups?
- 4 To what extent were created places concentrated in deprived areas?
- 5 Was the funding successful in reducing the waiting lists for uniformed youth groups and creating more places (both in new and existing groups)?
- 6 How did the different uniformed youth groups go about eliminating their waiting lists? How do groups tend to use waiting lists?
- 7 What types of young people took up the opportunities created by the Fund?
- 8 Did the funding improve the long-term sustainability of uniformed youth group places?

For questions 2 to 6, we also addressed the question: What worked well and what worked less well? What could be improved with the delivery?

The questions were addressed through a mixed-methods

evaluation approach described in more detail in the next section and Annex 5.1.

2. Methods

This section contains a brief description of the process evaluation methodology and its limitations. It also provides an overview of the evidence sources used.

2.1 Evaluation methodology

This evaluation relied on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, which were gathered through surveys, interviews with diverse stakeholders, quarterly monitoring data collection and workshops. The data was collected throughout the life of the Fund in order to capture the processes of start-up, delivery, monitoring and adaptation across the two years (see Table 2.1 for a summary of the data collection). The evaluation framework is provided in Annex 5.1.

Table 2.1: Evaluation data: sources, volume and purpose

	Volume of data collected	Purpose of collecting this data
Theory of Change development with individual UYOs	8 workshops with individual UYOs	To understand more about UYOs' plans for the Fund, how these are anticipated to reduce waiting lists, the assumptions behind these plans and the anticipated enablers, barriers and risks.
Monitoring	Quarterly	To obtain quantitative data

data collected by Groundwork	monitoring reports from 8 UYOs (96 in total, 32 per year)	on progress in delivery of the Fund (number of volunteers recruited, places created, location of new places etc.)
Interviews with Fund Delivery Stakeholders	Two rounds of interviews were conducted. Two participants from each of the Fund stakeholders (DCMS, YUF, Groundwork) took part in each round. An additional 3 DCMS stakeholders were interviewed once.	To understand the effectiveness of delivery of the fund, how groups went about recruiting volunteers and creating places, the sustainability of these capacity improvements, what has worked well and less well and what could be improved in future.
Interviews with UYO central staff	17 individuals (2 per UYO) [11]	
Interviews with volunteers	16 individuals (2 per UYO)	
Case study visits	Two case studies per UYO (16 in total). 34 interviews with staff/volunteers and 45 young people interviewed as part of mini focus	To obtain qualitative data from one-on-one interviews with volunteers, focus groups with young people and observations of the unit, focusing on: Funding given to the UYO, how, if at all, this impacted waiting lists or enabled to create new

	groups	places or open new groups/units for young people to attend.
Survey data from young people	Two waves of the survey, gathering longitudinal data from 406 UYO members and 773 young people who are not UYO members	Predominantly for the impact evaluation, but also to obtain data on what activities young people take part in at UYOs, including leadership activities (which may provide some evidence of sustainability).
Interviews with young people	31 young people interviewed twice	Predominantly for the impact evaluation but also provides data on the effectiveness of activities to recruit and retain young people and leadership activities.
Learning events hosted by Youth United Foundation	3 observations of workshops	These events will help provide additional evidence about approaches that are working well and less well in delivering the Fund and overcoming challenges relating to this.

2.2 Evidence sources

2.2.1 Monitoring data

Monitoring data on outputs of the fund was collected by Groundwork on a quarterly basis from each UYO. Each UYO set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with DCMS that were aligned with the aims of the fund. The KPIs included: number of places

created and filled, number of places in areas of high deprivation (IMD 1 to 5), number of waiting list places filled, number of adult volunteers recruited, and number of leaders trained. The monitoring reports completed by each UYO included quantitative data on their KPIs, as well as qualitative data that provided insights on facilitators and barriers to achieving their KPIs. There was organisational variation in data reporting, so figures on number of new units and places created may refer to those specifically created due to the Fund or those that were created during the fund time period (and likely would have benefitted from capacity or process improvements that were brought about by the Fund).

2.2.2 Interviews with Fund delivery stakeholders

Interviews were conducted at two points with stakeholders from DCMS (n=4 participants) Groundwork (n=3 participants) and Youth United Foundation (n=2 participants) who were involved with the design, development, and/or delivery of the Fund. These interviews focused on capturing what was working well, what was working less well, and why this was seen to be the case. They also covered key lessons learned throughout the Fund implementation, to inform the future implementation of similar approaches.

2.2.3 Interviews with staff at each UYO central office

Interviews were conducted at two points with central office staff at each UYO who were involved with the Fund in some capacity, including applying for the funding, leading activities supported by the Fund, and monitoring delivery. These interviews focused on understanding how UYOs were delivering against the fund objectives and working to meet their KPIs at an organisational level, as opposed to the unit-level explored through the case studies. They also focused on what was working well and not as well across the organisation.

2.2.4 Interviews with volunteers

Interviews with volunteers were conducted during the process evaluation case study visits to both new and existing units. Where a limited number of interviews with volunteers were

completed during the visits, follow-up online interviews were scheduled at a later date. Although some volunteers may have been involved in the application process, many were not and were instead asked about recent changes they might have seen as a result of their unit being funded through the Uniformed Youth Fund. The interviews also focused on their volunteering work, the types of young people who attend and how the Fund has changed the long-term sustainability of their unit.

2.2.5 Case studies with new units

Eight in-depth case studies were conducted – one with a new unit in each UYO. Case study locations were purposively selected with support from the central team at each UYO with an aim to conduct the case studies across a range of geographical areas, unit size, and length of time in operation. The case studies were not intended to provide a representative sample of local UYO units. Rather, the case studies were used to develop the contextual framework for the contribution analysis by providing rich insight into how activities are delivered on the ground and how young people are engaged with (and impacted by) these activities within the context of each UYO.

Each case study involved an in-person visit to a local unit of the UYO and resulted in a total of 79 interviews with staff and volunteers, young people who are members of the UYO, and wider stakeholders and an observation of young people participating in an activity led by the UYO. Detail on the number of interviews per UYO is provided in Annex 5.2.

Semi-structured topic guides were used as the base for the interviews, though these on-site interviews (especially those with young people) were more informal than the interviews conducted outside the case studies. Interviews with adults explored how units were delivering against the aims of the fund to increase capacity and spaces for young people, the type of young people that the UYO reaches in their area and sustainability of the newly created places. Topic guides for young people interviews were informed by the Youth Advisory Board (Appendix 5.1 for more detail) and included questions on

why young people joined the UYOs, whether and how long they were on a waitlist, how they experienced joining the group and what motivates them to continue attending.

2.2.6 Youth United Foundation learning events

Youth United Foundation delivered six Learning Events to support UYOs with developing their volunteer recruitment and retention strategies, data management plans and ways to improve youth participation. There were opportunities to share best practices from amongst the funded UYOs, but also from other community organisations that rely on adult volunteers for delivery. Notes from these sessions were used to gather further data on ongoing learnings and challenges.

2.2.7 Surveys and interviews with young people

The data was primarily used for the impact evaluation but were drawn on in some instances regarding recruitment and retention of young people, as well as leadership opportunities for members, which might support sustainability. More detail on the survey and interviews can be found in Annex 5.1.

2.3 Evaluation limitations

- Data collection of characteristics of young people and volunteers was discontinued due to limited submissions from UYOs. There were plans to collect data from UYOs, particularly about the characteristics of young people attending UYOs, the duration and intensity of young people's involvement, the demographic characteristics of volunteers, and the number of hours volunteers generally do per week. As such, our ability to report quantitatively on some research questions is limited by lack of data, but where possible, we have supplemented with qualitative findings from interviews with UYO staff and volunteers.
- The findings from case studies are likely prone to positivity bias. The groups identified for case studies were selected by

senior leaders within each UYO, and it is therefore possible that groups with more positive experiences were selected. Equally, participants may have felt less comfortable speaking about the disadvantages or ways to improve the UYO with staff/volunteers present. To mitigate this, case study data has been triangulated with survey and monitoring data, where possible.

3. Findings

This section covers the findings from the process evaluation, examining how UYO's sought to eliminate their waiting lists, both in terms of setting up new groups and increasing capacity at existing groups, and how these approaches worked on the ground. As part of their bids to the Fund, UYO's set out their strategy for creating new places (outlined in section 3.1). Approaches to reduce waiting lists included recruiting more staff and adult volunteers and increasing capacity to create new units and places (discussed in section 3.2). Section 3.3 details progress towards the creation of new units and places while section 3.4 describes progress towards filling the newly created places.

3.1 Fund set-up and management

3.1.1 Overview

As part of the application process, UYO's set out how they would deliver against the aims and contexts of the Fund. These approaches varied depending on their primary needs and targets. Once selected for funding, each UYO set annual KPIs with DCMS. KPIs were tailored to the organisation based on their current size, waiting list and aims. For example, at the time of applying, the Scouts had 412,986 members in the UK^[12] and aimed to create 6,000 places for young people on waiting lists.

Whereas JLGB had just over 4,000 members[\[13\]](#) and aimed to create 670 places for young people on waiting lists, meaning smaller targets.

Overall, the combined efforts of all funded UYOs exceeded the KPIs set for the three years of the Fund in terms of volunteers recruited, new leaders trained, units created, and places created. Girls' Brigade and Volunteer Police Cadets met all their targets. Table 3.1 outlines combined KPI targets and totals across all UYOs (figures at a UYO-level are presented in following sections). Some indicators did not have specific targets, such as staff roles created and places filled, but were monitored as part of the Fund. Overall, the combined efforts of the UYOs achieved all FY23/24 (Year 2) and FY24/25 (Year 3) KPI targets.

The tables included throughout these findings do not include data from FY22/23 (Year 1) of the Fund, as this was not a full year and most work consisted of UYOs setting up for delivery. Where UYO-level data is presented, there may be instances where a target is not provided; this is due to variations in agreements with the organisations.

Table 3.1: The combined KPI targets and totals from FY23/24 to FY24/25

	FY23/24 Target	FY23/24 Delivery	FY24/25 Target	FY24/25 Delivery	Overall Target
Staff roles created	N/A	96	N/A	0	N/A
Volunteers recruited	979	2,476	1,429	2,508	2,408
New leaders trained	206	1,474	399	1,827	605

Units created	83	501	131	297	214
Places created	7,356	11,993	10,821	11,748	18,117
Places filled	N/A	6800	N/A	6,223	N/A

Source: Quarterly reports provided by Groundwork

A consistent theme reported across all UYO's was needing to be more flexible and being responsive to changes. Most UYO's reported little change to their initial aims, showing consistency and alignment with original objectives. However, some did shift their organisational delivery aims, reallocated resources and adjusted plans over the course of the Fund.

For one UYO, their development of new units was slower than expected in FY23/24. As a result, in FY24/25, they focused on recruiting new staff and filling specific roles that would help to meet this objective - for example, in communications or central staff positions. Several groups also reprofiled their spending to meet their KPIs and aims. For example, to engage more young people with special educational needs (SEN), one UYO reallocated some funding to support additional training needs of staff to better support these members. For another, the process of co-developing their Theory of Change (ToC) for this evaluation led them to improve their strategy and data collection processes. As a result, some funding was reprofiled to support sustainability and durability.

3.1.2 UYO supports

An objective of the fund included providing support for UYO's to build their internal capacity to scale up sustainably to ensure organisations could continue to meet demand beyond 2025. Two organisations were appointed to support these aims, Groundwork UK and Youth United Foundation (YUF), who

worked with DCMS to support delivery of the Fund. Groundwork UK was selected to be the grant administrator, having oversight of the distribution and delivery of grants and working with UYOs to submit programme monitoring data and quarterly reports to DCMS. YUF held learning sessions for the UYOs together so they could share learnings and best practices over the course of the grant. Together, the organisations provided ongoing support to each of the funded organisations in the form of monthly meetings and quarterly check-ins regarding the quarterly reports.

Central staff reported varied experiences of these supports. Most reported having the regular monthly meetings with representatives from both parties for updates and discussion. These meetings typically focused on progress updates, such as finances and timescales, and a discussion around challenges. One UYO reported that these meetings were useful for identifying problems and offered the opportunity to learn what challenges other UYOs were facing. The quarterly meetings were also considered to be helpful, particularly for finance-related issues such as underspends in a particular quarter. In some instances, Groundwork assisted UYOs with budget management after oversight of underspend or issues with financial projections (i.e. the need to adjust or reprofile budgets due to discrepancies between planned and actual fund allocation). For example, one central staff member mentioned they had to reprofile at the end of each quarter based on overspend or underspend.

The experience of the learning sessions was more varied. One UYO found them to be “invaluable”, stating that they had swapped best practices with other UYOs. Another found them useful for learning about the experiences and challenges of other organisations. A third reported that they had not yet made any direct changes because of the learning sessions, but that these sessions had enabled internal discussion to take place.

The relationship with YUF and Groundwork was reported as being generally positive. Central staff appreciated YUF’s sector knowledge and collaborative approach, and both parties were

seen as being responsive and helpful. Staff reported that Groundwork conducted thorough planning with teams and engaged in regular reporting, which was found to be beneficial for aligning work with deliverables. However, some staff members found difficulties with processes and timelines for both the fund application and reallocation. For example, they noted that the application process required lengthy processes at short notice. For example, one UYO reported challenges in getting a timely decision around a request to reallocate funding, which put some of their KPIs at risk. Another UYO suggested that approvals of changes in budget or timings could have been communicated better or in a timelier way.

“We appreciate they need to be diligent; they need to be appropriate, and they need to make robust decisions. But making sure they happen within a timely manner means that we can deliver at pace. And sometimes that’s been on our risk register, waiting for the outcome of financial decisions, or decisions around the changes to KPIs.”

(UYO Central staff member)

3.2 Recruitment, retention and training of staff and adult volunteers

Regarding the objectives of the Fund itself, UYOs aimed to increase capacity of provision in areas with unmet demand using methods which worked best for each individual organisation and targeted areas. Generally, this required an investment in the recruitment and training of volunteers and staff. A further objective of the Fund was to support UYOs to build their internal capacity to scale up sustainably and ensure organisations can continue to meet demand beyond 2025. This could involve

developing resources to help train new volunteers, developing digital tools to support volunteers and improving the overall volunteer journey.

Tying in with the evaluation aims, the following section focuses on understanding the number of adult volunteers recruited, how and to what extent the Fund helped to improve the recruitment and retention of adult volunteers and staff to UYOs, and considering how this recruitment improved the long-term sustainability of the created places.

From interviews with central staff, in most UYOs, different roles carried different responsibilities and contributions to the unit:

- UYO leaders are the dedicated volunteers responsible for a wide range of tasks including planning, delivery, safety, and communication. They design and deliver sessions and activities, ensure safeguarding and first aid standards are met, and manage unit finances and resourcing. They also play a role in recruiting volunteers, promoting the group, and building relationships with the community.
- Young leaders, typically aged between 14 and 18, are members of the UYO and play a crucial role in supporting the leadership team, by helping to run activities, whilst developing their own skills and experience. Their responsibilities typically include helping plan and run activities and being a positive role model for younger members.
- Volunteers offer their unpaid time to support the unit. They could be parents of a member, a teacher, someone from the community, or an ex-member. Volunteers' responsibilities vary and may include assisting with planning and delivering activities, mentoring young people, and providing support to leaders.
- Staff are employed by the UYO. Their roles encompass youth development, leadership, and community engagement, with a primary focus on safeguarding young people and fostering positive experiences.

Despite the above positions bearing a variety of responsibilities, their roles were seen as interlinked, contributing to the group’s sustainability. From interviews with volunteers and young people, where young leaders were engaged and well-integrated into the unit’s community, their retention rates tended to be higher and were more likely to prioritise their role development within the unit. For some young leaders, their long-term engagement led to transitioning into an adult leader, highlighting the importance of retaining members of the group at different stages.

3.2.1 Volunteers recruited

Overall, UYOs nearly doubled the target for adult volunteer roles created. Table 3.2 illustrates that by the end of FY24/25, a total of 4,984 new adult volunteers were recruited, well exceeding the overall target of 2,408. Further, all organisations met or exceeded their overall targets. Based on this data alone, it suggests the Fund succeeded in aiding the recruitment of adult volunteers to UYOs and the recruitment approaches adopted by UYOs generally worked well.

Table 3.2: Number of new adult volunteer roles recruited across UYOs

	FY23/24 Target	FY23/24 Actual	FY24/25 Target	FY24/25 Actual	Overall Target
Boys’ Brigade	75	99	200	133	275*
Girlguiding	150	438	236	1087	386
Girls’ Brigade	10	7	10	56	20
JLGB	30	20	40	51	70
Marine Society and Sea	74	129	100	136	174

Cadets

Scouts	510	645	573	588	1083
St John Ambulance	100	400	250	117	350
Volunteer Police Cadets	30	738	20	340	50
Total	979	2,476	1,429	2,508	2,408

Source: Quarterly reports provided by Groundwork. *Boys' Brigade overall target was reduced to 200, though the overall total used here is the sum of FY23/24 and FY24/25 target

Findings from the case studies indicate that UYO's were motivated to recruit volunteers for several reasons. By recruiting more volunteers, UYO's aimed to optimise the resources available to them, balancing between paid staff and volunteers to achieve their operational goals. Volunteers also hope to bring positive change to young people's lives and therefore share the UYO's goals.

Volunteers were also motivated to support UYO's for a variety of reasons. Interviewed volunteers explained that one of the main reasons for offering their time to a UYO was to give back to their community and make a difference. They reported feeling satisfaction from helping young people to develop their skills and confidence and witnessing the positive impact of attending the UYO on their lives. Volunteers also felt motivated by the social connection and sense of belonging that joining a UYO offered to them. Building friendships and being part of a close-knit community appealed to those seeking social interaction.

"I like the social aspect of it, seeing loads of different

people, in my day job I don't get much social time really with people."

(Volunteer, Boys' Brigade)

Other volunteers felt driven by the opportunities for personal skill development and transferrable skills to other aspects of their life, such as their career.

"I wanted to expand my skills a bit more, but I didn't want to leave the job that I do, so Cadets allowed me to do that."

(Volunteer, Volunteer Police Cadets)

3.2.2 Staff and volunteer recruitment approaches

Based on interviews with central staff and volunteers, UYOs engaged in various strategies to attract new volunteers and staff. UYOs tended to use a phased recruitment approach, to build their staff leadership teams first, thereby establishing a strong foundation before expanding more widely. This aimed to streamline management and decision-making processes.

Approaches to recruiting volunteers or staff were similar when taking a national or large-scale approach; however, approaches to recruiting staff and volunteers tended to differ when working at a community level.

National and large-scale efforts to recruit staff and volunteers

- **Recruitment campaigns**

These were generally found effective to swiftly fill numerous

open positions for both staff and volunteers. For example, because of the funding, Volunteer Police Cadets used in-person and grassroots campaigning to reach out to potential volunteering candidates. They worked with existing volunteers and the young people in the local communities where need was the greatest. The approach was also young person led, engaging current Cadets to directly ask members of the public to support them at their unit.

“There’s often very little local and regional budgets for recruitment campaigns for volunteering. So, we’ve been able to use that DCMS money to have a national recruitment campaign for the first time. We’ve been able to support forces with recruitment materials.”

(Central Staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

- **Online advertisements and utilising social media**

Advertising staffing and volunteering positions on platforms such as Facebook to reach a wider audience was a commonly used approach. Some UYOs, such as Girls’ Brigade, were posting in community pages and groups to ensure they were targeting diverse audiences. Approaching recruitment in a more informal and relaxed manner, through social media, was particularly beneficial for recruiting volunteers who were seeking flexible commitments.

Community-based strategies to recruit staff

- **Internal advertising**

Many UYOs chose to internally advertise staff positions to

capitalise on existing talent and experience. This was seen to be a cost-effective approach and ensured applicants were already aligned with organisational culture.

Community-based strategies to recruit volunteers

- **Building and maintaining local relationships**

Efforts were made by UYO's to establish and sustain relationships with relevant local stakeholders, such as schools and community organisations. This strategy linked well with motivations volunteers had shared about joining, as the community emphasis aligned with desires to give back to their community. This approach was also deemed successful in enhancing diversity and inclusion of the volunteer workforce, particularly for the UYO's who prioritised developing a volunteer workforce that mirrored the communities that they served.

- **Local Growth Officers**

The Scouts implemented the use of Local Growth Officers, who were hired from local communities to boost engagement and retention. The officer's role was to support local Scouting to recruit and retain volunteers, support communities to open new units and help to meet project targets aimed at strengthening local Scout activities.

- **Drawing on existing UYO connections**

One useful approach was recruiting volunteers who had some existing connection with the organisation - for example, parents of a current member or people who had previously been a member themselves.

• **Trialling new strategies**

For some UYOs, the funding provided the opportunity to try new strategies, particularly to attract volunteers from more diverse backgrounds. For example, Scouts were trialling working groups to test approaches to attract young volunteers, which included engaging with people at fresher fairs and visiting Higher Education institutions.

UYOs experienced a mixture of challenges in meeting their volunteer recruitment requirements.

In some instances, UYOs relied on agreements with local partners to supply volunteers. However, these partnerships were occasionally hampered by time-consuming internal processes on the partner side. More broadly, the qualitative interviews highlighted a consensus amongst existing UYO volunteers and staff that finding people who were interested and able to commit to volunteering was at times difficult, but they developed strategies to address this. Central UYO staff often heard that people were less able to commit to volunteer as they had less free time outside of work, particularly in the context of the increasing cost of living during the funding period. To address this need, some UYOs were adapting roles to make them more suitable and appealing. For example, Girls' Brigade were breaking down roles into smaller, more flexible commitments, which better suited potential volunteers' schedules.

“The role of volunteering has changed a lot in recent years, where people are less likely to have free time to do unpaid work. We have responded to this by chunking up the roles so people can be more flexible and mix more. We also welcome new volunteers for a fresh outlook and to bring new skills and experience.”

(Central staff, Girls' Brigade)

Interviewed volunteers concurred that balancing volunteering with work commitments could be challenging, but they felt their UYO responded well to this barrier and offered flexibility that facilitated their ongoing engagement.

UYOs had the opportunity to share and learn about volunteer recruitment strategies from one another at the YUF learning sessions. In one session, Girlguiding presented their 3-pronged approach. Their practice involved Google search adverts, social media platforming and remaining updated on what approaches were working well on a localised level. They also managed a 'Movers' Facebook group for young members who were transitioning to university and encouraged them to join a local unit in their new area.

In terms of staff recruitment, interviewed central staff felt that this happened largely in line with their expectations. Generally, they felt the process to recruit was efficient and they possessed the ability to induct new hires well. They were able to fill the needed positions and even found that some of the practices developed during mass recruitment were being adopted for wider use across the UYO.

"It has been in line with expectations. Since the Fund, we have tried outsourcing recruitment work to a third party, rather than finding a member of staff to do this themselves...We've found this to be effective."

(Central Staff, Boys' Brigade)

However, interviews with Fund delivery stakeholders revealed challenges with staff recruitment. Despite the funding allowing UYOs to recruit more staff, one representative reported that the challenging job market was seen as a barrier to staff recruitment. Another stakeholder shared that the main source of underspend was due to staff expenses, with lower-than-expected recruitment initially and, in the case of some UYOs, managing large

organisational changes.

3.2.3 Retention of volunteers and staff

UYO staff and volunteers placed a strong emphasis on the importance of retention of recruited volunteers. Interview participants recognised the long-term benefits of retaining experienced volunteers who were familiar with how the UYO worked.

“I think we’re quite good at retaining leaders in our group. A lot of the leaders, some of them I’ve known since I started at 8, so they’ve literally been there the whole time and some of them have grown up and some of them have recently joined.”

(Volunteer, Girls’ Brigade)

“I think it’s the support network of having these people to rely on and if you need help, all you’ve got to do is ask and then someone is there to help you if you need it.”

(Volunteer, Marine Society and Sea Cadets)

Retention of staff and volunteers is particularly important for delivering positive outcomes for the members. In the impact evaluation, the development of trusted relationships with adult staff and volunteers was found to be an important factor in supporting young people’s wellbeing. From interviews with young people, the adults in their group were generally perceived very positively. They viewed volunteers as caring, supportive, and encouraging individuals who provide a safe and inclusive space for young people to develop. Young people also felt listened to and valued by the volunteers. Staff and volunteers were also considered to be role models by many members,

inspiring them to want to volunteer for their organisation one day, so they could provide a positive experience for other young people.

“They [volunteers] are really encouraging of me and they’re always setting me fun challenges and encouraging me.”

(Girls’ Brigade member)

“If we had a concern or if we had something that the group could improve on, we could go to a leader or volunteer and we could suggest it and honestly, they would probably agree and they would probably try their best to put it into action.”

(JLGB member)

From interviews with central staff members and YUF learning sessions, there was a diverse approach to retaining staff and volunteers. The following approaches were reported:

- **Early support for staff and volunteers**

Providing comprehensive initial support, such as standardised and tailored training, and a specific focus on the volunteer journey.

- **Flexible volunteering opportunities**

UYOs offered flexible options to fit volunteers’ varied commitments and availability. For example, offering volunteering shifts during evenings, weekends, or at different times of the day to suit diverse personal commitments. Additionally, offering remote volunteering opportunities to allow volunteers to

contribute through online platforms or by performing tasks that do not require a physical presence.

- **Appreciation**

For example, volunteers were publicly acknowledged during events and meetings and through newsletters. Awards and celebration events were also implemented for outstanding contributions and organisations held events to honour volunteering efforts.

- **Reward and recognition**

Several UYOs reported that they provided volunteers with forms of recognition for their skills attainment. In one learning session, Marine Society and Sea Cadets shared that they offer vocational qualifications for their volunteers. A central staff member at Volunteer Police Cadets said many of their training offers are Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accredited in response to volunteer feedback.

- **Digital skills training**

Conversations during the YUF learning session on volunteer retention surfaced a variety of approaches used to encourage volunteers to stay. Some UYOs cited access to digital skills training and specialised skill development, such as working with young people with additional needs, provided an incentive to stay. One representative from Marine Society and Sea Cadets reported that they offered vocational qualifications for volunteers to undertake, with a mix of free and subsidised programmes.

From the case studies, volunteers reported that the retention of existing volunteers had been effective. Volunteers felt that a strong sense of community and belonging was a key attributor for good levels of retention. Many volunteers felt part of a friendship group and enjoyed the supportive environment this provided. For example, Girls' Brigade and Marine Society and Sea Cadets both had volunteers and staff members who had been a part of the group for many years, where some had been

part of the UYO themselves when they were younger. This feeling of belonging and connection contributed to their sense of 'giving back' to the UYO. Volunteer retention was also bolstered by a shared passion for the UYO mission and cause.

However, volunteers reported some potential challenges regarding sustaining ongoing engagement with their UYO. The onboarding process was overwhelming for some recruits. One volunteer shared that they initially had concerns around how much information they had to remember. However, the volunteer felt well supported throughout the training process and was gradually introduced to working with larger groups of young people.

“When I first joined I was a bit daunted, I was thinking I didn't know if I'd signed up for a bigger role than I was actually going to be able to do...I had so many modules to get through and I was worried I would never remember it all...but it's worked out, it's been relatively smooth.”

(Volunteer)

Central staff also recognised that volunteers are asked to do a lot and the importance of ongoing support in order to retain them.

“It's not just the recruiting and delivery of running a project. They have other responsibilities around safeguarding and compliance. And so, you know, it's making sure we are aware that we ask a lot of the volunteers and it's around how we make sure they remain supported and valued for their contribution throughout that journey.”

(Central staff, Scouts)

There were also some volunteers who felt resistance from older volunteers to change practices which were already established within the UYO. Although this was not cited as a direct reason for volunteers leaving, it was reported to have caused some tensions amongst volunteers, making their volunteering experience less enjoyable.

“Sometimes when there are new rules or changes to the training, people don’t necessarily like it. What I’ve found is sometimes the older volunteers who have been used to doing things a certain way, once that changes, they’re not really happy about it and they don’t want to do it anymore.”

(Volunteer)

Other challenges included existing team leaders’ expectations of long-term volunteering. For example, in one group, where team leaders had been in the role for over 5 years, there were expectations that this would continue with new recruits. However, this was not always in line with new volunteers’ commitments.

In terms of staff retention, a key challenge was the time limit of the funding. Interviews with both Fund delivery stakeholders and central UYO staff found that a number of staff roles were fixed-term contracts (FTCs) funded up to the end of March 2025. The time-limited nature of the roles had an impact on interest from potential candidates at recruitment, but it was more significantly felt as UYOs started to lose staff members as the ends of their FTCs approached and they were still working to meet their KPIs.

“But I think that the big thing that came to light probably six to nine months ago was the concern about uncertainty around future funding. A lot of these roles

were funded up until the end of March 2025. And that had a bit of an impact obviously for most of the organisations really in terms of starting to lose people.”

(Fund delivery stakeholder)

“We are struggling because people are on short contracts, and they are now looking for other jobs... We have a lot of churn with people leaving.”

(Central staff)

3.2.4 Training of volunteers and staff

In order to meet the aim of increasing the reach of existing provision, most UYOs saw training volunteers or staff to support new units/groups and their ongoing sustainability as part of their strategy. As shown in Table 3.3, a total of 3,301 new leaders were trained across the time span of the fund, significantly exceeding the overall target.

Table 3.3: Number of new leaders trained across UYOs

	FY23/24 Target	FY23/24 Achieved	FY24/25 Target	FY24/25 Achieved	Ov Ta
Boys’ Brigade	10	99	20	120	30
Girlguiding	15	23	25	64	40
Girls’ Brigade	N/A	16	N/A	62	N/A
JLGB	6	20	4	37	10

Marine Society and Sea Cadets	20	53	30	104	50
Scouts	25	520	50	495	75
St John Ambulance	100	5	250	0	350
Volunteer Police Cadets	30	738	20	945	50
Total	206	1474	399	1827	605

Source: Quarterly reports provided by Groundwork

St John Ambulance were the only UYO to not achieve their target of new leaders trained, but central staff interviewed indicated that this was due to the ways in which they recorded the completion of training for those taking part in it. Much of the training is self-administered or on-the-job and St John Ambulance do not collect the data necessary to mark it as complete. They felt that the number of new leaders trained was in line with their expectations, despite it appearing like they missed their target.

From interviews with volunteers and central staff, there were various types of training which were undertaken by volunteers. Findings demonstrated a commitment to providing volunteers with diverse and comprehensive training opportunities, ranging from induction and mandatory training to continuous professional development and specialised skill-building sessions.

- **Comprehensive mandatory induction**

Interviews with central staff, unit staff and volunteers indicated

that initial mandatory training was common across UYOs. This often included some combination of face-to-face, shadowing, and online training modules. This covered programme activities, working with young people, and leadership training. Some UYOs mentioned that further development and delivery of the mandatory training was a direct result of the Fund. For example, central staff from Volunteer Police Cadets found they were able to sustain the national mandatory training that is delivered to all their volunteer cadet leaders.

“So that’s three-and-a-half thousand plus volunteers have gone through that [mandatory] training during the Fund. So that’s a huge success of the Fund that we’ve been able to just keep that going.” (Central Staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

- **Safeguarding training**

As with mandatory induction, safeguarding training was commonly reported by volunteers. Volunteers shared that this training focused on the UYO’s policies and risk management procedures. This included how to conduct thorough risk assessments, identifying potential hazards, and organisational policies related to risk management.

- **Leadership training**

Often delivered through modules or residential courses, volunteers reported that leadership training covered aspects such as mentorship and support, decision-making, problem-solving and role-specific training. For example, a volunteer for the Marine Society and Sea Cadets obtained a powerboat certification, which meant they could take on new responsibilities.

- **Residential/camp training**

Volunteers recalled this training included how to lead overnight trips, such as safety procedures, activity planning and logistics management (such as resource allocation, transportation coordination and site setup).

- **Specialised training**

Volunteers mentioned undertaking customised programmes to meet specific needs such as working with younger children or supporting young people with additional needs. Staff also spoke about additional training packages, with a focus on first aid, managing groups, behaviour management and specialised modules in trauma-informed practice and mental health first aid.

UYOs had varying strategic areas of focus for improving the training process and opportunities for volunteers. According to the monitoring data, several UYOs, such as Boys' Brigade, Girlguiding, and JLGB, had a strong focus on young leader training. Girlguiding reported 438 girls had completed online training as part of their Young Leader Development Programme and JLGB hosted a Year 11 training weekend for over 50 members, providing them with skills and training to step up as young leaders.

Other organisations developed enhanced training programmes. Marine Society and Sea Cadets progressed their Leading a Marine Society and Sea Cadet Unit work, which included creating a training guide and introducing new training offers for units and volunteers, such as 'Westminster for unit appointees'. Feedback from new Marine Society and Sea Cadets provision detachments indicated that having existing volunteers trained to better support delivery was beneficial, so they trained 100 volunteers to deliver a new physical training syllabus. A Volunteer Police Cadets central staff member said they introduced a new safeguarding course specifically for young leaders who were former members, which was in response to former safeguarding concerns regarding relationships between leaders and members. As a result, they had seen improvements in safeguarding knowledge in their young leaders and a

reduction in safeguarding concerns.

In some instances, new training offers emerged from local requests, and the Fund enabled UYOs to be responsive to these needs. One central staff member said they allocated resources to offer additional training on behaviour management, as volunteers indicated they were struggling with this in their units.

Aspects of the training, such as being conducted via online platforms and flexible module timing, helped to improve accessibility. For example, the Fund has enabled JLGB to run online training, which enabled shorter time windows for volunteers to complete these modules. Girlguiding reported that the Fund had helped to develop their online learning platform, especially the development of their peer-to-peer webinars on waiting lists management.

However, some concerns were raised about the sustainability of training once the funding ceases. For example, Volunteer Police Cadets felt certain aspects of their training delivery model, such as the provision of mental health first aid and working with young people training, will cease once the funding ends.

“Mental health and the working with young people, we will have to give to forces to deliver. Post-funding, we won’t have the capacity to deliver that”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

Though the training was largely well received by volunteers, there were some challenges encountered in its distribution. Geographic barriers required logistical solutions, such as coordinating travel for distant trainers. St John Ambulance felt they were working through this particular challenge well:

“We are finding ways to support the training with our team. So, some of the ways have been to facilitate travel for some of the trainers, because when the district is stretched far and wide, such as districts like Cornwall, where everything is quite far from each other, in some cases, we facilitated travel for the trainers to go and deliver that training.”

(Central staff, St John Ambulance)

3.3 Creation of new units and places

Another intention of the fund was to both set up new groups and increase capacity at existing groups. This section explores how the approach to deliver new groups worked on the ground, how UYO's expanded capacity at their existing locations and whether the creation of new units and places were focused in more deprived areas.

It will also explore in more detail how UYO's originally planned to use the Fund to reduce waiting lists. Although an original intention, the focus on reducing waiting lists lessened over the course of the Fund as UYO's reported further on how waiting lists were used to manage capacity and to ensure that places could be filled into the future. As the funding was used to create new units and expand capacity at existing units, interviews with central and local staff revealed that waiting lists often increased rather than decreased, as a larger number of young people wanted to join following an expansion of youth provision or wider advertising of local uniformed youth groups. The interaction between waiting lists and new places is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.4.

3.3.1 Delivery of new groups

Collectively, the UYOs far exceeded the target for new units created. Table 3.4 below shows that a total of 798 new units were created by all UYOs over the course of the fund.

Table 3.4: Number of new units created across UYOs

	FY23/24 Target	FY23/24	FY24/25 Target	FY24/25	Over Target
Boys' Brigade	15	16	57	8	72
Girlguiding	40	110	44	62	84
Girls' Brigade*	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A
JLGB	N/A	7	N/A	7	N/A
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	28	23	30	36	58
Scouts	N/A	216	N/A	155	N/A
St John Ambulance	N/A	10	N/A	13	N/A
Volunteer Police Cadets	N/A	117	N/A	16	N/A
Total	83	501	131	297	214

*Girls' Brigade figures are discussed further in section 3.3.3.

The process for establishing new units was described by central staff as multi-faceted and UYOs deployed a range of methods

and techniques for deciding where these units will be located. Typically, UYO's made data-driven decisions by leveraging data from various sources such as waiting lists or annual censuses to identify areas with the highest demand for new units. Data was then used to assess geographical gaps and prioritise those areas with the largest waiting lists.

Central staff interviewed described collaborative efforts with local adult leaders to create regional growth plans based on regional data. They worked together to identify promising locations for a new unit and assessed the potential success by analysing local demographics and available resources. For example, in their monitoring report, Volunteer Police Cadets had made significant progress in establishing new units by creating more places for young people. Their efforts were noted especially in underperforming areas, indicating a strategic focus on expanding outreach to underserved demographics.

“We have a pipeline. We take data from the annual census which tells us where the waiting lists are, then a local growth leader would develop a growth plan from looking at the macro-level to a regional breakdown. It starts with having a waiting list to this group that has opened and will be sustainable to considering opening a new unit through discussions with that growth officer.”

(Central staff, Scouts)

Central staff explained that in the process of planning to open a new unit, it was crucial to engage with the community, leverage existing networks, and secure buy-in from the wider district leadership teams.

Community engagement strategies entailed reaching out to local schools, gauging potential volunteer interest and sense-checking community support to be able to open a successful

unit. Areas with existing networks were often prioritised as they provided a better foundation for both establishing and sustaining units. Leveraging current links with communities and institutions like schools, churches, or affiliated organisations (like police stations or adult volunteer centres) also worked to enhance future operational success. Central staff reported that creating a new group in areas with fewer existing connections poses challenges, as it often feels like starting from scratch. Furthermore, recruiting suitable volunteers in these locations can be particularly difficult.

“To get a new unit open, we need wider district support which is usually the district leadership team, because they need to be committed to creating new units in that area. We identify geographical gaps and check the waiting lists across the area in the nearest units. We check whether there are schools in the area and how many schools there are to understand interest and get in touch with schools to get information out in the community and how feasible it will be to have volunteers.”

(Central staff, St John Ambulance)

“Things that have worked very well is where we have strong existing networks, particularly in urban areas where we have a high density of units already. We can borrow or use leaders from other units or if we have good links with the community. It makes a huge difference in providing a base for those young people to be at.”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

Using data held by central staff, UYO's are able to continuously

ensure that there are enough volunteers and resources by assessing existing capacity within community networks. Both local stakeholders and central staff outlined the importance of volunteer coordination to guarantee that there are enough skilled leaders able to support and maintain new units and actively worked to foster a culture of volunteerism and resource sharing between units where possible. A volunteer in a new Scouts unit explained that the unit was created to respond to local demand as another unit was at capacity.

This volunteer highlighted the success of targeted volunteer recruitment, emphasising the importance of being selective with regards to how many new leaders were recruited in tandem with new members.

“We have to tread carefully because we have to work in line with volunteer ability and allow them time to settle into their role and feel competent and safe in what they’re doing. There’s no point having three completely new leaders with 24 new kids. That would be unsafe.”

(Volunteer, Scouts)

Stakeholders also outlined ways in which UYO's have used the funding to refresh their digital platforms and streamline processes for recruiting and onboarding volunteers and used funding to upskill volunteers in social media and marketing to assist with recruiting young people.

“One group brought in a new management system that makes the whole process a lot easier to onboard people and makes it easier to retain them so in terms of the funding, it has helped to create places but also allow the uniformed youth organisations to review their existing processes a lot better.”

(Fund delivery stakeholder)

Stakeholders reported that a critical enabler in the creation of new units was having a strong people infrastructure. However, they recognised that volunteer recruitment and short funding timelines will continue to pose challenges.

Filling new places at newly created units was also reported as a challenge for those in the most deprived areas, attributed to a lack of pre-existing connections in these areas, diverging perceptions of UYOs and the need to build awareness from scratch. They suggested that increased community engagement and targeted outreach strategies were potential ways to address these challenges. Some UYOs, such as the Scouts, were referenced as one organisation which has more successfully faced this challenge due to their wider reach and being able to share learnings with smaller UYOs.

“Scouts have been able to set up in more deprived areas because of the reach they have and they have shared learnings with smaller groups. Of all the organisations, they’ve been doing much more like online advertising, social media marketing and spend of advertising.”

(Fund delivery stakeholder)

3.3.2 Expanding capacity

The Fund set out an original target to create over 23,000 new places for young people aged 10-18. Throughout each year of the fund’s delivery, discussions between Groundwork and UYOs led to adjustments of these targets to set attainable goals for individual UYOs. As a result, a new overall target of 18,177 new places was established. However, the fund’s efforts ultimately exceeded expectations, achieving over 23,000 new places. Table 3.5 demonstrates that this updated target was exceeded

by 5,574 places and exceeded the original overall target by 751 places. UYOs delivered against their targets at different levels. The majority of UYOs met their targets with two falling slightly short. St John Ambulance had to renegotiate their target as explained below.

Table 3.5: Number of new places created across UYOs

	FY23/24 Target	FY23/24	FY24/25 Target	FY24/25	Overall Target
Boys' Brigade	700	728	800	720	1,500
Girlguiding	1,000	4,207	1,278	4,352	2,278
Girls' Brigade	120	145	285	264	405
JLGB	270	318	352	353	622
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	826	575	876	900	1,702
Scouts	2,940	4,320	4,680	3,100	7,620
St John Ambulance	1,000	950	1,800	1,152	2,800
Volunteer Police Cadets	500	750	750	907	1,250
Total	7,356	11,993	10,821	11,748	18,176

Most UYOs met or nearly met their KPI; however, some did face challenges when creating new places in FY24/25.

A UYO that did not reach their target explained that in their case, their capacity to open new spaces has not been in place as forecasted. The three main factors they cited for this were the delays in reopening volunteer recruitment following a period of restructure, implementing the new volunteer structure in practice and a lack of leadership whilst new senior volunteer role recruitment took place.

As a result, in Q4, it was no longer feasible to deliver their original target due to further impacts of the reduction in team headcount as the project came closer to an end and uncertainty driven by end of funding reduced project presence. As a result, the target was revised down and subsequently achieved.

The main facilitators in enabling the creation of new places included:

- **Community embedding**

Hiring local staff and embedding them in communities, allowing for tailored approaches and immediate addressing of local needs.

- **Existing organisation infrastructure**

Leveraging existing infrastructure such as finance and HR systems helped to support efficient establishment and management of new places.

- **Resource availability**

Providing tools like 'unit resource boxes' helped new units to get started with the necessary materials for preparing engaging youth activities.

- **Proximity and presence**

Being physically close to other units in a district aided in building relationships with volunteers and enhanced community outreach to recruit new young people to fill these places

- **Central support teams**

These teams offered consistent support, oversight and set safe-to-operate standards that empower local forces to create new places with confidence

- **Use of strategic funds**

The dedicated fund has facilitated with recruitment and training, enabling volunteers to effectively engage in community outreach and promote new unit and place openings

“The main thing that has enabled us to create new places is our presence in the district and our proximity to volunteers. We can go and meet with them and share resources to help them get established, open and engaging young people.”

(Central staff, St John Ambulance)

UYOs have also faced some barriers to creating new places. Central staff reported challenges like having sufficient budget for various kinds of advertising due to having to target different kinds of audiences in different areas (e.g. in more rural areas, not everybody visits Facebook regularly and so more traditional outlets like print media might need to be utilised), new leaders being reluctant to take on a large number of young people into a new unit because they're unsure of being fully qualified or ready to take on that responsibility or new units opening in communities where that UYO does not have a core audience to draw from.

3.3.3 Places in more deprived areas

An original intention of the Fund was to prioritise eliminating waiting lists in deprived areas (IMD 1-5 Local Authority Areas or YIF areas). Table 3.6 below illustrates that by FY24/25, 13,396 new places were created in these areas. Across all UYOs, the

proportion of new places created in these areas was 56%, though some UYOs were more successful at targeting these areas than others. For example, Girls' Brigade ensured that 100% of their new places were in IMD 1 to 5, as they remain "strategically committed to making a positive difference to lives of children in deprived areas". Marine Society and Sea Cadets (69%) and The Scouts (66%) also created significantly more places in IMD areas 1 to 5 relative to all new places created.

Table 3.6: Number of new places created in IMD 1-5 across UYOs

	Places in 1-5 IMD & YIF areas	All new places created	Proportion in 1 to 5 IMD & YIF areas	
Boys' Brigade	771	1,448	53%	
Girlguiding	4,052	8,559	47%	
Girls' Brigade	409	409	100%	
JLGB		248	671	37%
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	1,025	1,475	69%	
Scouts	4,900	7,420	66%	
St John Ambulance	1,162	2,102	55%	
Volunteer Police Cadets	829	1,657	50%	
Total	13,396	23,741	56%	

Fund delivery stakeholders explained that although there was a focus on more deprived areas, the Fund was not limited to only these places, so variations between each UYO is in line with expectations. However, they felt that more places had been created in lower IMD areas than across the whole Fund, which is borne out in the reality seen in the table above.

“I think the objective of the Fund was always to prioritise in lower IMD areas, but that didn’t exclude creating places in higher IMD areas. So, in that sense, the Fund has probably delivered as it set out to based on how the waiting lists were at the time and the proportion of funding available.”

(Fund delivery stakeholder)

It was noted by central staff at some UYOs that many of their units are already located in deprived areas, indicating a natural alignment with community needs. A central staff member from Marine Society and Sea Cadets outlined that they already have representation in these areas and as part of the Fund, created hotspots based on IMD maps and tried to hire people who were loosely based nearby so that they could create more units and spaces in these locations.

Although Girls’ Brigade did not focus on creating new units, they have successfully created 100% of their new places in IMD areas 1-5. The UYO had a clear strategic intent to focus on areas of deprivation where safe and secure youth provision would make a noticeable difference, and where it is challenging for young people to afford the fees. They have faced challenges with recruiting youth leaders in these areas but have revised role descriptions, introduced role sharing, arranged volunteer rotas and stressed the importance of a leadership team, rather than one individual, to tackle this. Their success also builds on their understanding of parents and carers’ needs in deprived areas

and adapting their marketing. A central staff member described how there often is a 'latent demand' due to parents being under time pressure and not necessarily interested in placing their child on a waiting list.

“Because parents and carers living in IMD1-5 areas tend to be even more pressed for time than people in wealthier areas due to having to work extended hours and often juggle two or three jobs to make ends meet, we often find “latent demand” rather than formal waiting lists. People often don’t have the time to do their research and place their children on a waiting list for a uniformed youth group, but they do respond to proactive and targeted adverts on social media. We have also learned about the importance of mapping of local community assets to support this work.”

(Central staff, Girls' Brigade)

For other UYOs there are other external challenges to creating places in the most deprived areas. For example, JLGB outlined that Jewish faith areas are the priority consideration rather than areas of deprivation as groups cannot exist if there is no Jewish community. There are, however, communication strategies in place to actively attract young people from more deprived areas and central staff outlined that money should never be a barrier to engagement in a group. Volunteer Police Cadets too outlined that there may be a difference in reception to the police in different communities and that there are some areas where both young people and adult families want little interaction with the police force.

Creating a new unit in a new place, deprived or not, can present a challenge because there are a lot of unknowns. It is difficult for a UYO to anticipate these challenges if they are not active in that community and understand the barriers to participation in that particular location. But the funding has seen an increase in the

number of young people from deprived areas taking part and allowed UYO's to have broader reach and talk to communities for the first time.

“We have seen an increase in the number of young people from deprived areas and those who have SEN or are neurodivergent. Directly through the Fund, we’ve been able to go out and talk to those communities and reach those people for the first time, they’ve been able to join, and that has been really wonderful.”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

3.3.4 Waiting lists

We have covered how UYO's went about creating new places and units alongside expanding capacity at existing units, both with an intention to focus the creation of these new places in more deprived areas. A separate but co-existing original intention of the Fund was to reduce the size of waiting lists by building this capacity. However, what was found to happen in reality was that despite increasing capacity at new and existing units, the size of waiting lists did not typically reduce, and in many cases, continued to grow. This is partially because creating new places in new areas does not increase provision for young people already on waiting lists. Promotional activities led by UYO's as part of this fund also contributed to them receiving more requests and increasing existing waiting lists.

Central staff at UYO's reported that DCMS were adaptable and flexible to this being a key requirement of the Fund and as waiting lists did not decrease entering the third year of the Fund, they felt appreciative that DCMS no longer required them to report on the sizes of their waiting lists. The process by which this information was fed back to DCMS was also felt to have worked well, with UYO's communicating with Groundwork their inability to reduce waiting lists for a variety of reasons and both

YUF and Groundwork feeding the story on the ground back to DCMS.

The growth of waiting lists overall, despite efforts to reduce them, can be attributed to several factors:

- **Increased demand**

UYOs reported that post-Covid, there was a heightened interest in outdoor and uniformed youth activities more generally, driven by a desire for young people to engage in safe, structured environments outside the home. An increase in demand may naturally lead to longer waiting lists.

- **High-profile visibility**

Engagements in high profile events and increasing media exposure (in many cases through the use of the Fund), have significantly increased the profile of UYOs, boosting interest and applications.

- **Continual growth**

Even though new units and expanding existing old units might appear at first glance like it would reduce waiting lists, the success of these groups and recruiting volunteers to run these groups successfully, led to positive recommendations from other young people who attended, and created a cycle of more young people wanting to join.

- **Local management of waiting lists**

Prior to receiving funding, and in some cases now still (for example, Girls' Brigade), many waiting lists were managed locally, lacking central oversight and making comprehensive tracking more challenging. Some UYOs have used the funding to create more centralised approaches or move from anecdotal waiting lists to written documents, which although more efficient, has created greater visibility on the true extent of waiting lists.

“Waiting lists are processed locally using different approaches: Some areas may have a central person in a district looking at data and allocating resources accordingly while other areas may only have the leaders looking at who’s coming in next. Waiting lists typically get filled up right after they’re cleared which tends to mean they stay high.”

(Central staff, Girlguiding)

In some areas where UYOs have been able to successfully onboard new volunteers, waiting lists may well have reduced, but as mentioned in section 3.3.1 about opening new units, UYOs typically use these waiting lists to determine where to actually open a new unit and so they are a useful tool for UYOs to plan sustainably for the future. This is part of the reason why central staff at UYOs no longer felt it should be a key aim of the Fund.

By using the funding to promote new units and open new units in areas where there was unmet demand, central staff at all UYOs often considered waiting lists to be a necessary requirement. What was considered perhaps more important than reducing waiting lists, was engaging young people who might not have wanted to join a UYO in the past and filling the newly created spaces with young people from the targeted local areas (discussed further in section 3.4), whether that reduced the waiting list or not. Although it is true that waiting lists in some areas may well have reduced as a result of opening a new unit for young people who previously had no such opportunity to take part or by expanding an existing unit to tackle a waiting list, creating a successful and sustainable unit can lead to more young people wanting to join and the waiting list then increasing to its previous level.

In short, although the Fund has built capacity, UYOs often find themselves in a continuous situation whereby demand is always higher than what is able to be delivered. What UYOs then reported back, is that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Without

waiting lists, units are not necessarily sustainable for the future and might be forced to close should there not be demand beyond what is currently being provided, and by having a waiting list, it is implied that there is demand for them to exist in a specific location now and into the future.

“I know one of the key overriding KPIs was to reduce waiting lists and we have been able to do that in part. So, those that were on waiting lists at the beginning of the Fund have been able to get places that they wouldn’t have been able to get before. That’s great. But we’ve reached a whole group of new young people through the recruitment, through the awareness campaigns that we’ve done. So, actually, waiting lists have, in many areas, gone up because there are more parents, more young people that are aware of us than ever before that now want to join.”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

3.4 Engaging young people and filling new spaces

Alongside the number of new places created, the monitoring data outlines the number of new places filled by each UYO, as seen in Table 3.7. A total of 13,023 places had been filled by the end of FY24/25, meaning just over half of the new places created had been filled by young people. Volunteer Police Cadets, St John Ambulance and Girls’ Brigade filled the greatest proportion of new places, whereas JLGB and Girlguiding had filled less than half their new places. Marine Society and Sea Cadets had filled the least, with 17% of places filled.

Table 3.7: Number of new places filled across UYOs

	Places filled	All new places created	Proportion new places filled
Boys' Brigade	961	1,448	66%
Girlguiding	3,572	8,559	42%
Girls' Brigade	347	409	85%
JLGB	275	671	41%
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	247	1,475	17%
Scouts	4,419	7,420	60%
St John Ambulance	1,566	2,102	75%
Volunteer Police Cadets	1,636	1,657	99%
Total	13,023	23,741	55%

A stakeholder from the Fund delivery noted the slight 'discontinuity' between places that have been set up and those that were filled. They explained that building the infrastructure required to run the units (i.e. a lasting leadership team) often takes more time than creating the places themselves. The significant proportion of places not filled should not be viewed as a lack of demand or a waiting list issue, but rather as an indication of the time required to develop suitable infrastructure. Additionally, new units launched in emerging areas are unlikely to have existing waiting lists to fill the newly available places. Stakeholders expected these places to be filled over time.

UYOs had a particular focus on attracting young people from deprived areas, including those with postcodes under IMDs 1 to

5, to take up opportunities created by the Fund. Central staff and volunteers at local units reported a significantly higher than expected participation rate from young people in these areas. One member of staff from the Volunteer Police Cadets noted that they had seen an increase from a projected 25% to an actual figure of 60% of young people joining the organisation from deprived areas. The Volunteer Police Cadets' monitoring reports mentioned that significant progress had been made in creating and filling places for young people, exceeding targets, especially in underperforming areas.

Effective recruitment strategies included going to schools and communities to emphasise the benefits of joining a UYO. Notably, the Boys' Brigades concentrated their efforts in areas which lacked traditional youth engagement initiatives, while Volunteer Police Cadets promoted employability skills that young people acquire through participation. Interviewees noted that, for the first time, the Fund enabled outreach and networking to engage new audiences. These strategies were pivotal in attracting participants from targeted areas.

“Employing young people in deprived areas has been supported through promoting the potential employability skills they could learn through being a Cadet. We've been able to do that with Cadets and young people for the first time through the funding, which has been wonderful.”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

Targeted efforts were also made related to engaging older aged young people (ages 13 to 16). This group was engaged primarily through leadership and mentor roles, undertaken by various programmes led by the UYO. This approach helped to involve young people and provide them with responsibilities and skill-building opportunities, as well as potentially provide a foundation for developing these members into future youth

leaders and volunteers. For example, the Marine Society and Sea Cadets developed specific programmes to cater to the interests and skills of older youth. This involved structured activities and training to place emphasis on life skills, employability and personal development. Additionally, utilising digital platforms and social media to effectively capture the attention of older teens who were more digitally active.

“So, this year I’m a young leader...I’m leading the groups there and I’m running all the games and it’s a responsibility and JLGB has really helped me be able to manage this role.”

(Young Person, JLGB)

“I’ve done leading and had to assign roles to other people and work in the team and communicate...I’ve also learned first aid, engineering, seamanship and how to steer boats. It’s making me want to join the Navy.”

(Young Person, Marine Society and Sea Cadets)

Some UYO, such as Girls’ Brigade, have seen a notable increase of young people joining who are being homeschooled, particularly in the post-Covid 19 era. Efforts were made to reach out directly to homeschooling networks and online communities, with UYO leaders recognising the growing trend and unique needs of these young people. Some programmes and workshops were designed to integrate homeschooled youth, focusing on skills that may not be covered in their regular curriculum, such as teamwork and social engagement.

“We are seeing a greater proportion of girls who are

homeschooled, which has been a massive difference since Covid...With so many being homeschooled, it opens up new learnings, such as thoughts on friendships and social opportunities.”

(Central staff, Girls’ Brigade)

Reported by some UYOs, the funding had enabled outreach to underrepresented communities within the local areas. This was through the facilitation of changing national advertising and marketing communications to be more inclusive and representative of young people from various backgrounds with diverse needs.

For example, central staff from Volunteer Police Cadets refocused the use of imagery in their campaigns to include accessibility in policing, such as people using wheelchairs. They also crafted content suitable for young people with additional learning needs or those who were neurodivergent. These efforts broadened the scope of the programme and attracted a wider and more diverse group of young people, particularly from deprived backgrounds.

“The fund has completely unlocked all of that [changes to national branding] in ways that we didn’t expect. So, the national messaging has been able to change to be appropriate for young people. We’ve been able to have messaging that is suitable for additional learning needs or having pictures of young people in wheelchairs. When you think of policing, you maybe don’t think of accessibility issues. But we’ve been able to share that with people and we’ve seen the range of people who are joining the programme. It’s much more diverse than it was two years ago. That’s happened really, really quickly, and that’s been really, really great to see.”

(Central staff, Volunteer Police Cadets)

“She [young person] has quite severe dyslexia and dyspraxia...so what Guides has done is, first of all, made her feel really confident because she can meet girls away from an academic environment.”

(Parent of young person, Girlguiding)

Additionally, the funding also helped to support outreach initiatives, which offered programme leaders the resources to actively engage and connect with young people in the local area who may not have traditionally considered joining a UYO.

Volunteers and staff during case study visits also noted that a key factor in ensuring sustainability of units involved recruiting young people to first be members, who then can develop into becoming young leaders and volunteers themselves. In a survey of members, 33% (n=133) indicated that they were already a leader in their unit, helping to run sessions and support younger members. Another 46% (n=184) said that they would like to be a leader in their group in the future. Older participants were more likely to report having opportunities in their UYO to develop leadership skills, either through taking on additional responsibilities in their group or attending leadership training. And as previously described in the volunteer retention section, young people interviewed also indicated that their volunteers and staff served as role models, further inspiring an intention to eventually become a volunteer themselves. By creating places with dedicated volunteers, and then supporting members to develop and apply their leadership skills, UYOs support their long-term sustainability through the development of this leadership pipeline.

4. Conclusion

This process evaluation of the Uniformed Youth Fund revealed substantial achievements in creating and filling new places in UYOs across England. The Fund exceeded its primary targets, creating 23,741 new places (against a target of 18,670), establishing 798 new units, recruiting 4,984 volunteers, and training 3,301 new leaders.

UYOs implemented effective strategies for volunteer recruitment and retention, including phased recruitment approaches, targeted campaigns, community outreach, and flexible volunteering opportunities. Dedicated staff roles funded by the programme proved crucial in supporting volunteer recruitment, unit development, and organisational capacity.

The Fund successfully increased provision in areas of deprivation, with 56% of new places created in IMD 1-5 areas, addressing geographical disparities in youth provision. Some UYOs concentrated on expanding existing units in deprived areas, while others established new presence in communities where they previously had no foothold. The latter approach, while more challenging and time-intensive, created new opportunities for young people in these communities.

Diverse groups of young people were engaged through the Fund, including those from deprived areas, older teenagers through leadership roles, homeschooled children, and young people with additional needs. This inclusivity was achieved through targeted outreach and adapted marketing materials that better represented the communities being served. However, at the end of FY24/25, only 55% of created places were filled. This reflects the significant time required to establish scaling infrastructure – IT platforms, volunteer recruitment and training, venue securing – before young people could be recruited, particularly in communities where UYOs were building awareness and trust from scratch.

A significant insight emerged regarding waiting lists. Rather than

decreasing as initially expected, waiting lists often grew despite capacity expansion. This paradox reflected both increased demand following improved visibility and the operational reality that waiting lists function as important sustainability indicators for UYOs, signalling healthy ongoing demand for their services.

When asked about the biggest difference the Fund has made, many central UYO staff members spoke about how it was a 'catalyst for change' within their organisations. The changes cited included improving their volunteer experience, supporting more young volunteers, and increasing accessibility for members. However, the most noted impact was the number of new opportunities they were able to give to young people, with many reflections on increasing their offer in deprived communities.

"We've been able to support all of that existing footprint and new footprints, which has been wonderful, and see great young people come through and do great, wonderful things."

(Central UYO staff member)

The ultimate goal of the Fund was to increase these opportunities for young people in order to support their wellbeing and development of social, emotional, and practical skills. The concurrent impact evaluation^[15] found strong evidence for the positive effects of uniformed youth group participation, with a particularly strong contribution to non-cognitive outcomes such as self-confidence, teamwork and empathy, and a protective effect on wellbeing. Given the Fund's focus on expanding opportunities in deprived areas, it is particularly notable that the evidence indicates that UYO membership can be especially beneficial for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, supporting their socio-emotional development.

The evaluation also found that UYO staff and volunteers played a critical role in realising many of these outcomes. They facilitate a variety of activities and a safe and positive environment that enable young people to try new things, build confidence and deepen their social networks. Young people also developed trusted relationships with UYO staff and volunteers, who provided emotional and practical support. Staff and volunteers were also seen as role models, inspiring many to want to eventually volunteer for their UYO.

Based on these key findings, we recommend the following:

- DCMS to move away from waiting lists and their reduction being an indicator of success. Expansion of services is best measured through new units established and places created. Include realistic targets for filling places that differentiate between existing units (where waiting lists can supply members) and new areas (where community relationships must be built).
- UYOs to strike a balance between creating new units and filling places while maintaining the sustainability of existing units and places. There is a risk that prioritising the development of new units could negatively impact current ones, potentially leading to increased dropout rates among young people. It will be important to have clear records that document the establishment of new units and filled positions but also capture units closing and places re-opening.
- UYOs to incorporate impact evaluation findings into marketing materials to effectively demonstrate the benefits of UYO participation to potential members, volunteers, and community partners. Given many volunteers expressed a motivation to make a difference, the impact evaluation findings can be particularly useful for illustrating their potential impact.
- UYOs to continue to prioritise staff and volunteer development as the foundation of UYO success and positive outcomes for their members. Their recruitment, training and retention is critical to establishing and sustaining new units, particularly in previously unserved communities. Furthermore, high-quality

training and retention of volunteers is key to realising positive impacts for young people, as detailed in the separate Impact Evaluation Report. In this report, a few key mechanisms were identified as being particularly important for improving outcomes for members: creating supportive and inclusive environments, delivering varied and enjoyable activities, providing opportunities to build trusted relationships with adults and peers, and enabling members to take on leadership responsibilities. UYO may want to focus on ensuring that volunteers are provided with training and resources that enable them to deliver against these aspects of the programming well.

- Future evaluations to focus specifically on understanding what does and does not work when creating new units in deprived areas. Engaging staff and volunteers, as well as community partners and members, may be beneficial. Further research with young people would be useful for further understanding best practice for recruitment and retention. In particular, working with young people from hard-to-reach backgrounds would be essential for identifying ways to remove barriers to access.

The Fund has now been extended, and organisations have received an additional year of funding. Some of the recommendations highlighted above have already been implemented in the new Fund and its evaluation. The additional year of the evaluation will further explore issues of sustainability, particularly regarding how organisations prepare to maintain the new places past the lifetime of the Fund and tracking unit closures alongside openings. It will also further explore how UYO fill the newly created places with a particular focus on recruitment and retention strategies for hard-to-reach young people.

5. Annex

5.1 Methods

5.1.1 Evaluation framework

This table presents our evaluation questions relating to the delivery of the Fund and the data sources that will be used to answer them. Two ticks indicate that this data source will be key to answering the evaluation question, whereas one tick indicates that it will provide supporting evidence.

Table 5.1: Evaluation questions

	Delivery team and UYO staff interviews	Volunteer interviews	Interviews with young people	Case visits units,
Process evaluation				
Was the funding successful in reducing the waiting lists for uniformed youth groups and creating more places (both at new and existing groups)? This should include	Supporting Evidence	Supporting Evidence	Evidence not provided	Evide provic

a quantitative assessment of whether the waiting lists were reduced and overall capacity increased.

To what extent were created places concentrated in deprived areas?

Supporting Evidence

Supporting Evidence

Evidence not provided

Evidence provided

What types of young people took up the opportunities created by the Fund? (how young people are recruited; whether there is targeted recruitment of under-represented young people; whether nature of engagement varies by characteristics)

Supporting Evidence

Key evidence source

Evidence not provided

Supporting Evidence

How did the different uniformed

Key evidence source

Key evidence source

Evidence not provided

Supporting Evidence

youth groups
go about
eliminating
their waiting
lists? What
worked well
and what
worked less
well? How do
groups tend to
use waiting
lists?

Did the funding
improve the
long-term
sustainability
of uniformed
youth group
places?

Supporting
Evidence

Key
evidence
source

Evidence
not
provided

Evide
provic

Did the fund
improve the
recruitment
and retention
of adult
volunteers to
uniform youth
groups?

Evidence
not
provided

Key
evidence
source

Evidence
not
provided

Suppo
Evide

How was the
fund delivered
on the ground
in terms of
setting up new
groups?

Supporting
Evidence

Key
evidence
source

Evidence
not
provided

Evide
provic

How was the
fund delivered

Supporting
Evidence

Key
evidence

Evidence
not

Evide
provic

on the ground in terms of expanding capacity at existing groups?		source	provided	
What could be improved with the delivery?	Key evidence source	Key evidence source	Supporting Evidence	Evidence provided
Impact evaluation				
What was the impact of participating in uniformed youth groups on social and emotional skills, practical skills and wellbeing?	Evidence not provided	Evidence not provided	Key evidence source	Key evidence source
Did these impacts vary by the types of activities delivered?	Evidence not provided	Evidence not provided	Key evidence source	Key evidence source
What was the impact of participating in uniformed youth groups on educational attainment?	Evidence not provided	Evidence not provided	Supporting Evidence	Evidence provided

5.1.2 Case study detail

The number of interviews conducted as part of the case study visits are detailed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Interviews completed at each UYO as part of case study visit

	Staff/volunteer interviews	Young people interviews
Boys' Brigade	3	6
Girls' Brigade	6	5
Girlguiding	6	6
JLGB	5	5
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	2	8
Scouts	3	5
St John Ambulance	3	5
Volunteer Police Cadets	6	5
Totals	34	45

5.1.3 Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) was engaged across seven workshops to provide feedback on multiple aspects of the evaluation including the overarching ToC, survey questions, best practice for interviewing young people and disseminating findings. The objectives and findings from each of the workshops are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Youth Advisory Board workshop objectives and findings

Workshop number	Format	Number of Attendees	Timing	Objectives
Workshop One	In-Person	8 young people	June 2023	The first workshop was held in person in London, aiming to familiarise everyone with each other and the evaluation. In this workshop board members were given information about the evaluation and their role, shared their intentions and hopes, as well as an opportunity to get to know one another. In July, Dartington held an online catch-up session with four board

members who were unable to attend the in-person session.

Workshop two	Online	8 young people	July 2023	The second workshop invited the board to review the revised ToC for the evaluation in terms of language, structure, and relevance to young peoples' experiences. The YAB members also delivered presentations about their UYO to the group.
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Workshop three	Online	9 young people	July 2023	The workshop was set to review quantitative outcomes measurement tools to collect data for the impact evaluation. To
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align with the
survey
development
the board
contributed
some survey
design
principles,
tested the
YPS (Young
People's
Survey
created by the
Centre for
Youth Impact
questions, and
suggested
areas for
measurement
in the survey
that they
thought would
reveal the
impact UYOs
have on
members.

Workshop four	Online	10 young people	September 2023	The workshop was planned to take place in August 2023 but was delayed to September. I focused on interview deployment plans and suggested interview questions.
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Workshop five	Online	7 Young people	April 2024	This worksho was originally planned for February 202 to focus on interpretation:
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of data
collected from
surveys and
interviews,
which would
feed into the
interim report
However,
because of a
change in the
method for the
survey and an
extension to
the survey
window, early
insights from
the survey
were included
and the
workshop
focused on
reviewing and
testing the
topic guides
for the next
round of
interviews with
young people

Workshop six	Online	7 young people	November 2024	The timing of this workshop was adjusted to fit in with th completion of the analysis c round 1 of the interviews wit the young
-----------------	--------	-------------------	------------------	---

people for the impact evaluation. The workshop sought to sense check the findings of the analysis with the YAB focusing on understanding what resonated with them, what they found surprising, what did not seem correct and what they thought might be missing. These questions were explored for each of the contribution claims and the alternative explanations.

Workshop
seven

Online

7 young
people

April 2025

This worksho
was timed to

coincide with the completion of the contribution analysis of the young people interviews following the second round of interviews. There were a number of questions and points of clarification arising from the contribution analysis so the workshop was designed to focus on conducting sense-making of the contribution analysis findings and exploring those areas where further information was required to more fully interpret and contextualise the findings. Time was also

given to
discussion of
how young
people might
most usefully
engage with
the evaluation
to inform the
design of
young person
focused
outputs.
Finally, the
planning
process was
initiated for a
final
celebration
event for the
YAB.

5.1.4 Surveys with young people

Two rounds of surveys of young people were conducted, which was the primary data collection for the QED. The survey group included both young people in UYOs (the ‘treated’ group) and those who were not (the ‘untreated’ comparison group).

Recruitment and administration

The ‘treated’ respondents were recruited via central staff teams of UYOs who directed parents to an online consent form. Parents provided their consent and facilitated their child(ren)’s access to the survey invitation. The comparison group was recruited via a random sample of young people in the National Pupil Database (NPD). Letters were posted to parents, which asked them to pass the survey link onto their child if they were happy for them to take part.

The survey included a question for all participants about whether they were a member of a UYO and which one. If a respondent indicated they were part of any UYO (regardless of whether it was receiving funding), they were included in the ‘treatment’ group.[\[16\]](#) Survey respondents were aged 10 to 18 at the point of recruitment in the 2022/23 school year in line with the Fund aims.

Surveys were administered at two points in order to capture changes in experience and outcomes over time – Wave 1 was February – April 2024 and Wave 2 was November 2024 – January 2025. For our analysis in this report, we only included those respondents who completed both surveys, which gave us a total sample of 1,179 young people - 34% (n=406) in the treated group and 66% (n=773) in the comparison group.

Respondent demographics

Tables 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 show the breakdown of demographics across the analysed sample, UYO members and the comparison group.^[17] The sample's average age was approximately 15, ranging from 10 to 19. Girls comprised about 57% of the sample. Individuals of White ethnicity constituted approximately 75% of the sample. The sample included 43% of participants who lived in an area of high deprivation (IMD 1-5 areas have higher levels of deprivation).

Table 5.4: Survey sample characteristics – gender, age, ethnicity and IMD Decile

		Total	UYO Member	Non-UYO Member
Gender (n=1143)	Girl or Woman	57%	53%	60%
	Boy or man	39%	41%	38%
	Non-binary	1%	1%	0%
Age (n=1118)	10-14	38%	46%	34%
	15-18	62%	54%	66%
Ethnicity(n=1179)	White	75%	86%	70%
	Asian or Asian British	11%	6%	14%
	Black, Black British, African or Caribbean	5%	3%	7%
	Mixed or multiple ethnic	5%	3%	6%

	groups			
	Other ethnic group	2%	1%	3%
IMD Decile (n=1107)	1-5	43%	41%	43%
	6 to 10	57%	59%	57%

Table 5.5: Survey sample characteristics - region[\[18\]](#)

		Total	UYO Member	Non-UYO Member
Region (n=1178)	East England	10%	10%	10%
	East Midlands	9%	10%	8%
	Greater London	11%	9%	12%
	North East	8%	9%	8%
	North West	11%	12%	10%
	South East	11%	9%	11%
	South West	10%	6%	14%
	West Midlands	9%	10%	8%
	Scotland	0%	1%	0%
	Wales	1%	1%	1%
	Prefer not	20%	17%	22%

to say

Table 5.6: Sample distribution by UYO

Uniformed Youth Organisation	Total
Boys' Brigade	2%
Girlguiding	11%
Girls' Brigade	4%
JLGB	1%
Scouts	31%
Marine Society and Sea Cadets	14%
St John Ambulance	22%
Volunteer Police Cadets	5%
Royal Air Force Cadets	4%
Army Cadets	3%
Combined Cadet Force	2%
Fire Cadets	1%

Content

The survey included questions to assess differences in outcomes between the two groups. The outcomes assessed included:

- wellbeing, assessed using the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) scale for measuring personal wellbeing, known as the ONS4;[\[19\]](#)
- resilience, assessed using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS),

[\[20\]](#) which measures an individual's ability to recover from stress and adversity;

- socio-emotional skills, assessed using selected statements from the Young People's Survey (YPS);[\[21\]](#)
- community engagement and belonging, assessed using three distinct self-report items focused on collective efficacy, self-efficacy for community action, and community connectedness.

It also included questions about other groups and activities the young people take part in. For the treated group, there were questions about length of time in their UYO, frequency of attendance, and activities undertaken in their UYO. For further detail on the survey, please see the Uniformed Youth Fund: Impact evaluation report.

5.1.5 Interviews with young people

In-depth interviews were conducted with young people in UYOs that received funding. A longitudinal interview design was employed with 36 participants to capture changes over time. The two rounds of interviews were conducted in May/June 2024 and November/December 2024, resulting in 67 data interactions. Participants were sampled from the survey respondents who consented to being contacted about the interviews. The primary sampling criterion was UYO, aiming for four members from each. Recruitment also aimed to achieve balance in region, age, and gender. Details on the interviewed sample are presented in Table 5.7.

The interviews used two age-appropriate semi-structured topic guides, one for 10-14-year-olds and another for 15-18-year-olds. The topic guides were informed by the YAB and findings from the case studies. Questions focused on how being a member of their respective UYO had influenced their confidence levels, wellbeing, mental health, social skills, practical skills, and opportunities. The guides also explored how and in what ways these changes had taken place (i.e. the key causal mechanisms), and the extent to which these changes were a

direct result of UYO membership. For more detail on the interviews with young people, please see the Uniformed Youth Fund: Impact evaluation report.

Table 5.7: Interview sample characteristics – UYO, gender, and age

		Interview 1	Interview 2
UYO	Marine Society and Sea Cadets	5	5
	Scouts	6	5
	JLGB	3	3
	St John Ambulance	4	3
	Girlguiding	6	6
	Boys' Brigade	3	2
	Volunteer Police Cadets	5	3
	Girls' Brigade	4	4
Gender	Girl	19	17
	Boy	15	12
Non-binary or gender questioning	2	2	
Age	10-12	14	13
	13-15	10	8

	16-18	12	10
Total	36	31	

[1] [Read the impact evaluation.](#)

[2] [Read the impact report.](#)

[3] HM government. (2022). [Levelling up the United Kingdom](#) HH Associates Ltd.

[4] Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2022). Uniformed Youth Fund business case [not published]

[5] Prince's Trust. (January 2021). [Prince's Trust Tesco Youth Index 2021.](#)

[6] DCMS and New Economics Foundation (2016). [A description of social action.](#) DCMS.

[7] Family, Kids and Youth. (2015): [Evaluation of the Social Action Journey Fund.](#)

[8] Youth United Foundation. (2018). [Social integration: The role of uniformed youth groups.](#)

[9] This target was later revised to 18,177, which is explained further in section 3.3.2.

[10] DCMS. (2023). [Youth Investment Fund \(YIF\) – places section methodology.](#)

[11] 3 interviews were conducted with one UYO

[12] [Scouts Annual Report 2021/22.](#)

[13] [JLGB Annual Report 2021/22.](#)

[14] Revised to 2100 places in FY24/25

[15] Placeholder for link/citation for impact evaluation.

[16] Participation in UYOs varied between the two survey waves, meaning some participants started or stopped being UYO members. The analysis in this report focuses on participants who were current UYO members at wave 2. The research team also extensively cleaned the dataset to appropriately code any 'other' responses to either treatment or comparison groups.

[17] Some characteristics have missing data for certain individuals, so the total for some demographic characteristics does not equal 1,179 or 100%.

[18] The Fund was focused on England only, however, a small number of participants from Scotland and Wales were identified in the sample using postcode data. This is likely the result of groups near borders such that some young people cross borders to attend their group.

[19] [Personal well-being user guidance](#).

[20] Smith, B. et al, (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the Ability to Bounce Back. International journal of behavioral medicine. 15. 194-200.

[21] [Young People's Survey \(YPS\)](#).

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