

# UK Shared Prosperity Fund

## Consultation on Support for young Londoners intervention

Summary of responses

March – May 2023



Funded by  
UK Government

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— UP —**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. UKSPF background

In April 2022 the UK government launched the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills up to March 2025.

The Greater London Authority (GLA) is the lead authority for London's UKSPF allocation and has set out how the fund will be used across the three investment priorities within its UKSPF Investment Plan.<sup>1</sup>

Of the GLA's allocation, £38.1m is being invested in the UKSPF People and Skills investment priority, which will help reduce the barriers some people face to employment and support them to move towards employment and education, supporting local growth. This will focus on supporting economically inactive Londoners and supporting young Londoners.

The People and Skills funding will replace the European Social Fund (ESF), which is due to end on 31 December 2023. ESF and UKSPF are different programmes, with different priorities, different requirements, and less funding available under UKSPF.<sup>2</sup> UKSPF funds must be spent by March 2025, and the Government is yet to announce plans for future years' funding.

### Supporting young Londoners intervention

As set out in the Investment Plan, the GLA intends to allocate £13.1m to support around 6,500 young people through a bespoke intervention, to be led by the Mayor of London. This investment will support unemployed and economically inactive young people into employment, education and training outcomes.

- Around two-thirds will focus on commissioning employment support programmes for young Londoners aged 16-24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Following the consultation, the intention is to commission two types of programmes; a universal employability skills programme, and a more targeted and holistic programme to meet the needs of young people further away from the labour market.
- The remaining funding will be utilised for the expansion of Careers Hubs, and the commissioning of additional work experience provision for young people who are studying in education (students), who are aged 16+ and at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training).

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<sup>1</sup> [UK Shared Prosperity Fund | London City Hall](#)

<sup>2</sup> For the 2014-20 funding cycle, London received an allocation of £433m ESF.

To help inform the focus and programme design of UKSPF provision for young people in London, the Mayor conducted a public consultation between March and May 2023 with a range of stakeholders including skills and training providers, local authorities, schools, colleges, business representatives, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and young people who have experience of being NEET or face other forms of disadvantage. This report summarises the consultation findings, and we encourage prospective providers to use these findings to support the development of high-quality proposals that directly meet the needs of young people.

### **1.2. Consultation methodology**

The consultation consisted of two phases.

#### **Phase 1**

Desk research was conducted into the current skills and employment support landscape for young people: mapping provision, analysing labour market data and conducting a literature review. See Annex A for examples of recent studies relating to supporting young people who are NEET. Scoping conversations were then carried out with three employment support organisations working with young people to cross reference the findings with factors relating to programme delivery. Through this process, the following consultation themes were identified:

- A. Outreach, engagement, and retention of young people
- B. Providing tailored support for young people
- C. Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) / Work experience
- D. Outcomes and destinations
- E. Programme commissioning, payment, and delivery models

## Phase 2

A range of stakeholder groups were consulted between April – May 2023 to gather a wide variety of views and perspectives relating to the consultation themes. These were conducted through a variety of methods including interviews, surveys, focus groups, workshops, and roundtable discussions.

Stakeholder group	Details of engagement	No. Engaged
Employment support and skills sector stakeholders	Representatives from a variety of organisations attended consultation forums, mostly remotely. These included both large and small employment support and skills providers, voluntary and community sector organisations, youth specialist organisations, ESF providers delivering youth and NEET contracts, the London Care Leavers Compact, and the Mayor’s Skills for Londoners Board.	114
Local authorities	London Councils surveyed London local authorities (with 12 responses) and held two online workshops via the Central London Forward and West London Alliance subregional partnerships.	30
Business representatives	These included representatives from the Jobs and Skills Business Partnership, a small to medium enterprise (SME) sourced through the Mayor’s Good Work Standard programme and the business network Business in the Community.	5
Young people	<p>An estimated 77 young people were consulted via support organisations through a variety of methods including surveys and workshops. They were aged 15-24 from across London. The following groups were included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GLA Peer Outreach Workers (POWs) helped design and deliver parts of the consultation</li> <li>• POWs conducted street interviews with 25 young people aged 15-21 from a range of backgrounds (including refugee background and SEND)</li> <li>• the Young People’s Action Group (YPAG) from the GLA Violence Reduction Unit</li> <li>• young people with care experience</li> <li>• emotional support peer-researchers with a variety of experiences including disability, LGBTQ+ or low-income household</li> <li>• young people who are NEET and engaged in employment support, some of whom have special educational needs, low educational attainment, or are disabled.</li> </ul>	77

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• young people who have served a custodial sentence</li> </ul>	
Schools and college CIAG leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A questionnaire was sent to schools and colleges career leaders/careers advisers and headteachers</li> <li>• Feedback was collected through four sub-regional careers hubs</li> <li>• Feedback was collected from schools and colleges through career cluster activity and via ten careers cluster projects.</li> </ul>	107
<b>Total number of stakeholders engaged</b>		<b>333</b>

This report combines key findings from each of the stakeholder groups under the identified consultation themes.

## 2. Cross-cutting themes and conclusions

The following conclusions relate to cross-cutting themes that emerged throughout the consultation response, review of ESF evaluations and evidence review. These conclusions have been used to inform the programme and commissioning design for the UKSPF youth strand. The GLA recommends that employment support providers consider the learnings from this consultation and embed them in their programme design. The full consultation response summary can be found in Section 4.

### 2.1. Outreach and engagement of young people

#### Key findings

- Young people want to understand how they would benefit from the programme before joining. This means knowing whether the programme offers incentives, paid opportunities, employer connections, tailored support, and other similar information. Seeing testimonials from past participants and hearing from peer outreach workers with similar backgrounds would be an effective draw.

- Programmes should advertise where young people already spend time. This means youth groups, community centres, tube stations, barbershops, cafes, and other similar spaces. It also means using popular social media channels such as Tik-Tok to reach those who are NEET.
- To encourage sustainment on a programme, it is essential to engage the young person's support system including Personal Advisers (PAs) for those with care experience and parents for those with SEND. Mentors should support young people to address their barriers to participation, including digital, financial, language, childcare and transportation barriers.
- Sign-up processes need to be streamlined, or the young person may lose interest and disengage. Perseverance is required and dedicated resource should be allocated on a programme to re-engage young people who have dropped out of a programme, possibly due to challenging or changing life circumstances.

#### GLA response

- The GLA recommends that providers consider the consultation feedback received from young people on effective outreach, engagement and retention methods in the development of their bids and programme design.

## **2.2. Involving lived experience**

#### Key findings

- For an employment support programme to be successful in supporting young people it must directly appeal to the young people it is trying to target. Young people should be involved in the design of programmes with their voice prioritised in establishing what they want and need to succeed. Young people should be engaged in continuous feedback which contributes to the development and evolution of the programme.

#### GLA response

- Young people have been an integral part of this consultation and will be involved in the selection process for the universal and targeted NEET programmes. The bid scoring framework will consider how well young people's perspectives will be integrated into programme delivery.

## **2.3. Mentoring and peer support**

#### Key findings

- One of the most impactful interventions for young people is to build a relationship with a trusted mentor who can offer holistic 1-to-1 support. Frontline staff should be diverse, qualified and experienced. Caseloads need to be small enough, and



targets manageable, to allow for mentors to have sufficient personalised 1-to-1 contact with the young person.

- Young people want to be treated fairly as an equal and feel that their mentor is genuinely interested in their progression. Young people want peer support or peer mentoring, where they can connect with other young people who have shared experiences or backgrounds. Through emerging research and review of the ESF evaluations, it is clear there is a huge demand for peer support, and yet this a hugely under-utilised tool in employment support for young people.

#### GLA response

- The GLA recognises mentoring as a trusting, purposeful and ongoing relationship between a younger person or people, and a person they are not related to. It involves the exchange of support, advice, encouragement, and skills development. Mentoring is based around personal need and delivered through strong trusted relationships. The universal and targeted NEET programmes will embed 1-to-1 mentoring into their delivery models. The GLA will share best practise with bidders through the New Deal for Young People Mentoring Quality Framework. The GLA will also encourage peer-mentoring as a feature of programmes where achievable within the timeframes.

## **2.4. Barriers to participation and wraparound support**

#### Key findings

- Holistic, personalised approaches tailored to the needs of young people are most effective. Young people entering an employment support programme may have needs relating to mental health, learning difficulties, housing, substance dependency, and would therefore require wraparound support to engage with employability support and achieve progress or positive outcomes.
- Young people said they would be motivated to engage in a programme if they developed a plan with their mentor which included achievable mini goals leading to long-term goals so they would have something to work towards, know what to expect from the programme and see tangible progress. Goal setting should be led by the young person, and plans should incorporate elements of wraparound support informed by a needs assessment.
- Financial and practical barriers to participation can include accessibility, housing, transport, mental and physical health, language and literacy needs, clothing, food, digital, familial support.

#### GLA response

- Providers are encouraged to consider how they will provide wraparound support to meet the unique needs of young people participating in their programme, how these needs will be assessed and barriers to participation, progression or employment, education and training (EET) addressed. Both targeted and universal NEET programmes will require individual personalised progress plans to be developed in partnership with the young person.
- The targeted NEET programme will support holistic models where there is adequate time and resource allocated to work with young people who are furthest from the labour market.

## **2.5. Work experience**

### Key findings

- Young people generally want work experience opportunities as it presents a way to explore career interests, experience the world of work, build confidence and network. However, schools and providers struggle to identify good quality work experience opportunities, and young people often cannot afford to participate in them, or the opportunities are not flexible enough. At a minimum, a stipend for lunch, travel and clothing (if necessary) should be provided. Where possible, employers should pay young people for participating in work experience and explore vouchers and stipends where this would impact household benefits.

### GLA response

- The GLA has considered the consultation findings in their development of the Careers and Work Experience programmes, for example, specifying quality measures that must be in place when delivering work experience to ensure future careers interests of students are considered. Agreed learning objectives must also be set out prior to the work experience and a review of learning and personal development gained as a result of work experience.
- Providers should make provision in their project budget for costs related to travel, subsistence, equipment etc., that may be required, for the student to take part in work experience placements.

## **2.6. Employer engagement**

### Key findings

- Employer engagement is key to achieving positive employment, education and training (EET) outcomes as it exposes young people to employers and vice-versa through careers education, mentoring, work experience, internships and job

interviews. Employers may not have the knowledge, capacity or willingness to meet the needs of young people who are NEET and provide holistic pastoral support.

- Young people interviewed through the ‘detached’ research work generally felt distrust of employers, with fear of being exploited or discriminated against. Pre-employment knowledge and training is necessary to prepare young people for the world of work, including knowing their employment rights and entitlements.
- Many young people expressed frustration at only being offered roles that were low-skill, low-paying and not within their areas of interest, for example hospitality and retail roles. Young people want to explore a wider range of career opportunities relating to their interest and ambition, and to connect with employers in a range of sectors.

#### GLA response

- Employers should be integral to providers’ bid development so that programmes can help address skills shortages and identify opportunities in growth sectors.
- Programme pathways and opportunities should be provided that align with labour market demand and young people’s aspirations, for example growth sectors such as digital, green and creative.
- In partnerships between providers and employers, work should be done to map out the pathway of a young person, develop a shared understanding of the challenges young people face, clarify the responsibility of each partner, and broker live opportunities.

## **2.7. Partnerships with VCS, youth organisations and local authorities**

#### Key findings

- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, grassroots organisations and youth specialists such as youth centres and youth workers have excellent links to the young people in their communities, and have the relationships, trust, skills and expertise to provide them with holistic support.
- Local authorities hold extensive data on young people who are NEET, have relationships with schools, social care systems and local youth services, and form an integral part of the ecosystem supporting young people who are NEET.

#### GLA response

- VCS organisations should be involved in partnerships and consortia from the beginning and be properly funded for their involvement. The targeted NEET programme will provide the opportunity for more specialist and grassroots organisations to bid for funding.
- Local authorities should be engaged in partnerships early on in programme development, and referral pathways developed.

## **2.8. Measuring distance travelled**

### Key findings

- The focus of past NEET projects on EET outcomes does not acknowledge the various barriers faced by many young people who are NEET, the significance of incremental milestones on a young person's career journey, or the intensive support which mentors provide to support that young person to enable them to participate in the programme. The 'distance travelled' for that young person is equally important, particularly in a project which will run for only one year and should be measured and rewarded accordingly.

### GLA response

- The GLA has committed to recognising the importance of inputs and softer or social outcomes, and this has been reflected in the project requirements for both universal and targeted programmes. The targeted NEET programme will reward these outcomes.

## **2.9. In-work support**

### Key finding

- To sustain an EET outcome, young people who are NEET are likely to require wraparound in-work support from their mentor and would also benefit from pastoral support or a 'buddy' at their new place of work or education. The mentor may be required to advocate to the employer on behalf of a young person who may face difficulty in their new role, to build common understanding. Without in-work support, young people may disengage due to various reasons, and this would have a detrimental impact on their confidence and future chances, risking a continued cycle of programme disengagement and inactivity.

### GLA response

- Recognising that UKSPF projects are only for one year, the GLA is not expecting sustained outcomes for all participants, but is encouraging providers to deliver in-work support for all EET outcomes where feasible, for a minimum of three months.

## **2.10. Payment, eligibility and evidence requirements**

### Key findings

- When a young person joins a programme, there is often a lengthy process of paperwork without any meaningful activity which can result in participant drop-out. Sign-up and referral processes should be quick and user-friendly, with demonstrable progress and results.
- More flexibility in eligibility and programme delivery models, and more light touch reporting and evidence requirements, would allow providers to deliver a more personalised programme of support, responding to the needs of every young person and devoting more time to frontline delivery and building partnerships. Programmes should facilitate cross-borough referrals to avoid a 'post-code lottery' for certain provision.

### GLA response

- Where possible the GLA has considered these findings when developing commissioning, reporting and programme management models, resulting in lighter-touch administrative and reporting requirements than past programmes. The GLA expects projects to establish mechanisms to support cross-borough referrals between projects operating in different grant package areas.

## **2.11. Early interventions for pre-NEET students**

### Key finding

- For young people at risk of becoming NEET, early intervention is key before the age of 15. A preventative approach as part of a long-term strategy is most impactful and cost-effective.

### GLA response

- UKSPF People & Skills funding is aimed at unemployed and economically inactive people, aged 16+, so there are limitations on the support that can be provided here. The GLA has allocated funding to London's careers programmes through London's four Careers Hubs. Hubs work with local secondary schools and colleges, including specialist schools for additional educational needs and disabilities, Pupil Referral

Units and Alternative Provision. Hubs work with institutions to improve careers outcomes for all young people and to bridge the gap between employers and education. Their work includes providing more high-quality experiences with employers, amplifying apprenticeships, technical and vocational routes, target interventions for economically disadvantaged young people and connecting careers provision to the needs of local economies in order to support all young people in their best next step into a positive education, employment or training progression from education. This is delivered alongside work experience opportunities targeted at students age 16+ at higher risk of becoming NEET.

## **2.12. Acknowledging funding and time limitations**

### Key finding

- The gap between ESF ending and UKSPF beginning, and the short UKSPF funding timeframe of one year, are serious concerns for many providers. Knowledgeable and experienced staff with existing relationships and connections at local and regional levels will be forced to leave the sector, having a destabilising and adverse impact, and making the delivery of UKSPF challenging. It will be difficult to achieve meaningful sustained outcomes within one year, particularly with time spent mobilising and building relationships. Ending a programme after one year may have adverse impact on young participants who have built trust and relationships with their mentors.

### GLA response

- The GLA recognises that the gap between the end of ESF and beginning of UKSPF presents a significant funding challenge for providers and is working to bring forward delivery into the current financial year where possible. However, the GLA has committed to running an open competition for most GLA-led UKSPF activity, and this process will take several months. These programmes are unlikely to commence before January-March 2024.
- Whilst the GLA recognises that multi-year funding models are most effective in supporting this target group, UKSPF funds must be spent by March 2025, and the Government is yet to announce plans for future years funding. The GLA will build flexibility into grant agreements, so that there will be an option to extend projects if further UKSPF funding is announced and/or UKSPF is extended. This is subject to project performance, UKSPF funding rules and the discretion of the GLA.

## 3. Summary of Consultation Response

Below is a summary of the general response we received on each of the consultation themes. This includes input from all stakeholder groups. The cross-cutting themes in Section 3 emerged from analysis of the wider consultation insights, as below.

### 3.1. Outreach, engagement, and retention of young people

#### Linking provision with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

Respondents fed-back that the majority of funding is typically awarded to large organisations as primary contractors. VCS organisations, due to their existing knowledge, relationships and specialisms are often expected to contribute a significant amount of work but are given the ‘funding scraps’. This model is unsustainable for the VCS, particularly smaller, community-led or grassroots organisations, and does not build capacity amongst these organisations who can reach, engage and support young people effectively.

It was suggested that partnerships and consortia need to include VCS and grassroots organisations at bid development phase and ensure they are paid fairly.

Talent Match<sup>3</sup> was cited as a model of good practice where large organisations such as housing associations were matched with smaller organisations working in the community to engage the hardest to reach.

**“Ideally providers would collaborate for the benefit of the participants. The concept of collaboration is not a new one, but it has been hard to put into practice, particularly when the funding creates competition amongst providers.”**

#### Effective outreach methods

The views of respondents representing organisations reflected the findings of our conversations with young people. Before signing up to a programme, young people wanted to know “What’s in it for me? Is it worth my time?”, whether this was guaranteed job interviews, connections with employers, or improved employability skills. Paid incentives are a big draw, including paid work experience, paying for qualifications, and providing a travel and clothing allowance.

Respondents recognised the need to have young people’s perspectives embedded from design through to delivery. **“Programmes have to be engaging and deliver what young people want, not what we think they want.” - Provider**

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<sup>3</sup> Talent Match | The National Lottery Community Fund ([tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](http://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk))



**“Young people need to get their voices heard. They know what works for other young people. Providers need to know what careers young people want to go into – they might not be interested in what you’re even offering” - Young person**

Peer outreach was identified as a highly effective and underutilised method. Many young people agreed that hearing about programmes from other young people they can relate to would encourage them to join a programme and continue to engage. Seeing positive testimonials, and data and statistics around success rates would add credibility to the programme.

Young people suggested age-appropriate marketing through social media, particularly TikTok, Snapchat, Spotify and Instagram, as a good way to reach those who were NEET and not engaged with any support. Many young people already attend youth groups, community centres, places of worship, barbershops, gyms, sports clubs, cafes and chicken shops, and it was suggested these routes be used for outreach and engagement. Young people also suggested posters and advertisements in public places and on public transport, highlighting the key elements that young people would want from a programme. See Annex C for a poster designed by one of the young people in the consultation, which would attract them to join an employment support programme.

Young people (NEET with SEND) suggested parental engagement was an essential factor in them joining a programme, and they would need clear and concise information about what a programme would entail. They were more likely to attend a programme when a known organisation referred them and supported them to attend.

Other suggestions from young people included developing an online platform that would advertise skills and employment opportunities for young people, schools emailing opportunities to their students who are about to finish education, and providers working directly with Social Workers and Pupil Referral Units.

### **Effective engagement and retention**

Respondents indicated that it is necessary to go where young people feel comfortable and safe. This could include working directly with housing associations and local authorities or taking a flexible approach to outreach. They stressed there is not a one-size-fits-all approach that will work effectively across the range of young people.

Members of the Care Leavers Compact said that (pre-ESF ending) there is a “sea of available provision”, and the main challenge is getting young people onto these programmes and retaining them. It was acknowledged that providers don’t always have the right connections at grassroots level, and young people don’t have the confidence, motivation, resources etc. to engage with employment support programmes.



### **“Why should young people get out of their comfort zone when they’ve been let down before?” - Provider**

1-to-1 mentoring is widely recognised as the most effective format for the delivery of employment support programmes. Young people said they would be encouraged to continue in a programme where they felt respected, treated fairly as an equal and their mentor was experienced, qualified, as well as genuinely interested in their progression. Where possible, a mentor should be relatable and have a similar background and lived experience. They also discussed being able to meet other young people who had been on the programme or who had been NEET to develop friendships and community.

There were different suggestions on how employment support programmes can address the challenge of engaging and retaining young people:

- Providing life skills for ages 15-18 is an important pre-cursor to engaging with employment support. This includes knowing how to become independent, manage finances, navigate transportation, knowing what support is available and how to access it.
- Financial and practical barriers to participation need to be identified and addressed, which could include accessibility, housing, transport, mental and physical health, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs, clothing, food, digital, and/or familial support. One suggestion included implementing a laptop loan scheme to address digital exclusion. Reimbursing young people for travel still requires them to pay upfront, and this can cost up to £11.20 per day. For young people with SEND, travel funds should also cover taxi journeys as friends and family cannot always be relied on.
- The mentor needs to be persistent and keep trying to engage and encourage that young person, demonstrating reliability and investment. Text reminders for appointments can be effective. One suggestion was to allocate specific programme funding to reengage those who drop-out.
- There is often a lengthy process of paperwork without any meaningful activity which can result in drop-out. Sign-up and referral processes need to be quick and user-friendly, with demonstrable progress and results.
- Several young people said they would be motivated to keep engaging if they developed a plan with their mentor which included achievable mini goals leading to long-term goals so they would have something to work towards, know what to expect from the programme and see tangible progress. Receiving feedback from their mentor on their progress would be encouraging. Goal setting should be led by the young person.
- Young people also need time to engage properly with programmes, feel comfortable, build a relationship with their mentor and build their confidence. Feeling rushed to take opportunities puts them off and risks dropout.

- A lack of buy-in or capacity from a young person's family can be a barrier. Taking a collaborative approach with the other people and support systems in the young person's life can keep them engaged. For care leavers, working with Personal Advisers is essential as they will have existing relationships with the young person, understand their unique circumstances, and be able to identify whether a referral to employability support is appropriate.

**“Seeing the same person every week, fun activities, reaching and setting goals” - Young person**

**“Something that would encourage me to attend more appointments is having a long-term plan because it helps to see visually” - Young person**

### **The role of local authorities**

Local authorities have a statutory duty towards young people who are NEET which includes collecting information so they can be identified and given support to re-engage. Most of the local authorities engaged through the consultation are carrying out initiatives such as data sharing, early updating of school lists, tracking young people, and working with stakeholders to support young people and reduce the number who are NEET and 'Unknown'<sup>4</sup>.

Local authorities have extensive experience working with local providers supporting young people, both internal and external and as both partners and funders. Local authorities stressed the importance of providers working with the local authorities from the start. There is often a lack of engagement with local authorities during the commissioning and contracting stages even though they have key data, expertise and connections with schools and local services. The solution is for greater partnership and multi-agency approaches including local authorities to be built in from the outset.

## **3.2. Providing tailored support for young people**

### **Wraparound support**

Some local authorities felt that past programmes have not met the specific needs of young people, and that new UKSPF programmes should be genuinely designed around the needs of young people and delivered by providers with a track record of experience/expertise with client groups.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Unknown' status refers to young people who are in unknown destinations and are not being tracked by schools or local authorities.

Young people should be involved in the co-design of programmes with their voice prioritised in establishing what they want and need to succeed. However, young people who might typically engage in youth voice panels, workshops, co-design etc. are often already engaged with support, education or employment in some capacity, and do not represent the needs and views of the 'hard to reach' young people these programmes set out to engage.

**“[Providers should]...provide individual support instead of generic support. Generic support is like a diet plan, it won't work for everyone.” - Young person**

It was acknowledged that grassroots organisations and specialist organisations and services supporting young people have the skills and knowledge to engage and support young people but may not have the capacity or resource to mobilise in time to bid for UKSPF contracts. A collaborative approach to delivery should be taken to draw together the right expertise to support young people.

One of the most impactful interventions is to build a relationship with a trusted mentor who can offer holistic 1-to-1 support. Frontline staff should be diverse, qualified and experienced. Caseloads need to be small enough, and targets manageable, to allow for mentors to have sufficient personalised 1-to-1 contact with the young person.

Wraparound support should be holistic and flexible to respond to the needs of each unique young person and should support them to build life skills. Access to emotional and mental health support and support accessing secure housing are key elements that enable a young person to engage with a programme. Many young people said they wanted help finding stable accommodation as part of employment support.

The Care Leavers Compact stressed that care leavers are not a homogenous group and will have varying needs and challenges that employment support professionals may not be aware of. They may not have familial support, a financial safety net, secure housing, emotional support, etc. Improved training in understanding the needs of care leavers and practising trauma-informed approaches would be beneficial for mentors. Some innovative models which have worked well include having care leaver leads at local sports clubs providing mentoring and employability support and paying young care leavers for participating in employment support programmes.

### **What young people think a 'good' employment support programme looks like**

We asked young people what a 'good' programme of support would look and feel like to them.

When discussing the logistics of a programme, young people wanted regular and consistent appointments, an accessible and convenient location, a reasonable length (around one hour), and flexible delivery models. Many young people expressed a

preference for either hybrid or online delivery models to fit around their daily lives, and others preferred in-person meetings which feel more engaging and personal. Young people will have different preferences and appointments should be tailored to suit that individual's desires and access needs. It is important to create a safe and welcoming environment where young people feel comfortable and relaxed, as feeling pressured can have a negative effect on engagement.

With regard to programme content, young people wanted programmes to offer them:

- a greater understanding of the world of work including understanding employers, jobs, duties, benefits, contracts and term of conditions, paperwork like taxes and P60s, and their employment rights
- support to build their social skills and understand how they should act and dress in a professional setting
- help accessing the skills and training that employers want
- training opportunities and paid work experience opportunities which are relevant to their career aspirations
- connections with employers and networking opportunities
- employability skills (CVs, job search, interview skills)
- exposure to different roles and careers
- support to take an active role in their own career journey (i.e. developing the confidence to job search independently and take the initiative to apply for a role)
- skills development in public speaking, presenting, communication, confidence and professionalism
- understanding what would look good on a CV or University application, and what specific activities will open-up future career pathways
- support with personal development and growth (this point is usually overlooked but is just as important as CV and interview skills)
- support gaining driving license, support finding accommodation
- a long-term plan with achievable goals so they know where it is leading and can track their progress.

### **Support for mental health and emotional wellbeing**

In-house counselling and therapeutic support by qualified practitioners were identified as effective interventions for young people with mental health support needs. The NHS can be difficult to navigate and has long waiting lists, which can put young people off accessing support. Other suggestions included having well-being check ins with your mentor, utilising peer-support, and signposting to mental health support providers. Local authorities

suggested additional funding be made available to support young people with anxiety and mental health issues to participate in supported programmes for longer periods.

It was suggested that programme formats be adapted to meet the needs of individual young people, whether that be a home visit for an individual who can't leave their house, agreeing to online meetings instead of face to face, or running group or peer-led sessions.

## Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) / Work experience

### CIAG

Good-quality CIAG is embedded in many support programmes and organisations, however, staff knowledge, information and resources are dependent on the location of the programme, the contract, and how well it works with the local authority and other partners.

CIAG should be employer-led so that advice aligns with labour market demand and growth sectors while matching the interests of young people. Local authorities expressed the benefits of providing both vocational and academic career pathways information to education-sector professionals and parents. One large national employer in the energy industry has had over 60,000 connections with school children to date. When working in schools, they said it's easy to engage the young people who are ambitious, motivated and switched-on, but acknowledged that this activity is likely not reaching the most disadvantaged.

Young people reported a mixed experience of CIAG in schools, with some never having experienced CIAG and other having accessed a lot. They were concerned that there was more information and resources given to certain routes than others (i.e. apprenticeships, university, traditional sectors) and that schools were picking and choosing which students would be suitable for certain pathways.

Young people expressed a desire for CIAG to be more tailored to their unique circumstances, including those with SEND and from low-income backgrounds. Access to relatable positive role models in the community can have a huge impact, and role models in specific sectors can help raise aspirations. Young people would find past students coming in to talk about their career pathways relatable and impactful. Young people don't always have a good relationship with school/education so CIAG should also be available in community settings.

Young people with experience of the justice system wanted more opportunities in roles relating to business and technology. They felt that they were only exposed to low-paid and low-skilled 'leftover jobs' and wanted equal access to careers and not just jobs. They wanted a chance to show what they are capable of, and this would break the cycle of being **“trapped in a system where they end up re-offending because they haven't been given equal opportunities”** - Young person

## Pre-NEET

For young people at risk of becoming NEET, early intervention is key before the age of 15. Targeted interventions often come too late, when the young person is already disengaged or inactive. A preventative approach can be more impactful and cost-effective. More funding and resource should be invested in preventative work with students who are pre-NEET. CIAG and work experience opportunities are not enough for NEET prevention and more intensive wraparound support is required to address the complex barriers faced by many children which see them disengage from learning.

One ESF provider suggested implementing a pre-NEET programme using a social impact bond model, working across schools, identifying young people at risk and engaging with different types of non-traditional learning to prevent them from becoming NEET. This would help to enable engagement with more young people and improve chances of sustained progression.

**“Those at risk of becoming NEET usually have seriously overlapping experiences of marginalisation. So, the advice has to be as relevant as possible to their current circumstances.” - Provider**

### *Work experience*

Respondents agreed across stakeholder groups that young people need to be paid a fair liveable wage to feel motivated, valued and confident, and to be able to afford to participate in work experience and employment opportunities. While most young people want paid work experience opportunities, a minority of young people acknowledged that they would not mind doing unpaid work experience if it was good quality, fun, had clear benefits and would support them into a good career.

**“18-24-year-olds have already done work placements and traineeships in the past and don't want to do more unpaid work.” - Provider**

**“Jobs should allow work without experience because how do I get experience if no one is offering to employ without experience?” - Young person**

Business in the Community stressed the importance of providing young people with a travel, clothing and lunch allowance to address barriers to participation. Where payment would impact their personal or household benefits, they suggested alternative legal methods of payment such as an accommodation stipend or vouchers. They also stressed the importance of ESOL support when working with young migrants or refugees in work placements, alongside support to learn about UK workplace culture, and flexibility to meet their needs around childcare, immigration processes and ESOL classes.



For work experience to be impactful and effective for a young person, it needs structure, clear objectives and actions, relevance to their career goals, a buddy or mentor, and should be linked to live job opportunities or further employment support. Young people want to be given responsibility and the opportunity to gain real experience and skills. Young people (NEET with SEND) expressed that while they were nervous to begin, work experience had boosted their confidence.

### **3.3. Outcomes and destinations**

It is acknowledged achieving meaningful and sustained outcomes within a year will be challenging.

Several employment support providers suggested that for young people with complex needs, there should be an emphasis on the 'distance travelled' in their career journey, where a personal unique plan is developed with each young person, and that achievement of milestones on this plan are measured and rewarded. Several young people expressed this format would keep them focussed, motivated, and engaged.

The Care Leavers Compact highlighted that young care leavers cannot afford to do apprenticeships, and financial barriers will need to be addressed for sustained outcomes to be secured.

#### **Employer engagement**

Employer engagement is a core part of securing and sustaining employment outcomes for young people with long-term positive impacts. Their mentor should support them to overcome obstacles and engage with their employer when needed. It was suggested that regular meetings are established between employers and mentors, which would encourage the employer to be flexible to meet the needs of the young person.

Business representatives told us there is an appetite in the business community to do more, but they do not know how to get involved and they need support to do it, particularly from specialist organisations that are experienced supporting young people who are NEET. Businesses will often expect new employees to be ready-for work and can be unwilling to provide the pastoral support and flexibility required for that young person to succeed. Expectations and responsibilities should be clear on both sides of the partnership. There should be greater education for employers on the benefits of engaging with and hiring young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including providing positive case studies, presenting the 'business case', framing the conversation as positive rather than negative, and providing incentives.

Pre-employment wraparound support and essential skills training for young people is important to prepare them for the world of work. But businesses using inclusive recruitment practises also need to adapt their workplaces and culture to make sure that people from disadvantaged backgrounds can thrive – **“it’s not just about getting a foot in the door”**. The employer has a role to play in making sure their employees are safe and supported. Providers and authorities both have a role to play in developing this shared understanding.

Through establishing relationships and partnerships with businesses, providers can educate those businesses in the benefits of hiring young people, and on the pastoral support, empathy and understanding that may be required to support those young people. They can also develop initiatives like trial periods, guaranteed interviews and job carving. There are currently some excellent programmes that do not have relationships with employers or businesses, and therefore struggle to achieve employment outcomes.

The wider system and specific employment pathways should be mapped out, so the range of stakeholders including providers, VCS organisations and businesses, can understand how and where to engage young people who are further from the labour market. It is important to understand the different roles each stakeholder plays, and for there to be genuine collaboration and partnership between them.

### **How young people feel about entering employment**

Young people expressed worries about starting a first job, including self-doubt and worrying about doing something wrong. They would feel pressure to be liked and do well which would cause anxiety. They would have concerns about getting there on time, knowing the journey route, looking presentable and affording the transport/clothing.

**“Will I be good enough?” “Will they like me?” “Can I do this?”.**

They said that having a timetable in advance, knowing what paperwork would be required and having an opportunity to meet their team/have a site tour would help alleviate anxiety.

Young care leavers told us that in preparing for employment they would appreciate practical support such as pre-planning the journey and having a wake-up call on your first day. They would benefit from pre-employment support to build their confidence and motivation, and to learn how to manage money.

In preparing for the world of work, young people want to build skills such as interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, communication, decision making, maintaining a healthy work/life balance, professionalism, and money management.

Young people typically want a workplace ‘buddy’, regular 1-to-1s, skills and training opportunities to support them in their role, fair pay and the opportunity for pay increases,



an inclusive environment, and a healthy work/life balance. Most young people wanted the opportunity to keep in touch with their employment support mentor as part of in-work support.

Young people interviewed through the 'detached' research work generally felt distrust of employers, with fear of being exploited or discriminated against.

### **Digital and technological skills**

Throughout the course of the consultation, the increasing prevalence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was mentioned by a range of stakeholders. We are on the cusp of significant change in the labour market where demand, opportunities and barriers are likely to shift. It is important that employability support is agile and able respond to the changing environment, and that young people are supported to build their digital footprint (e.g. building credit, on the electoral register, registered on LinkedIn) and that employment support is linked to growth sectors in technological innovation.

## **3.4. Programme commissioning, payment and delivery models**

### **Identifying gaps in provision post-ESF**

The gap between ESF ending and UKSPF beginning is a serious worry for many providers, as is the UKSPF People and Skills allocation only being available for one year. Knowledgeable and experienced staff with existing relationships and connections at local and regional levels will be forced to leave the sector, having a destabilising and adverse impact, and making the delivery of UKSPF challenging.

ESF has been funding youth and NEET provision, including support for young people with SEND, young refugees, and other targeted programmes. Stakeholders suggested that UKSPF should be used to meet this gap with targeted programmes for young people with SEND, refugees, care leavers and those with mental health issues and housing needs. There is a need to improve marketing, communications, and the visibility of services to avoid duplication.

### **The benefits of a universal high-volume offer VS more targeted support**

Many respondents said that ahead of ESF contracts ending, London is saturated with a mandatory employment offer for young people and highlighted that a universal high-volume programme should not risk duplicating other universal offers. However, there was some agreement that both a universal offer and a more targeted support offer could work together in a complementary fashion with seamless cross-referral processes in place from

the outset to provide a range of options for young people at differing stages of their journey. **“The paperwork should follow the young person”**.

Targeted support and person-centred approaches have proven to work for young people who are NEET. Young people indicated they want an employment support programme to feel personalised and tailored to their unique circumstances. Wraparound support should be an integral element of any employment programme, providing a wide range of support through a network of in-house expertise and specialist partners. This would ensure those furthest from the labour market are in a better position to positively engage with the employment support on offer.

It's clear that both universal and more targeted NEET programmes need to feel personalised and offer a degree of wraparound support. A balance should be achieved between ensuring there is a universal support offer available to all young Londoners who are NEET, whilst also considering the gaps in specialist provision and ensuring that there is provision offered that is targeted and tailored to fill these gaps.

### **Payment and reward models**

The views presented on payment and reward models were varied.

Many employment support providers indicated that upfront payments and mobilisation fees were preferred to aid with cashflow issues. One organisation reported operating for five months in arrears which adversely impacted programme delivery.

There was agreement that one year is too short a period to achieve sustained EET outcomes for young people. This timeframe would also inhibit mobilisation and the building of meaningful relationships necessary to make the programme work. Whilst there were conflicting opinions on the benefits of a payment by results model linked to EET outcomes, several providers suggested that an outcomes payment model linked to inputs, social impact and distance travelled would be appropriate. Others suggested a mixture of revenue and payment by results, and some proposed moving away from payment by results completely.

It was noted that young people with SEND, and other young people with specific needs and barriers, can take longer to gain paid employment so there should be a reasonable adjustment of resource and funding.

Overall, there was a request that UKSPF funding be divided fairly and appropriately between the 'usual suspects' (primary contractors who are large organisations that run multiple high volume employment support contracts) and smaller, specialist organisations who can provide the tailored support necessary to achieve sustainable outcomes for those with complex needs.

## **How programme management can support innovative approaches**

Employment support providers suggested unrestricted funding and flexible delivery models were the way forward, and necessary to deliver a holistic programme of support that responds to the needs of the diverse range of young Londoners. This approach could facilitate interventions such as setting personal budgets and enabling the delivery of more intensive support to help to achieve greater and more sustainable impact for those furthest from the labour market. It was stressed that every young person is different, with varying needs, and programmes should be free to respond to those needs. The GLA should be agile and responsive in relation to programme management, allowing more flexible delivery.

There was consensus amongst providers that the UKSPF evidence requirements need to be light touch. The rigour and administrative burden that came with ESF presented a 'barrier to success' and took away from frontline work. It was suggested that moving forward, eligibility criteria and associated evidencing requirements should be relaxed - 'if a young person is NEET, then they are NEET'. UKSPF should facilitate cross-borough referrals so that the offer is accessible to all young Londoners who are NEET and seeking support.

There was a call for services and provision to be better joined-up across local authorities, providers, VCS, employers, Jobcentre Plus, etc., working together to map provision, share knowledge, build referral pathways, and avoid duplication. This would help providers to more effectively refer to services outside of their specialism. Programmes would benefit from coming together with key stakeholders ahead of a programme launch to engage in horizon scanning, coordination of services, agreement of brokerage and referrals, and to support greater collaboration.

## **4. Case study: Detached outreach work with young people in Croydon**

### **4.1. Background**

At an early consultation planning meeting, the GLA's Peer Outreach Workers (POWs) suggested the GLA undertake detached outreach work with young people who are not already engaged with support organisations. Detached outreach work involves going onto

the street and approaching individuals to interview them, without prior contact or arrangement.

On 19 May 2023 four of the Peer Outreach team, accompanied by GLA officers, went to Croydon and interviewed 25 young people aged 15 – 21, including refugees and young people with learning needs. The POWs asked them questions about their experiences, aspirations and perceptions relating to skills and employment.

When reflecting on their experiences of undertaking the detached outreach work, the POWs generally felt sad or upset about the responses due to the high proportion of interviewees that felt undervalued, forgotten, or exploited. Annex B contains a visual document they created which captures their views. In general, the detached work presented more negative results compared to the consultation activities that engaged young people who are already being supported by an organisation.

## **4.2. Research findings**

Young people felt undermined and underappreciated by employers. There was a clear sense of distrust, where young people had become disillusioned through the following issues:

- long application processes taking hours that result in rejection or no response
- unrealistic and unfair payment conditions, for example being paid every two months at a cinema job
- feeling disrespected at work due to their age
- no consideration being taken into an individual's circumstances, for example being given late night shifts on a school night
- being taken advantage of by employers due to their young age and being paid unfair wages - "I was 18 and a manager getting paid the least"
- information about their employment rights being withheld
- learning difficulties and mental health issues being misunderstood by employers, with young employees accused of being 'reckless' or 'not fulfilling duties' as a result

Some additional barriers which prevented young people from working included:

- Universal Credit is affected by working to the point where it's not worth it
- trying to balance work with school/college or university
- work experience feeling like the only route to employment, but they cannot find work experience
- feeling overstressed
- applications being difficult to complete and not having support to do them
- challenges facing young parents, particularly ones who cannot drive
- the cost of transport is prohibitive
- young people fearing discrimination based on their mental health, sexual orientation, religion and age

- difficulties for migrants to get a job, particularly with ID checks and processes. It can be easier to get a job that the young person is culturally linked to, for example being Polish and working in a Polish shop.

The young people interviewed reflected on the type of support that would help them. This included:

- the opportunity to network and connect with businesses, and gain a greater understanding of career pathways
- support, skills and advice on how to gain and sustain employment
- being treated with respect
- being given work experience opportunities.

## 5. Evaluation of ESF programmes

As part of this evidence review and consultation, we analysed the evaluation of the following ESF programmes:

- ESF 2020-32 NEET Youth Programmes (GLA co-financing organisation)
- ESF 2020-23 full programme evaluation (GLA co-financing organisation)
- ESF 'Universal' NEET employment support programmes provider evaluation surveys (ESFA co-financing organisation)
- ESF 2014-20 (Phase 1) Youth Programme (GLA European programmes management unit)

Insights and recommendations have been grouped under common themes.

1. Careers and Sectors
2. Employer engagement
3. Mentoring
4. Programme structure
5. Programme activity
6. Recruitment and referrals
7. Commissioning and programme management
8. Evidence, data collection and reporting
9. Targets and outcomes
10. Knowledge sharing and best practise

### Careers and sectors

- Some young people felt that there was not enough support in their areas of interest. These included IT and digital jobs and creative jobs. They felt that employability

support was largely targeted towards jobs in hospitality, retail or care, and therefore did not always feel appropriate for their personal ambitions and interests.

### **Employer engagement**

- It was recommended the GLA and projects continue to invest in job brokerage for the most disadvantaged. The evaluation found this was particularly effective in helping participants gain employment, as mentors could target support to a particular job role and also engage with employers to explain the participant's situation and 'advocate' for them.

### **Mentoring**

- Personalised 1-2-1 support was shown to be most effective in dealing with more hard-to-reach groups.
- A loss of key staff, particularly mentors was a challenge. Losing a mentor delayed the ability of some projects to be able to provide support until a mentor was found and time was required for mentors to build relationships.

### **Programme structure**

- A long-term flexible approach was valued, including engaging and working with people over several months to help them gain EET, building relationships and developing long-term plans. Being able to engage when it suited was valued by young people, which worked with chaotic home lives.
- The application and referral process was too slow with some young people waiting a month after initial contact for their first appointment.
- While the targeted NEET strands generally performed well, some strategic partners felt that targeted support is the most effective method of progressing NEET to EET and that the targeted strands were not specialized enough.
- It was recommended the GLA continue to invest in a mix of online and face-to-face provision. Providing ad-hoc financial support to ESF participants was beneficial in helping them access provision and outcomes e.g. interview clothing, travel funds, even renting a bicycle to travel to college.
- Through evaluation forms, some providers recommended conducting a thorough needs assessment at the outset of the contract to gain a deep understanding of the target population's challenges, barriers, and aspirations. This assessment should include demographic analysis, stakeholder consultations, and data-driven insights to inform program design and resource allocation effectively.

### **Programme activity**

- Most young people acknowledged the employability support offered was simple, but many had not received this information before or did not have other places where they could access this support, so it was seen as useful. However, a few interviewees felt that the support offered was not advanced enough for their needs.
- Projects should recognize that individuals in the NEET category have diverse needs and circumstances, and develop a tailored and holistic approach that combines a range of services, including career guidance, skills training, mental health support, addressing barriers to progression, and access to education or employment opportunities. A one-size-fits-all approach is not effective in addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by NEET individuals.
- Projects should consider that supporting participants with emotional and mental health and addressing multiple barriers to progression is a key area of work.

### **Recruitment and referrals**

- Projects should ensure that referral organisations have a good understanding about the eligibility criteria and the appropriateness of referrals. They should also link with several different referral routes to ensure volumes. The following effective routes were identified to recruit young people:
  - Building partnerships with schools to identify early those at risk of becoming NEETs. Projects that achieved relatively high recruitment had well-established partnerships with local schools and local authorities.
  - Understanding exactly who in the schools had the authority and reach to refer young people. For example, a pastoral contact or teacher. A Personal Adviser for looked after or care experienced. Knowing exactly which route to take was a result of long-term engagement and partnerships with the schools.
  - Strong links with local authorities helped to make sure that recruitment was targeted to those who were eligible for the programme, and to track participants if they moved schools or boroughs.
  - Having a diverse range of referral partners rather than relying on one. This should include public agencies alongside organisations that work specifically with the target group, such as community groups, homeless shelters, food banks and probational services
  - Investing in developing personal relationships among individual advisors and other front-line staff in referral partners, to ensure that referrals come from a range of sources in an organisation and not reliant on a few people
  - Using recruitment staff with lived experience or that are embedded in the community as they can build on the trust they have with prospective participants



## **Commissioning and programme management**

- It was recommended the GLA consider whether bidding process can be simplified
- The GLA should look for additional ways to ensure that smaller providers can take part in the project

## **Evidence, data collection and reporting**

- All projects reported challenges in collecting the programme data required to evidence outcomes. Some of the main challenges included:
  - evidencing someone to be NEET
  - evidencing successful one-to-one support when the needs of the participants might not align with the programme requirements e.g. hours of 121 support
  - evidencing that young people have medical conditions (without an ECHP or council referral)
  - collecting evidence from NEET people who self-referred was difficult and demotivating for the participant
  - contacting participants once they had completed the programmes for follow-up and outcomes data collection
  - an underestimation of the level of reporting requirements and data needed to measure outcomes, which took resources away from the delivery of activities. Some project staff reported having to move project delivery staff to a full-time role in collecting programme data.
- It was recommended that evidence requirement processes are further simplified.

## **Targets and outcomes**

- For future programmes, measures of progress towards work would be a valuable addition to measures of entry into work. This includes developing soft skills and improving confidence.
- It was recommended that projects should invest upfront substantial resources in collecting outcome data when the evidence requirements are perceived to be onerous and cost their projects accordingly. Some should also consider the use of incentives to encourage participants to submit information to measure outcomes.
- The GLA should also consider in the scoring of bids whether providers have submitted sufficient resources in their project plan for gathering outcome



documentation and ensure the costs of this are built into the funding value for future funding rounds.

### **Knowledge sharing and best practise**

- Projects should foster strong collaborations and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as educational institutions, employers, community organisations, and government agencies. This would leverage their expertise, resources, and networks to enhance the program's impact and reach. As part of this approach, it is necessary to establish clear communication channels and mechanisms for ongoing collaboration, information sharing, and coordination to maximise collective efforts.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination of best practices among organisations involved in similar contracts. Encourage the exchange of lessons learned, success stories, and challenges faced to foster a collaborative learning environment.

## 6. Annexes

### Annex A: Emerging research and recommendations

The Young Foundation's research report commissioned by the Mayor for London, *No Wrong Door: How an integrated employment and skills system can support Londoners* (July 2023)

The Mayor's No Wrong Door (NWD) programme supports collaboration and integration between London's employment and skills funders and providers, as well as other public services. The programme aims to improve access and the quality of support Londoners receive. This report seeks to better understand the diversity of needs across a range of priority groups trying to access skills and employment services across London and identify areas for better integration of the system. Young people were a particular focus, and many of the young people they spoke with faced intersecting identities and barriers (Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), low skills or qualification levels).

Young people interviewed experienced a number of challenges and barriers that prevented them from access skills & employment opportunities. This included:

- a lack of work experience and other challenges preventing young people getting a foot on the employment ladder
- young people with SEND facing additional barriers as they leave supportive school and college environments and find it difficult to access work in the traditional manner, often without knowledge of their rights and the support they are entitled to
- employers not being understanding and inclusive towards young people with SEND, and not offering them adequate support in the workplace
- young people leaving school or college unprepared to create a CV or attend a first interview. Young people in employment support being exclusively offered low-skill roles by work coaches when they had higher expectations and were seeking 'good work' rather than any work
- young people with SEND feeling uncomfortable disclosing their needs, and service providers often lacking the training and skills to offer tailored support.

The report suggests several ways to improve the experiences of young people in accessing skills and employment support, and includes:

- better in-school and college employment support for students not going to university
- employing peer-mentors – young people with similar experiences to provide support and coaching
- improving parental knowledge around post-school education and career routes, particularly accessible to families who have English as a second language
- dissatisfaction amongst providers with the way employment support programmes are funded and managed. A focus on high volumes of numerical targets and Key

Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to job outcomes means that service providers feel they are not always able to make the best decisions for service users.

A number of suggestions were made for tailoring targets and funding to better-enable service providers to meet the needs of Londoners seeking employment, training and skills, including:

- identifying the right outcomes over an appropriate timescale, finding ways of measuring outcomes that capture success on a person's journey to work
- making funding and targets more flexible, with some room to allow a small proportion of service users to fall outside of eligibility criteria at the discretion of frontline staff, for instance age limits and geographic location

Additional suggestions would require significant shifts in how funders and central government operate. These include:

- Funding programmes for longer; e.g., moving from six-month funding to three years
- Increasing funding and reducing targets to allow more time per customer
- Considering personal budgets and alternative commissioning models

*The Education Development Trust (EDT) and Employment Related Services Association's (ERSA) new joint research report, Entry and retention in the labour market: narratives and solutions for NEET and care leaver employment support (July 2023)*

This study looks at the barriers that young people who are NEET face to reintegrating into EET; what is currently offered to support them in tackling these barriers; and what best practice looks like in breaking down these barriers and supporting young people as they enter and continue in EET.

When surveyed employment support providers, the greatest perceived barriers to entry into EET included mental health (92 per cent), lack of confidence (90 per cent), lack of formal qualifications (78 per cent), lack of employer understanding (58 per cent), lack of secure/stable housing (58 per cent) lack of financial stability (52 per cent), lack of transport (38 per cent), childcare (26 per cent), and lack of local vacancies (20 per cent).

One important finding was the mismatch between the practitioner survey responses and young people's perspectives regarding the importance they place on peer mentoring. Only one survey respondent out of 87 mentioned peer mentoring when asked about effective strategies, however, care-experienced young people indicated that, for them, it needs to be a priority.

**Key recommendations relating to the design and delivery of employment support:**

- Funding for NEET programmes should include allocations for young people to access private mental health support, such as talking therapies. Providing swift

- mental health intervention for this young age group should therefore be a priority to prevent the severity of conditions increasing and reduce future burden on services.
- Young people or individuals whose backgrounds match that of the typical caseload should be employed to act as consultants in development/design of services, or peer mentors.
  - Where possible, flexible geographical eligibility requirements should be employed for programme participants to ensure that young people who move outside of the catchment area boundaries can continue accessing IAG.
  - A national network of corporate employers who can employ NEET young people should be developed; such employers can accommodate young people who may require a role tailored to their needs, can allow flexibility with routine, and will undergo trauma-informed training. This could then be supplemented with local networks of smaller employers who may not have formalised social value commitments but are nonetheless sympathetic and open-minded.
  - Provide fully funded trauma-informed and mental health training for small-to-medium businesses, to equip them with the tools to take on and support NEET young people who may have mental health issues.

**The Resolution Foundation's new research report, *Left behind: Exploring the prevalence of youth worklessness due to ill health in different parts of the UK* (June 2023)**

This study is part of the *Young people's future health inquiry*, a three-year programme supported by the Health Foundation. It explores the prevalence of youth worklessness due to ill health in different parts of the UK.

They find that economic inactivity due to ill health among 18-24 year-olds has nearly doubled over the past decade, and is heavily concentrated among those with low levels of skills, with four-in-five young people who are too ill to work having only qualifications at GCSE-level or below.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of young people who are not working due to ill health. The number of 18-24-year-olds in this category has near doubled in the last ten years, rising from 94,000 in 2012 to 185,000 in 2022. Today, almost one-in-four (23 per cent) workless young people are not working because of ill health, up from less than one-in-ten (8 per cent) in 2012. Mental health problems are now the most common reason for young people to be workless due to ill health. Children and young people's mental health services are notoriously stretched, and there is also considerable variation by place.

### **Research recommendations:**

- Better mental health support must be available at the earliest possible stage to prevent young people from falling behind in the first instance.
- Action is needed to help unwell young people catch up with their education later down the line. Given that the majority of young people who are workless due to ill health lack qualifications above GCSE level, efforts to increase the number of young people attending university or doing apprenticeships miss the mark. Instead, policy makers must invest to make it easier for adults to achieve GCSE and A Level skills (Levels 2 and 3) after leaving compulsory education.

### **Learning & Work Institute's research report, The Power of Potential Supporting the future of 'NEET' young people in the labour market (July 2022)**

Although the UK's NEET rate has recovered from its post-pandemic peak, the number of NEET young people who are economically inactive (not looking for work) continues to rise despite the job vacancies. This means that there is a growing, potentially untapped, resource of young people who risk being locked out of opportunities with long-term costs for them and the country. This report investigates the characteristics, circumstances and challenges faced by young people who are NEET.

Mental health has been identified as a substantial barrier to employment for young people who are NEET, with those who responded to the poll giving mental health problems as the most common reason that they are finding it difficult to find a job or are not currently looking for work. This is reinforced by the data analysis, which found that, out of all young people who are NEET who report a long-term health problem or disability, mental health is by far the most common 'main' condition. Other important barriers include the job application process, a lack of confidence, a lack of work experience, childcare or caring responsibilities, a lack of flexibility, financial barriers and insufficient training or qualifications.

Support with social and emotional barriers is one of the key areas of support identified by young people, which would help them reach their career aspirations. Opportunities for gaining work experience, support with childcare and caring responsibilities and financial support were also considered important.

## Research recommendations:

The findings of this research have a number of implications for providers of support services for young people who are NEET, and for employers.

- **The importance of tailored support to meet individual needs of NEET young people:** Evidence suggests that personalised approaches to overcoming barriers to employment are most effective, and it is important that providers understand individual NEET young people's barriers to employment and take account of these when planning and delivering services.
- **Integrating employment and mental health and wellbeing support:** The most common reason why young people who are NEET find it difficult to get a job, or are not currently looking for work, is mental health problems. It is important that services that support NEET young people into employment understand and address these needs, with support effectively joined up at a local level, for example through Youth Hubs and other local employment and skills support.
- **Confidence building:** With confidence building being the third most common reason why it was difficult for NEET young people to gain employment, confidence building has to be a feature of support for young people who need it, especially in certain parts of the UK such as the Midlands and Wales where this was a particularly prevalent barrier.
- **Caring responsibilities:** Young women are substantially more likely than young men to be economically inactive due to family responsibilities. It is therefore important that providers offer their services flexibly, provide advice and support around childcare, and can work with employers to create flexible work placements and jobs.
- **Work experience:** As the second most common type of support identified in the polling, work experience is an important feature of support for young people who are NEET. This can help build CVs and also transferable skills as part of an effective package of support, particularly for young people who have not previously been in employment.
- **Qualifications and training support:** Understanding the skills needs of NEET young people and offering support to gain relevant qualifications and training should be part of a support offer.
- **Location of work/support with travel costs:** Financial support to help with transport costs was highlighted by the focus group as helping to overcome some of the cost barriers, particularly when starting a job. Where a young person is in contact with Jobcentre Plus, providers should ensure that the option of Flexible Support Fund to help with travel cost for interviews, training and the first months of travelling into work has been explored.
- **Employer engagement:** This research shows that the key considerations for young people who are NEET, when looking for employment, are flexibility in hours, location and pay level. Providers should support local employers to create viable

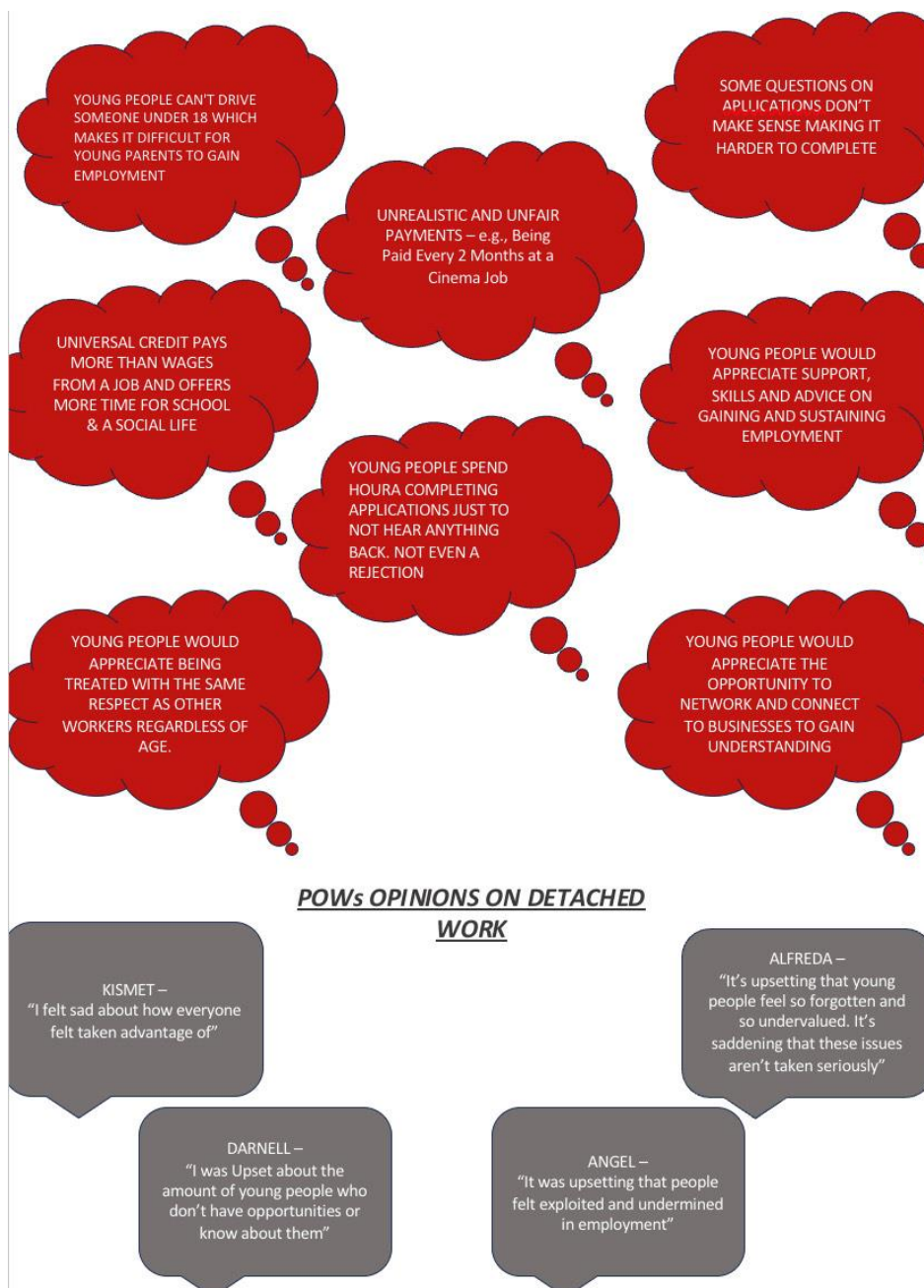
opportunities (work placements, jobs and apprenticeships) for young people that meet their skills needs.

- **In-work mental health support:** Mental health and wellbeing support is important in enabling young people to stay in work and progress. Providers therefore have an important role to play in ensuring that employers understand and can support young people's mental health needs in the workplace.



## Annex B: Peer outreach worker feedback - visual document

This file was created by one of the Peer Outreach Workers who captured their thoughts on completing the detached outreach work in Croydon.





## Annex C: Young person's poster design

This poster was created by one of the young people involved in the consultation who set out what type of advertising and messaging would encourage her to join an employment support programme.



# NEED A JOB?

Feel like your CV is top-notch but still not getting any responses?  
Join our employment programme!  
We aim to make young people work-ready with the skills, equipment and connections they need.

## what's in it for YOU?

- We offer training and exposure to non-traditional employment paths, from creative industries, consulting and marketing.
- Free access to a laptop and basic training in Edexcel.
- Get your CV reviewed by professionals and get tips on how to maximise opportunities on LinkedIn.
- Get access to workshops, networking events, career fairs and top professionals in their fields to further your connections.
- Paid, hands-on work experience and volunteering opportunities to spice up your CV and the chance to explore different sectors.
- Flexible mix of hybrid in-person and online mentoring.
- A certificate of completion and a reference for future applications.
- Our program is perfect for developing your communication, networking and soft skills by meeting other like-minded individuals on the program!

## and the best part? it's completely free.

"This programme offers so many work experience opportunities, and opened my eyes to industries and sectors I had no idea existed!"  
Hanna, 20

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