

DEMOS

LAUNCH PADS

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT HUBS

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JULY 2024

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Any errors remain the authors' responsibility.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is part of our **Public Service Reform** pillar of work at Demos. In this pillar, we look at how public service reform can empower citizens and professionals, prevent problems from arising in the first place, and support the economy - as set out in our cross-cutting vision for reform, [*Liberated Public Services*](#).

Public services need to be available for people when they face challenges or difficulties in their lives, such as when young people are not in education or employment. High-quality employment support, where young people and professionals work together towards achieving a shared goal like getting a job or accessing training, can improve young people's long-term outcomes. Providing this kind of early support to young people can help prevent other problems from arising. In this project, we have focused on one innovative example of this type of provision: the network of Youth Employment Hubs established since 2020 by the Department for Work and Pensions in partnership with Local Authorities, charities, training providers and other local organisations.

At Demos we put people at the heart of policy making to create bold ideas and a more collaborative democracy. So in this research and policy project, we conducted site visits to Youth Employment Hubs as well as focus groups and qualitative interviews to understand the views and experiences of both young people and professionals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Far too many young people in the UK are currently not in employment, education or training (NEET): an estimated 900,000 young people aged 16-24, equivalent to one in eight (12.6%) of all young people. This is the highest rate since 2015.

The new government should make addressing this challenge a high priority, because missing out on employment, education or training at a young age can result in serious adverse consequences. Research has shown that it harms young people's skill levels and physical and mental health in the short term, and has a long-term negative impact on people's earnings, employment prospects, job satisfaction and health over 20 years later. It also has a serious economic impact: research by PwC and Youth Futures Foundation has shown that UK GDP would increase by £38 billion if the UK reduced the proportion of young people who are NEET to match Germany.

There are indications that the new government recognises the importance of this issue. At a Demos event earlier this year, Liz Kendall, then Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, spoke about Labour's plans to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET, saying that "being unemployed or lacking basic qualifications when you're young can harm your job prospects and wages for the rest of your life - this isn't good enough for young people or for our country." In their manifesto, Labour included the following commitment: "Drawing together existing funding and entitlements, Labour will establish a youth guarantee of access to training, an apprenticeship, or support to find work for all 18- to 21-year-olds, to bring down the number of young people who are not learning or earning."

We welcome the government's commitment to addressing this issue. However, it will need to develop a plan to deliver the proposed Youth Guarantee. In this research and policy project, we have explored the existing Youth Employment Hubs programme. We argue that these Hubs should be a central element of Labour's plan to deliver the Youth Guarantee in order to reduce the number of young people who are NEET.

The innovative Youth Employment Hubs programme is run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in partnership with Local Authorities, charities, training providers and other local organisations, providing employment support alongside other support services to young people typically aged 18-24. This is the first major research report to be published on Youth Employment Hubs. In this project, we set out to explore what young people and staff think about the Hubs, how well the initiative has gone so far, and how the Hubs could be further improved in the future.

Youth Employment Hubs (also called Youth Hubs) started being set up in response to the pandemic in 2020, and now there are over 100 of them across Britain. In 2023-24, they supported over 14,000 young people. They represent a new way of working, with DWP Youth Hub Work Coaches providing support to young people at Youth Employment Hubs, rather than at Jobcentres. The Hubs are enabling stronger partnership working between DWP, Local Authorities, charities, training providers and other local organisations. Under one roof, they are providing employment support, careers

advice and access to skills and training opportunities, alongside wider services such as mental health and wellbeing support.

Young people to whom we spoke for this research were consistently positive about Youth Employment Hubs, saying that they enjoy using the community spaces the Hubs are based in rather than Jobcentres, that they are able to build strong trusting relationships with staff and that they get high-quality practical support to move into employment. They did, however, provide some constructive criticism, particularly regarding low awareness of Youth Employment Hubs among young people.

The Youth Employment Hubs initiative is having success because it is a good example of public service reform. In line with Demos's vision for public services, *Liberated Public Services*, Youth Employment Hubs are enabling young people to build their confidence and get holistic support, freeing professionals to experiment with service design and delivery, and encouraging place-based collaboration between organisations working together to achieve shared outcomes.

We strongly encourage the government to build upon the established network of Youth Employment Hubs as a foundation from which they can deliver the Youth Guarantee. The Conservative party should be proud of the progress the initiative has made since 2020, and urge the Labour government to support and improve them. There is an exciting opportunity to establish Youth Hubs as a permanent part of the public service landscape, contributing to two of the new government's missions to 'kickstart economic growth' and 'break down barriers to opportunity'.

With 130,000 more young people who are NEET than in 2022, now is the time to build on the success of Youth Employment Hubs. The government must ensure that its new Young Futures Hubs - which are aimed at children and teenagers - work effectively in partnership with Youth Employment Hubs, which support an older age group (usually 16-24 or 18-24). Through our research we have also identified four specific measures which policy makers should implement to support and improve the effectiveness of Youth Employment Hubs:

- 1. HM Treasury (HMT), DWP and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should work together to commit £100 million annual funding to Youth Employment Hubs in the 2024 Autumn Budget.** Currently, we estimate that approximately £25 million of funding is provided to Youth Employment Hubs (£11.5 million from DWP, which we roughly estimate to be around half of total costs). In the 2023 Spring Budget the government committed to extending DWP's Youth Offer, of which Youth Employment Hubs are one part, until April 2028. However, according to our research interviewees, future funding for Youth Employment Hubs is highly uncertain, with many facing a 'cliff edge' when current funding agreements come to an end in March 2025, such as those Hubs funded by the first round of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). There is a serious risk that some Hubs will be forced to close in March 2025. We recommend that central government should provide funding to extend and expand the Youth Employment Hubs programme. Specifically, we recommend that DWP should continue to fund Youth Employment Hub Work Coaches, while HMT and MHCLG should provide funding for Youth Employment Hubs via the second round of UKSPF. We estimate that total funding of £100 million per year could fund around 350 Youth Employment Hubs, ensuring that young people in every area of England, Scotland and Wales have access to a Hub, and could provide support to around 70,000 young people per year.

- 2. DWP, Combined Authorities and Local Authorities should work together to create three-year funding agreements for each Youth Employment Hub to increase stability and enable staff to focus on delivery.** To be successful, the Hubs need to be built up as strong local institutions in order to increase awareness among young people, build strong local partnerships and provide job security to the skilled practitioners delivering employment support. Currently some Hubs only have a 12 month funding agreement, which is too short and causes problems, such as high staff turnover, due to persistent uncertainty about the Hub's future. Three-year funding agreements would provide greater stability and enable Hub managers and practitioners to focus on delivery and improving outcomes. In the relevant areas of England, Mayors and Combined Authorities should take the lead on this process as employment support is devolved under the new government. For example, Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands, recently announced a regional '[youth employment plan](#)' designed "to align with national government's youth guarantee" which includes a commitment to build on existing Youth Employment Hubs "to provide all young people with access to a range of support and services".
- 3. Funders, DWP and local partner organisations should make all Youth Employment Hubs 'open access' - providing support to all young people, not just those receiving Universal Credit.** Some Hubs already operate successfully with an 'open access' model, but others only support young people if they are receiving Universal Credit. However, two thirds (62%) of 18-24-year-olds who are out of work do not receive Universal Credit and are therefore excluded from getting support if eligibility is restricted. Opening up access is essential to ensure Youth Employment Hubs can help deliver Labour's manifesto commitment to provide "support to find work for all 18- to 21-year-olds". Our proposed £100 million annual budget includes funding for additional capacity to support young people not receiving Universal Credit. By doing this, the government can turn Youth Employment Hubs into a universal service for young people, complementing the government's plans for a 'national jobs and careers service' and building on Demos's previous proposal for a [Universal Work Service](#).
- 4. DWP should provide additional strategic guidance to Youth Employment Hubs while continuing to support local autonomy.** One of the strengths of existing Hubs is that they are genuine local partnerships experimenting in how to reduce youth unemployment: DWP should be given significant credit for encouraging this innovative approach. DWP should continue to support local autonomy and at the same time can also provide additional strategic guidance to Hubs. Specifically, we recommend that DWP should create guidance on enabling and strengthening data sharing between the different partner organisations working together in Youth Employment Hubs, as well as supporting Hub managers by disseminating good practice and learning. DWP can also support the promotion of Youth Employment Hubs via a 'digital front door' to employment support, as set out in Demos's report [Open Door Policy](#).

If the next government commits to supporting Youth Employment Hubs, we believe they could become a 'Sure Start for youth employment', increasing the number of young people moving into good work and high-quality skills and training. Sure Start centres provided co-located holistic support to families with children aged five or younger, and recent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that they were highly effective, improving the GCSE grades of children from disadvantaged areas ten years later. In the same way, Youth Employment Hubs can improve people's careers, earnings and wellbeing in the long term - and boost economic growth and productivity, benefitting us all.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DEFINITIONS

For this project on the future of Youth Employment Hubs, we had three core research questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Youth Employment Hubs currently?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Youth Employment Hubs in providing support to young people from marginalised backgrounds?
3. What should policy makers do to support and improve the effectiveness of Youth Employment Hubs?

Our definition of a Youth Employment Hub

One of the research findings in this report is that Youth Employment Hubs vary significantly. As such, for the purpose of conducting this research we developed our own definition of a DWP Youth Employment Hub, slightly adapted from the definitions used by DWP and the Work and Pensions Committee.^{1,2} The definition we have used is:

Youth Employment Hubs are shared spaces, separate from Jobcentres, with DWP Youth Hub Work Coaches working alongside partners such as Local Authorities, charities, training providers and colleges, providing access to a range of employment-related services for young people in one location.

We have used the full name *Youth Employment Hub* in this report for the sake of clarity, but we also regularly shorten this to *Youth Hub* as this is the name which most stakeholders use to refer to them. As set out in the introduction, Youth Employment Hubs are connected to DWP and typically provide support to young people aged 18-24 who are not in employment. Youth Employment Hubs are distinct from the new government's *Young Futures Hubs* which are designed to support children and teenagers.³ Young Futures Hubs are also sometimes referred to as 'Youth Hubs', but they are different and aimed at a younger age group. In this report, wherever we use 'Youth Employment Hubs' or 'Youth Hubs', we are referring to our own definition set out above.

Our definition *excludes* some local institutions called 'Youth (Employment) Hubs' which are not connected to DWP, and which we decided not to include in our research scope. The primary differentiating feature is whether there is a partnership to co-locate a Youth Hub Work Coach alongside other practitioners in the same building or space, which links the Hub more formally to DWP. However, these 'other' Hubs are likely to share many of the same characteristics as DWP Youth Employment Hubs and so some of our research findings will also be applicable to them. We also excluded 'digital Youth Employment Hubs' from our research.

1 Work and Pensions Committee. Plan for Jobs and employment support. House of Commons, 12 July 2023, p. 22. Available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40930/documents/200444/default> [accessed 16/07/2024]

2 Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

3 Labour Party. Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024. 13 June 2024, p. 88. Available at <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

Geographical scope

This research report is about Youth Hubs in England. Although our desk-based research included Youth Hubs across Britain, we did not speak to any Youth Hub managers based in Scotland or Wales. In addition, the policy context of devolution means that our findings do not necessarily directly apply to Youth Hubs in Scotland and Wales. Operational responsibility for Jobs and Benefits offices in Northern Ireland is devolved, and to our knowledge there is no precise equivalent of Youth Hubs in Northern Ireland.

Call for Evidence and evidence review

Using the most recent list of Youth Hubs published by DWP, combined with our own desk research, we constructed an internal database of Youth Hubs.⁴ Through our database and with the support of ERSA, we circulated a Call for Evidence that received over 25 responses from Youth Hub managers and other stakeholders. These responses informed the design of qualitative research.

We also conducted a desk-based evidence review in two parts: first, reviewing documents about Youth Hubs published since 2020, and second, reviewing previous youth employment programmes and initiatives which shared characteristics with Youth Hubs. We expand on our findings from the evidence review in section 3.

Qualitative research: site visits, focus groups, interviews

Our qualitative research included six in-person site visits, during which we spoke to Youth Hub managers and practitioners working at Youth Hubs, as well as running four focus groups with young people using the Youth Hubs (see below). For our site visits, we selected a range of different types of Youth Hub in the North West, the West Midlands and the South East of England. The hubs were based in different types of buildings and located in both cities and towns. We have included some quotes from these conversations in this report, and have therefore decided not to name the specific locations of the Youth Hubs we visited to prevent the identification of individuals.

During our in-person site visits, we ran four focus groups on site with young people who were either currently using or had previously used the Youth Hub. The focus groups included 34 young people, who were remunerated for their time in travelling and taking part. Our recruitment was supported by Youth Hub practitioners.

During our site visits we spoke to Youth Hub Work Coaches and other DWP staff, but these were for background information only and were not research interviews. We clarified with DWP staff that we would not be using any quotes from them or attributing any views to DWP staff within this research report.

We also conducted virtual interviews with 24 people. These included Youth Hub managers, as well as people working for Combined Authorities, Local Authorities, charities, and other stakeholder organisations.

Roundtables

To test and refine our recommendations, we ran two roundtable discussions. We ran the first roundtable with Youth Future Foundation's Future Voices Group. This enabled us to ensure our recommendations were informed by the perspectives of young people. The Future Voices Group is a diverse group of ambassadors consisting of twenty young people aged 16 to 24 years old who

⁴ Davies, M. Youth Services: Location - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 19 June 2023. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-19/190113> [accessed 16/07/2024]

support Youth Futures Foundation with their strategy and vision.⁵

We ran our second roundtable with a range of practitioners and policy professionals, in partnership with ERSA, who provided feedback on our draft recommendations. Although we took all feedback and comments into account, the authors are responsible for the final recommendations.

Abbreviations and glossary

CA	Combined Authority
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ERSA	Employment Related Services Association
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
LA	Local Authority
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
UKSPF	UK Shared Prosperity Fund
Universal Credit	We refer to Universal Credit for simplicity, but it is also possible for a young person accessing a Youth Hub to be receiving a different type of unemployment-related benefit such as Jobseeker's Allowance.
YEG	Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway
Youth Employment Hub or Youth Hub	Unless otherwise stated, this refers to our own definition of a DWP Youth Employment Hub (see above)
Youth Hub Work Coach	A member of staff employed by DWP/JCP who has appointments with young people receiving Universal Credit at a Youth Hub instead of at a Jobcentre.

⁵ Youth Futures Foundation. Future Voices. Available at <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/our-work/ignite/future-voices> [accessed 16/07/2024]

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

DWP INTRODUCED YOUTH HUBS IN 2020 TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE MOVE INTO EMPLOYMENT

DWP introduced Youth Hubs as a new policy initiative in 2020 as part of the government's response to the rise in unemployment among young people during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶ Youth Hubs form part of DWP's 'Youth Offer' for young people receiving Universal Credit aged 16-24.⁷ The Youth Offer includes:

1. The 'Youth Employment Programme', which provides 13 weeks of support to a young person from a Work Coach at a Jobcentre; this is designed to provide "intensive support during the first 13 weeks of a [Universal Credit] claim".⁸
2. Youth Hubs, which provide up to six months of support for young people from a Youth Hub Work Coach and other practitioners based at a Youth Hub instead of at a Jobcentre. According to DWP, "suitable claimants will have specific skills and employability barriers preventing them from moving in to work that could be addressed by the support of a DWP Work Coach situated in a Youth Hub."⁹
3. Youth Employability Coaches, who are based in Jobcentres and provide support to young people "with multiple barriers to work and complex needs to develop the skills to look for, find

6 Comptroller and Auditor General. Employment support. National Audit Office, 9 June 2021. Available at <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Employment-support.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

7 Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

8 Davies, M. Employment: Young People - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 8 November 2022. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-08/82265> [accessed 16/07/2024]

9 Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

and keep employment".¹⁰ Youth Employability Coaches provide support for six months, although this can be extended to 12 months.¹¹

Youth Hubs are therefore designed to serve young people with 'moderate' support needs, or who are in an 'amber' support category. This category refers to young people who need some additional support but do not have multiple or complex barriers to employment. The Library of Birmingham Youth Hub blueprint states that those involved in discussions about the Youth Hub agreed that it should support young people who are "unemployed with 'amber' barriers - those with appetite for support and willing to engage, but more barriers than can be easily overcome at JCP".¹² There is, however, variation between Youth Hubs: we are aware that some Hubs do support young people with multiple or more complex barriers/needs.

We understand that Jobcentre Work Coaches are usually responsible for assessing the barriers/needs of each young person, and then referring them to the appropriate part of the Youth Offer. Although DWP's Youth Offer document does not give examples of types of barrier/need, the Library of Birmingham Youth Hub blueprint has the following paragraph which does give some examples:

Certain barriers are too complex for the Youth Hub to deal with, and young people facing these barriers should be referred to a Youth Employability Coach. This includes things like housing issues, significant substance abuse, or other major barriers that mean young people are a long way from being work ready. At the opposite extreme, work ready young people in need of light touch help with CV/interview practice can already be helped by Jobcentre Plus. The Youth Hub is best placed to support young people between these two groups, those with skills barriers – such as some basic skills, occupational qualification, level 2, lack of work experience, significant confidence issues. Many of these young people will have been unemployed for 3-12 months.¹³

DWP's Youth Offer was initially introduced to support young people receiving Universal Credit and required to look for work (those in the 'intensive work search' regime in JCP terminology). However, recognising that there are many young people who are so-called 'economically inactive' - that is, not working and not actively looking for work recently - DWP expanded Youth Offer eligibility in September 2023, with the aim of providing the option of accessing the Youth Offer to 30,000 young people considered 'economically inactive'.¹⁴

At time of writing, there is no official published list of current Youth Hubs. In 2022, DWP stated that there were over 150 Youth Hubs in England, Scotland and Wales.¹⁵ In June 2023, DWP published a list of 119 Youth Hubs in England, Scotland and Wales.¹⁶ We are aware that some new Youth Hubs have opened since then, and we are aware of at least one which has closed. We have therefore used the figure of 120 Youth Hubs as an estimate in this report.

Though the primary purpose of Youth Hubs is to support young people into employment, there is often provision of related types of support such as careers advice, skills and training advice and

10 Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

11 Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

12 Gadsby, B. Blueprint for the Library of Birmingham Youth Hub. Impetus. Available at <https://impetus-org.files.svdcn.com/production/assets/publications/Impetus-YouthHubs-Blueprint.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

13 Gadsby, B. Blueprint for the Library of Birmingham Youth Hub. Impetus. Available at <https://impetus-org.files.svdcn.com/production/assets/publications/Impetus-YouthHubs-Blueprint.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

14 Department for Work and Pensions. Government announces employment support boost for over 30,000 economically inactive young people. GOV.UK, 25 September 2023. Available at www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-employment-support-boost-for-over-30-000-economically-inactive-young-people [accessed 16/07/2024]

15 Davies, M. Employment: Young People - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 8 November 2022. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-08/82265> [accessed 16/07/2024]

16 Davies, M. Youth Services: Location - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 19 June 2023. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-19/190113> [accessed 16/07/2024]

mental health and wellbeing support. However, the type and range of services available depend on which local partner organisations are involved in the Youth Hub. As such, there is no default standard on what support a Youth Hub may provide beyond employment support.

GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS ARE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DWP AND OTHER LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Youth Employment Hubs are partnerships between DWP and local partner organisations, with co-located support provided by Youth Hub Work Coaches and other practitioners in the same physical building. There is significant variation between different Youth Hubs, so the following description reflects what we understand to be a typical arrangement, but this will not apply to every Youth Hub.

Typically, Youth Hubs are managed by a 'lead organisation', not DWP / JCP. Examples include a Local Authority, an FE college, or a charity. Usually the Youth Hub manager works for this lead organisation. The Youth Hub manager's role can include day-to-day operations, marketing, staffing, location and connecting with other local services. JCP locally provides at least one Youth Hub Work Coach (sometimes more than one), whose role is to have appointments with young people at the Youth Hub instead of at the Jobcentre. The advantage that JCP gets from this arrangement is a better experience for young people, and easier access to additional support from other organisations. For partner organisations, the co-location of DWP Youth Work Coaches requires young people to take their Universal Credit appointments at the Youth Hub, facilitating direct referrals to the support they offer (see section 2 on partnership working).

We understand that the agreement to set up a Youth Hub usually relies on at least one senior individual within the lead organisation, and at least one senior individual within the local/regional JCP team. The senior people within the lead organisation and within JCP provide oversight of the Youth Hub overall, particularly with regard to how funding is used.

Our understanding is that the creation of DWP Youth Hubs primarily depends on local agreements. This explains why there is a great deal of variability, both in whether a given area has a Youth Hub at all, and between different Youth Hubs. However, we think that this local flexibility is a strength, not a weakness, because it helps to foster effective working relationships at a local level (see section 2).

Based on our research, we understand that funding comes from a range of sources. DWP fund Youth Hubs directly by paying staff costs for Youth Hub Work Coaches, and in grants provided via the JCP Flexible Support Fund. According to information published by DWP, Youth Hub Work Coach costs were around £4.8 million in 2022/23.¹⁷ Total forecast spending on Youth Hubs by DWP in 2023/24 was £11.5 million.¹⁸ This suggests that forecast grant spending was around £6.7 million. According to Youth Hub managers we interviewed, in cases where DWP provides grant funding, partners agree to aim to meet quantitative targets (for example, relating to the number of young people to whom they provide support or the number of young people who enter employment after receiving support).

Youth Employment Hubs are also funded by other sources, such as specific funding schemes - the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a common source of funding for Youth Hubs, for example. Sometimes, funding also comes from the core budgets of organisations such as Local Authorities or charities. In addition, lead organisations often provide in-kind support such as the use of a building to host the Youth Hub.

¹⁷ Davies, M. Youth Services: Finance - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 19 June 2023. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-19/190112> [accessed 16/07/2024]

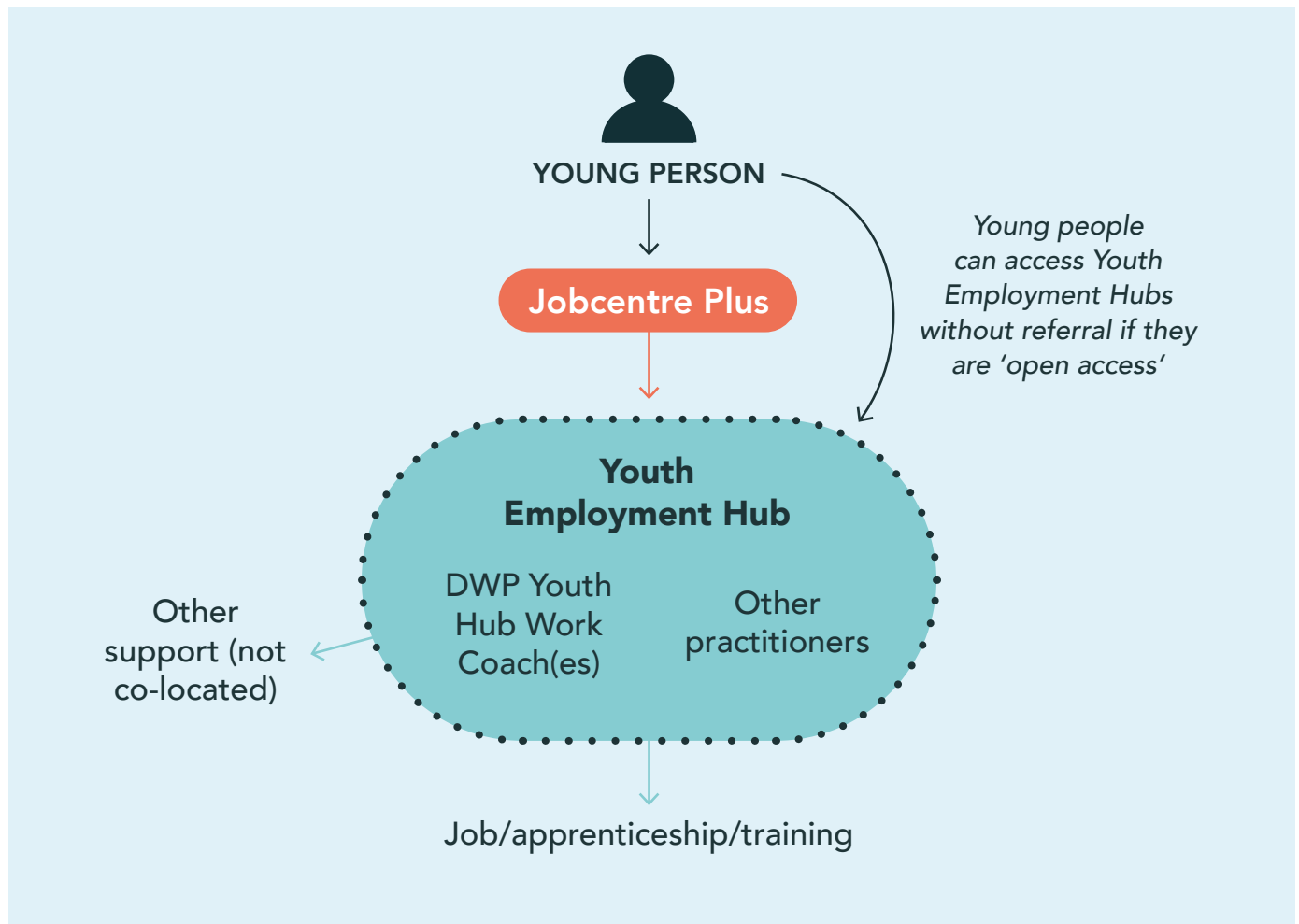
¹⁸ Davies, M. Youth Services: Finance - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 19 June 2023. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-19/190112> [accessed 16/07/2024]

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE USUALLY REFERRED TO A YOUTH HUB FROM JOBCENTRE PLUS

Typically, a young person is referred to a Youth Hub by their JCP Work Coach. The diagram below shows the typical 'pathway' for a young person accessing a Youth Hub.

FIGURE 1

PATHWAY FOR A YOUNG PERSON ACCESSING SUPPORT AT A YOUTH HUB



We understand that usually a JCP Work Coach is responsible for referring a young person to a Youth Hub (if there is one available locally). This means that, if they agree, the young person takes their next Work Coach meeting at the Youth Hub instead of at the Jobcentre. At the Youth Hub, their Youth Hub Work Coach has an appointment with them and can also refer them to other support co-located at the Youth Hub. While providing support to the young person, either the Youth Hub Work Coach or other practitioners can refer the young person to other types of support outside the Youth Hub. The aim is that the young person then moves on from getting support at the Youth Hub to a job, apprenticeship or skills training.

The diagram and paragraph above describe the typical 'pathway'. However, alternative routes also exist. Some Youth Hubs are 'open access' - that is, any young person can walk in, or book an appointment, without needing to be referred by a JCP Work Coach. Some of the Youth Hubs we visited were open access, and some of the young people who took part in our focus groups said that they had accessed their local Youth Hub after hearing about it via word of mouth, for example from family and friends. However, although we do not have quantitative data, we understand that the majority of young people accessing open access Youth Hubs currently are referred by a JCP Work Coach.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS COULD FORM PART OF A UNIVERSAL WORK SERVICE

Demos is particularly interested in Youth Employment Hubs because they have similarities to the proposal we previously made for a 'Universal Work Service' - a public employment service open to anyone who wants work-related advice, support or guidance.¹⁹ In our report *Working Together*, we argued that the current system of employment support is both fragmented and centralised. Although a wide range of organisations, from Jobcentres to local charities, offer employment support, they operate in silos and with low public awareness. This creates a confusing employment support landscape for both individuals and employers, which we described further in our report *A Tapestry of Services*.²⁰

In the context of the current system, Youth Hubs represent an intentional shift to a more collaborative form of employment support delivery. We believe that Youth Hubs could be a forerunner of a broader integrated employment, skills and careers system, better equipped to provide wraparound support. Where Youth Hubs are open access, this also aligns with our principle that employment support should be available to any young person who wants to access it, regardless of whether they are receiving Universal Credit or whether they currently have a job.

In our report *Working Together*, we also highlighted the importance of 'relational practice' in providing employment support, especially to groups who may face disadvantage in the labour market. We argued this should be at the centre of the Universal Work Service's design. We have seen through our research that Youth Hubs are set up with the aim of facilitating this kind of relational support which builds strong, trusting relationships with young people as the foundation for supporting them to achieve employment, education or training outcomes.

¹⁹ Phillips, A. *Working Together, the case for universal employment support*. Demos, 7 May 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Working-Together.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

²⁰ Phillips, A. and Stephenson, C. *A Tapestry of Services: Employment, skills and careers support in East Birmingham and North Solihull*. Demos, 3 August 2023. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/a-tapestry-of-services-employment-skills-and-careers-support-in-east-birmingham-and-north-solihull> [accessed 16/07/2024]

SECTION 2

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A TYPOLOGY OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

In our research we found that Youth Employment Hubs vary significantly (see next section). To illustrate two important ways in which the Hubs vary, we have developed a typology below based on the type of building or space the Hub is located in and how young people can access it.

		ACCESS DIMENSION	
		OPEN ACCESS	REFERRAL ONLY
Building & service dimension	Building or space mainly for young people (youth centre, youth zone, charity supporting young people, FE college)	Type 1a	Type 1b
	Community building (all ages) (library, community centre, other charity/not-for-profit organisation)	Type 2a	Type 2b
	Employment and skills hub (either for young people only, or an all-age hub/ service including a Youth Hub)	Type 3a	Type 3b

The **access dimension** differentiates between Youth Hubs which are 'open access' to all young people, and those which are referral only:

- Open access Youth Hubs sometimes do have eligibility criteria: usually these are age (usually 16-24 or 18-24, although there is variation), residency (such as living in the relevant Local Authority area) and sometimes not being in employment. Although these are all slightly different, we categorise them together on the basis that the core principle of open access is that a young person can walk in or book an appointment themselves without a formal referral.
- Typically, 'referral only' Youth Hubs offer support to young people only if they are referred to the Youth Hub by their JCP Work Coach.

Whether a Youth Hub is open access or not depends on the setup of the partnership. Currently, Youth Hub Work Coaches themselves only support young people receiving Universal Credit, so an open access model relies on other co-located practitioners offering support to young people, such as people working for a local council, FE college or charity. Based on our in-person visits, interviews and roundtables we concluded that the open access model is a strength of these Youth Hubs, enabling young people to access support who would otherwise miss out.

Youth Hub managers told us that an advantage of having an all-age employment and skills hub which hosts a Youth Hub ('Type 3' in our typology) is that it makes an open access model easier to run. This is because more people are using the hub overall, and therefore it is more practical to employ staff who have the time to speak to people and understand their needs as they walk in or have an initial appointment.

The **building and service dimension** reflects the fact that Youth Hubs are located in a wide variety of different types of settings, and are hosted by a variety of different services. We have identified three main 'types':

1. A building or space mainly for young people often hosts the Youth Hub. Sometimes the host organisation is involved in delivering support to young people (for example, where a youth centre hosts a Youth Hub this is often the case). In other instances, the host organisation may simply be providing the space for the Youth Hub without any involvement in delivering support.
2. A community building or space which has some kind of broader use, not specifically aimed at young people. For example, this can be a building owned by a Local Authority such as a library. Other community organisations or charities sometimes host a Youth Hub.
3. An 'employment and skills hub' is a specific building and/or service which focuses on providing some combination of employment support, careers advice and skills/training provision. In some cases the hub is only for young people, while in other cases it is an all-age hub with, for example, a dedicated part of the building hosting the Youth Hub.

Below we provide a few examples of how our typology works (noting that it is possible the information available online may not reflect practice on the ground):

- The recently opened Sandwell Youth Hub in West Bromwich is an example of *Type 1b*. The Youth Hub is based at YMCA's West Bromwich site, and supports young people who are referred by their JCP Work Coach.²¹
- The Library of Birmingham Youth Hub is an example of *Type 2a*. It is based in the Library in central Birmingham, and is open access.²²

²¹ YMCA. Youth Hub launched at YMCA West Bromwich. 2 February 2024. Available at <https://www.ymcab.org.uk/sandwell-youth-hub> [accessed 16/07/2024]

²² Gadsby, B. Blueprint for the Library of Birmingham Youth Hub. Impetus, p. 8. Available at <https://impetus-org.files.svcdcd.com/production/assets/publications/Impetus-YouthHubs-Blueprint.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

- The Youth Hub based in The Link, Walsall, is an example of Type 3a. The Link is an all-age ‘one stop shop for jobs and training’, which hosts Walsall’s Youth Hub, and is open access for all Walsall residents.²³

STRENGTHS OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

Relational practice helps build trust between young people and practitioners

A consistent conclusion from evaluations of employment support programmes, including those for young people, is that a strong, trusting relationship between the practitioner and citizen/young person is crucial for improving outcomes.²⁴ In previous research, Demos highlighted the importance of relationships in public services and how these are too often overlooked.²⁵ In our qualitative research for this project, we regularly heard about the importance of the relationships between practitioners and young people, which we refer to as ‘relational practice’ in this report.

When we spoke to young people, they regularly talked about the importance of particular relationships with Youth Hub staff (both Youth Hub Work Coaches and partner organisations). Young people valued the continuity of regularly receiving support from the same person, and talked about how practitioners listened to them and gave them support and encouragement. Young people often contrasted this kind of relational practice with the kind of support they had received at a Jobcentre. For example, some young people said they often had appointments with different JCP Work Coaches when they went to the Jobcentre, rather than talking to the same person consistently.

[Participant 1] At the Jobcentre you have different people you have to go and meet with. I don't know who I'm going to see. I had a person for one second, and then I got another one... so confusing. Can I just have one person who I could speak with?

[Participant 2] I feel like that probably helps with people with anxiety as well. Sometimes I feel anxiety myself, you don't know who you're going to speak to. But when you come here [to the Youth Hub], you do [know].

Young people, focus group participants

Others said that short appointments at Jobcentres meant they did not feel like they got any meaningful support, help or advice.

[At the Youth Hub, staff] actually taking the time to understand your skills and needs, and trying to find something a bit more relevant. Which I found here took into account more than the Jobcentre, which was kind of a 10 minute interview and just kind of asking if you found work, but they're not really helping because they don't really have time to help.

Young person, focus group participant

²³ The Link. Home page. (no date). Available at www.thelinkwalsall.co.uk [accessed 16/07/2024]

²⁴ Phillips, A. Working Together, the case for universal employment support. Demos, 7 May 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Working-Together.pdf> [accessed 17/07/24]

²⁵ Mackenzie, P. The Social State: From Transactional to Relational Public Services. Demos, 28 July 2021. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-social-state-from-transactional-to-relational-public-services> [accessed 16/07/2024]

Almost every young person in our focus groups said they had more positive and meaningful relationships with staff at the Youth Hub than at the Jobcentre: continuity (getting support from the same practitioner consistently) and time (longer conversations / appointments) were key reasons for this. We understand that one explanation for this is that Youth Hub Work Coaches have, on average, lower caseloads than JCP Work Coaches, which enables them to have longer conversations / appointments.

[At the Youth Hub] people are clearly laughing and joking and having a bit of rapport with the work coaches. When you go to the Jobcentre, it feels like you're waiting in a dentist office or some sort of thing. It's terrible. It's so moody.

Focus Group participant

When we spoke to practitioners, they also highlighted the importance of relational practice for supporting young people. They noted that often this first involved building a relationship of trust with the young person, then moving on to 'soft skills' such as verbal and non-verbal communication, and then supporting them to find a suitable job or education/training opportunity. For example, some practitioners told us about building a young person's confidence so that they could make eye contact with someone while speaking, while others gave examples of accompanying young people while travelling to help build their confidence using public transport. Practitioners told us that this kind of relational practice includes challenging young people or encouraging them to move beyond their comfort zone - grounded in a relationship of trust.

We're not just helping people with CVs, we help people so that they are ready for work. One client we had - brilliant CV, committed to job search - problem was his personal hygiene was terrible. One of the mentors in the Youth Hub earned the right to tackle this - and he took it on board.

Youth Hub practitioner

Practitioners told us about some factors which could be improved to support relational practice:

- Under current rules, most young people can get support from a Youth Hub for six months. Practitioners told us that for some young people, this is not long enough; for example, it can take two or three months to build the initial relationship before moving on to supporting a young person to search for a job.
- Dedicated and expert staff are essential to delivering relational practice and supporting young people to achieve better outcomes at a Youth Hub. However, short-term funding can be a serious problem for staff recruitment and retention. For example, some Youth Hub staff are on 12-month temporary contracts due to short-term funding, and this sometimes results in staff leaving the Youth Hub because their contract is coming to an end, disrupting the support young people receive even if the funding is subsequently extended.

Youth Employment Hubs vary significantly - but this is a strength, not a weakness

In our research, we found Youth Hubs vary significantly. DWP have provided significant flexibility to local managers to adapt the Youth Hub offer depending on which local partners they are working with, the sources of funding available and the local community context. Some of the variations include:

- The type of building the Youth Hub is located in (see above)
- The model of access: 'open access' or referral only (see above)
- Some Youth Hubs are in effect embedded within a larger organisation or service, while others are standalone.
- Some Youth Hubs have been co-located with existing services, while others have been set up as brand new Hubs.
- The types of additional support available within Youth Hubs: some Youth Hubs primarily offer support from a Youth Hub Work Coach, while others are more expansive and offer support from a range of other practitioners and organisations. This can include additional employment, skills and careers support/advice as well as other types of support, for example mental health and wellbeing.

Based on our research, our conclusion is that the variation and flexibility within the Youth Hub model is a strength, not a weakness. This is because the flexible model enables DWP and different partner organisations to come together and create something which works well contextually both for young people and the partner organisations involved. Where strong local relationships and collaborations already existed - between DWP and other organisations, and between other organisations themselves - these enabled local partners to create a Youth Hub together successfully. However, strong existing relationships are not a prerequisite: a number of our interviewees told us that the process of working together to set up and then run the Youth Hub had strengthened inter-organisational relationships.

When we spoke to young people, there was no particular consensus about where Youth Hubs should ideally be based, which suggests that local flexibility about location can work well. The only concern which some focus group participants mentioned was regarding Youth Hubs being based in educational settings, such as a college. A few young people who had poor experiences at school said that they would be uncomfortable having to re-enter an educational environment to get support at a Youth Hub.

I think it's cool for [the Youth Hub] to be completely detached as well because school was not a safe place for me, but this is. Having them together, I feel like I'd be less likely to attend.

Young person, focus group participant

I don't think there is one specific building that's one size fits all. Because I think every location is different, every city or town has different facilities, different places. So I think it really should depend on what works best for that particular location.

Young person, focus group participant

Youth Hubs can certainly be strengthened and improved, and we set out some of the ways to achieve this in our recommendations (see section 4). However, our key message for policy makers is that the local flexibility of the Youth Hub model is a strength, not a weakness.

Youth Employment Hubs facilitate stronger partnership working between DWP and other organisations which provide support to young people

A consistent theme we heard from practitioners working at Youth Hubs was that the Youth Hub structure facilitates stronger partnership working between DWP/JCP and other organisations which provide support to young people. Typically, these partner organisations had pre-existing links: JCP Work Coaches often refer young people to other organisations for additional support, and youth employment organisations often make an effort to build relationships with JCP and individual Work Coaches to raise awareness of what they offer, so that JCP Work Coaches can refer young people when appropriate. These are the kinds of links that generally exist across the country, regardless of whether there is a local Youth Hub or not.

However, Youth Hub practitioners explained to us that Youth Hubs significantly improve on these pre-existing links in several ways. First, Youth Hub staff told us that the partnership within Youth Hubs works well for both sides. For JCP, it enables easier referrals and allows young people to access additional support, while for non-JCP organisations it makes providing support easier because young people are required to come to the Youth Hub to have their Universal Credit appointment. Practitioners told us that 'getting young people through the front door' was improved by having co-located Youth Hub Work Coaches, and that once young people had come the first time, they were more confident and were more likely to return, as well as simply being aware of the support which is available.

Young people have to come in - they have to attend their Universal Credit appointment - and they think it's not too bad. So getting them in once, offering them a cup of tea, it's a community centre. So that environment puts people at ease.

Youth Hub practitioner

Second, communication is better because Youth Hub Work Coaches and other practitioners are co-located in the same physical location. This enables closer partnership working, and improves respective staff's knowledge of each other's work. In some Youth Hubs we visited, there was a strong sense of 'one team' working together to support young people despite practitioners working for different organisations. This sense of teamwork was a feature which several Youth Hub managers mentioned to us as a significant strength of Youth Hubs.

Third, co-location improves the ease and quality of referrals. The process of 'referring' a young person to another organisation or service is, at many Youth Hubs, a matter of speaking to someone sitting at the next desk across. This makes the referral process considerably easier, both for practitioners and for young people. It also improves the quality of referrals, because Youth Hub Work Coaches have a better knowledge of the support other organisations provide. By contrast, in our previous research in Birmingham and Solihull, organisations told us that the quality of referrals from JCP Work Coaches was inconsistent: practitioners told us that sometimes people were referred who were not suitable for that organisation's programme of support.²⁶

²⁶ Phillips, A. and Stephenson, C. A Tapestry of Services: Employment skills and careers support in East Birmingham and North Solihull. Demos, 3 August 2023. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/A-Tapestry-of-Services-August-2023.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

Fourth, co-location improves the ongoing support young people receive through joined-up working. We heard that sometimes JCP and non-JCP staff would talk about how a young person was progressing to ensure they were providing joined-up support and discuss if there were any barriers the young person was facing. Youth Hub practitioners told us that this kind of informal communication was valuable in supporting young people in a holistic way.

This close partnership working was valued by young people as well as by Youth Hub staff. For example, one young person in a focus group told us:

There's great teamwork among the staff [at the Youth Hub], they genuinely want to help you.

Young person, focus group participant

This supports the idea that co-location is one method for 'integrating' or 'joining up' services so that they serve "lives, not professions" as Chris Naylor, former Chief Executive of Barking and Dagenham Council, puts it.²⁷ Barking and Dagenham found that integrating staff from different professions and council services in 'Community Solutions Hubs' was better for citizens and simultaneously reduced costs for the council.²⁸ Youth Hubs operate on a much smaller scale than the Community Solutions Hubs, but based on our interviews we think they are experiencing some of the same advantages of co-location.

Youth Employment Hubs buildings support the destigmatisation of employment support

In our focus groups, young people frequently distinguished Youth Hubs from the 'intimidating' environments of Jobcentres. Most focus group participants had experience of both, since most of them had received support at JCP in the past before being referred to a Youth Hub. Young people often described Jobcentres as unpleasant and intimidating, commenting on the lack of private spaces, the short appointment times, and the presence of a security guard as being unsettling.

Going in there [the Jobcentre] feels like you've committed a crime. Everyone's just so serious.

Young person, focus group participant

The [Youth Hub] in general, I would say that being able to come somewhere that is understanding rather than judgmental... because I feel like in my head I thought that I'd be judged for not being able to get a job and I feel like going to the Jobcentre, it was going to be very formal. But just coming here, it feels much more welcoming.

Young person, focus group participant

²⁷ Naylor, C. Only We Can Save the State: Lessons for national government from public service reform in Barking and Dagenham. Demos, 11 June 2024. Available at https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Only-we-can-save-the-state_CN_Paper.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

²⁸ Naylor, C. Only We Can Save the State: Lessons for national government from public service reform in Barking and Dagenham. Demos, 11 June 2024. Available at https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Only-we-can-save-the-state_CN_Paper.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

There is a bit of a stigma about people that need support in getting work [...] my first time going to the Jobcentre, I was thinking, "people that see me go in there are going to think that I'm just scrounging or are going to think that I'm not going to be able to function in society."

Young person, focus group participant

On the other hand, young people emphasised the more positive environment of Youth Hubs. Some felt that locating Youth Hubs in community spaces such as libraries took the stigma away from accessing employment support. Practitioners tended to agree with young people on the value of Youth Hub spaces, with staff we interviewed telling us that the Youth Hub environment is more conducive to constructive employment support delivery for young people.

You know, anyone can come to the library. I think it's really pretty and there's really nice artwork. When I came in, I thought it was lovely.

Young person, focus group participant

In our focus groups, when we asked for constructive feedback, some young people asked for the inclusion of more private, sound-proof spaces in their Youth Hubs. We know that some Youth Hubs offer rooms that can be booked for a private conversation, including several of the Youth Hubs which we visited for our research. However, this is not available everywhere.

I think having a quiet room would be really helpful because sometimes I want to go somewhere else where there's not many people or any people at all apart from me and my [Youth Hub] Work Coach. But there's nowhere really to go...

Young person, focus group participant

In our evidence review, we noted that some users of the MyGo programme in Ipswich also struggled with the open-plan environment of the centres.²⁹ As such, integrating more private spaces for discussion into Youth Hubs would improve the experiences of young people who want to share more personal circumstances as well as those who struggle with social anxiety.

Youth Employment Hubs provide a range of expansive support

According to both young people and Youth Hub practitioners, Youth Hub Work Coaches are able to have longer meetings with young people in comparison to the standard 10-minute appointment at a Jobcentre. (Jobcentres offer a range of different types of support, but the 10-minute appointment is the most common way of providing support to people.)

²⁹ Bennett, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

Interviewees told us that this increased young people's motivation to attend appointments at the Youth Hub in comparison to Jobcentre appointments. Anecdotally, a number of people told us that the attendance rate at Youth Hubs was higher than at local Jobcentres - that is, a higher proportion of young people attended their Universal Credit appointments at the Youth Hub than at the Jobcentre.

Youth Hubs are also designed to provide additional support to young people, although there is significant variation between Youth Hubs in what types of additional support are available. Sometimes, support is specifically related to employment, skills and careers and is provided by other organisations or programmes in addition to the support provided by a Youth Hub Work Coach. Practitioners told us about several advantages of this. For example, other practitioners tend to have greater flexibility about their time than Youth Hub Work Coaches, and can therefore talk to young people and support them for longer periods (for example, 30 minutes or even an hour in some instances). This can extend to more informal types of support such as travelling on public transport or attending job interviews with young people to encourage confidence. Another advantage is that collectively Youth Hub staff are able to provide other types of support apart from one-to-one guidance, such as group sessions, workshops, presentations and opportunities to meet employers. These can work well since young people are very positive about the welcoming environment of a Youth Hub.

Some Youth Hubs are also able to provide other types of support beyond employment, skills and careers. Sometimes this is provided within the Youth Hub itself, while at other times it might be having an initial conversation with someone for a 'warm referral' process. This can include mental health and wellbeing support and financial/debt advice, for example. When we spoke to young people in our focus groups, most of our participants said that they appreciated the co-location of these types of additional support, giving reasons such as being comfortable in and familiar with the Youth Hub building/environment, and easier access. We also asked focus group participants whether they would want to access other types of support at Youth Hub, and generally participants were positive about the idea.

There have been times when I thought, "Do I need support with my mental health?" But I've shied away from it because it just seemed inaccessible at the moment, but maybe with there being [support at] a Youth Hub that shows that they do do all of it, whilst looking for a job, you can also gather that support and having someone help and be there who understands mental health, would eventually give you more opportunities with work. So I think having more than one avenue of support and all in one place would be better for Youth Hubs in general.

Young person, focus group participant

Some Youth Hub managers to whom we spoke said that they wanted to remain focused on employment/skills/careers - using a phrase such as "we can't do everything here". There is a balance to achieve, but the feedback we heard from young people suggests that many do - or would - appreciate an expansive Youth Hub model which co-locates multiple services in one place.

Youth Employment Hubs are supporting marginalised young people who face barriers to starting and staying in employment

Marginalised young people often face additional barriers to starting and staying in employment. For example, recent research by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation, explored the 'risk factors' which make it more likely young people will

become NEET aged 16-25.³⁰ The research identified six 'risk factors' (see below) which increased the likelihood of a young person being NEET, while also finding that "as the number of risk factors a young person experienced rose, their likelihood of being NEET also increased substantially."³¹ Since Youth Hubs often support young people who are NEET it is important for them to be aware of these risk factors and consider what they can do to support young people who may be experiencing multiple risk factors at the same time.

- Not having an academic qualification above level 1
- Having a limiting disability
- Having own child before the age of 21
- Having own child between ages 21 and 25
- Having a mental health condition
- Having been identified as having special educational needs (SEN)

In our interviews with both Youth Hubs practitioners and young people, we heard about some barriers to employment which young people face. Three in particular overlap with the risk factors identified by NatCen and Youth Futures Foundation:

- Mental ill health was the barrier most frequently mentioned. Youth Hubs would normally support young people with mild-to-moderate mental ill health, rather than more severe mental ill health, and so typically practitioners and young people mentioned anxiety, depression and low confidence as being issues. (Although low confidence is not the same as mental ill health, practitioners often mentioned them as being related.) Several practitioners specifically linked this to young people's experiences during the pandemic when their education, work experience opportunities or transition from education aged 16 or 18 had been severely disrupted.
- Practitioners also talked about supporting young people with SEND or neurodiversity / autism. For example, one Youth Hub manager we spoke to said that about 20% of the young people the Youth Hub supported had SEND needs. For comparison, within the school population in England (a different age group to that which Youth Hubs support), 18.4% of pupils have special educational needs (SEN).³²
- Some Youth Hub practitioners specifically mentioned that young people with no qualifications, or low qualifications, faced additional barriers to entering employment. Several interviewees referred to young people who did not have GCSE English or Maths qualifications as facing barriers - which matches the NatCen research about the 'risk factor' of not having a qualification above level 1. (A GCSE pass - grade 4 or above - counts as a Level 2 qualification.)³³ Unfortunately we have no data to be able to comment on, for example, what proportion of young people supported by Youth Hubs have no qualifications above level 1, which would be valuable information to inform the design of Youth Hub provision in the future.

We also asked Youth Hub practitioners about other groups of marginalised young people:

- Some Youth Hub practitioners told us about supporting young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This varied considerably depending on the demographics of the local community, as is to be expected. A few Youth Hub managers mentioned supporting people from ethnic minority backgrounds who lacked English, such as refugees from Ukraine, although this appears to be relatively rare.

30 Crowley, J. and others. Risk factors for being NEET among young people. National Centre for Social Research, December 2023. Available at <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/OVERLA2.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

31 Crowley, J. and others. Risk factors for being NEET among young people. National Centre for Social Research, December 2023, pp. 20-32. Available at <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/OVERLA2.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

32 Department for Education. Special educational needs in England. GOV.UK, 20 June 2024. Available at <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england> [accessed 17/07/2024]

33 Department for Education. What qualification levels mean. Available at www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels [accessed 16/07/2024]

- We also asked staff about providing support to young people with physical health conditions or disabilities. Overall few people mentioned this as a support need, although some Youth Hub managers did talk about providing support to young people with disabilities in general (whether related to physical health or mental health).

Youth Employment Hubs offer additional support to marginalised young people, but this varies between different Hubs

It is clear from our research interviews that Youth Hub managers and practitioners are aware of the different types of marginalisation mentioned in the previous section, and want to support young people as much as possible. Different Youth Hubs have adopted different strategies to achieve this, depending on factors such as funding and which other organisations they are able to partner with in the local area. We can roughly divide additional support into four types:

- 1. Training for practitioners:** some Youth Hub managers talked about providing training for practitioners so that they could provide high-quality support to all young people. For example, several Youth Hub managers mentioned providing additional training to staff to support young people experiencing mental ill health; others mentioned mental health first aid training.
- 2. Referrals and developing relationships with other organisations:** Youth Hub practitioners often refer young people to other organisations for additional support, and in some cases have built up good relationships with these organisations to support what people sometimes called 'warm referrals' or 'warm handovers'. This includes organisations which provide mental health and wellbeing support and organisations which provide support to people with SEND. Sometimes where a Local Authority is a partner in the Youth Hub, practitioners are able to make use of other LA resources: for example one LA told us about how Youth Hub practitioners can refer young people to a different LA team who provide mental health support to local residents.
- 3. Having specialist staff within the Youth Hub itself:** some Youth Hubs have specialist staff within the Youth Hub itself providing support in the same location. We heard examples of staff working full-time as part of the Youth Hub team, such as practitioners providing mental health and wellbeing support; support to young people from marginalised communities / ethnic minority backgrounds; support to neurodivergent young people; and support to young people with SEND and/or other disabilities. We also heard about examples of co-location in other ways, for example specialist staff being in the Youth Hub once a week or once a month, rather than being based there full time. Specialist staff are sometimes funded/employed directly by the Youth Hub or the Youth Hub host organisation, but others are funded/employed by DWP, the LA or another organisation. Flexible local arrangements allow managers to adapt the support depending on the local context.
- 4. Adaptations:** for example, some Youth Hub managers told us they have set aside specific times of the week or month as quiet periods at the Youth Hub for young people with SEND or who would prefer a quieter environment.

I started going there because I just thought that, "Oh, I can go there. They can only find a job." And then later along they were telling me about that mental health course, so I was like, "I'll give it a go." I went there on the first day, loved it. [...] I always saw they gave me something, I have ADHD and I can't do nothing about it, but he showed me that there's actually more I can do.

Young person, focus group participant

WEAKNESSES OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

Short-term funding agreements cause problems for Youth Employment Hubs

Funding for Youth Hubs is often short-term, for example based on 12 month agreements. We heard from interviewees that it is specifically the short-term nature of funding arrangements which cause problems through instability: for example, interviewees talked about Youth Hubs shutting down; staff leaving because they were on fixed-term contracts with no job certainty when the funding agreement was coming to an end; and difficulty in paying for suitable venues, which are a key part of the success of Youth Hubs. This was one of the major themes our interviewees talked about, highlighting that it takes time to build effective partnership working and that the success of Youth Hubs is being undermined by short-term funding arrangements. Interviewees also told us that, for example, Youth Hub managers have to spend more of their time applying for funding, which takes away their focus from supporting improvements in delivery.

Two common sources of funding for Youth Hubs are DWP (via JCP budgets) and UKSPF via Combined Authorities and Local Authorities. We were told that in many cases Youth Hub agreements with DWP are on a 12-month basis, while UKSPF by default only provided funding for the 'People and Skills' investment priority for the year 2024/25, which also resulted in 12-month funding agreements. UKSPF currently ends in March 2025, and there is currently no information about a second round of funding ('UKSPF2'). The new government will need to set out its plans for the future of UKSPF at the 2024 Autumn Budget. If there is no extension or second round of UKSPF, some Youth Hubs would almost certainly have to close down. We return to this theme in our recommendations (see section 4).

Awareness about Youth Employment Hubs is low among young people and among some organisations and services which support young people

Although we have not collected quantitative data in this project, based on our qualitative research our conclusion is that awareness about Youth Hubs is low - including among young people, employers and other stakeholders. This is a problem because over half (62%) of out-of-work 18-24-year-olds do not receive benefits, and therefore are unlikely to find out about a Youth Hub via a Jobcentre.³⁴ If Youth Hubs are going to help permanently reduce the number of NEETs, young people need to know that Youth Hubs exist and that support is available for them, but this is not the case at the moment. Generally, the young people in our focus groups felt strongly about increasing public awareness of Youth Hubs.

It should just be common knowledge. I found out about [the Youth Hub] when I was 24, which is literally the age limit. I could have had so many years of getting better help and better guidance.

Young person, focus group participant

Low awareness is partly because some Youth Hubs are 'referral only' - that is, they only support young people who are formally referred to the Youth Hub by a JCP Work Coach. From a purely administrative point of view, low awareness is not necessarily a problem for 'referral-only' Youth Hubs. However, it is a problem with regard to overall outcomes for all young people in a particular area, given the high proportion of young people who are not in employment and not receiving Universal Credit. For this reason our recommendation is that all Youth Hubs should be 'open access' (see section 4).

³⁴ McCurdy, C. and Murphy, L. We've only just begun: Action to improve young people's mental health, education and employment. Resolution Foundation, 26 February 2024. Available at www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/weve-only-just-begun [accessed 16/07/2024]

Even for those Youth Hubs which are already 'open access', we judge that awareness among young people is generally low. However, we did hear some examples of awareness gradually increasing. For example, in our focus groups most young people had been referred to the Youth Hub by their JCP Work Coach, but a few young people told us they had found out about the Youth Hub in another way, for example by word-of-mouth from a friend or family member. A couple of young people mentioned to us that their friends were aware of the Youth Hub and the support it could offer.

Advertising, promotion and marketing of 'open access' Youth Hubs is currently the responsibility of each individual Youth Hub. Managers of open-access Youth Hubs told us they had employed a number of different strategies including creating a website and social media accounts and aiming to raise awareness with other organisations and services in the local area which support young people. However, not every Youth Hub has staff capacity to undertake promotion and marketing; some for example have either no or very limited online presence at all.

Low awareness can also be a problem among other stakeholders, by which we mean in particular organisations and services which are in contact with young people and therefore could recommend the Youth Hub to young people looking for advice, support or guidance related to work. For example, while some Youth Hubs work closely with local FE colleges, in other cases there are few links between them at the moment. Some stakeholders working in youth charities to whom we spoke either had not heard of Youth Hubs or did not know what they offered. Youth Hub managers told us that building awareness of their Youth Hub with local stakeholders is a priority for them. We think that raising awareness of open access Youth Hubs in schools, colleges and Local Authority education/NEET teams is particularly important (see section 4).

Links between Youth Employment Hubs and employers are sometimes limited

One aspect of successful employment support for young people is building links with employers who want to recruit young people and who offer 'good work'. According to practitioners, awareness of Youth Hubs among employers is generally low. One reason for low awareness is that Youth Hubs are individually small in scale; this limits their capacity for raising awareness with local employers. In the recommendations section, we explore ways of addressing this by better coordinating employer engagement.

We did hear some examples of Youth Hubs building links with employers. We heard one example of a Youth Hub working with a local employer who was impressed with job candidates from the Youth Hub and wanted to know that a young person had been supported by the Youth Hub on their job application. We heard several examples of employers coming to the Youth Hub building itself and running a presentation or information session for young people. Where Youth Hubs are based in well-established organisations, they are able to draw on their existing relationships with employers to run activities like information sessions. Anecdotally, it seemed that Youth Hubs which were newly set up tended to have weaker links with employers and had found it harder to establish these links.

Most Youth Hub managers we spoke to said they wanted to undertake more employer engagement but had found it hard to do so. Sometimes this was because they lacked staff capacity, while others said they had found it hard to find employers willing to engage with them.

Without quantitative data, it is not possible for us to comment on whether or not the examples we mention in this section are representative of Youth Hub engagement with employers overall. However, our impression is that engagement with employers is a weakness in the current Youth Hub model. It is worth noting, however, that this is not a weakness confined to Youth Hubs. Employment support programmes often focus on the 'supply side' (people) rather than the 'demand side' (jobs and employers). Research by Katy Jones and Calum Carson has highlighted employers' mixed experiences of engaging with Jobcentres, for example noting that "several stakeholders including DWP representatives felt that Jobcentre employer engagement was something of a 'lost art', in part

side-lined by increasing shifts towards the digitalisation of services.”³⁵ Although the picture is varied, overall we think that Youth Hubs should prioritise improving employer engagement, which we discuss in our recommendations (see section 4).

Data sharing and data collection are issues for many Youth Employment Hubs

Issues with data regularly came up in our conversations with Youth Hub managers and practitioners. There are inter-related problems with *data collection* and *data sharing* between organisations.

On data collection, currently most partner organisations at Youth Hubs have to collect or re-collect the data about the young people they support. This is because the Youth Hub is a building, not a ‘service’ or ‘programme’, so each individual organisation has its own data collection arrangements. A Youth Hub manager told us that a number of spreadsheets owned by different members of Youth Hub staff was the main way data was collected and managed. Staff told us that this takes up time and is frustrating for young people who might, for example, have to fill in three separate forms to get support from three different organisations at the Youth Hub. Another time consuming task is collecting data related to outcomes. Based on our conversations, we understand that each Youth Hub organisation tends to do this separately, which involves individually contacting young people by email or telephone to find out what they are currently doing (for example, to track their progress in starting or staying in employment). This can be a time-consuming process since little of it is automated. One Youth Hub manager told us they had paid for a CRM system to help them manage these processes more effectively, but noted that the cost was very large in the context of the overall budget for the Youth Hub.

On data sharing, many Youth Hub managers whom we interviewed told us that they were frustrated at the lack of data sharing between organisations. For example, despite co-locating in the same building, generally we heard that DWP/JCP does not share data with Youth Hub partners. This means that a Youth Hub partner organisation has to start again ‘registering’ a young person for support from their own organisation or programme. For young people receiving Universal Credit, JCP will have better data on what they do after finishing receiving support from the Youth Hub in terms of hours worked and benefit payments; however this kind of ‘outcome data’ is not shared with partner organisations.

Data sharing between organisations is often difficult to implement for reasons such as data protection regulations and risk aversion regarding sharing data. However, it has clear potential to improve the quality of young people’s experiences, to support staff and to help Youth Hub managers by enabling them to track outcomes and improve the effectiveness of Youth Hubs.

Communication to young people about Youth Hubs is sometimes inadequate

One specific finding which came out of our focus groups with young people, and our interviews with practitioners, is that communication to young people about Youth Hubs is sometimes inadequate. Several young people told us that they were provided with no or very little information about the Youth Hub before accessing it for the first time. They told us they were referred to the Youth Hub by their JCP Work Coach, but did not know what to expect or what the process would be like. This could be a barrier for young people with anxiety or SEND for example, or mean that a young person is unnecessarily nervous or anxious before their first meeting - a point which one of our focus group participants made.

35 Jones, K. and Carson, C. Universal Credit and Employers: Exploring the Demand Side of UK Active Labour Market Policy. Manchester Metropolitan University, January 2023, p. 21. Available at www.mmu.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/UniversalCreditandEmployersFinalReportJan2023.pdf [accessed 17/07/2024]

Before you have your first appointment, just having a bit more of an idea of what it's going to entail - I had no idea what I would be turning up to, I didn't know what my appointment would be like, I didn't know how long it would be. So maybe just having a little bit more information before we come for our first appointment, because after that I had loads of support that was really helpful. But I just didn't know what to expect and that itself made me not want to come in the first place.

Young person, focus group participant

Young people also told us that communication about what support the Youth Hub offered was sometimes poor. For example, they did not know what other types of support were available, or they were not told that the Youth Hub had both a DWP Youth Hub Work Coach and other organisations co-located there. Practitioners told us that sometimes there is confusion about the different roles and organisations present at a Youth Hub - for example, having to clarify that Local Authority staff don't work for DWP, which staff told us can help build trust with some young people. We think that at least some of these points could be addressed by improving communication before a young person starts using a Youth Hub.

Though Youth Hubs are working well, there are a number of areas for improvement

To conclude, we found Youth Hubs are working well overall. They occupy an important space in the employment support landscape by taking a holistic approach to supporting young people and by facilitating stronger partnership working between JCP, Local Authorities, charities, training providers and other organisations.

However, Youth Hubs also have some weaknesses which should be addressed. Some of these are more specific, like improving communication to young people before having their first appointment at a Youth Hub. Others are more systemic, like the weaknesses caused by short-term funding and the lack of data-sharing agreements.

In the next section, we consider which of these strengths and weaknesses are similar to previous comparable programmes designed to deliver employment support to young people, and what lessons can be learnt from these previous programmes. We then address some of the weaknesses we identified through our recommendations in section 4.

SECTION 3

LEARNING FROM PREVIOUS YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUB-LIKE PROGRAMMES

POLICY MAKERS AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUB MANAGERS CAN LEARN FROM OTHER EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Youth Hubs share similarities with previous employment programmes such as MyGo, Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) and Talent Match. Therefore, there is an opportunity for policy makers and Youth Employment Hub managers to learn from these previous employment support programmes, based on both success factors and the challenges they faced.

In our evidence review we aimed to identify previous programmes or schemes which had similarities to the current Youth Employment Hubs initiative. Specifically we looked in greater depth at programmes which met some of the following six criteria:

1. The model is physically located outside of Jobcentre Plus, allowing for an informal, friendly and welcoming environment
2. The model is designed to support young people, most commonly defined as age 16-24
3. Personalised one-to-one employment support provided by JCP Work Coaches
4. Personalised one-to-one employment support provided by other organisations apart from JCP
5. Co-location of multiple services and/or multiple organisations in the same location; partnership working between different organisations
6. Primary outcome of young people entering employment

Lessons from these programmes can help improve Youth Employment Hubs. We found significant overlap between key themes from past programme evaluations and our own research findings about Youth Employment Hubs; we outline some of these key themes below.

THE CO-LOCATION OF SERVICES ENCOURAGES EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Youth employment support is often characterised by high levels of fragmentation and disjointed provision.³⁶ This has sometimes led to support being duplicated or services even competing with each other. As such, evaluations of Youth Employment Hub-like programmes highlight co-located services and partnership working as core strengths.

A review of a range of employment support programmes for young people states that the best practice of partnership working consists of organisations aligning their objectives, resources and goals to improve working relationships.³⁷ Much like Youth Hubs, the MyGo and YEG schemes benefitted from close coordination with JCP. For example, the co-location of YEG advisers in the JCP offices improved the relationship between the two organisations. This supported the development of joint ventures such as employability and IT courses as well as increased referrals of participants. Similarly, the MyGo evaluation praised the joint working practices between JCP, Local Authorities and partner organisations. The evaluation underlines the strategic and operational importance of “effective partnerships, collaborative leadership and good governance”.³⁸ Similar lessons can also be taken from programmes funded by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). Co-location with other relevant services encouraged referrals, according to the process evaluation:

Another key positive aspect of implementation commented on at the project level concerned the referral routes established and the buy-in from a range of key stakeholders to refer young people onto the provision. In particular, provider representatives commented on the successful relationships established with Jobcentre Plus, which was noted as becoming a key referral mechanism onto the YEI. Co-location of services, including providers being co-located with Jobcentre Plus staff in some instances, was similarly cited by several interviewees as a key positive aspect of YEI implementation to date.³⁹

Youth Hubs are by design already working in partnership with JCP, which is clearly a strength as described in section 2. Looking forward, Youth Hubs need to work effectively in partnership with other organisations in order to increase capacity and foster innovation that can support improvement in the quality of support they offer in order to increase impact.⁴⁰ We think that one way of achieving this is to lengthen funding agreements to provide greater stability (see our recommendations in section 4). In addition, the YEI initiative suggests local flexibility is an essential consideration when co-locating services as it will allow provision to be designed and curated according to local need.⁴¹ As we outlined in section 2, we believe Youth Hubs are already doing this well, but there are also opportunities for further improvement.

36 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

37 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

38 Bennet, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

39 Ecorys. Youth Employment Initiative Process Evaluation: Assessment of Strategic Fit, Design and Implementation. October 2017, p. 67. Available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75c6d840f0b67f59fc883/youth-employment-initiative-process-evaluation.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

40 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

41 Ecorys. Youth Employment Initiative Process Evaluation: Assessment of Strategic Fit, Design and Implementation. October 2017. Available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75c6d840f0b67f59fc883/youth-employment-initiative-process-evaluation.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

The partnerships with, and co-location of, a range of non-employment services and wraparound support in one location recognises that wider solutions are needed to tackle the barriers that may be obstructing a young person from entering education, employment or training.⁴² The YEG integrated close relationships with Local Authority departments, such as homelessness units and Troubled Families (now Supporting Families) teams, in their employment support.⁴³ The YEG also co-developed tailored provision with local providers such as mental health and wellbeing courses.⁴⁴ Such provision of wraparound support encourages young people not only to take up work, but also to sustain it.⁴⁵ In Phase 1, the YEG achieved its targets for overall job outcomes and sustained (26-week) job outcomes.⁴⁶

Crucially, the YEG partnered with varied service providers, including referring young people to help with debt, finances, budgeting, benefits, carers' and disability organisations, housing associations, business support for self-employment, local FE colleges and careers services.⁴⁷ In France, the Mission Locales (Local Missions) program uses a similar approach to support young people aged 16-25 who have been out of education or employment for a year or more.⁴⁸ The personal advisers on this programme consider the wider difficulties a young person may face, such as issues related to housing and health, and utilise their local partnerships to provide the correct provision according to the young person's need.⁴⁹ This kind of approach is relevant for Youth Hub practitioners when partnering with wider services that are not co-located within the Youth Hub itself.

RELATIONAL PRACTICE AND PERSONALISED SUPPORT ENCOURAGES SUSTAINED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

As with Youth Hubs, participants in other employment programmes commonly emphasise the value of one-to-one, personalised support/coaching. The positive contribution made by one-to-one advisers/coaches is driven by their approach to building trust with the young people they are supporting. This kind of relationship can be described as a 'working partnership' or 'working alliance', which is characterised by trust and involves both individuals working together to achieve a shared goal. The term 'working alliance' is used in psychotherapy, and studies have shown that it is a crucial element in positive clinical outcomes.⁵⁰ Although the literature on the same concept in the context of employment support is limited, both practitioners and service users regularly talk about the quality of the relationship as an important factor in research about employment support.^{51,52,53}

42 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

43 Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation. Learning and Work Institute, March 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Liverpool-City-Region-Youth-Employment-Gateway-YEG-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

44 Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation. Learning and Work Institute, March 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Liverpool-City-Region-Youth-Employment-Gateway-YEG-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

45 Orlando, C. and Wilson, T. Improving outcomes for young people: Lessons from Europe. Institute for Employment Studies, October 2022, p. 22. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Improving_outcomes_for_young_people.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

46 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

47 Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation. Learning and Work Institute, March 2018, p.41. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Liverpool-City-Region-Youth-Employment-Gateway-YEG-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

48 Orlando, C. and Wilson, T. Improving outcomes for young people: Lessons from Europe. Institute for Employment Studies, October 2022, p. 22. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Improving_outcomes_for_young_people.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

49 Orlando, C. and Wilson, T. Improving outcomes for young people: Lessons from Europe. Institute for Employment Studies, October 2022, p.22. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Improving_outcomes_for_young_people.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

50 Ravn, R. and Bredgaard, T. Relationships Matter – The Impact of Working Alliances in Employment Services. Social Policy and Society, Vol. 20, Issue 3, July 2021, pp. 418-435. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746420000470> [accessed 17/07/2024]

51 Ravn, R. and Bredgaard, T. Relationships Matter – The Impact of Working Alliances in Employment Services. Social Policy and Society, Vol. 20, Issue 3, July 2021, pp. 418-435. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746420000470> [accessed 17/07/2024]

52 Catty, J. and others. Predictors of employment for people with severe mental illness: results of an international six-centre randomised controlled trial. The British Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 192, Issue 3, March 2008, pp. 224-231. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.107.041475> [accessed 17/07/2024]

53 Phillips, A. Working Together, the case for universal employment support. Demos, 7 May 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Working-Together.pdf> [16/07/2024]

Young people across a variety of employment programmes observe it is the friendly support of their advisers/coaches that helped overcome hesitations caused by unhelpful and even upsetting experiences of employment services in the past, and that advisers/coaches help to nurture a trusting and open relationship.⁵⁴ One MyGo participant said about his coach: “She actually took an interest in what I was doing and all that, and that really sort of puts your mind at ease and eases you into opening up a lot more.”⁵⁵ Just as we heard in our focus groups with Youth Hub users, young people in other programmes appreciate their individual interests being taken into account when receiving employment support. Similarly, the YEG evaluation stresses participants valued and trusted advisers who treated them as an individual by listening to their needs, concerns and aspirations.⁵⁶ This highlights that young people appreciate an environment in which they are not hurried into any available job but instead supported to be able to work towards their career goals. The supportive approach taken by advisers/coaches helps to create this type of environment.

Advisers/coaches are then able to take a tailored, proactive approach. In the case of MyGo, coaches advised on how and where to search for jobs, regularly informed young people about relevant vacancies and training opportunities and often went as far as contacting employers on their behalf. Participants appreciated that the coaches guided them through these processes rather than asking them to do so alone. In a review of other youth employment programmes, coaches have prioritised working at the young person’s level and pace by co-developing their support journey with them. This allowed them to create bespoke plans for their participants as well as building the capacity of the young person they were supporting to take greater ownership of their progress.⁵⁷ In the evaluation of the YEG, the Learning and Work Institute recommended investing in personalised, adviser-led support which has effective links with employers to enable good job matching.⁵⁸

The relationship that young people build with their adviser/coach also helps grow their own confidence and motivation to find employment.^{59,60} One MyGo participant admitted, “I didn’t want to really look for a job... then I went to MyGo and they like basically have given me a boot up the bum... they showed me how to look for jobs... giving me support in my confidence.”⁶¹ Through their trusting relationship, coaches are best situated to informally encourage young people towards their career goals. The benefit of personal coaching is often dependent on the consistency of having one reliable coach. In cases where MyGo participants disengaged from the program, it was often a result of ineffective coaching support. As such, close attention must be paid to ensuring that relationships built between coaches and participants are high-quality and sustained over time. This is why longer-term funding agreements can help support better delivery and improved outcomes (see recommendations in section 4).

54 Bennet, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

55 Bennet, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

56 Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation. Learning and Work Institute, March 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Liverpool-City-Region-Youth-Employment-Gateway-YEG-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

57 Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

58 Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation. Learning and Work Institute, March 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Liverpool-City-Region-Youth-Employment-Gateway-YEG-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

59 Bennet, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

60 Hasluck, C. and Green, A. What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions. Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 2017. Available at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2007/hasluck_and_green_2007_rrep407.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

61 Bennet, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

EVALUATIONS AND CONSISTENT DATA COLLECTION CAN SUPPORT IMPROVEMENT AND ADAPTATION OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Past employment programmes have been able to benefit from timely and thorough evaluations. Evaluations are key to understanding how service delivery and outcomes can be further improved.⁶² Participants in Talent Match completed a Common Data Framework questionnaire when they joined the programme. This was followed up at 3, 6, 12, 18 and 24 month periods to generate a comprehensive dataset on their experience of finding employment.⁶³ This was supplemented with a profile of local labour market conditions to evaluate the success of different partnerships within Talent Match and their evolution. This kind of evaluation can help programmes learn and improve over time through a process of 'continuous improvement'. However, currently there is no similar shared framework across Youth Hubs, and no infrastructure to support sharing best practice and learning. As we noted in section 2, in interviews Youth Hub managers talked about problems with data collection, data sharing and evaluation. We make recommendations to address these issues in section 4.

CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING FROM THE PAST

In the course of our research, we were encouraged to observe that Youth Hubs are already incorporating some aspects of best practice from previous Youth Hub-like models. First, the use of personal advisers/coaches has been underlined as the most effective way to engage and sustain youth participation with employment support. From former programmes we are able to distinguish the particular characteristics that make an effective adviser/coach. A friendly and proactive adviser serves as the cornerstone of trust, confidence and motivation. As we found through our Youth Hub staff interviews, employment support practitioners are motivated by their job and often go the extra mile to support young people. As such, advisers/coaches/practitioners deserve the support and investment needed to continue these roles sustainably and at a high quality for every young person they support. Specifically, the Youth Hubs programme can enable practitioners to have more time per person and to specialise in supporting young people, which in turn can aid their professional development.

Second, a large part of the success of Youth Hubs is the co-located, partnership model. Similar to Youth Hubs, MyGo and YEG benefited greatly from a close relationship with JCP. Shared goals, pooled resources and speed of communication help to streamline service delivery and enable partners to pursue joint ventures. As we lay out in our recommendations, we recommend that the government recognise the value of Youth Hubs in the employment service landscape by providing longer-term funding. This would encourage institutions such as JCP and Local Authorities to trust the longevity of Youth Hubs and provide the attention and investment they deserve.

Third, former employment programmes benefitted from thorough and timely evaluations. As such, in section 4 we make recommendations to support data collection and sharing best practice. This would not only allow Youth Hub managers to understand what practices are working well but would also help demonstrate the value they add to other employment support services, fostering the cross-party consensus required to cement Youth Employment Hubs as a permanent part of the public service landscape.

⁶² Orlando, C. What works in youth employment partnerships. Institute for Employment Studies, June 2021. Available at www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/Partnership%20_Guide.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

⁶³ Damm, C. and others. Talent Match Evaluation: A Final Assessment. Sheffield Hallam University, 6 July 2021. Available at www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/publications/talent-match-evaluation-a-final-assessment [accessed 16/07/2024]

SECTION 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research findings in section 2, and learning from past programmes in section 3, in this section we set out our recommendations for the future of Youth Employment Hubs. We have grouped our recommendations around seven themes.

THEME 1: PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND LONGER FUNDING AGREEMENTS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

Based on our research, our conclusion is that Youth Employment Hubs are a positive innovation in providing holistic employment support to young people. Our key recommendation is that the new government should re-commit to Youth Employment Hubs and provide additional funding to improve them. Therefore, our first recommendation is that the government should commit to providing £100 million annual funding for Youth Employment Hubs. This budget is designed to fund all the rest of our recommendations. For a breakdown of how we calculated this budget, refer to the Annex at the end of this report.

As we noted in section 2, short-term funding causes problems for Youth Employment Hubs, reducing the effectiveness of support for young people. For future funding, longer-term agreements should be a high priority.

Our recommendation is that the government should fund Youth Employment Hubs through a combination of funding from DWP and the second round of UKSPF ('UKSPF2'). UKSPF currently ends in March 2025, and this is potentially a major threat to the future of Youth Hubs. Nonetheless, we think that UKSPF is a good source of funding for Youth Hubs as it has the potential to provide longer-term and stable funding, depending on the design and parameters of UKSPF2.

There is a clear direction of travel towards further devolution of employment support, as seen in both the 'devolution deals' agreed with various Combined Authorities and in the Labour Party's manifesto.⁶⁴ A key test for these plans for devolution of employment support is whether they

⁶⁴ Labour Party. Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024. 13 June 2024, p. 40. Available at <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

provide sufficient flexibility to CAs and LAs so that they can make longer-term funding agreements to support joined-up or integrated local delivery, through initiatives including Youth Employment Hubs. In the relevant areas of England, Mayors and Combined Authorities should take the lead on this process as employment support is devolved under the new government. For example, Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands, recently announced a regional ‘youth employment plan’ designed “to align with national government’s youth guarantee” which includes a commitment to build on existing Youth Employment Hubs “to provide all young people with access to a range of support and services”.⁶⁵

RECOMMENDATION 1

HM Treasury (HMT), DWP and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should work together to commit £100 million annual funding to Youth Employment Hubs in the 2024 Autumn Budget. Currently, we estimate that approximately £25 million of funding is provided to Youth Employment Hubs (£11.5 million from DWP, which we roughly estimate to be around half of total costs). In the 2023 Spring Budget the government committed to extending DWP’s Youth Offer, of which Youth Employment Hubs is one part, until April 2028. However, according to our research interviewees, future funding for Youth Hubs is highly uncertain. We recommend that central government should provide funding to extend and expand the Youth Employment Hubs programme. Specifically, we recommend that DWP should continue to fund Youth Employment Hub Work Coaches, while HMT and MHCLG should provide funding for Youth Employment Hubs via the second round of UKSPF. We estimate that total funding of £100 million per year could fund around 350 Youth Employment Hubs, ensuring that young people in every area of England, Scotland and Wales can access one, and could provide support to around 70,000 young people per year.

RECOMMENDATION 2

All funders, including DWP, Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and charities (providing in-kind support) should work together to agree funding arrangements for three years, for new Youth Hubs and as existing Youth Hubs renew their contracts/agreements, in order to increase certainty and stability.

THEME 2: MAKE ALL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS ‘OPEN ACCESS’

Although some Youth Hubs offer ‘open access’ to all young people of the relevant age group, other Youth Hubs only provide support to young people if they are referred by a JCP Work Coach and are receiving Universal Credit (‘referral only’). The latter is a problematic policy because it excludes many young people who need support to start or stay in work. First, it excludes the majority of 18-24-year-olds who are out of work: almost two in three (62%) of this age group who are out of work do not receive Universal Credit.⁶⁶ They would not be able to access support from a ‘referral only’ Youth Hub. Second, a ‘referral only’ policy excludes young people who are in work but want to access advice, guidance or support - for example, this could be a young person on a temporary or

⁶⁵ West Midlands Combined Authority. Mayor launches flagship plan for youth unemployment in the West Midlands - to create 20,000 learning and work opportunities. 10 July 2024. Available at www.wmca.org.uk/news/mayor-launches-flagship-plan-for-youth-unemployment-in-the-west-midlands-to-create-20-000-learning-and-work-opportunities [accessed 17/07/2024]

⁶⁶ McCurdy, C. and Murphy, L. We’ve only just begun: Action to improve young people’s mental health, education and employment. Resolution Foundation, 26 February 2024. Available at www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/weve-only-just-begun [accessed 16/07/2024]

zero-hours contract, in a low-quality job, or someone looking for advice on education/skills/training. Young people in these situations would clearly benefit from accessing a Youth Hub, but would not be able to in a 'referral only' model.

There is clear evidence for unmet demand among young people for advice, guidance or support related to employment and skills. For the research in this project we visited several open-access Youth Hubs and spoke to young people in focus groups who had found Youth Hub support useful but had not been referred there by a JCP Work Coach (for example, they had heard about the Youth Hub via word of mouth). Likewise, the MyGo programme, which supported young people aged 16-24 in Suffolk, also provides evidence that there is unmet demand: 42 per cent of participants were not receiving benefits when they joined the MyGo programme.⁶⁷ Demos recently published in-depth research on unmet demand for employment support and careers advice in our report *Open Door Policy*.⁶⁸

As noted previously, we think that the open access model is a strength of those Youth Hubs which already operate using it. It is also a step towards a public employment service, along the lines of the Universal Work Service concept, the advantages of which we have set out in previous Demos research.⁶⁹ The following recommendation addresses enabling access to Youth Hubs; we provide recommendations on expanding the network of Hubs and raising awareness under Themes 3 and 4.

RECOMMENDATION 3

DWP and local partner organisations should work together to make all Youth Employment Hubs 'open access' wherever practically possible, to serve all young people living in the local area regardless of whether they are receiving Universal Credit or not. Eligibility criteria should be kept to an absolute minimum. New Youth Hubs should be designed and set up to be open access. Youth Hub managers can operate an open access model using a variety of options including walk-ins without appointments, bookable appointments and initial virtual appointments, depending on the Youth Hub's setup and staff capacity.

Understandably, there are some concerns about the impact open access Youth Hubs may have on young people who need support the most. As noted earlier, we observed that many Youth Hubs currently operate on an open access basis and many practitioners support adopting this approach. We have not heard of an example where a Youth Hub being open access has resulted in excessive demands on staff time. However, if in the future this were to be the case, practitioners would have to judge the level of support each young person requires, and ensure that additional support is provided to those who need it the most.

⁶⁷ Bennett, L. and others. MyGo Evaluation: Final report. Learning and Work Institute, September 2018. Available at <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/mygo-evaluation-final-report-september-2018> [accessed 16/07/2024]

⁶⁸ Phillips, A. Open Door Policy: Why the new government should introduce an Employment Advice Guarantee. Demos, 9 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/open-door-policy-why-the-new-government-should-introduce-an-employment-advice-guarantee> [accessed 17/07/2024]

⁶⁹ Phillips, A. Working Together, the case for universal employment support. Demos, 7 May 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Working-Together.pdf> [accessed 16/07/2024]

THEME 3: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS SO THAT THEY ARE AVAILABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN ALL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY

There are currently around 120 Youth Hubs in England, Scotland and Wales. This means that Youth Hubs are not accessible to young people living in all areas of the country. Currently there is no confirmed list or map of DWP Youth Employment Hubs; however, ERSA have created a working map of Youth Hubs, a version of which we include here.⁷⁰



70 ERSA. Youth Employment Hubs map. 2024. Available at <https://ersa.org.uk/youth-hubs> [accessed 17/07/2024]

Although we are not certain about the geographical distribution of Youth Hubs, the map indicates that some cities, and broader geographical areas, do not have a Youth Hub at the moment. Using some figures for purely illustrative purposes, there are around 900,000 young people aged 16-24 who are NEET. With about 120 Youth Hubs in England, Scotland and Wales, this means that each Youth Hub would need to support about 7,500 NEET young people - and this does not count young people who would be not NEET but could still benefit from Youth Hub support (for example, a young person on a zero-hours contract, or currently undertaking an education/skills/training course). Based on our research, the typical Youth Hub supports far fewer young people than this - we estimate around 150 young people per year per Youth Hub. We think that these illustrative figures, combined with the map indicating patchy geographical distribution, make a very strong case for increasing the number of Youth Hubs across the country. By doing this, the government can turn Youth Employment Hubs into a universal service for young people, complementing the government's plans for a 'national jobs and careers service' and building on Demos's previous proposal for a Universal Work Service.⁷¹

We appreciate that one reason for the current geographical distribution of Youth Hubs is that by design they are local partnerships between multiple organisations, and that this means it will take some time for the overall number to grow depending on local factors. This is a positive aspect of Youth Hubs, but we nonetheless think that the ambition should be to expand the overall network of Youth Hubs with the aim of making it possible for all young people to access a Youth Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 4

DWP, working with partner organisations, should increase the number of Youth Employment Hubs. From a DWP perspective, the aim should be that every JCP is able to refer young people to a local Youth Hub. Initially, DWP should prioritise establishing Youth Hubs in the remaining areas in England, Scotland and Wales which have a high number of young people and do not currently have a DWP Youth Hub. In these areas, DWP should look for existing local hubs, partnerships and organisations which they could support by making a formal agreement to establish a Youth Hub. We are aware of some 'Youth Employment Hubs' which currently are not DWP Youth Hubs (that is, they do not have a formal partnership with DWP and do not have co-located Youth Hub Work Coaches). Making use of these hubs/organisations which already exist would be a sensible way of increasing the number of DWP Youth Hubs. From a Local Authority perspective, the aim should be that every lower-tier local authority in England, Scotland and Wales has access to at least one Youth Hub. This could mean either having a Youth Hub located within the LA area itself, or having access to a Youth Hub shared between several LAs where this makes sense geographically.

71 Phillips, A. Working Together: The case for universal employment support. Demos, 7 May 2022. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/working-together-the-case-for-universal-employment-support> [accessed 17/07/2024]

THEME 4: INCREASE AWARENESS OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND PROFESSIONALS INCLUDING THROUGH PROACTIVE OUTREACH

Where Youth Hubs are already 'open access', the next step is to raise awareness of the support which is available. The vast majority of young people who currently use Youth Hubs are referred by JCP Work Coaches: we very roughly estimate this may be in the region of 80% of young people across all Youth Hubs, based on our interviews with Youth Hub managers. As mentioned above, the majority of 18-24-year-olds who are out of work do not receive Universal Credit and therefore cannot be referred to a Youth Hub by a JCP Work Coach. These young people can only benefit from the support offered by Youth Hubs if they are aware they exist.

Several young people in our focus groups mentioned that they personally were glad they had heard about the Youth Hub but felt that overall awareness among friends was low. We have also found in our research that awareness among wider stakeholders and policy makers is also quite low, which could also have an impact on the number of young people referred to Youth Hubs by other organisations, for example schools and colleges. It is important that raising awareness includes proactive outreach to young people who are more likely to need the support of a Youth Hub.

There are several reasons for low awareness:

- A lack of public information about Youth Hubs online
- Youth Hubs are relatively new (the first ones were set up in 2020, and many have been set up more recently). This emphasises the importance of ensuring that Youth Hubs become long-term local institutions in their communities.
- Some Youth Hubs are co-located or hosted by other services or organisations which have a more prominent 'brand' of their own. This is not a problem as long as people know that Youth Hub support is available.

Having spoken to Youth Hub users and practitioners, we believe the following would be relatively inexpensive ways of more effectively marketing Youth Hubs:

RECOMMENDATION 5

DWP should create a website 'Find your local Youth Employment Hub' to act as a Youth Hub directory. A very basic website, <https://find-your-nearest-jobcentre.dwp.gov.uk>, already exists as an example. 'Find your local Youth Employment Hub' should provide links to the websites of Youth Hubs, where these exist. Such a tool would be useful for professionals working across statutory and non-statutory services, as well as for young people searching online for employment support. 'Find your local Youth Employment Hub' could be integrated into a 'digital front door' to employment support and careers advice, as recommended in Demos's recent report *Open Door Policy*.⁷²

RECOMMENDATION 6

Managers of Youth Hubs should consider how to promote awareness of the Youth Employment Hub with other professionals. This should include speaking to schools,

72 Phillips, A. *Open Door Policy: Why the new government should introduce an Employment Advice Guarantee*. Demos, 9 July 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/open-door-policy-why-the-new-government-should-introduce-an-employment-advice-guarantee> [accessed 17/07/2024]

colleges and Local Authorities - for example, Local Authorities already do work to reduce the number of NEET young people in their area and, in partnership with schools, track 'Risk of NEET Indicators' (RONI).⁷³ These existing structures could be used to promote awareness of Youth Hubs via professionals as well as directly to young people and parents. For example, this could mean proactively providing information about the Youth Hub to young people who are leaving school age 16 or who are leaving college age 18 and do not have an intended destination. Youth Hubs could in this way potentially play a role in preventing young people becoming NEET. Youth Hub managers should also build links with their local Careers Hubs, which "bring together schools, colleges, employers, and apprenticeship providers in local areas across England".⁷⁴ Although Careers Hubs have a different role, mainly focusing on young people who are in education, there is clearly some overlap which could generate beneficial partnerships between Careers Hubs, Youth Employment Hubs and their respective employer networks. Youth Employment Hub managers should also aim to raise awareness with local youth organisations, who could refer young people to the Hubs.

THEME 5: LEARN FROM GOOD PRACTICE TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

We think that the flexibility, variation and experimentation in Youth Employment Hubs is a strength which enables local partnerships to work together effectively. However, while maintaining this flexible approach, it is also important to ensure there is help available for young people with additional support needs, as Youth Hub managers emphasised to us in interviews. We think there are opportunities for different Youth Hubs to learn from good practice, as well as an opportunity to take a more flexible approach to the length of time for which Youth Hubs can support young people.

In our interviews with Youth Hub managers, we heard that experiencing mental ill health or having a mental health condition is the most common 'additional support need' that young people have. In this respect, the support available at Youth Hubs is somewhat inconsistent. For example, some Youth Hubs have a specialist staff member who provides mental health and wellbeing support, while other Hubs primarily rely on referring young people to external local organisations. Some Youth Hub staff told us that they wanted to provide additional support, but were not able to do so, for example because they did not have any spare funding or had not been able to build a partnership with a local organisation providing mental health support. Although less common, we also heard examples of Youth Hubs providing support to neurodivergent young people and young people with SEND, in partnership with specialist organisations. We therefore provide some recommendations on how to spread good practice below.

A number of different Youth Hub managers and practitioners independently told us that another problem for young people with additional support needs is that current Youth Hub rules state that most young people can only access support from a Youth Hub for six months. Practitioners told us that for some young people, this was too short. As we noted above, practitioners told us it can take two or three months to build the initial relationship before moving on to supporting a young person to search for a job. Practitioners told us that some young people required more foundational support, such as becoming confident travelling further afield or using public transport, before they could be 'work ready' and able to apply for jobs. We include a recommendation to address this below. We know that in many cases Youth Hubs already follow at least some of these recommendations, and so our focus here is on spreading good practice.

⁷³ Local Government Association. Public Services Committee inquiry into the transition from education to employment for young disabled people. January 2024. Available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/128149/html> [accessed 16/07/2024]

⁷⁴ The Careers and Enterprise Company. What are Career Hubs? Available at www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-hubs/what-are-careers-hubs [accessed 16/07/2024]

RECOMMENDATION 7

DWP should fund awareness training for all Youth Hub Work Coaches. Likewise, Youth Hub managers should use some of their budget to pay for awareness training for all other staff working at the Youth Hub. The training should cover mental ill health, neurodiversity and autism, and SEND (including learning difficulties or disabilities). The training should include helping practitioners understand how and when to refer young people to specialist organisations locally. Understanding referral processes, and building strong relationships with relevant organisations, is important for the safety and wellbeing of young people and also of Youth Hub staff. We are aware that in many cases staff have already been provided with similar training, but we include it as a recommendation to emphasise its importance.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Youth Hub managers should consider having a specific professional who can provide additional support to young people with mental ill health within the Youth Hub itself, for example by having a professional co-located in the Youth Hub for part of the week. This role could be funded directly by the Youth Hub, or it could be funded by multiple Youth Hubs working together, or it could be a professional working for a separate mental health and wellbeing organisation. When we asked young people about this, the consensus was that they would prefer to access mental health and wellbeing support *directly within* the Youth Hub as opposed to being referred to provision elsewhere. Where this is not possible, Youth Hub managers should aim to build strong relationships with relevant local organisations to ensure referral processes work well. A strong understanding of referral processes is also important in cases where a young person may have a more urgent mental health-related issue that goes beyond the kind of support which a Youth Hub can offer.

RECOMMENDATION 9

We identified during our research that there are opportunities to build links between Youth Hubs and NHS Talking Therapies services, which include Employment Advisers (EAs) within Talking Therapies. Currently, based on our interviews, we understand that links between the two are often non-existent or weak. We have three specific recommendations:

- a. Youth Hub practitioners should (i) make sure they know how young people can self-refer themselves to their local NHS Talking Therapies service, and (ii) encourage young people to self-refer if they have mentioned mental ill health (such as anxiety or depression) as a barrier to employment. Last year 89% of people accessed Talking Therapies within six weeks of referral.⁷⁵
- b. It is important that professionals are mutually aware of each other's services. To achieve this, Youth Hub managers and Senior EAs within Talking Therapies should meet to discuss their respective services so that collectively public services provide joined-up support to young people.

⁷⁵ NHS England. NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression, Annual reports, 2022-23. 16 January 2024. Available at <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-talking-therapies-for-anxiety-and-depression-annual-reports/2022-23> [accessed 17/07/2024]

- c. The DWP Youth Hubs team and the Work and Health Unit Talking Therapies team should explore the possibility of running a pilot Youth Employment Hub/Talking Therapies partnership (such as co-locating a Talking Therapies member of staff within a Youth Employment Hub).

RECOMMENDATION 10

We recommend that Youth Hub managers and practitioners should be given the flexibility to request extending Youth Hub support from six months to 12 months, when they judge this is appropriate for an individual young person. There is an existing mechanism for Youth Employability Coaches to extend support to 12 months via a 'case conference', and so the same mechanism could apply to Youth Hubs.⁷⁶ Following the principles set out in Demos's vision for public service reform, *Liberated Public Services*, we recommend that DWP should by default trust practitioners' judgement and approve requests for an extension of support from six to 12 months.⁷⁷

THEME 6: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS SHOULD IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS

As discussed in our research findings, Youth Hub engagement with employers is inconsistent at the moment. Reasons for this include the fact that individually Youth Hubs are quite small, and do not necessarily have the scale to interest employers; employers themselves may not be aware of Youth Hubs; and the limited funding available to Youth Hubs means that employer engagement may not be prioritised within constrained budgets.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Youth Hubs in a region should consider working together to coordinate employer engagement for youth employment effectively between them - both across Youth Hubs in a region, and youth employment and skills organisations more generally. This could involve, for example, Youth Hubs pooling resources to fund an 'Employer Engagement Officer' to coordinate employer engagement across Youth Hubs in an area/region; or it could involve the relevant Local Authority providing a staff member to coordinate employer engagement across different employment support programmes. There are also opportunities to coordinate and link up with Careers Hubs, which connect schools and colleges with employers and therefore already have employer networks relevant to young people. Where CAs and LAs are involved, there are also opportunities to link employer engagement more strategically to broader economic growth strategies and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) which already include employer engagement on topics relevant to Youth Hubs.

⁷⁶ Department for Work and Pensions. DWP Youth Offer. UK Parliament, (no date). Available at https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0349/177_Youth_Offer_V1_0.pdf [accessed 16/07/2024]

⁷⁷ Glover, B. *Liberated Public Services: A new vision for citizens, professionals and policy makers*. Demos, 29 May 2024. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/research/liberated-public-services-a-new-vision-for-citizens-professionals-and-policy-makers> [accessed 16/07/2024]

RECOMMENDATION 12

DWP/JCP should assign to each Youth Hub one person from the JCP local employer engagement team with responsibility for communication and coordination between the Youth Hub and JCP regarding employer engagement.

THEME 7: HARNESS DATA, EVALUATION AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

As discussed in our research findings, Youth Employment Hubs currently face problems with data collection and data sharing. There is a need to address these issues to help improve Youth Hubs. Part of the solution should be to enable better data sharing between DWP/JCP and partner organisations co-located in Youth Hubs. The 'trailblazer devolution deals' with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities recognise the importance of data sharing to "facilitate better targeting and efficiency of an integrated employment and skills offer".⁷⁸ This certainly applies to Youth Hubs in the same way as other employment support programmes.

We have also found that there is limited infrastructure to help spread good practice and learning between Youth Hubs. Some Youth Hub practitioners speak to each other, usually informally, but several Youth Hub managers told us they would welcome opportunities to connect with other Youth Hubs and learn from good practice. We think that making connections between Youth Hubs, sharing learning and spreading good practice are key ways of helping Youth Hubs improve over time.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Funders should provide additional funding to help Youth Hubs improve data collection and storage, for example by enabling them to use a CRM system.

RECOMMENDATION 14

DWP should explore how to enable data sharing with partner organisations at Youth Hubs, building on the agreement to improve data sharing included in the 'trailblazer devolution deals' with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Building on the above, **DWP should publish formal guidance on 'Data sharing within Youth Hubs'**, with the aim of giving confidence to DWP staff and Youth Hub managers about how they can share data. The guidance should include support on data legislation and IT system security.

⁷⁸ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Combined Authority Trailblazer deeper devolution deal. GOV.UK, 15 March 2023, paragraph 162. Available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal [accessed 16/07/2024]

RECOMMENDATION 16

DWP, by listening to the experiences of Youth Hub managers, should help to disseminate good practice and create a guide to support successful establishment of new Youth Hubs.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Combined Authorities, Local Authorities and Youth Hubs in a region should set up a regional 'Youth Hub Network' to enable Youth Hub managers to share best practice and learn from each other through peer relationships. We recommend that, depending on the relevant area, either a CA or an LA should take responsibility for setting this up and providing coordination, facilitating whatever Youth Hub managers would find useful through the Youth Hub Network. Youth Hub Networks should also consider if they want to invite representatives from other organisations to join the network. For example, this could include a representative from the local Careers Hub to help join up working with schools, colleges and employers across the local area. Where relevant, a Mayor speaking at the first meeting of the Youth Hub Network could help establish its importance.

CONCLUSION

The new government has promised it will adopt a new way of working, 'mission-driven government'. The government should adopt the aim of sustainably reducing the number of young people who are NEET, because this would make a significant contribution to achieving the missions to grow the economy and break down barriers to opportunity. It will not be easy, but the rewards are significant - better life outcomes for individuals, businesses able to recruit the employees they need, and a more productive workforce for a more productive economy.

We welcome the government's commitment to guaranteeing an opportunity of training, an apprenticeship, or help to find work for all 18- to 21-year-olds. This can certainly help reduce the number of young people who are NEET, alongside proposed reforms to apprenticeships and the skills system. But the new government needs a plan for how to deliver the Youth Guarantee.

Youth Employment Hubs must be part of that plan. In our conversations with young people and practitioners, we were struck by how positive people were about the partnership working between DWP/JCP, Local Authorities, charities and young people themselves - and how Youth Employment Hubs were facilitating these partnerships. It is this kind of close partnership working which is crucial to delivering better outcomes for young people.

However, the future of Youth Employment Hubs is not guaranteed. It would be a backwards step if they were to disappear from the landscape of services for young people. The new government should re-commit to them and use them as a foundation for delivering the Youth Guarantee, while at the same time seeking to expand the network and improve them, as set out in our recommendations. If the government does this, it can help improve outcomes for the long term: for individuals' lives, and for the country as a whole.

ANNEX

£100 MILLION FUNDING FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT HUBS

DWP forecast total spending of £11.5 million on Youth Hubs in 2023/24.⁷⁹ Divided by around 120 Youth Hubs, we estimate that DWP is spending about £100,000 per Youth Hub per year. It is difficult to estimate how much other organisations spend directly on Youth Hubs, partly because some of this 'spending' is actually in-kind support (for example, providing a venue for the Youth Hub). Ignoring in-kind support, we have estimated that on average other organisations spend an additional £100,000 per Youth Hub per year. This gives a total cost of £200,000 per Youth Hub per year. This estimate is based on figures provided by some interviewees, but it is only a rough estimate.

We therefore estimate total spending to be approximately £25 million (rounding up from £23 million). In our recommendations, we recommend expanding the network of Youth Hubs so that every JCP and every LA has access to a Youth Hub. There are around 350 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales, so we have used that figure for a 'full' network of Youth Hubs. This would require funding of around £70 million.

However, we have also recommended that all Youth Hubs should be open access so that more young people can use them. We therefore multiply our figure of £70 million by 1.3 to account for serving a higher number of young people, which gives a total of £90 million.

A few of our other recommendations would require funding, for example investment in a digital tool 'Find your local Youth Employment Hub' and helping Youth Hubs improve data collection and storage. We have therefore added £10 million funding to cover these costs, bringing the total to £100 million.

The total £100 million annual budget could fund an expanded network of 350 Youth Employment Hubs across England, Scotland and Wales. If each Youth Employment Hub served 200 young people per year, the whole network would serve 70,000 young people per year.

We recommend that the £100 million total should be funded through DWP and the UKSPF, to put Youth Employment Hubs on a stable and secure footing for the future. DWP should continue to fund staff costs for Youth Hub Work Coaches. Other organisations should continue to be involved, but we understand that, for example, most charities provide in-kind support (such as venues and staff time) rather than direct cash funding.

⁷⁹ Davies, M. Youth Services: Finance - Question for Department for Work and Pensions. UK Parliament, 22 June 2023. Available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-19/190112> [accessed 17/07/2024]

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