



Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

Implementation and process evaluation

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Contents

	Executive summary	4
1	Introduction	14
1.1	Background and context	15
1.2	This report	16
1.3	Evaluation aims and methodology	16
2	CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer	19
2.1	Programme aims and ambition	20
2.2	Governance structure and policy framework	21
2.3	YG Trailblazer service provision	22
3	Programme participants: barriers, demographics and completion	25
3.1	Barriers to engaging with education, employment and training	27
3.2	Participant demographics	34
3.3	Participation and completion rates	39
4	Delivery level: referrals, support and employer engagement	43
4.1	Referrals into the programme	45
4.2	Support for young people	52
4.3	Internships, employer engagement, and support provided to employers	63
5	Programme and system level: findings about programme design and delivery and systemic change	66
5.1	Lessons from programme level activities	68
5.2	Contribution of the YG Trailblazer to system level change	73
6	Outcomes from the programme	87
6.1	Education, employment, and training outcomes	89
6.2	Wider outcomes	92
7	Recommendations	98
7.1	Recommendations for future delivery of the YG Trailblazer in CPCA	99
7.2	Recommendations for future CPCA local policy	102
7.3	Recommendations for the future development of the Youth Guarantee nationally	105
	Conclusion	108
	References	109

Executive summary

In November 2024, the Government announced the creation of eight Youth Guarantee (YG) Trailblazers in England, with the aim of supporting young people into education, employment and training. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) was one of the combined authorities selected to test innovative approaches to address “persistent challenges around coordination, engagement and accountability” within the different systems supporting young people.¹ Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by CPCA to evaluate the implementation of the YG Trailblazer. This report presents final findings from the implementation and process evaluation of year one of CPCA's YG Trailblazer. It draws on mixed-methods research including in-depth interviews, young people focus groups, survey data and management information (MI) data.

The YG Trailblazer programme

CPCA staff involved in the set-up of the Trailblazer identified systemic issues in the provision available for young people outside education, employment or training, describing the support landscape as limited, fragmented, and geographically unequal. The YG Trailblazer aims to address those issues by:

- Increasing the capacity and volume of provision available for young people in the region
- Creating new place-based provision and wraparound support for young people aged 18-21
- Creating a structured and outcomes-focused approach to supporting young people aged 18-21, by moving from a fragmented to a coordinated system of support
- Focusing on all young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), without prioritising certain demographics, and
- Working with employers to generate more opportunities for young people, balancing employers' skills needs and young people's ambitions and motivations.

CPCA's YG Trailblazer provision consists of a range of infrastructure and place-based services. In year one, CPCA commissioned 30 delivery partners, to expand existing services and develop new and innovative provision for young people. Delivery covered a wide range of support types, including confidence and wellbeing, mental health, pre-employability, training and work experience, delivered through face-to-face, online and hybrid formats.

¹ Get Britain Working White Paper (2024) Chapter 4: A Youth Guarantee to unleash opportunity and set young people on the path to success. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper>

Programme participants: demographics, barriers and completion

By the end of year one, 1,108 young people had engaged with CPCA YG Trailblazer across 27 interventions.² The reported demographic characteristics of the participants were as follows:

- Participants were more likely to be men than women (62% compared with 37%). While a higher proportion of men were expected to take part in the CPCA YG Trailblazer reflecting the national picture, the difference is larger than anticipated. In 2025, 53% of young people aged 16–24 who were NEET in England were men compared to 47% of women.
- Two in five reported having a long-term physical or mental health condition (40%). This is broadly in line with the national data that shows that 45% of young people aged 16–24 who are NEET are classed as disabled.³
- One in three (33%) reported that they have or previously had Special Educational Needs (SEN). While this is higher than the national proportion of pupils receiving SEN support at school (15% in 2025/2026),⁴ it is in line with research that shows that young people with experience of SEN support are more likely to be NEET.
- Peterborough had the highest share of participants (34%), followed by Huntingdonshire (25%) and Cambridge (12%). The distribution of participants broadly reflects the geographic spread of young people on Universal Credit across the region.

Participants faced multiple and compounding barriers to education, employment and training (EET), with MI data and qualitative evidence showing that structural and individual barriers often interact rather than operate in isolation.

- Confidence and skills were the most commonly reported non-health-related barriers, with 24% of participants identifying confidence and skills as their primary barrier. Qualitative evidence suggests that low confidence, limited qualifications, lack of work-readiness skills and insufficient work experience often form a reinforcing cluster of barriers that reduce young people's readiness to engage with EET. Young people also often reported uncertainty about career options, limited knowledge of how to find work and a lack of clear direction after leaving education.

² MI data about young people was collected for 27 interventions out of the 35 in total which were delivered by 30 different providers.

MI data was not collected for six of the 35 interventions, either because they were not providing support directly to young people or because they were providing anonymous support. Two delivery providers did not provide any MI data, one of them faced challenges with the delivery of their intervention and did not deliver anything. The other only supported a small number of young people, resulting in significant delays to providing support.

³ Department for Work and Pensions (2026) The employment of disabled people in 2025. Official statistics. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025>

⁴ Department for Education (2026) Special educational needs in England. Available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2025-26>

- Nearly one in five participants (18%) reported transport as their primary non-health-related barrier. Young people, delivery staff and strategic stakeholders consistently identified the availability, reliability and cost of transport in CPCA, and especially in rural areas, as a significant barrier to accessing EET and support services.
- Most participants (70%) reported a primary health-related barrier to EET, with the most common being mental health conditions, particularly anxiety and depression, which were frequently identified by young people, delivery staff and strategic stakeholders as barriers to participation, confidence and progression.

Over half of participants (56%) completed their intervention while only one in ten (10%) stopped engaging prior to completion, however over one third (34%) had missing completion data. Completion rates were lower for participants facing health-related barriers (51%) compared to those without (63%). Completion rates for those reporting autism were particularly low compared to the average (44%). Dropout rates were relatively low overall (10%) but varied by participant barriers and may not reflect the actual engagement or disengagement with the programme due to low outcome data. Participants reporting autism (16%), skills (17%), confidence (16%) and suitable jobs (14%) as barriers were more likely to disengage from provision.

Experience of the YG Trailblazer programme

Referrals: Young people accessed the programme through a range of referral routes, with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) (24%) and self-referrals (18%) being the most common. Providers highlighted the importance of warm referrals, co-location, and local outreach in generating engagement.

Initial contact: Delivery staff noted that engaging and onboarding young people gradually into the provision was effective at building trust, particularly for those further away from the labour market. Despite this, several providers found it challenging to engage with young people during this initial phase.

Onboarding: The young people who took part in focus groups reported that the sign-up process was easy and straightforward. Some delivery providers noted that some young people can be anxious about attending onboarding sessions, particularly those referred by JCP for fear of sanctions or because of a mistrust of services due to past negative experiences. Reporting requirements, primarily set by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were considered particularly extensive by some delivery providers.

Engagement: Engagement approaches varied across providers, but evidence suggests that gradual onboarding and relationship-building were particularly effective for young people with complex needs, including those experiencing anxiety or long-term disengagement. Providers built rapport with young people by personalising engagement approaches throughout their journeys, which often resulted in strong, positive relationships with delivery staff, which young people feel stand out from past negative experiences of career support.

Outcomes and changes as a result of the programme

Education, employment and training outcomes

Education, employment and training (EET) participation increased from 20% at the start of the programme to 37% at the end, representing a 17 percentage point increase. In total, 147 young people (14%) who were not initially in EET progressed into EET.

It is also important to note that, due to the lack of a counterfactual, it is not possible to know how many of those young people would have progressed in EET if they had not participated in the programme.

However, EET status was missing for 34% of participants, which limits the robustness of these findings. Providers also reported that it was difficult to attribute outcomes directly to the programme due to the compressed delivery timeline.

Progression varied across groups. Young women had slightly higher progression rates than men (26% compared with 21%), and participants without health conditions were more likely to progress (27%) than those with health conditions (20% of those with a health condition that affects their day-to-day activity and 12% of those that does not affect their day-to-day activity).

Wider outcomes

Qualitative evidence suggests that young people experienced improvements in confidence, social skills and readiness for work, with many reporting that they felt more prepared to apply for jobs and had a better understanding of career pathways.

Survey findings (based on a small sample of 30 matched responses) showed more mixed results, with limited measurable change in confidence, wellbeing and work-readiness. However, both survey and qualitative evidence indicate improvements in practical skills to find work, including CV writing, interview skills and job search techniques..

System-level change generated by the programme

There is evidence that the Trailblazer programme has begun to generate system change across multiple levels:

- **At a structural level**, the programme has increased the volume and diversity of provision, expanded capacity and created new interventions across youth support, education, health and employment systems.
- **At a relational level**, CPCA's convening role and programme structures have facilitated new relationships and greater connectivity between providers and stakeholders. However, this was limited in early delivery as a result of implementation delays, due to the time required to set up the Data Sharing Agreements with DWP.
- **At a transformative level**, there is limited evidence of changes in underlying system behaviours or mental models, reflecting the short timescales of implementation.

The programme has begun to strengthen coordination and connectivity across systems, but further work is required to embed and sustain these changes.

Lessons learned

What is working well about delivery?

Provision was tailored to young people's needs. One young person reflected on how staff had been able to tailor support to fit with their health condition and another said that staff were able to adjust delivery to accommodate their neurodiversity.

Providers are successfully building rapport and trust, resulting in strong relationships which young people feel stand out from previous negative experiences.

Providers adapted to young people's preferences. For example, one provider noted that low uptake in a five-day long training course covering a range of employability skills prompted them to redesign the course. They adapted it to create weekly sessions to encourage participation of young people who may be reluctant to commit for a week-long training.

The provision was voluntary, low-pressured and accessible. One young person mentioned that the absence of tests and consequences for failing made it easier for them to consistently attend. Providers reported that the absence of conditionality and benefit sanctions was particularly positive.

Longer-term, one-to-one and non-time-limited support are particularly effective for sustaining engagement among young people with complex needs. Young people valued having time to build trust and relationships with staff, with some contrasting this positively with previous short-term support that ended just as they felt comfortable enough to engage. Providers reported that longer-term support enabled them to provide personalised support at the young person's pace and provide continuity during transitions into EET.

Co-location of services, such as co-location within the Peterborough Youth Hub and joint delivery sessions across providers are effective at engaging young people who are NEET with the range of support, and facilitate partnership working across the range of providers.

The programme has increased the volume and diversified the type of support available, expanding capacity across the system.

What is working less well about delivery?

Programme level challenges had an impact on delivery, including:

- **Compressed delivery timescales resulting from implementation delays** reduced delivery from an anticipated nine months to approximately three months for some providers, limiting the depth of support and ability to build partnerships.
- **Capacity constraints within some of the delivery providers,** particularly those providing non-time-limited support, undermined the amount of time staff could spend with young people and it was seen as a risk to staff wellbeing. This was exacerbated by

taking a tailored approach and needing to spend more time building relationships than originally planned.

- **Administrative and reporting requirements** were considered extensive and sometimes not youth-friendly, with some questions being intrusive and young people needing to share the same information with multiple providers. Delivery staff felt that this risked undermining early engagement and trust.

Delivery was also negatively impacted by local structural challenges, including:

- **Transport and lack of jobs remain significant structural barriers.** These barriers are particularly prevalent in some parts of the region, such as rural or most deprived areas.
- **Supporting young people to manage their emotions and mental health challenges.** Delivery staff did not always feel there was appropriate provision to refer young people onto if they needed intensive support.
- **Some partners felt that their delivery did not last long enough to meaningfully support all young people.** Some interventions offer time-limited support, which may feel insufficient or generate hard cut-offs. For example, one young person who had been supported into a job reflected that they would have valued in-work support to further strengthen their CV and progress into their career. This points to the importance of wraparound support for young people and the importance of the continuation of support for people while at work.
- **Sustaining young people's engagement with the support.** Some young people reflected on the difficulty they faced maintaining motivation to attend support. Delivery providers reflected that this could lead to lower levels of engagement in the first place and/or with certain activities that require more time commitment. Other young people noted that the lack of engagement from some participants had an impact on their own experience of the programme, particularly when the provision required group work.
- **Employer engagement is challenging,** often relying on pre-existing relationships, with providers reporting employer fatigue and limited awareness of the wider programme.



Recommendations

The evaluation identifies several priorities for future delivery in CPCA and wider policy.

Recommendations for future delivery of YG Trailblazer in CPCA

The YG Trailblazer aims to set the foundation to move from a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to addressing youth employment in the region, to a more joined-up and coherent system. Building on the momentum created during year one of the Trailblazer, several improvements can be made to strengthen delivery and outcomes in year two and beyond.

1. The YG Trailblazer programme team should strengthen its strategic relationships with key stakeholders through engagement beyond board meetings.
2. The YG Trailblazer programme should regularly convene Trailblazer delivery partners to improve coordination, facilitate referrals and signposting between the interventions that form part of the YG Trailblazer, and beyond.
3. The YG Trailblazer programme team should focus on reviewing and streamlining interventions to maximise additionality, efficiency and impact.
4. In year two, increase the proportion of initiatives in the Trailblazer that focus on employers and the demand side.
5. The CPCA YG Trailblazer team should explore options to reduce the administrative burden on providers to collect administrative and monitoring information.
6. The CPCA YG Trailblazer team should work with delivery providers to set expectations and explore options to ensure more accurate and complete monitoring information.



Recommendations for future CPCA local policy

Structural and long-term challenges are influencing the numbers of young people who are NEET in the region, and the barriers that young people face extend beyond the youth employment and skills system. Joined-up working across different teams within CPCA, as well as wider strategic partnerships, is essential to creating a more integrated infrastructure of support that is accessible to all young people and provides high-quality pathways to education, training and employment.

7. The CPCA Skills team and the YG Trailblazer programme team should work together to develop clear leadership and accountability for young people who are NEET in the region, strengthening their convening role to improve coordination and joined up provision.
8. CPCA should ensure the planned Youth Employment and Participation Strategy is grounded in evidence and informed by the lessons from the Trailblazer.
9. CPCA should consider how it can supplement national provision by focusing resources on reaching young people that will not benefit from mainstream employment support. CPCA should make the case for greater investment in the local transport infrastructure, raise awareness of the Tiger Pass across the region and learn from best practice to overcome transport challenges.
10. CPCA should develop and test an employer engagement strategy to support the range of programmes and objectives of the region, including employment support and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP).

Recommendations for the future development of the Youth Guarantee nationally

The YG Trailblazer programme aims to test local approaches to inform the national blueprint for the Youth Guarantee. This evaluation has highlighted a number of points that should inform this.

11. National government should commit to moving from short-term Trailblazer funding to longer-term local funding to deliver the Youth Guarantee, ensuring coverage across the country.
12. The Government should expand the age range of all the interventions that make up the Youth Guarantee, ensuring a universal offer for all young people who need support to access education, employment or training.
13. The Government should expand Jobs Guarantee eligibility to include young people claiming health-related benefits, and work towards expansion to all young people who have been NEET for 12 months, alongside exploring options to open the scheme to young people who are not receiving benefits.
14. The Government should focus on building trust among young people who are NEET, by focusing on providing high-quality employment support by promoting engagement with that support and reviewing benefit sanctions.



1 Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to evaluate the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG) Trailblazer in the region. This report presents the final findings from the implementation and process evaluation of year one of CPCA's YG Trailblazer.

1.1 Background and context

In the UK, just over one million young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).⁵ Being out of work, education or training can have scarring effects on young people's life chances, including their longer-term career prospects and earnings.⁶ In November 2024, the Government announced the creation of eight YG Trailblazers in England. CPCA was one of the Mayoral Strategic Authorities selected to test innovative approaches to address "persistent challenges around coordination, engagement and accountability" within the different systems supporting young people.⁷ The selected authorities were expected to provide leadership and accountability to deliver a coherent offer for people aged 18 - 21 and to offer tailored support to young people who need it to access employment, education or training. While initially announced as a year-long programme (March 2025 to March 2026), the scheme was extended by another year in August 2025 (until March 2027). The Government is investing £45 million per year to deliver the eight YG Trailblazers.

CPCA, created in 2017, brings together seven constituent councils, including one upper-tier local authority, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), and one unitary authority, Peterborough City Council (PCC). Prior to the introduction of the YG Trailblazer, there was no systematic tracking of young people aged 18 – 21 who are out of work, training or education in the region. However, both CCC and PCC have a statutory duty to track and monitor the participation in education and training of young people aged 16 – 17, which can give an indication of the volume of 18–21-year-olds who are NEET. The data reveals significant geographical variations in participation and economic outcomes, with the proportions of young people who are NEET ranging from 6% in Peterborough to 2% in South Cambridgeshire. The proportions of unknown – where the education, employment and training status is not known by the Authority – also vary between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (1% in Peterborough compared with 0% - 0.4% in the constituent local authorities of Cambridgeshire).

⁵ Powell and Francis-Devine (2026) NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. Available here: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06705/>

⁶ Treneman et al (2025) Transforming opportunity. Learning and Work Institute's vision for a Youth Guarantee. Available here: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/LW-Youth-Guarantee-Vision-1-3.pdf>

⁷ Get Britain Working White Paper (2024) Chapter 4: A Youth Guarantee to unleash opportunity and set young people on the path to success. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper>

1.2 This report

This report is structured into seven sections:

- **Section 1** contains an overview of the evaluation aims and methodology, including the limitations of the methodology.
- **Section 2** provides an overview of the CPCA YG Trailblazer, including its ambition, governance and policy framework, and delivery model.
- **Section 3** contains information about the programme participants, including their barriers to education, employment and training (EET), their demographic characteristics and their participation and completion.
- **Section 4** focuses on the delivery of the Trailblazer by different providers, including the referral routes into their interventions, the support they offered to young people, the employer engagement approach taken by CPCA and internships offered through the programme.
- **Section 5** contains learning on the contribution of the YG Trailblazer to system change, as well as learning from the programme level governance.
- **Section 6** summarises the outcomes from the programme for young people.
- **Section 7** outlines a series of recommendations to inform future delivery of the YG Trailblazer (Year 2 and similar programmes) and the national rollout of the Youth Guarantee.

Throughout the report, we refer to the organisations that have delivered the interventions funded through the CPCA YG Trailblazer as 'delivery providers' or 'delivery partners'. We use the term 'strategic stakeholders' to refer to individuals involved with the design or delivery of the YG Trailblazer, including board members, staff working in the CPCA YG Trailblazer programme team, and the CPCA Skills and Employment senior leaders.

1.3 Evaluation aims and methodology

The evaluation had four key objectives:

1. To capture outcomes observed for young people at the end of year 1 programme delivery, including access to education, employment and training, as well as changes in wellbeing, confidence and work readiness.
2. To explore the contribution of the YG Trailblazer to system change, particularly in terms of joined up and partnership working across the youth employment and education systems in the CPCA area.
3. To understand what works well and less well in supporting young people into education, employment and training, for whom and why.
4. To identify areas of improvement to foster more partnership working as well as more effective support to move young people into education, employment, and training.

The evaluation questions are included in [appendix 1](#) of this report.

Methods and data sources used in the process evaluation

L&W conducted a process evaluation as well as a feasibility study. Findings from the feasibility study are presented in a separate report. The findings from the process evaluation draw on data collected through mixed-methods research, including:

- Ten scoping interviews conducted with the leads of some of the interventions funded through year one of the YG Trailblazer (10 out of the 30 delivery partners were selected for the fieldwork). The interviews took place before the organisations had started delivering their interventions (between October and December 2025). The interviews focused on the intervention design, perceived opportunities represented by the YG Trailblazer, and anticipated challenges to delivery. The interviews were also an opportunity for the intervention leads to familiarise themselves with the different evaluation activities. This facilitated early buy-in among delivery organisations for subsequent research activities, including the recruitment of young people and delivery staff to take part in the evaluation.
- A pre- and post-programme survey was used to collect data on changes experienced by young people across a range of outcomes, including self-efficacy, health and wellbeing, readiness for work, local engagement and skills to find work. All programme participants were invited to complete both the pre- and post-questionnaires by their individual providers. The questionnaire was designed by L&W using validated measures. Further information on questionnaire design, data collection and data analysis is included in [appendix 2 and 3](#).
- Forty-two in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with delivery staff from 10 of the 30 delivery partner organisations (31 interviews) and stakeholders working closely with them (five interviews), as well as employers (six interviews) involved with the programme. The purpose was to better understand the interventions they delivered, what worked well, and to capture lessons learned. Delivery staff were also asked for their understanding of the challenges young people face and the outcomes that delivery providers were expecting young people to achieve as a result of taking part. Three waves of fieldwork were conducted, with the first wave starting October 2025, the second in January 2026 and the last one in February 2026. Employers were those who had hired interns and engaged with taster days organised by one of the providers.⁸
- Sixteen in-depth qualitative interviews with strategic stakeholders who were either part of the programme board, CPCA staff working on the delivery of the YG Trailblazer programme or members of CPCA's Skills Team.
- Four focus groups with young people (between four and nine participants per focus group). Three were online and one was held in-person at the Peterborough Youth Hub. Participants were recruited using the email addresses of survey respondents who indicated that they were happy to be contacted for follow-up research activities, and by intervention leads directly.

⁸ In qualitative research, saturation refers to the point at which new data collection no longer adds additional insights. In this case, interviews with staff did not generate any additional insights on key aspects of the evaluation.

- Management Information (MI) data analysis collected by providers and compiled by CPCA. Information collected included: participant demographics; barriers to education, employment or training; employment, education and training status at the start and end of the programme; and the intervention start and end dates. L&W contributed to the initial design of the data collection at the start, but the information collected was mainly driven by national evaluation requirements.
- Two Test and Learn workshops for the delivery providers were organised in December 2025 and in April 2026. The aim of the workshops was to share best practice and knowledge as well as to gather participants' insights on the different aspects of the programme.

Evaluation limitations and challenges: The evaluation findings should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind:

- In-depth interviews were conducted with delivery partners to provide detailed and nuanced knowledge of those interventions, but interviews were only with 10 of the 30 delivery providers. This presented a risk that the key lessons would not be applicable to all interventions. This was mitigated by selecting interventions for fieldwork that represented a wide variety of delivery models. Alongside this, the research team was able to validate emerging findings with representatives of all the delivery providers at one of the Test and Learn workshops. It was also noted that saturation was reached by the end of the fieldwork for some aspects, namely programme perceptions, the challenges young people face, and challenges experienced by providers.
- There were additional limitations associated with the timescales of fieldwork. Due to the programme's shortened delivery timescale, interviews were, in some cases, conducted at an early implementation stage, limiting the experience interviewees could draw on and the richness of the data collected. This risk was mitigated by conducting follow up interviews with some stakeholders at the end of the delivery cycle.
- Methodological limitations were identified with the pre/post survey, such as the small number of matched responses and delays at the start which limited responses.



2 CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

Summary

The CPCA YG Trailblazer was designed to address gaps in existing provision by increasing capacity, creating more holistic and place-based support, improving coordination across services, maintaining universal access for young people who are NEET, and strengthening employer engagement to generate opportunities.

A governance structure and policy framework were established to support delivery, including oversight from a multi-agency Programme Board that provided strategic direction and a Youth Forum that aimed to incorporate young people's lived experience into programme design.

In year one, the CPCA commissioned 30 delivery partners to deliver 35 interventions across core and grant funding, creating a diverse delivery model spanning different organisation types, geographies, and levels of prior experience in the region.

Provision covered a wide range of support types, including confidence and wellbeing, mental health, pre-employability, training and work experience. It was delivered through face-to-face, online, and hybrid formats.

2.1 Programme aims and ambition

CPCA staff involved in the set-up of the YG Trailblazer identified systemic issues in the provision available for young people outside education, employment or training (EET), describing the support landscape as 'limited, fragmented, and geographically unequal'. The aims of the first year of the Trailblazer were to address this gap by:

- Increasing the capacity and volume of provision available for young people in the region, with a key focus on widening the type of support in terms of duration, type of offer and intensity of support. Delivery and strategic staff alike noted that there was limited capacity to support the volume of young people seeking support. This resulted in large caseload sizes within statutory teams,⁹ who were unable to provide young people with the level and intensity of support they needed.
- Creating new place-based provision and holistic support for young people, providing a wide range of services such as support with mental health, housing, and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).
- Creating a structured and outcomes-focused approach to supporting young people, by moving from a fragmented to a coordinated system of support. CPCA staff noted that lack of coordination and integration between different youth employment provision across the region was a key barrier to effective support.
- Focusing on all young people, aged 18-21, who are NEET, without prioritising certain demographics. While it was recognised that some young people face more barriers to EET than others, CPCA staff emphasised the importance for the YG Trailblazer to be universally accessible to all young people in the region, with some interventions providing more tailored support to specific groups.

⁹ The statutory teams referred to in this report are the NEET teams at Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough's City Council holding the statutory duty of tracking young people's destinations in year 12 and 13.

Working with employers to generate more opportunities for young people, balancing employers' skills needs and young people's ambitions and motivations. CPCA staff identified the need to go beyond simply financial incentives by providing direct support for employers to hire young people. The lack of apprenticeships and other employment opportunities for young people in the region was perceived as a key gap in opportunities.

A big part of what we've done through the Youth Guarantee is to try and stimulate employment.

- CPCA senior leader

2.2 Governance structure and policy framework

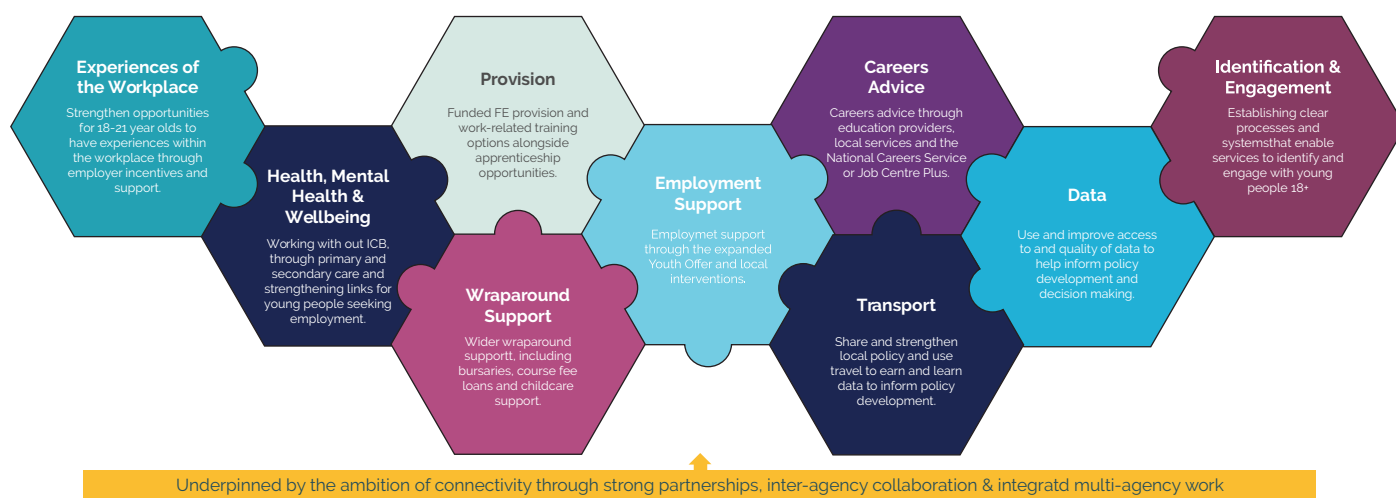
Year one of the YG Trailblazer was overseen by CPCA's Skills and Employment Committee and the Combined Authority Board. CPCA also established a **Programme Board**¹⁰ at the start of the YG Trailblazer. The board's Terms of Reference set out that its role is primarily advisory and that it is responsible for providing strategic oversight of the programme. The board met every six weeks during year one, either face-to-face or online.

A CPCA-level **Youth Forum** was also created, with eight young people aged 16 to 26 recruited from across the region. The forum aimed to shape the YG Trailblazer programme and delivery to reflect the lived experiences of local young people. Section five of this report includes findings related to its implementation and what has worked well and less well in year one.

CPCA developed a policy framework at the start of the YG Trailblazer to support the planning and delivery of the programme (Figure 1). It was designed with the intention of representing all the cogs needed to deliver a coherent and holistic youth employment system.

Figure 1: CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer Policy Framework

VISION: All young people aged 18-21 have access to training or employment support and are prevented from becoming economically inactive before their career begins. The Youth Guarantee will strengthen support for 16-17 year olds who are at risk of or who have disengaged from sustained participation in education and learning.



¹⁰ The programme board consists of representatives from CPCA, employers, Further Education colleges, public health and the Integrated Care Board, higher education, adult community education, police and crime commissioners, regional DWP/Jobcentre Plus (JCP), Youth Futures Foundation, young people's statutory NEET services, voluntary and community sector organisations, housing services and associations, the Careers and Enterprise Company and Youth Employment UK.

2.3 YG Trailblazer service provision

The CPCA Trailblazer was designed for breadth, rather than having a narrow cohort focus. Whereas other YG Trailblazer areas focused on specific target groups, CPCA deliberately commissioned across multiple cohorts and intervention types simultaneously, with the aim of ensuring that provision was available for all young people, at whatever point they entered the system and that immediate starts were always possible. This approach brought together a wide range of organisations including voluntary and community sector providers, education institutions, health-adjacent bodies, and specialist providers, some of which had not previously been formally connected to the combined authority.

During the first year of the YG Trailblazer delivery, the CPCA commissioned 30 delivery partners across the region to expand existing services and develop new provision for young people. CPCA allocated the funding to providers either as part of "Core funding" (10 providers) or "Grant funding" (20 providers), with the latter being particularly focused on testing innovative types of support. There was wide diversity across providers in terms of:

- Size (local and national organisations)
- Type (statutory, voluntary and community sector, and private providers)
- Connection to the local area (organisations with and without prior experience of delivering in the region)
- Type of intervention (focused on building the infrastructure e.g. data and tracking services, of providing support to young people, adults in the community or employers)
- Type of support offered (confidence building and wellbeing, mental health services, holistic support e.g. signposting to specialist organisations, pre-employability, training and work experience, including internships and apprenticeships)
- Geography (some focused on only some local authorities in the region while others offered support for everyone)
- Cohorts of young people they sought to support (despite being universally accessible as a programme, some organisations prioritised outreach in particular areas, or specialised in working with particular groups such as young women)
- Format (online, face-to-face, or a mix of face-to-face and online)

Some of the delivery partners delivered more than one intervention, with 35 interventions being commissioned in total. Overall, out of the 30 organisations:

- Half provided face-to-face delivery (15). Only three providers delivered services exclusively online and most delivered using a mix of in-person and online formats¹¹
- 16 provided services aimed at supporting young people to develop their confidence and wellbeing – either through one-to-one coaching, group sessions or activity-based methods (e.g. music, outdoor activities). Two providers delivered specialist mental health services

¹¹ These proportions are based on the number of providers. Some of the providers deliver several interventions, such as Youth Employment UK and Cambridgeshire County Council.

- 20 provided pre-employability support, with 13 providing training opportunities and eight providing work experience opportunities
- The majority of interventions focused on supporting young people to develop a better understanding of their needs, career pathways ("Inspiring" - 25 interventions) and employability and life skills ("Building" - 25 interventions)
- 12 providers offered more intense coaching support to young people further away from the labour market ("Developing")
- 17 created training and work experience opportunities for young people closer to the labour market or supported them to access work ("Participating")
- 22 interventions were delivered in Peterborough - a programme priority area with the highest rate of young people who are NEET in CPCA

The journey stage phases referred to above (Developing, Inspiring, Building, Participating) were designed by Peterborough City Council's NEET service team to broadly describe the stages through which young people will move on their journey into employment. The "Advancing" stage has not been used in this analysis as it refers to support for a young person who is already secure in education, employment or training, which was beyond the scope of the year one offer. These stages are being used here as a tool to map out the YG Trailblazer provision and explore coverage and any potential gaps along a young person's journey. While in year one the only criteria for grant funding applications was that they aligned with the policy framework and showed innovation, CPCA has used this pathways model to structure commissioning for year two. This reflects the ongoing test and learn approach adopted, with lessons learned informing future delivery.

Table 1: Young people's journey stages into EET

Developing	Inspiring	Building	Participating	Advancing
My EET coach and I are getting to know each other.	I am exploring different sectors of work.	I am building and developing my skills through short courses and new opportunities.	I am in temporary or short-term employment, training or education which will end in 6 months or less.	I am secure in my education, training or employment.
I can talk about the things I like to do in my spare time and will try some new things.	I can identify sectors of work that are new and are of interest to me.	I have a CV which showcases my skills and experiences.	I am developing my skills further through short courses.	My current role is open ended or will last more than 6 months.
I know what is important to me and what motivates me.	I know what skills and/or qualifications are needed for the sectors of work I am interested in.	I will try some relevant work experience, virtual or in-person.	I have updated my CV to reflect my new skills and experience.	
I know who can support me and how they can help.	I know which skills are my strengths and which I would like to develop.	I know how to include my skills and experience on an application.	I am looking for my next opportunity.	
		I know where and how to look for education, training or employment opportunities.		

See [appendix 2](#) for descriptions of each intervention and [appendix 3](#) for an overview of provision typology (including funding streams, eligibility, geographical coverage and type of support offered).

Core funded provision

Partners received core-funding to deliver a range of interventions as specified by CPCA, including in-person, hybrid and online employability and holistic support with delivery starting between July 2025 and January 2026. Core-funding has been used to:

- Expand existing services (e.g. statutory NEET services within Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council),
- Build the local evidence base (e.g. through a local Youth Voice Census),
- Develop new digital platforms for young people in the region, including a mental health platform that provides free and anonymous counselling and mental health support for young people, a tailored online learning programme for young people to develop their employability skills, and a virtual work experience programme which consists of videos of workplaces across key sectors in the region,
- Create new interventions(e.g. the YouthHub in Peterborough testing co-location of careers, housing and mental health support) and introducing new services to the region. Four of ten delivery partners who received core-funding had not previously delivered in CPCA or were delivering new interventions.

Grant funded provision

In Autumn 2025, 20 organisations received grant funding to support young people in the region. A total of £1.5 million was invested to test new approaches to support young people and to provide tailored support to young people who face the greatest barriers. Grant-funded delivery started between December 2025 and January 2026, and ran until March 2026. One of twenty providers who received grant-funding had not previously delivered in CPCA.

Grant-funded interventions were designed to be aligned with one or more of the themes included in the policy framework:

- Mental health and wellbeing, including music-based sessions and wellbeing support.
- Wraparound support for specific cohorts, mainly care leavers.
- Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance, including community-based careers advice and navigation, and peer mentoring.
- Experiences of the workplace, including construction taster sessions and work placements in hospitality.
- Education or training provision, including construction skills or re-engagement programmes.
- Employment support, including sales and leadership development for young people out of work.

3 Programme participants: barriers, demographics and completion

Key findings and lessons

Young people in the region face multiple and compounding barriers to accessing employment, education or training (EET). MI data and qualitative evidence showed that structural barriers (e.g. transport and labour market conditions) and individual barriers (e.g. mental health, confidence and skills) interact and reinforce disengagement. Lack of confidence, skills and work experience often form a reinforcing cluster of barriers, limiting young people's readiness for employment.

Confidence and lack of skills are significant barriers. One in four young people (24%) cited one of these as primary non-health-related barriers to employment.

Seven in ten participants reported a primary health-related barrier, with mental health and neurodiversity being the most prevalent. These barriers are associated with lower completion rates and require more intensive, specialist and longer-term support.

Participants have relatively high support needs, with 40% reporting a long-term physical or mental health condition and 34% reporting they have or had Special Educational Needs while at school. This is broadly in line with national data that shows that 45% of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET are disabled, and are more likely to have received support for SEN.

Most participants are white (75%), and the geographic spread of participants across the region broadly reflects the distribution of young people on Universal Credit.

Just over three fifths of programme participants are men (62%). At a national level young men are more likely to be out of education, employment or training than young women. However, the difference in participation rates between men and women in year one of the Trailblazer is larger than nationally. Better local intelligence on the demographic characteristics of young people who are NEET in the region is needed to inform future programmes and address any gender imbalances in participation, engagement and outcomes.

The YG Trailblazer engaged over 1,100 young people in year one across the 27 providers who provided MI data. Just over half (56%) are confirmed to have completed their programme, with relatively low recorded dropout (10%), although completion data is missing for a third of participants. Variation in completion and dropout rates across providers, alongside high levels of missing data, highlights the need to strengthen outcome monitoring and better understand what drives retention.

Barriers affect outcomes differently, with completion rates lower for participants facing barriers linked to confidence, skills, and finding suitable jobs, and even lower for those with health-related challenges. This highlights the need for differentiated support.

3.1 Barriers to engaging with education, employment and training

Multiple and compounding barriers

Young people experience a range of challenges in accessing EET opportunities. The challenges faced by young people are often multiple and compounding, with structural, individual, and social factors interacting to influence outcomes. This is reflected in both qualitative evidence and MI data, which show that young people rarely face a single barrier in isolation, but rather a combination that can reinforce disengagement. Several strategic partners emphasised that supporting young people who are NEET is complex and requires a coordinated, system-wide response.

There's a huge swathe of young people who are so far away from being able to go into the workplace now because they've got such a huge number of barriers.... He can't get there. He's lost his confidence. He doesn't want to leave his bedroom. He's not financially stable enough. (...) there's a whole raft of issues.... It's so complicated, the problem, that you can't just go. 'Oh, here's some apprenticeships, off you jolly well go'.

- Strategic partner

One of the young people engaged in the programme explained that asking young people about their main barrier is not necessarily the right approach.

In MI data, delivery partners and young people were asked for information on primary and secondary non-health-related barriers, and primary and secondary health-related barriers to EET.

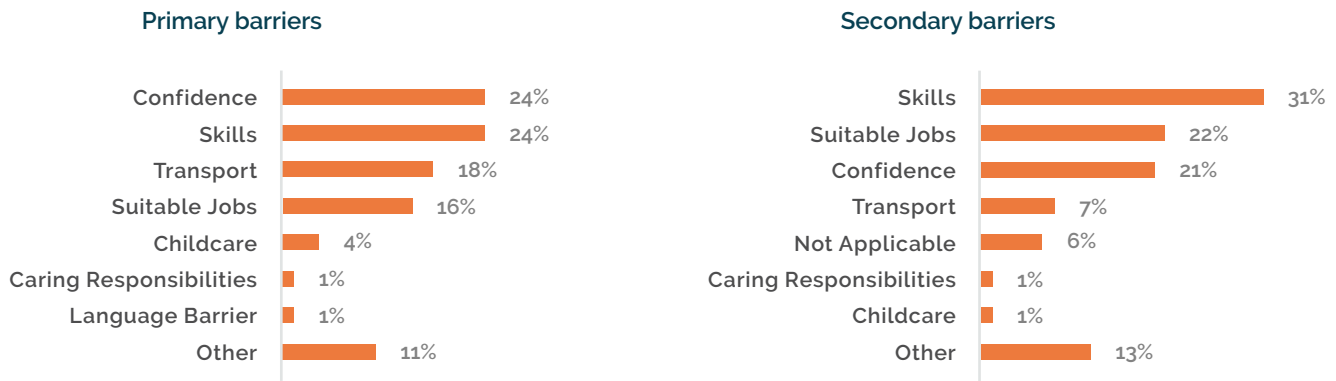
I don't necessarily answer it in terms of what the main barrier is, because I don't think there is a main one, I think there is, it's sort of a domino effect, personally. Some people end up in a situation of not being able to get a job, not just because they don't know how to apply, but for a variety of other reasons.

- Young person

Non-health-related barriers

Participants reported a range of non-health-related barriers (Figure 2). The barriers reported in the MI data are in line with the barriers reported by young people in focus groups and by delivery partners.

Figure 2: Proportion of participants by primary and secondary non-health-related barriers to EET



Base: 688 participants with primary non-health related barrier information recorded.

Base: 454 participants with secondary non-health related barrier information recorded.

Confidence and skills

Confidence and skills were the most commonly reported primary non-health-related barriers to EET, with 24% of participants reporting those as their primary non-health-related barriers. Lack of experience is closely linked to confidence and skills, with young people in focus groups often citing these barriers together.

Most delivery staff and several strategic partners highlighted a lack of confidence and low self-esteem as significant barriers for many young people. This is often linked to prolonged periods out of education or employment, mental health challenges, and the impacts of COVID-19 on social development, resulting in young people lacking the confidence to apply for roles, attend interviews or engage with support services.

Skills were also the most commonly reported secondary barriers to EET (31%). Strategic partners identified "cold spots" of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) provision and uneven geographical distribution of provision across the region. One strategic partner highlighted that provision is more limited in some parts of Cambridgeshire, particularly rural areas, than Peterborough which benefits from a wider mix of provision because of its metropolitan status with larger colleges, a university and a larger HE offer. This uneven distribution can restrict access to appropriate courses and progression opportunities, particularly for young people without the means to travel outside their local area.

While some young people need further training to be able to gain the skills necessary to find suitable work, other young people are further along in their journey towards employment and primarily need practical support such as CV or application guidance. Interviews with delivery staff highlighted limited work-readiness skills, including knowing how to find and apply for roles, as well as workplace expectations, communication, and independence as key challenges.

They don't know where to look, they don't know how to apply, and they don't know what to look for.
- Delivery staff

Transport, travel and location

Travel and location were cited as a significant barrier to accessing EET opportunities among young people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in the 2025 Youth Voice Census (26%). MI data supports this, with nearly one in five participants reporting transport as a primary non-health-related barrier (18%) and a further 7% as a secondary barrier. A smaller number of delivery staff emphasised that transport barriers are not solely about availability, but also young people's confidence, willingness and independence to travel. Anxiety linked to using public transport and low confidence were identified as additional constraints, meaning that transport often interacts with individual barriers and may only become a binding constraint once young people are otherwise ready to engage.

Transportation is a major structural challenge in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, highlighted in strategic stakeholder and delivery staff interviews and focus groups with young people. Most delivery staff, strategic partners and stakeholders, cited issues related to the availability and reliability of public transport, particularly in rural areas such as Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, particularly around Wisbech and Ely. These areas were described as having limited bus routes, infrequent services and poor connectivity to employment and education opportunities.

To address this gap, CPCA invested Trailblazer funding into the Tiger Pass, which reduces bus fares to £1 for young people aged under 25. Several providers also invest in their own travel infrastructure, including dedicated travel funding and providers who own their own vehicle. Despite this, evidence suggests that travel remained a substantial barrier throughout the programme delivery due to enduring issues regarding the geographical unavailability, frequency and reliability of transport in the region.

Job opportunities

Lack of suitable jobs and opportunities is also a key structural barrier. One in six participants said that finding suitable jobs (16%) was a primary barrier, with 23% reporting it as a secondary barrier. This aligns with qualitative findings that young people struggle to find roles that match their skills level, experience or circumstances. Many delivery staff and strategic partners highlighted a shortage of entry-level roles appropriate to the needs of young people, alongside a decline in apprenticeship opportunities and limited progression routes in some areas.

The 2025 Youth Voice Census also found that the most common barrier to finding work for young people in the region is a lack of work experience. This was also a common barrier reported by young people and strategic partners and reflects a key ambition of the CPCA YG Trailblazer, as reported by strategic partners. Participants felt discouraged when applying for jobs because they believed they did not meet work experience requirements. Young people can become increasingly demoralised the longer they remain out of work, education or training. This is the gap that the CPCA's internships team was aiming to address, by providing an interface between employers, young people and funded internships and apprenticeship grants.

I did really well in my GCSEs [...], but because I've not got a lot of work experience or any like, any things in the real world [...] I guess it puts me lower down on the list, compared to someone that's actually got themselves out there and been proactive and because I've delayed that so long, I feel like people will see, 'oh, he's 21 now. He's not got a lot of work experience.

- Young person

Transition out of education

Young people also reported uncertainty about what career path they wanted to pursue or how to go about finding work. They felt they didn't receive sufficient support, especially when they were in school, so they didn't know where to begin and lacked the confidence to start applying. This lack of knowledge about career paths and lack of clear purpose or direction contributed to young people being out of work, education or training for long periods of time. Several interventions provided coaching to young people, to support them in developing their confidence and a better understanding of existing training and career pathways.

Transitions out of education were identified as a key risk point. Several delivery staff and stakeholders highlighted that young people leaving school or college often lack clear plans, and some struggle to sustain participation due to unmet needs. Particular challenges were identified for groups such as young people with SEN, care leavers and those with complex personal circumstances, as well as those who fall into gaps between youth and adult services.

I think through the school path, it was easy to follow, because you were kind of told what there is. But once you finish school, it's like, it's a whole world out there, and that's kind of for you to explore. And I think that's what intimidated me the most.

- Young person

Systemic inequality

There is also evidence that local context and "place" shapes young people's aspirations. Several delivery staff, strategic partners and stakeholders highlighted systemic issues including generational unemployment, lack of role models and entrenched patterns of disadvantage in certain communities. In more deprived areas, this was linked to low aspirations, limited exposure to career pathways, and structural inequalities in access to opportunities such as work experience.

You will have parents who do not have the means, the English, the understanding and it creates an inbuilt sense of inequity.

- Strategic partner

Strategic partners and stakeholders further highlighted systemic inequalities in access to work experience and careers support, noting that opportunities often rely on parental networks or individual school-employer relationships. These structural inequalities contribute to differences across the CPCA region, with some areas facing challenges more comparable to deprived coastal or post-industrial contexts, while others benefit from stronger labour markets and provision.

Health-related barriers

Health issues, particularly mental health conditions, impact young people's confidence and motivation to find work or training and to engage in support. Struggles with mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, were cited as a major challenge in interviews with strategic stakeholders and delivery staff, and focus groups with young people. Mental health conditions can lead to long cycles of social isolation and inaction.

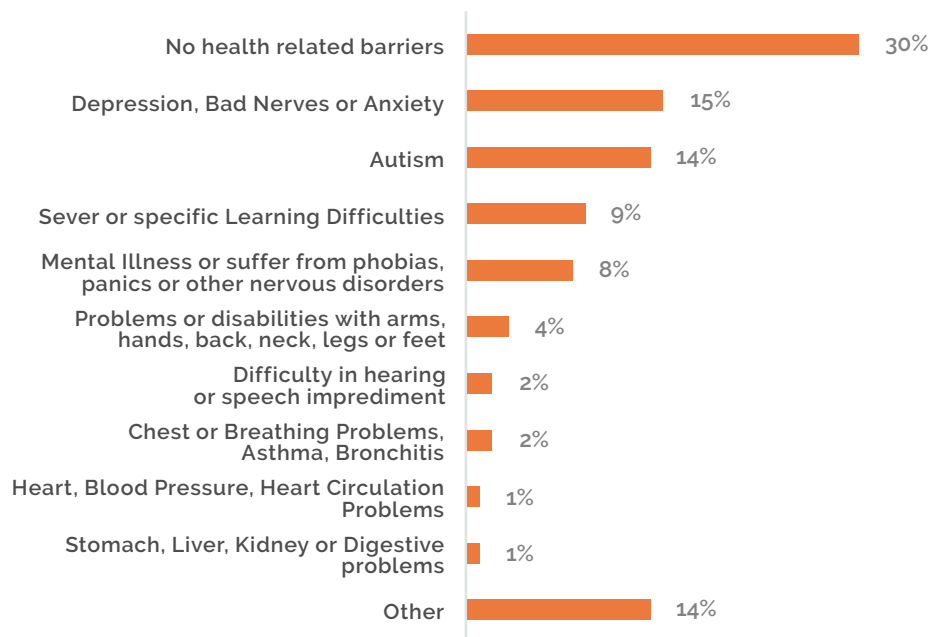
I've been like, not very social for a couple years now, because the reason I dropped out of sixth form was because of my mental health. So, like, it's been a struggle for me with confidence and, like, just being able to interact.

- Young person

MI data shows that seven in ten participants (70%) reported a primary health-related barrier to work or education (Figure 3). The barrier that was reported by the largest proportion of participants was 'depression, bad nerves, or anxiety', with 15% of young people reporting this as a primary barrier. A further eight percent reported having mental illnesses or phobias. Taken together, this means that 23% of participants cite mental health as their primary health-barriers to EET. This is in line with the proportion of young people (aged 16-24) who are NEET and who reported a mental health condition in the UK, with approximately 20% having reported a mental health condition in 2025.¹² Two organisations have been commissioned to address this challenge: Kooth providing free and anonymous mental health support and counselling to young people, and CPSL Mind providing one-to-one support in Peterborough Youth Hub.

¹² L&W's own calculation using findings from the Milburn Review Interim report, with 45% of young people aged 16-24 being disabled (i.e. having a long-term health condition) and 43% of disabled young people reporting a mental health condition. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report>

Figure 3: Primary health-related barriers to education, employment or training



Base: 648 participants with non-missing information about primary health-related barriers.

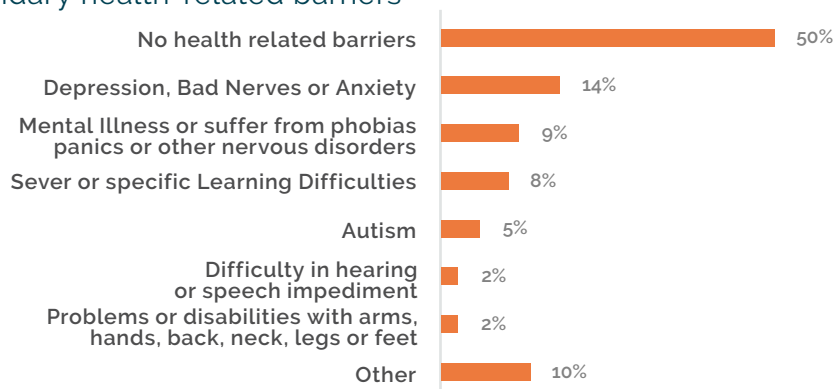
Neurodiversity and learning difficulties were highlighted as a challenge in strategic stakeholder interviews, which affects how young people think, learn and interact with the world. The second most common primary health-related barrier is 'autism', reported by 14% of participants, followed by 9% reporting a severe or specific learning difficulty as a primary barrier to work or education. Interviewees noted that neurodivergence often presents as patterns of self-isolation and social anxiety in young people. These challenges affect communication, confidence and the ability to engage in education and employment.

We have customers who are on the spectrum and because they're on the spectrum, there are various ranges of health challenges, or will I say behavioural challenges, that they are dealing with. And I mean when some of them are still struggling to be among [a] group of people or struggling to be able to articulate themselves and they're struggling to even leave their houses.

- Strategic stakeholder

Half of the participants with a primary health-related barrier also reported a secondary health-related barrier. Depression, bad nerves or anxiety were the second most commonly reported secondary health-related barriers (14%) (Figure 4). This reinforces the fact that young people face a range of challenges to engage with EET opportunities.

Figure 4: Secondary health-related barriers



Base: 436 participants who reported a secondary health-related barrier and had no missing information on the secondary health-related barriers.

Young person case study: Justin (pseudonym)

At the time of the interview, Justin had been receiving support from Cambridgeshire NEET service, through the Youth Impact Programme (YIP) for two years. His description of the support provided through YIP is included in Figure 5. He explained that one of the main benefits of the programme was the opportunity to go out and have fun with other people. This is in line with the benefits that other young people expressed from taking part in residential or group activities. YIP also provides wraparound support, with delivery staff regularly checking on Justin to make sure he has everything he needs.

Through YIP, Justin was referred to Curious about Hospitality and Noise Solution (both organisations received funding through the YG Trailblazer). Justin was interested in working in hospitality to save money for university before pursuing a career as a detective. Through Curious about Hospitality, he completed a range of qualifications, such as fire safety, and explained that he now has "so many qualifications from them". In Figure 5, Justin described the different activities he participated in as part of Curious about Hospitality, including volunteering at pop-up events and attending sessions with different businesses. He noted that he met someone through this programme who could help him secure a job. Additionally, he was also referred to Noise Solution to help with his mental health. Overall, he was positive about the support received from both organisations.

Justin faces a range of challenges to accessing education, employment or training. In addition to dealing with a mental health issue and lack of financial support to go to university, Justin doesn't have the right qualifications to access the right training opportunities to then pursue his career goal. He also explained that there is a lack of local job opportunities, accessible by public transport. Referrals and signposting, along with wraparound and holistic support, can prove effective at supporting young people to address these challenges and move closer to employment. This is consistent with both qualitative findings and MI data analysis, which show that lack of jobs is one of the main non-health-related barriers to employment in the region. Justin's journey highlights the importance of providing young people with sustained support so they can make progressive improvements, build confidence, and become more work-ready.

Figure 5: Justin's journey into CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (in his own words)

YIP (Youth Impact Programme)	Curious about Hospitality	Noise Solution
YIP is about supporting young people who are looking for employment, they can also help those who are struggling in employment, they can also help find opportunities for those who aren't really looking for work or can't work at all.	Curious about Hospitality was recommended to me by YIP specifically through Kim	Noise Solution was recommended to me by Kim who thought it would be able to help with my mental health as I wasn't in the best place
They also host days out for those who don't want to be stuck inside all day as it can be quite boring, they also host residential which are a few days out at certain areas such as Grafham Centre and other areas	Curious about Hospitality can train you to be able to achieve certain qualifications and be able to make you ready to work in the hospitality sector.	Noise Solution is about helping young people through making music or learning how to make music.
They also partner with a lot of businesses which can be helpful to young people looking for work	On my first session with them, they taught us how to do CPR and had brought in these CPR dolls which had mouths which you could learn mouth to mouth CPR.	How it helped me was that it was able to help me express myself more through music and being able to interact with more people and it helped me be able to handle social situations a bit better.
They can help you find University and College courses you would like to do and help you apply for them.	One session I had really liked is when we went out to visit a business called Pure Gym and they had shown us around and had shown us different job opportunities and how there are different sectors in a Gym-like business.	
YIP are able to lead people to work placements through courses that they recommend you can do as you can gain qualifications and work experience through them and they can also help you with CVs	On the last day of the course we have hosted an event for local businesses to come and watch a presentation that we had made a few days before, the presentation was about a local pop-up event that could happen but won't due to funding. The pop-up event was a food truck that would have sold bagel burgers and drinks and the presentation had to be 30min -1 hour long.	

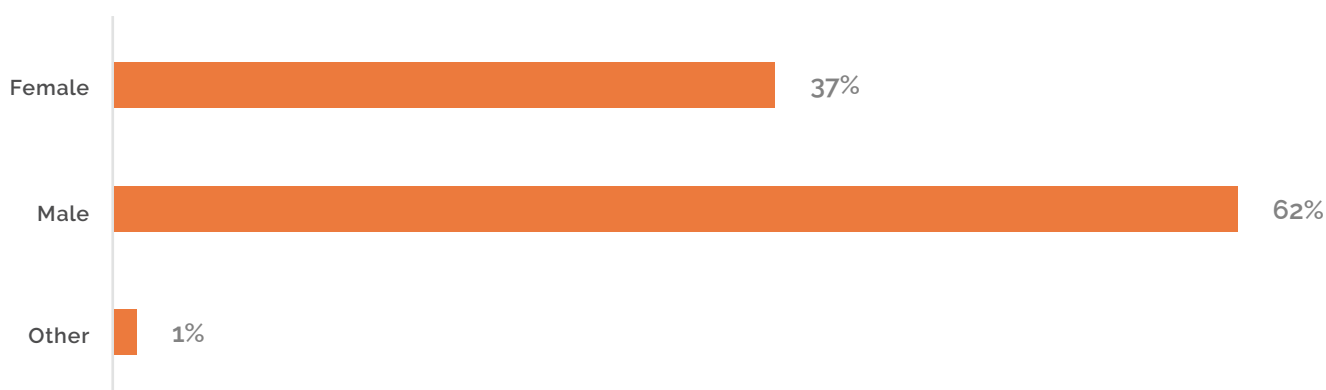
Notes: Justin was asked to represent "some way or another" his journey through the support using an online white board. Figure 5 is a display of the way he has represented his journey, with minor corrections to spelling and punctuation to improve readability.

3.2 Participant demographics

Gender

More young men have participated in year one of the YG Trailblazer than women. Just above three fifths (62%) of programme participants were men, compared to 37% of women (Figure 6). In 2025, at the national level, it was estimated that across the country 53% of the young people aged 16–24 who were NEET were men compared to 47% of women.¹³ While a higher proportion of men were expected to take part in the CPCA YG Trailblazer during year one, the difference is larger than anticipated. Better local intelligence on the proportion of young women and men who are NEET in the region is needed to better understand local needs. Furthermore, prioritising future research on understanding the gender divide across the CPCA area would help inform practical solutions to address any gender imbalances in participation, engagement and outcomes.

Figure 6: Proportion of participants by gender



Base: Participants with no missing information on their gender = 900.

Health

Two in five participants (40%) reported that they have a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more (Figure 7 with 17% reporting this reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a little and 13% a lot. Ten percent reported that their long-term health conditions did not reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities¹⁴ This is broadly in line with the national data that shows that 45% of young people aged 16–24 who are NEET are classed as disabled.¹⁵

¹³ Office for National Statistics (2026) Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: February 2026. Available here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/february2026>

¹⁴ Data were missing for 186 participants (19%), the conclusions in this sub-section are based on the assumption that missing data were not disproportionately distributed across the categories.

¹⁵ Department for Work and Pensions (2026) The employment of disabled people in 2025. Official statistics. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025>

Figure 7: Proportion of participants by long-term health conditions

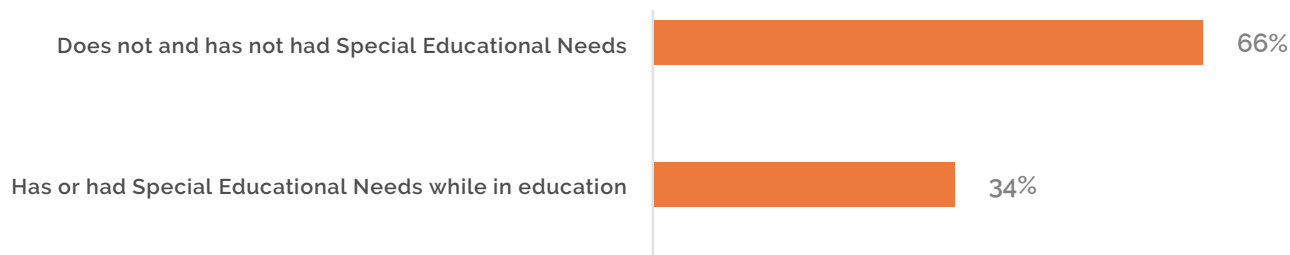


Base: Participants with no missing information on their long-term health conditions = 782.

Special Education Needs status

More than one in three participants (34%) has or had Special Educational Needs while in education (Figure 8). As a comparison, at national level, 15% of pupils received SEN support at school in 2025/2026.¹⁶ However, this is in line with other evidence that shows that young people who received SEN support are more likely to be NEET at ages 16-17 than people who did not receive this support (10% compared to 5%).¹⁷

Figure 8: Proportion of participants by Special Educational Needs status

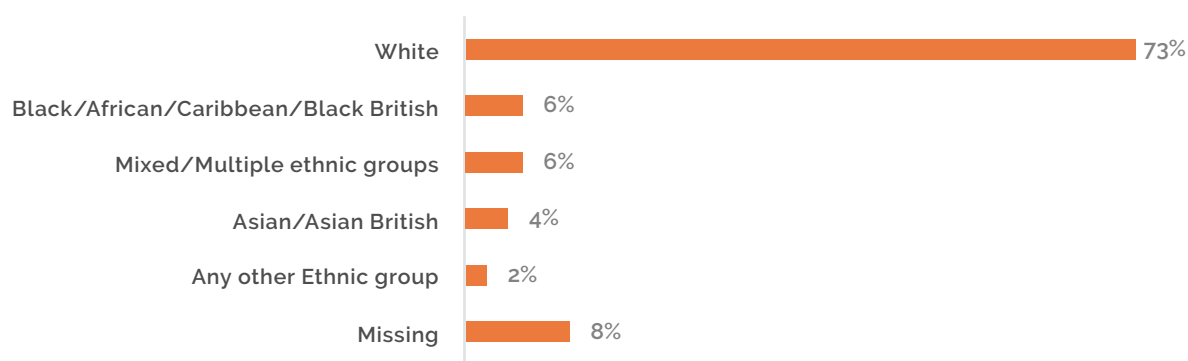


Base: Participants with no missing information on their SEN status = 785

Ethnicity

Most participants who engaged with the YG Trailblazer identified as White (75%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Participants by ethnic groups



Base: 965 participants

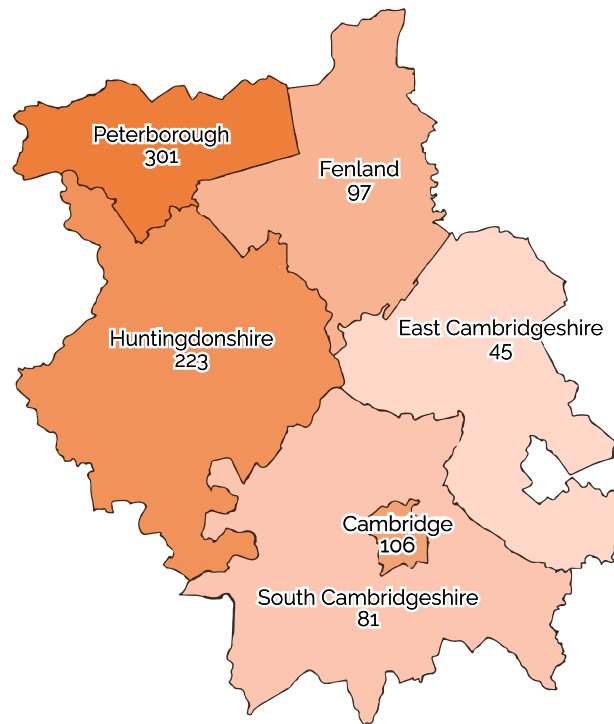
¹⁶ Department for Education (2026) Special educational needs in England. Available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2025-26>

¹⁷ Treneman et al. (2025) Young people who are not in education, employment or training – what does the data tell us? Available here: https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/LW_NEET_data_briefing_April2025-3.pdf

Local authorities

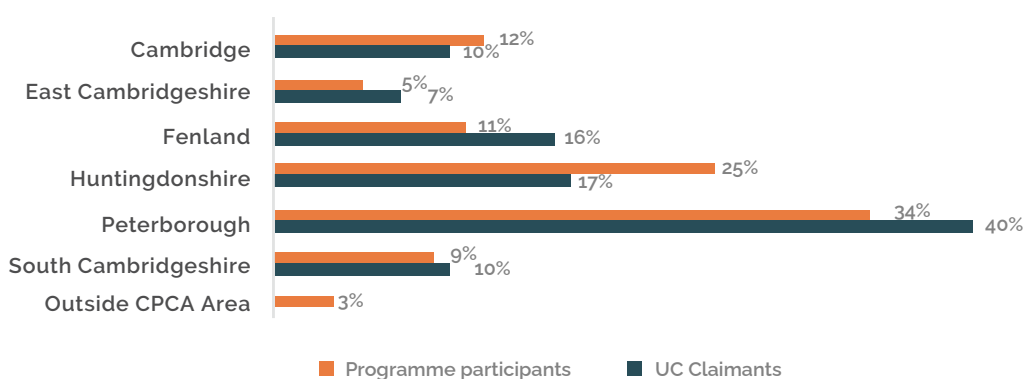
Data shows that programme participants were more likely to live in Peterborough than in the rest of the region, with 301 participants or more than one in three participants from Peterborough (34%) (Figure 10). This is followed by Huntingdonshire (223 or 25% of participants) and Cambridge (106 or 12% of participants).

Figure 10: Volume of programme participants by constituent local authority



While it is difficult to estimate the number of young people aged 18-21 who are NEET by local authorities due to the lack of available data, the number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants by local authorities provides some insight into the distribution of the young people who are NEET in the region (Figure 11). This suggests that the programme has reached the right geography, with broadly similar proportions of participants and UC Claimants by local authorities. Despite some differences, particularly for Huntingdonshire and Peterborough, local authorities with the highest proportions of UC claimants also have the highest proportion of programme participants. However, better local intelligence is needed to fully understand needs across the region.

Figure 11: Proportion of CPCA YG Trailblazer participants and Universal Credit Claimants in 2025, by local authorities



Base: Programme participants with recorded information about the place where they live = 883. Universal Credit (UC) Claimants = 2,146.

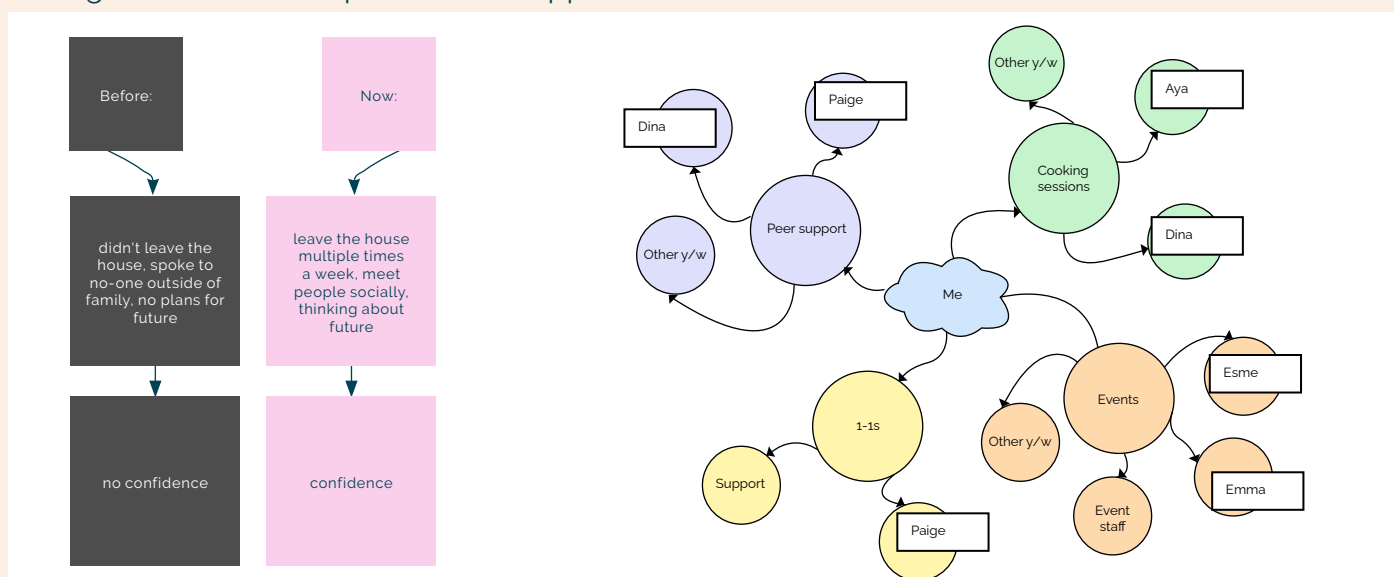
Young people case study: Olivia (pseudonym)

At the time of the evaluation, Olivia had engaged with Turtle Dove for nearly two years. Turtle Dove received funding from the YG Trailblazer to continue the ongoing support they are offering to young women. Olivia's experience illustrates the challenges young people face to access EET as well as what works to support young people in their journey into EET.

Olivia heard about the support from her mother, with whom she has a close relationship. Olivia emphasised her preference for longer-term support rather than time-limited support. This is something she valued at Turtle Dove where she did not feel pressured or pushed to engage. This experience contrasted from previous experiences of short-term programmes, such as counselling and support accessed through YMCA. While both programmes could have been helpful, Olivia explained that a 10-week or six-week programme did not provide her with enough time to open up. She explained that she "found it quite of a strange situation to walk into a room with someone who was a stranger and see them once a week for an hour for a few weeks, and [...] as I was getting comfortable with them and I was actually like in a place to feel comfortable enough to make progress, that they were like, okay, and we're done now. Yeah, that's it. You've got to do it by yourself."

In the journey (Figure 12), Olivia has represented the different activities she undertook through Turtle Dove, which were a mix of group sessions (e.g. cooking sessions, peer support, and events) and one-to-one support. She noted the names of people she felt were making the support valuable, and concluded by saying that one of the positives was being with other young women. Olivia's experience illustrates the benefits for young people having the opportunity to engage with young people in similar situations. One of the delivery staff at Turtle Dove also explained that young women benefit more from gender specific provision than young men. This points to the need to consider gender dynamics when developing support for young people.

Figure 12: Olivia's experience of support, in her own words



Notes: Olivia was asked to represent "some way or another" her journey through the support using an online white board. Figure 5 is a display of the way she has represented her journey, with minor corrections to spelling and punctuation to improve readability.

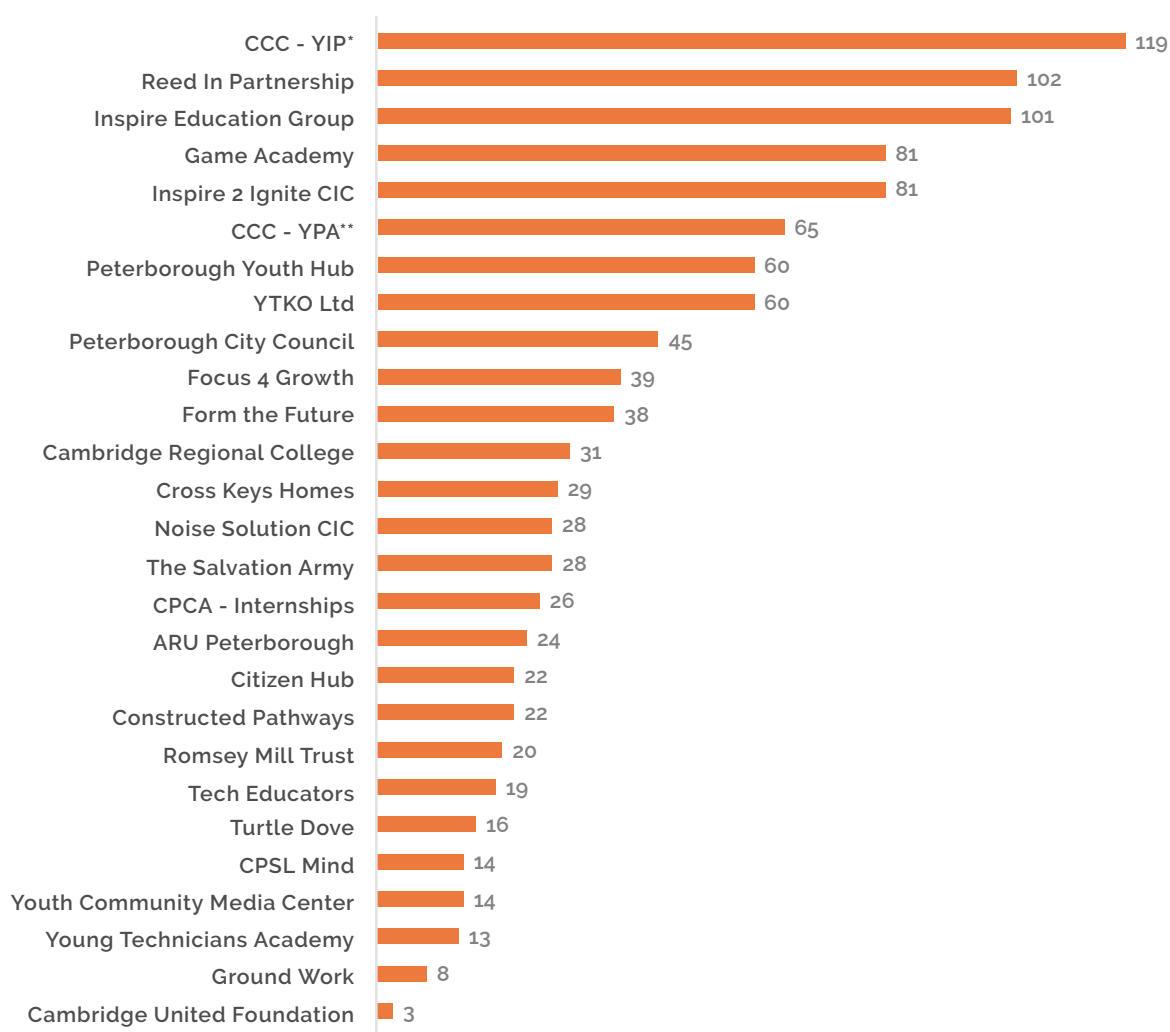
Olivia explained that she has tried different “things to get myself back on track” but that this hasn’t worked because “sometimes the support just isn’t there, sometimes I can’t access the support”. Olivia explained that she struggled in school because of mental health issues. She said that “the school didn’t really try that well, and they weren’t great for a lot of reasons”. Olivia’s experience at school and when leaving school reinforces the need to consider key transition points. Overall, Olivia was very positive about the support she received at Turtle Dove and she explained that she has gained confidence and skills and now has more experiences to include on her CV. However, she also explained that she fears ‘ageing out’ of support. This is in line with other research findings that show the need to prioritise continuity of support to avoid cliff edges in provision.



3.3 Participation and completion rates

In total, 1,108 young people started a YG Trailblazer intervention during year one. Cambridgeshire County Council's Youth Impact Programme (CCC YIP) recorded the largest volume of starts followed by Reed in Partnership and Inspire Education Group (Figure 12) of these YIP and Reed in Partnership were existing programmes that were able to expand provision due to the Trailblazer.¹⁸ Each intervention had different Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which were negotiated at the start of the programme. Due to the compressed timeline at the start of the programme, some interventions had their KPIs reprofiled. KPIs ranged from 20 young people engaging with the intervention to more than 100. Figure 13 shows the number of young people who started different interventions, ranging from 3 to 119. The low number of starts for some interventions could be explained by a range of factors, including the challenges in recruiting young people or providers not sharing MI data.

Figure 13: Programme starts by intervention

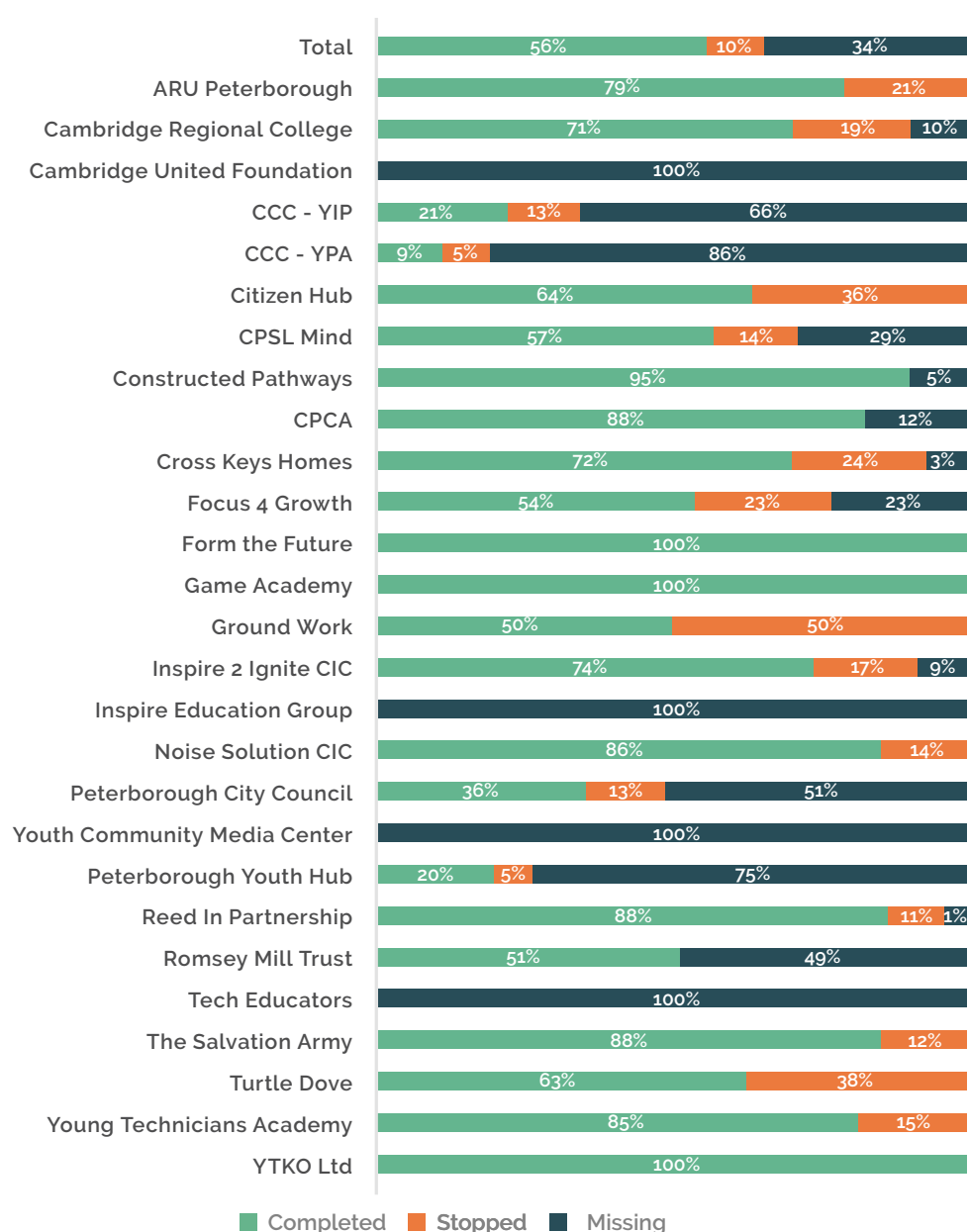


*CCC – YIP: Cambridgeshire County Council Youth Impact Programme. **CCC YPA: Cambridgeshire County Council Youth Progress Advisor.

¹⁸ This corresponds to 965 individual participants engaged with one or several interventions funded through CPCA YG .

Overall, 56% of young people completed their participation by March 2026 and 10% stopped engaging prior to completion (Figure 14). The intervention with the largest proportion of young people who stopped engaging prior to completion is Ground Work (50%), followed by Turtle Dove (38%) and Citizen Hub (26%).¹⁹ However, completion status was missing for 34% of all participants. The volume of missing completion data appears to be larger among interventions that provided non-time-limited support. The following interventions had more than half of their completion data missing: Youth Impact Programme (66%) and Youth Progression Advisor (86%) delivered by Cambridgeshire County Council, Peterborough Youth Hub (75%) and by Peterborough City Council (51%). Two organisations did not provide any data on completion status (Peterborough Youth Community Media Centre and Tech Educators) by mid-May. The large volume of missing data points to the need for CPCA to work with providers to understand MI challenges and improve compliance with contractual arrangements.

Figure 14: Completion rate by intervention



Base: See charts above for the base by interventions. Note: Some totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

¹⁹ These proportions are based on very small numbers, corresponding to only eight young people in total who stopped the support offered by Ground Work, six by Turtle Dove and six by the Citizen Hub.

Participants facing more complex barriers tend to have lower completion rates and higher dropout rates, suggesting that the nature of barriers plays an important role in shaping young people's progression through the programme.

Completion rates are lower among participants with confidence (54%), suitable jobs (54%), and skills (50%) as primary barriers. Dropout rates are also higher among those reporting skills (17%), confidence (16%), and suitable jobs (14%), which is in line with the lower completion rates for these groups. This suggests that these barriers are particularly challenging to overcome without targeted and sustained support.

On the other hand, participants who reported childcare as barrier to work or education had the highest completion rate (87%) and lowest dropout rate (3%) of any group. Programme participants who reported transport as their primary non-health-related barrier were more likely to have completed their programme (65%) by end of March 2026 than average (56%) and had a relatively low dropout rate of 13%.

Participants who reported a health-related barrier to EET also had lower completion rates than those with non-health-related barriers. The completion rate for those with no health-related barriers was 63%, compared to 51% for those with a health-related barrier. Participants who reported autism as their primary health-related barrier (44%) and those with severe or specific learning disabilities (59%) were least likely to complete. This suggests that participants with health-related barriers, particularly those linked to mental health and neurodiversity, may require more intensive, specialist and longer-term support, and may make slower progression through provision compared to those facing other types of barriers. This aligns with qualitative findings from delivery staff and strategic stakeholders, who described young people experiencing anxiety, social isolation, or difficulties leaving their homes, which can limit their ability to engage consistently with programmes.

Qualitative evidence suggests that barriers are often interconnected and cumulative. For example, delivery staff interviews highlighted that transport, or job availability may only become relevant once confidence and mental health challenges are addressed. Similarly, lack of work experience is closely linked to skills deficits and a lack of confidence. This may help explain why barriers such as confidence and skills are associated with lower completion rates in the MI data, as they underpin a wider set of challenges related to readiness for employment or education. Delivery staff also noted that confidence to use transport can be a barrier in itself, rather than the availability of transport, suggesting that as young people become more work-ready, structural barriers may become more prominent.



**4 Delivery level: referrals,
support and employer
engagement**

Key findings and lessons

Young people accessed year one of the CPCA YG Trailblazer through a range of routes, with the most common being through JCP and self-referral. Embedding promotional material in spaces where young people engaged helped generate self-referrals. Warm referrals from other organisations were also seen as particularly effective in increasing sign-ups and sustaining engagement with provision. Co-location of services was effective at generating cross-referrals between organisations and helped providers recruit young people directly.

Year one of the Trailblazer offered a highly diverse and flexible range of provision, with a 'no one-size-fits-all' model. Providers successfully used a mix of one-to-one, group, online, in-person and tailored support to meet different needs and engagement preferences.

Personalised and flexible approaches were a core strength, particularly for young people with complex needs. One-to-one and non-time-limited support were especially effective for building trust and sustaining engagement.

Engaging young people with more barriers to EET often required providers to spend significant time building trust, particularly with those experiencing anxiety, isolation or long-term disengagement. The time needed to engage these young people needs to be considered when developing interventions aimed at these young people.

Providers reflected on the high volume of information required about young people and the number of forms to be completed at the start of the programme. These administrative and data requirements can undermine early engagement. This was particularly the case for some providers, which points to the need to adapt the requirements based on the intensity and length of each intervention.

Partnership work is present but inconsistent, with informal signposting common but fewer formal referrals. Barriers include lack of awareness of other provision and limited trust between providers. This points to the need for more networking opportunities for front-line staff, as well as the need to consider a single point of contact, to ensure providers have enough information to provide better IAG to young people in the region and that each young person is referred to the right provision for them.

Employer engagement is uneven and often dependent on pre-existing relationships, with providers who already had strong employer links more successful in creating opportunities. Other providers reported employer fatigue, low awareness, and capacity constraints.

Models such as the Peterborough YouthHub, Game Academy and IEG Community Navigators are considered to be innovative in the region. Many aspects of their approaches, such as the creation of youth-friendly environments, the focus on reducing stigma, integration of multiple services or engagement of young people through interests such as gaming, are effective at engaging and supporting young people.

4.1 Referrals into the programme

A wide range of referral routes

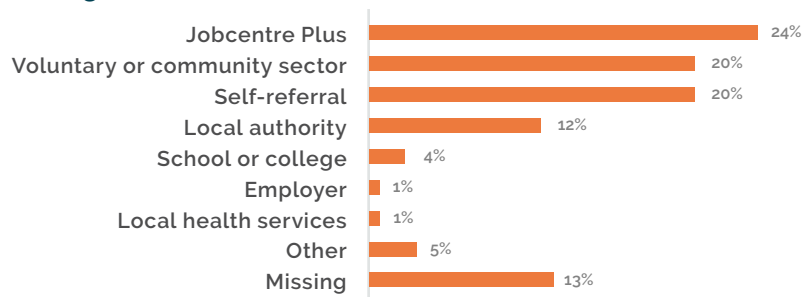
Referrals into the programme were generated by delivery partners through a wide range of routes. CPCA's role in supporting referrals into the programme was limited, with CPCA facilitating cross-referrals between delivery organisations by convening delivery partners. However, one of the YG Trailblazer programme team members explained that they see year two as an opportunity to establish more structured referral processes.

Delivery partners were responsible for generating their own referrals, drawing on their expertise to reach the right audience and checking young people's eligibility into the programme. As a result, there were a range of routes into the Trailblazer, with the most common being through JCP (Figure 15), and one in three young people referred by JCP had engaged with Reed In Partnership. Nearly one in four young people were referred into an intervention through this route (24%). Nationally, it is estimated that half of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET engage with JCP, although only one in four are required to look for work.²⁰ This suggests that the proportion of referrals into the programme from JCP is broadly in line with national data. However, better intelligence on the systems, services and support accessed by young people who are NEET would allow a more robust assessment of whether additional efforts are needed to reach those outside the benefits system, or whether the current referral pattern is representative of the volume of young people engaging with this service.

The wide variety of referral routes represents the diversity of interventions and young people's needs in the region. For example, the Youth Impact Programme (YIP) delivered by Cambridgeshire County Council was targeted at two main cohorts: young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) and young people living in supported accommodations. This explains why a large proportion of young people were referred by housing services.

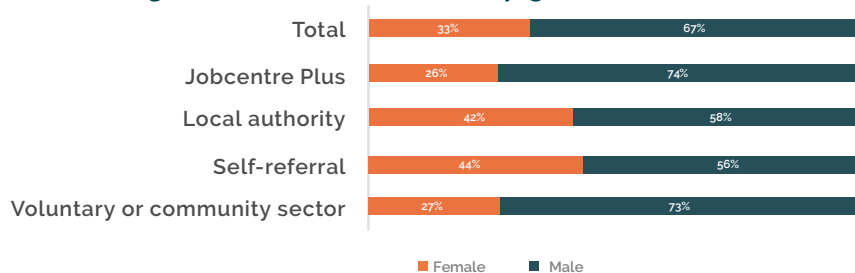
Young women were more likely to self-refer into the programme (44%) or to be referred through a local authority (42%) than to be referred by JCP (26%) or the voluntary or community sector (27%) (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Referral routes



Base: All participants = 1,108.

Figure 16: Referral routes by gender



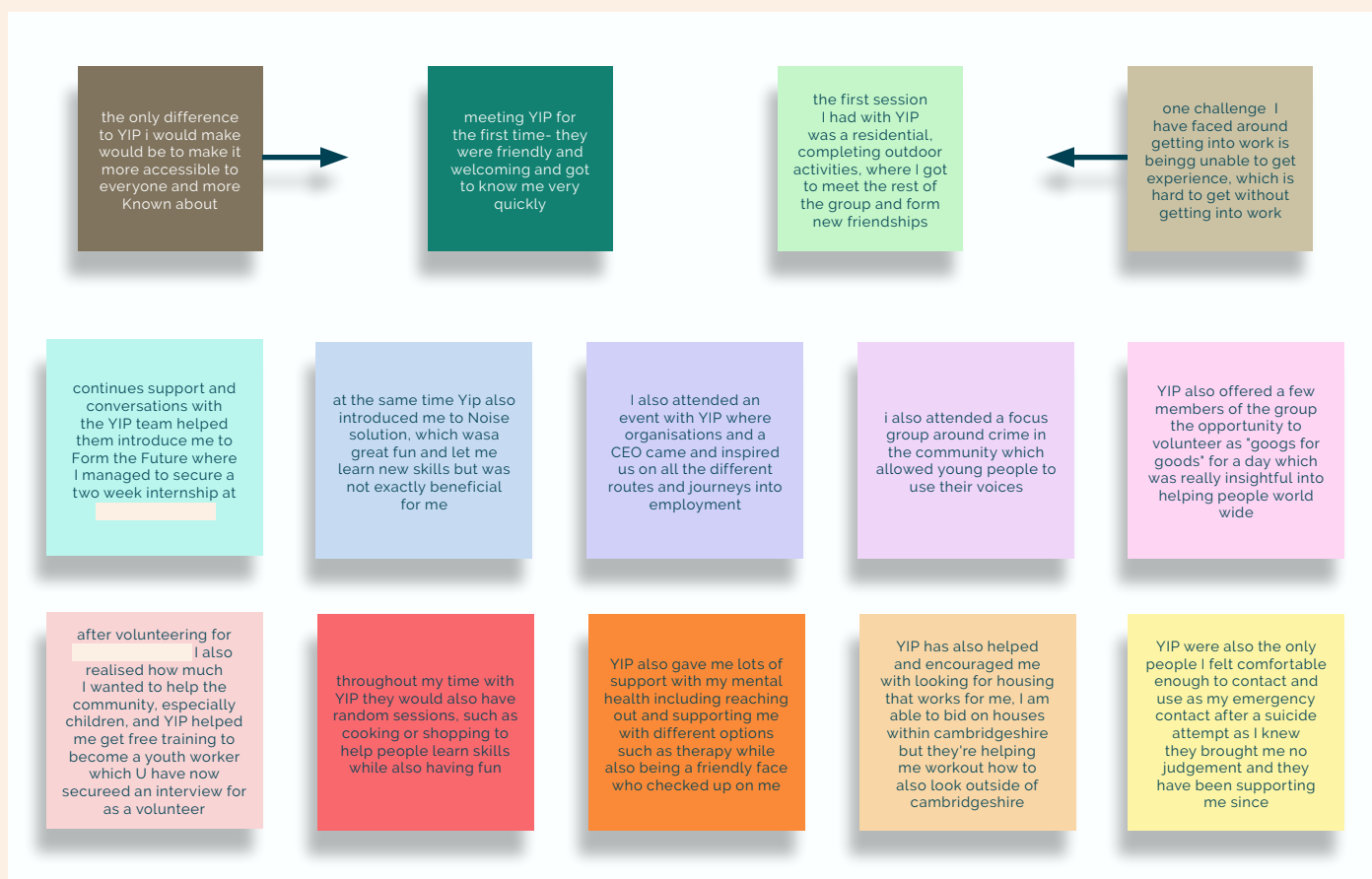
Base: Total, All participants with non-missing gender and referral routes = 821. JCP = 118, Self-referral = 172, Voluntary or community sector = 200. Employer, local health services, school or college, and other were not included due to the small sample size (below 50 people referred through these routes).

²⁰ Phipps et al. (2025) The Youth Guarantee and the benefits system. Challenges, opportunities and changes needed. Available here: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/The-Youth-Guarantee-and-the-benefits-system-1.pdf>

Young person case study: Dylan (pseudonym)

At the time of the evaluation, Dylan had been involved with the Youth Impact Programme (YIP) for six months. He first came into contact with this provision at his accommodation. Dylan outlined his journey through CPCA's YG Trailblazer (Figure 17). He emphasised two elements that had encouraged him to participate in the programme. Firstly, that he did not feel pressure to engage with the support. Secondly, that delivery staff were 'understanding' and 'non-judgemental'. Dylan said that his first encounter did not "feel very pressured, like I was talking to someone because it's their job. It felt like they were there because they wanted to be there." Dylan's experience illustrates some of the key learnings about young people's views of the support received, particularly the importance of delivery staff being non-judgemental and of having no entry requirements or eligibility tests.

Figure 17: Dylan's journey into CPCA Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (in his own words)



Note: Dylan was asked to represent "some way or another" his journey through the support using an online white board. Figure 17 is a display of the way he has represented his journey, with minor corrections to spelling and punctuation to improve readability.

Young people who have participated in YIP attended a range of activities. Dylan highlighted some of these when representing his journey, including residentials – where young people engage in outdoor activities – and group sessions. Dylan explained that the group sessions were particularly helpful in developing new skills and contrasted them with his experience of learning at schools. For example, he described how young people might be asked to buy snacks for a movie night within a set budget. He explained that without realising it, young people develop a range of transferable skills, such as teamwork, budgeting, and time management. He explained that the activities are "lots of fun, so it's not like in school, where it's like do this, do that, so you can be better at this, it's do this,

and you'll get better at this".

Dylan also received individualised and tailored support from YIP, and he sees YIP delivery staff as his primary emergency contacts. He explained that he contacts YIP staff for support when facing difficult situations and does not feel comfortable seeking support from anyone else.

Delivery staff also signposted him to other interventions and support, some of which are funded through the YG Trailblazer. He explained that he had been signposted to Noise Solution to help with his anxiety and mental health, but that it was not right for him as he was not interested in pursuing a career in music. He was also referred to Form the Future which helped him access a two-week internship at the NHS.

He explained that his main barrier to employment has been gaining work experience, but that he now has a clearer understanding of his interests and what is possible. For example, he wants to become a youth worker and has already completed the training. He was preparing for a job interview the next day.

Overall, Dylan's journey into the Trailblazer demonstrates the complementarity and additionality of the different interventions funded through the YG Trailblazer. This also demonstrates the importance of wraparound, longer-term, and non-time-limited support. Dylan's experience also illustrates the many challenges young people may face, including housing, mental health and lack of work experience.



Generating self-referrals

Nearly one in five young people self-referred to an intervention. Partners used a range of approaches to encourage self-referrals including flyers and posters. Some providers used social media to encourage more young people to sign-up (e.g. TikTok). Family and friends, as well as word of mouth, were also common approaches to encouraging self-referrals.

Providers noted that promoting support in places young people are likely to engage, for example posters in GP surgeries and football clubs, was a successful approach to generating self-referrals. One delivery provider also highlighted the importance of youth-friendly spaces, with high visibility, to encourage engagement, suggesting that spaces located on a high-street can allow young people to just walk-in to the service and speak with support staff. This shows that strong local knowledge and an understanding of the target group is important in generating referrals and reaching out to a wide range of young people. However, one provider reflected that the CPCA YG Trailblazer could have played a bigger role in generating referrals by using social media more effectively and promoting the support offered by individual organisations more widely.

Importance of warm referrals

Providers also highlighted the importance of warm referrals, whereby one organisation refers a young person directly to another organisation. This approach was seen as effective both in generating sign-ups and in supporting sustained engagement.

Providers noted that warm referrals were more likely to happen when both organisations already had strong and trusted relationships. For example, in the case of the Youth Impact Programme mentioned above, it was noted that referrals were more likely to come from the housing providers that had links with the intervention. Another provider noted that they were able to leverage their relationship with JCP work coaches to generate a high volume of referrals from JCP. They had pre-existing relationships with JCP work coaches as they had worked on another programme in the region where they had co-located services.

These findings show that the volume of warm referrals is intrinsically linked to the quality of the relationships between individual providers. However, developing strong relationships can take time and effort. One provider noted that even when they are familiar with an organisation or have already worked with them previously, they needed to redevelop their relationships.

The relationship is there, but it just needs to be rekindled a little bit more for this, which is why I think it's probably taking a little bit longer than we would have liked to really start to see numbers.

– Delivery provider

While developing relationships can take time, one of the providers noted that they successfully developed strong relationships within a short timeframe, which enabled them to meet their target in terms of the number of young people engaged with their intervention. A key factor in this was the role of CPCA in facilitating networking events,

and that their offer was different from the other organisations. This points to the need to consider the complementarity of the different interventions commissioned, to facilitate better working relationships and reduce competition among the different providers.

Delivery staff also noted that there were often communication gaps between providers when referring young people and emphasised the importance of formalising processes with partners.

Having a named person works really well for us (...) They will keep us informed (...) we will get a list of who started and they will tell us who kind of falls off or who doesn't complete a programme. I don't think it's set up like that as far as I can tell with the people that are offering the Trailblazer at the moment.

- Youth Support Service

Co-location of services

Co-location of services was also perceived as effective in generating referrals. Firstly, it enabled delivery staff to recruit young people directly. For example, some of the delivery staff recruited young people while working from JCP premises. Secondly, co-location helped delivery staff to gain a better understanding of the other provision. This was seen as a particular strength of the Peterborough Youth Hub for example, where providers reported that the shared space created opportunities to network.

It's also been really good from a networking point of view for us. Because they've got Steadfast Training in there, they've got Jobcentre advisers now who are based there. They've got Mind, you know, so there's different organisations. So every time that we're there, we're gaining more resources and networking with more people, which is really good.

- Delivery staff

Case study: Peterborough Youth Hub

The Peterborough Youth Hub, hosted by the POSH Foundation, was established as part of the CPCA YG Trailblazer to provide youth-specific, holistic employment support in Peterborough. The model draws on the EFL in the Community "Training Ground" approach delivered by football club charities and foundations across England. The Hub is based at the Peterborough United Football Club stadium which aims to create a welcoming, youth-focused environment distinct from statutory services.

Youth Hub employability staff deliver personalised employment support directly to young people through a mixture of drop-ins, one-to-one appointments and group sessions. There is a strong focus on building trust, understanding individual circumstances, and providing tailored support to move young people closer to employment.

Alongside this, a number of co-located partners provide specialist services within the same space, so that young people can access a range of support in a single location. This includes JCP work coaches, mental health support from CPSL Mind, training opportunities from Steadfast Training, advice and guidance from Peterborough Education and Employment Team, and tenancy readiness and money advice from Cross Keys Homes. Young people have engaged with co-located provider support after being referred by Hub employability staff, including 33 young people who have started the training provision.

What works well

Physical and cultural environment of the Hub: Hub staff reported creating a relaxed, welcoming setting with no uniforms, music playing, free drinks and informal seating to differentiate the Hub from statutory environments. Staff and stakeholders said that the venue being located in the football stadium is attractive to young people. The setting helps reduce the stigma often associated with Jobcentres and encourages greater openness. Staff report that young people are more willing to discuss challenges and aspirations in this environment.

Personalised, in-depth employability support that fills gaps in existing provision: Hub staff prioritise building trust and understanding a young person's circumstances before focusing on job outcomes. While short, infrequent JCP appointments are often insufficient for young people with complex barriers, the Hub model provides longer, more flexible support that helps young people move closer to work quicker.

Co-location of partners and services: Hub staff observed that young people rarely attend only one appointment when services are co-located; instead, engagement with one service often leads to contact with others during the same visit. Staff reported that hosting JCP appointments at the stadium—with four work coaches delivering regular sessions—has improved attendance among young people with a history of non-attendance at Jobcentres.

What works less well

Location within the city: Both young people and staff highlighted that the Hub's location is not somewhere young people would naturally stumble upon, as it is not centrally located. Partners are exploring more accessible, central spaces (e.g. the 'Bridge' in Peterborough) as a partner provision to the Peterborough Youth Hub.

Access and physical environment: Young people and staff identified the Hub's location within the stadium as difficult to find and navigate, with limited signposting and a layout that requires young people to pass security and move through multiple corridors before reaching the Hub. This can feel uninviting or intimidating, particularly for those less confident or not self-motivated to attend. Hub staff have recognised these challenges and have begun to improve signage and provide clearer directions.

Awareness and engagement: Awareness of the Hub and its offer was initially low, resulting in a small number of young people visiting the Hub and limiting consistent attendance from some partners in the early stages. Hub staff initially relied on promotion through the football club's social media but recognised the importance of multiple recruitment channels and expanded outreach to virtual schools, care leaver teams, colleges and universities.

Footfall has since increased significantly; a total of 195 attendances were recorded between November 2025 and March 2026, rising to 299 between April and 19 May 2026 (494 total attendances). In terms of unique individuals, 353 young people have attended the Hub since opening. This increase has been driven in part by the regular on-site presence of JCP work coaches and Peterborough EET delivering appointments and drop-ins, which has brought more young people into the Hub.

As demand has grown, partners are now co-located more consistently, improving access to support. However, some services (e.g. Cross Keys Homes tenancy readiness workshops) are still in development, with plans to expand delivery as engagement continues to increase.

4.2 Support for young people

Types of support offered

Support for young people is delivered in a wide variety of formats. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to support, with different interventions delivering support in different ways, to meet the needs of diverse young people:

- **One-to-one**, such as support from the Cambridgeshire County Council Youth Progression team. Providers felt that one-to-one sessions allowed them to support young people in a flexible, tailored way that added the most value for individuals, and allowed them to build strong relationships.
- **Group sessions**, such as the entrepreneurship course run by YTKO. Group sessions have the benefit of enabling young people to gain transferable skills for the workplace, such as through delivering presentations to their peers, while building social skills and stepping out of their comfort zone. However, providers said delivering in a group can be challenging as it is not possible to tailor provision to meet the needs of each young person. Young people's behaviour can also disrupt group sessions, impacting other young people and requiring a large amount of staff attention to manage.
- **A mix of one-to-one and group sessions**, such as Reed in Partnership and Turtle Dove. Providers felt that offering as many ways as possible to engage and participate with support ensured that young people could take part in the way they felt most comfortable.
- **Anonymous**, such as the Kooth mental health support. Anonymous and online support for mental health is seen as beneficial by the intervention lead, as it enables young people to access support early, reduces the stigma associated with mental health, and provides reassurance that the service is truly confidential. However, more research is needed to establish the benefits of, and best practice for, delivering anonymous support through the YG Trailblazer.
- **Online** delivery included both live formats such as Game Academy, or self-guided content such as the Youth Employment UK Journey to Work Course. Providers felt that online delivery offers a wide range of participation options for young people; speaking out loud, using chat features, contributing to group co-working and community building spaces, or engaging with online content independently without having to interact with others. Young people were also able to catch up on any sessions they missed by watching recordings. Delivering online also removes the issue of transport barriers and can be well suited to young people who experience anxiety around, or simply are not used to, leaving the house. Online delivery does require young people to have access to a suitable computer or device to participate, or for this to be provided, and setting up online access and ensuring young people have the right software installed can be challenging.
- **In-person**, such as Inspire 2 Ignite industry taster days. Providers often mentioned the importance of building strong relationships with young people, with some saying that face-to-face work allowed them to do this best. However, delivering in person was also challenging for delivery providers who cover a large geographic area, as staff often spend a lot of time travelling to meet young people.

- **Time-limited support or courses** are often effective at addressing specific needs or skills gaps, such as the provision offered by Game Academy. However, some partners reflected that their delivery did not last long enough to meaningfully support all young people and that extended delivery times for support would have benefited many participants. Providers also felt that, for some young people, committing to attending provision of a set length can be challenging and result in low attendance.
- **Non-time-limited**, such as support from the Peterborough City Council NEET service. Providers reflected on how working with young people in an open-ended way supported them to build trusted relationships that made young people feel valued. Provision was usually tapered, so young people felt supported to move onto the next step in their pathway to employment, rather than staff supporting young people indefinitely, without progression.
- **Structured or semi-structured courses**, such as the Youth Impact Programme or Game Academy. Many providers felt that longer, structured courses allow staff to build rapport with young people over time. They also reflected on how even within courses, there can be elements of tailoring and flexibility, such as allowing young people to take breaks when needed. Some young people struggled to attend courses that started at a specific time because of challenges with time management or reluctance to get up earlier than usual in the morning.
- **Fully tailored to the young person**, such as the Peterborough City Council NEET service. This was seen positively by both young people and delivery partners. One young person reflected that staff had been able to tailor support around their health condition, while another said that staff were able to adjust delivery to accommodate their neurodiversity. However, delivery partners generally said that a holistic, flexible approach was more challenging to deliver, particularly given caseloads are high, as they wanted to meet the needs of each individual young person but it can be difficult to anticipate the time needed to address complex needs.
- **Wraparound support** once young people have moved into work, or to help them with other aspects of their lives, such as housing for example, provided by Reed in Partnership. Pastoral support was noted as a particularly important aspect of young people's support needs. A number of delivery staff noted that they often provide support that is more typically offered by family members or carers.

While a wide diversity of types of support were offered through year one of the CPCA YG Trailblazer, flexible and person-centred is a common theme. All providers aimed to offer support that meets the needs of the young people they target, providing support that is accessible, friendly, and with little to no barriers to participation. This varied approach allowed the Trailblazer to effectively support young people at different stages of their journey towards and into EET. The accessibility of the programme compared to other employment support was highlighted in the positive views shared by young people about the YG Trailblazer, in comparison to JCP, where support was often described as impersonal and focused on meeting the conditions for receiving benefits, rather than providing genuine support to find work.

Case study: Game Academy

Game Academy is a national online training provider specialising in digital skills development for young people. Its premise is that gaming is an undervalued credential that maps onto transferable workplace skills including collaboration, project management, data handling, and creative problem-solving. In CPCA, Game Academy delivered three cohorts of an online programme across the Peterborough, Huntingdon, and Fenland areas between January and March 2026, with the explicit aim of re-engaging young people who are NEET through a subject they are already invested in, and supporting them into employment, education or training. This was a new provision for the area, enabled by the Trailblazer.

The programme targeted 16- to 24-year-old gamers who are NEET. Approximately 58% of participants across Game Academy's programmes nationally have a neurodivergent condition, and the CPCA cohorts reflected this, according to interviews with delivery staff. The online, camera-off format was widely seen as a safer and more accessible space, particularly for young people with anxiety or those less comfortable in group settings. Young people were recruited through social media marketing, direct outreach to JCP offices, and referrals from local authority NEET teams.

The programme ran across approximately 40 to 50 hours over four weeks, delivered entirely online via Zoom and Discord. Content covered three interconnected strands: industry knowledge (sessions with games industry professionals covering game design, narrative, art, and production); employability skills (CV building, LinkedIn, portfolio development, interview practice, and professional communication); and collaborative project work, in which groups developed a full game concept and presented it to an industry professional for feedback. A Level 1 or Level 2 IT User Skills qualification was embedded throughout.

What worked well

The online delivery format and use of Discord generated a familiar and low-pressure environment that reduced barriers to engagement for young people with anxiety or neurodivergence. The use of gaming as a hook generated strong initial engagement, and the combination of industry-facing project work and employability support helped young people build confidence in a way that felt relevant and motivating. The close working relationship between Game Academy and local authority NEET teams was identified as a key enabler, with youth progression advisors playing an important role in preparing young people before referral and maintaining continuity of support throughout.

What worked less well

Compressed timescales significantly limited Game Academy's ability to build the local referral relationships needed to reach its target cohort, particularly in Peterborough and in more rural areas like Wisbech. Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and housing associations – identified as valuable routes to reaching young people experiencing the greatest barriers – were also difficult to activate.

Engagement and onboarding

Engagement activities varied between providers - influenced by how and what provision they delivered - and the young people they work with. Engagement activities had two functions: to generate self-referrals through advertising provision to young people, and to engage young people who have been referred into provision to ensure they signed up and took part.

Each provider adopted different strategies to engage young people, the success of which was influenced by:

- **The modes of engagement:** There were mixed views about the success of different methods of engagement – online, text, emails, and in-person. While some providers noted that engaging young people via email was effective in establishing the first contact, others reported that calling young people directly was more effective. This reinforces the importance of being flexible and adapting to young people's preferences to successfully engage young people with provision.
- **Cohort of young people:** Providers generally found that it was more difficult to engage young people who were further from the labour market, compared to those who were closer. Providers described a lengthy process of building trust before young people would consider engaging with provision, particularly with young people who were unused to leaving the house, perhaps had not been to school or college for a long time, and had little structure or support in their day-to-day life.
- **Self-referral:** Some providers felt that engaging young people who had self-referred to the programme was particularly challenging. Engagement is perceived as less challenging when young people are referred by other organisations with which they already have strong and positive working relationships. This points towards the importance of providers developing good working relationships and trust to facilitate referrals.
- Onboarding to the YG Trailblazer involved two main elements across providers:
- Once referred into provision, most delivery partners have an **initial call or meeting with the young person**. This step helps providers understand the individual's support needs and allows them to explain the nature of the provision. Some providers use a structured needs assessment, while others adopt a more conversational approach.
- Another key element of onboarding was ensuring that young people had completed all the **forms and reporting requirements** needed to formally onboard them to the provision.

Many providers raised this as an aspect of onboarding that they found challenging, either because they felt the forms and reporting requirements were too long and requested too much information, or because they were not youth friendly. One provider gave an example of this, where they felt that the language used in the forms was not accessible for young people, particularly those with dyslexia. Providers felt that the forms threatened to disrupt the trust they were building with young people that was essential to them providing effective support.

"You really, really want to be engaged in conversation with them, learning about them, you know, understanding what it is that they want to do, what makes them tick, what makes them turn off? So when you have to go through six documents, four questionnaires at the first appointment, you can see them dissociating."

– Delivery provider

One provider developed an online form to help delivery staff collect information about young people they support. One of the delivery staff interviewed, who worked on two different interventions at the same time, noted that the electronic form was helpful and facilitated the collection of the required information. This points to the need to explore ways to facilitate the collection of information required for administrative purposes, which minimises the burden on staff and participants.

However, the burden of the reporting requirements was not seen as a significant issue by all providers. This seems to suggest that reporting requirements need to be adapted to the length and intensity of the intervention. For example, shorter provision could be required to collect less information and/or receive further support to collect the required information.

Onboarding was considered to be easy and straightforward by young people who took part in focus groups.²¹ There was no strong focus on forms or reporting requirements as a challenge, in contrast with the views shared by some providers.

"Like, to be honest, it felt too easy because, like, I was kind of thinking, oh, maybe it's not real, like, maybe it's too easy to be true, because it is genuinely just replying to one email and them getting back like you're part of the course. Make sure you give your details. Once you do that, then it's just the course starts, and as long as you're there and turning up like there's nothing more you need to do, really, because that's all it takes to sign on."

– Young person

By contrast, some of the delivery providers said that young people can be anxious about attending onboarding sessions. The reasons differed by provider:

- One provider said that some young people who had been referred to them through JCP thought they might be subject to benefit sanctions if they did not attend. Partners had to reassure them and emphasise the voluntary nature of the programme.
- Some young people were reported to have a distrust in services due to past negative experiences. As a result, providers needed to invest time in building rapport across several sessions. One delivery team noted that this could be a lengthy process, taking more time than initially anticipated.

²¹ The difference between the views of the delivery providers and the young people who engaged with the research may be because the young people who were confident enough to take part in a focus group are likely to also be more confident than many of their peers who received support from the YG Trailblazer.

Overall, providers were taking a variety of engagement approaches, which meant they were likely to engage a broad range of young people. This variety also helped to meet the differing needs and preferences of young people. The onboarding process is less varied and centred around understanding a young person's needs and goals, starting to build rapport and trust, as well as completing mandatory forms to meet reporting requirements. Providers felt that the reporting requirements undermined the quality of early contact with young people. However, this was not reflected in young people's views of onboarding, which were broadly positive.

Signposting and referrals

Signposting happened regularly across year one of the YG Trailblazer and most providers saw it as integral to the collaborative nature of the programme. Providers saw value in being able to give young people information about other services they might want to access, and many were eager to learn more about different provision available through the Trailblazer, particularly in the early days of delivery.

Formal onward referrals – where delivery staff contact another provider on a young person's behalf – seemed to happen less frequently and routinely among the providers we spoke to. It was not entirely clear why this was the case, but the provision of IAG was identified as a key need in the CPCA area, suggesting some providers might have lacked the skills needed to effectively refer young people onto suitable provision. One provider also mentioned that competition for sign-ups held them back from signposting or referring young people to other providers.

Trust in other provision was raised as an important factor in giving providers the confidence to signpost and refer young people to other provision. Some providers expressed fear of signposting young people onto provision they didn't have a relationship with, as they felt this might risk the young person falling through the cracks. It is therefore important that providers build strong relationships with one another to support warm transitions for young people, and give providers the assurance they need to signpost and refer with confidence. However, it was noted that opportunities for delivery staff to meet with their counterparts in other organisations were relatively rare. This points to the need to facilitate more networking opportunities for front-line staff working directly with young people to help them deliver better IAG.

Signposting raised challenges for some providers; there wasn't always appropriate provision to signpost young people to, the waiting time for support, or start dates not aligning with a young person's end point with another provision. This challenge was predominantly around provision that used a cohort delivery model which was not the case for a large proportion of YG Trailblazer provision where delivery was predominantly flexible.

"I think the one challenge we have is knowing where to refer people to, where to signpost them to, and having the knowledge, because we're safeguarders as well, that some of the places that you can see clearly those people need will have a year's waiting list. It's trying to access as much as possible." – Delivery provider

Case study: Community Navigator programme: Providing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in the Community

The Community IAG Navigator programme was delivered by Inspire Education Group (IEG) in partnership with Runway Training. This intervention aimed to provide training for adults in the community who work with young people who are NEET (e.g. a basketball coach) to deliver IAG and become 'Community Navigators'. While these adults were likely to be trusted and listened to by young people, they may not know how and where to signpost and refer the young people.

The intervention consisted of delivering Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Level 2 qualifications to adults in the community. The course was delivered over five weeks and was comprised of weekly sessions, with additional one-to-one sessions as and when requested. Eleven participants attended the course delivered by IEG and eight by Runway Training. Course participants included professionals working across a range of organisations, including Peterborough City Council, Centre 33, the NHS, Turtle Dove, and Citizens Hub.

Due to delays in commissioning the grant-funded interventions, providers mainly used their existing relationships and providers involved with the YG Trailblazer to recruit participants for the course. However, this was seen as a missed opportunity to reach out to people in the community who may not have been trained to provide IAG as part of their role, such as basketball coaches or faith leaders.

The content of the course was designed to help participants gain the qualifications, and it was adapted to the geographical area and target populations. Course participants interviewed noted that the trauma-informed session and the session on how to reduce biases were particularly helpful. Some participants also noted that they felt more confident in their practice and that the course helped them to better structure their sessions. However, participants and trainers noted that attending the training sessions alongside their day-to-day job was challenging. Trainers noted that with more lead-in time to develop the intervention, they could have worked with the organisations of the course participants to adjust their workload and/or working patterns to enable delivery during their work hours.

Course participants also valued the opportunity to meet with peers and make connections across different organisations. For example, one course participant noted that through the course they had exchanged numbers with someone working in an organisation they weren't familiar with. This points to the need for professionals to have space to meet and exchange about different practices. An **interactive map** was also developed by the trainers in IEG to support Community Navigators in sharing information about the services and support available for young people in the area of Peterborough.

Exit from an intervention

As with other aspects of delivery, there was no single approach to supporting young people as they stop receiving support from an intervention. However, across interventions, providers usually aimed to avoid a hard end point or cliff edge for young people. For example, the Peterborough City Council NEET service continued contact with young people as they moved out of provision to ensure continuity of support during the transition.

The approach to exit was generally determined by whether an intervention was discreet or non-time-limited. For discreet provision, young people would know from the outset that the intervention would last for a certain period of time, such as for the length of a course they signed up to. However, non-time-limited provision did not have a natural or predetermined end date. Most providers offering this type of support aimed to work collaboratively with young people to support them to end provision or move onto another kind of support when they were ready. One provider outlined four key destinations that could result in a young person exiting non-time-limited support:

1. Moving into work or learning.
2. Agreeing with the young person that they have given all the support they can and the young person is ready to continue working towards their goals on their own.
3. Referring onto other provision. In some instances, providers would continue to support a young person alongside their new provision, depending on their needs and wishes and the type of support they were being referred onto.
4. Disengaging from support without giving a reason.

Most young people engaging with the YG Trailblazer did not have a strict exit point from support. This was due to the flexible nature of programme delivery and way in which the YG Trailblazer created stronger signposting and referral networks.



Case study: YTKO

YTKO delivers enterprise and self-employment support, providing an offer distinct from other providers, focused on early-stage business idea generation, start-up support and alternative pathways to employment. Support is tailored following an initial diagnostic activity and delivered through a blended model of one-to-one sessions, interactive workshops and joint delivery with other Trailblazer partners, both in-person and online. YTKO had previously delivered self-employment support in the area, but did not run programmes targeted at young people as a distinct cohort.

At the time of the evaluation, a small number of young people had already started businesses, with several more in the process of doing so. Some young people were exploring business ideas across areas such as cafes, home-based enterprises, music and DJing, gaming and creative industries.

What worked well

Partnership working and cross-referrals: YTKO is the only provider delivering dedicated self-employment and enterprise support, with YTKO staff highlighting that the support is complementary to other Trailblazer partners because it is a unique offer. This has enabled strong partnership working, with YTKO proactively canvassing and reaching out to Trailblazer partners to collaborate to deliver joint events (such as tastings, workshops, drop-ins and information sessions), receive warm referrals and support young people already engaged elsewhere. Staff reported that this helped boost referrals to YTKO and allowed young people to access a wider range of support without having to navigate services independently.

On completion of the intervention, staff review progress with young people and identify next steps based on their needs and goals. Most participants were not yet ready to start a business, often due to timing, funding or personal circumstances. For these young people, staff provided continued wraparound support, including employability guidance and interview preparation. Staff also report referring young people to Trailblazer partners for support depending on their needs, including support with employability, soft skills, mental health or debt management.

Trauma-informed approach: Staff described a flexible, trauma-informed approach using lived experience, varied delivery styles, and attention to neurodiversity and emotional regulation. This includes allowing regular breaks, using informal spaces, co-designing sessions with young people and prioritising trust before outcomes.

Grants: YTKO used Trailblazer funding to provide grants up to £500 to help young people overcome financial barriers to starting a business, such as purchasing equipment. Staff highlighted that this enabled young people who were ready to progress to do so more quickly and confidently, and six young people had received the grant, with around 12-14 more applying for it.

What worked less well

Paperwork: Paperwork was reported as a barrier by delivery staff, both due to its impact on their capacity and its impact on participants. The paperwork was considered to be time-consuming and overwhelming or intrusive for young people, especially when it is also often duplicated across providers. This has led to incomplete forms, creating additional follow-up work for staff and in some cases results in disengagement by young people. To overcome this challenge, staff have tried to support young people to get the forms completed throughout the day during YTKO sessions.

Shortened delivery window: A compressed delivery window, and starting just before Christmas, meant staff were unable to run longer, more in-depth activities such as 8-week courses that help build trust and rapport. As a result, delivery has focused more on basic sessions, limiting YTKO's ability to fully apply their methods and support young people to the extent they hoped to.

Transport: Delivery staff reported that transport is one of the main challenges to participation due to the size of the CPCA area and the logistical challenges of getting young people to specific venues. Staff noted that both the availability and cost of transport, as well as the coordination required, made attendance more difficult than anticipated, with some young people unable to travel consistently to sessions. This was mitigated by staff putting additional effort into organising transport for young people and considering accessibility when planning delivery locations, which meant arranging transport was a resource-intensive aspect of the intervention.



4.3 Internships, employer engagement, and support provided to employers

Employers played a relatively small but important role in the first year of delivery of the CPCA YG Trailblazer. Not all interventions engaged employers as part of their Youth Guarantee offer, and those that did engaged employers in different ways and for different reasons. For some interventions, employer involvement was essential to delivery, while for others, employers were engaged to provide pathways into work for young people.

- The **internship, apprenticeship, and Higher Technical Qualification (HTQs) grants** relied on engaging employers who would in turn recruit young people into short-term work, usually through an internship.
- **Inspire 2 Ignite** ran industry taster days co-designed and delivered with local employers, who were also asked to offer internships through the Trailblazer as part of their involvement.
- **Youth Employment UK** recruited employers to take up their offer of free membership as part of the Youth Guarantee, and also asked some employer members to contribute to their video series that allows young people to explore careers in local businesses.
- **Reed in Partnership** had strong existing relationships directly and indirectly with employers and leveraged these to connect young people to job opportunities.
- Some of the **IEG Community Navigators** working with the Inspire Education Group also reported that they have direct relationships with employers which enabled them to connect young people with local opportunities.
- **Peterborough Youth Hub** provided a space for local services to co-locate, including JCP, who in turn connected them to local employers.
- **Game Academy** leveraged connections to identify employers hiring in the gaming industry and organised an employer day to allow young people to meet employers in an informal setting.

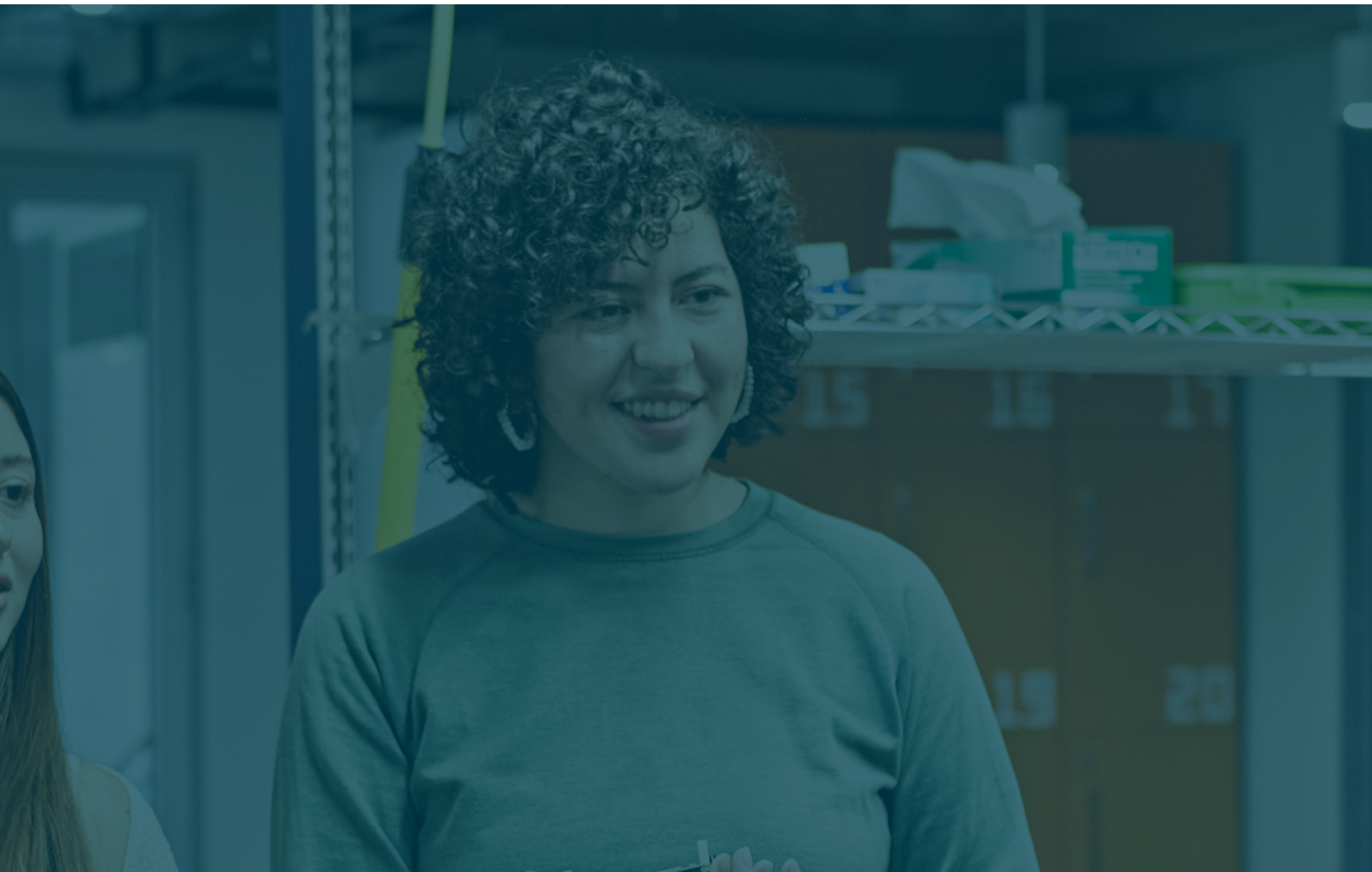
Delivery providers that engaged employers had mixed views of how successful this element of the YG Trailblazer was. Providers with strong existing relationships with employers generally faced the least challenges. For example, Inspire 2 Ignite are well known and trusted among local employers, which allowed them to quickly mobilise connections to offer industry days as part of the Youth Guarantee, despite the compressed delivery period. This reflects the importance of taking a long-term approach to engaging employers to build enduring, mutually beneficial relationships.

Some providers faced significant challenges engaging employers, particularly in the early stages of delivery. Providers and stakeholders identified different reasons for this, but one of the key challenges to engaging employers was a sense of employer fatigue. Some delivery staff felt that a lot was being asked of employers, with the YG Trailblazer being just one call on employers' time and resource among many.

Challenges engaging employers led to changes to the internship programme in the first year of delivery. Initially, employers were offered funding for 50% of a young person's salary for a 12-week period. However, based on employer feedback, a 6-week fully funded option was introduced which helped boost employer engagement, create more opportunities, and subsequently increase the number of young people starting internships.

The employers we spoke with felt positive about their experiences of the specific interventions they engaged with as part of the YG Trailblazer. Engaging with provision helped them to give local young people opportunities, meet their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals, and fill vacancies. However, employers had very limited knowledge of the YG Trailblazer beyond the intervention they were engaged in. Some employers said they would be interested in knowing more, particularly about other interventions that could benefit them. However, delivery staff were more sceptical, with some saying they felt that employers weren't interested in knowing more and did not engage with the information they shared about the wider YG Trailblazer.

Overall, employer engagement was an element of the CPCA YG Trailblazer that could have benefited from more development and coordination in year one. Employers play a key role in providing work experience and jobs for young people in the area. Successful employer engagement relied mostly on prior relationships, while staff trying to build new relationships faced more challenges. That being said, employers who did engage in the Trailblazer were positive about the benefits it had for their business, young people, and the local community, suggesting there is space for development of employer engagement in year two of delivery.



Case study: Youth Employment UK Membership

Youth Employment UK is an independent national organisation working to tackle youth unemployment and offers membership for employers across the UK. Membership provides employers with access to policy guidance, the ability to post on Youth Employment UK's opportunity finder which lists vacancies, careers events, and apprenticeships for young people to apply for, and access to the annual Good Youth Employment Symposium. Employers also meet with someone from Youth Employment UK at least once a quarter to ensure they can make the most of the membership. In return, members are required to make a commitment to being (or becoming) a good youth employer and to work towards Youth Employment UK's **Good Youth Employment Standards**. All the support provided through the membership is designed to help employers make progress towards this commitment.

CPCA commissioned Youth Employment UK to provide free membership for 20 local employers for a year. By the end of year one, 12 employers had signed up for membership.

What worked well

Membership is flexible in design, with employers able to set tailored goals that will help them become more youth friendly. Examples of becoming more youth friendly could include offering work experience to young people or doing outreach in schools. Membership does not involve working towards an accreditation, which takes the pressure off employers, allowing them to engage in a way that works for them.

What worked less well

Despite membership being offered for free through the YG Trailblazer, it was challenging to get employers to sign up, especially at the start of delivery. The key reason given for this was lack of understanding about the offer. It was noted that employers were unsure about the nature of the offer, whether it was free to access, and what level of work it would require from them.

**5 Programme and system level:
findings about programme
design and delivery and
systemic change**

Key findings

The Trailblazer was designed for breadth, rather than a narrow cohort focus. CPCA deliberately commissioned across multiple cohorts and intervention types simultaneously to ensure that provision was available at whatever point a young person entered the system.

The implementation of the YG Trailblazer in year one was significantly affected by delays, with cascading effects on the volume of participants reached, the depth of co-design achievable with partners, and the pace at which provider collaboration developed.

The programme's first year operated more as a mobilisation and test-and-learn phase than a full delivery year, with many of the structures, relationships and pathways necessary for effective implementation only consolidating in its later months.

There is evidence of partnership working across the different providers and limited evidence of competition among providers, despite providers having similar target cohorts and high participation targets during a short delivery timescale. Delivery providers have generally valued the networking opportunities provided by CPCA from late 2025 and see them as key in facilitating greater partnership working across Trailblazer-funded services. Nevertheless, there was a lack of convening of providers by CPCA during the early stages of the programme.

The programme board is perceived to have the right membership and to be bringing together organisations who are not necessarily convened in other spaces. CPCA sees the YG Trailblazer programme as a catalyst for positioning itself as a coordinating entity regarding youth unemployment within the regional youth employment ecosystem.

There is considerable variation in the nature and depth of board members' existing relationships with CPCA, with implications for how the programme board functions in practice and what complementary engagement each member requires beyond formal meetings.

The CPCA Trailblazer programme did not have an explicit blueprint for the system change it sought to achieve. Despite this, interviews with CPCA strategic staff point to two key systemic tools designed to enact change: the commissioning process and CPCA's convening role.

Some structural and relational change was achieved during the first year of YG Trailblazer delivery, with a mixed picture of relational work across the youth support ecosystem generated by the programme. While the programme's core and grant-funded provision is shifting resource flows at a structural level, the relational work of convening delivery providers and programme board members is facilitating new relationships and greater connectivity, with further work required to strengthen networks.

5.1 Lessons from programme level activities

Programme design and delivery

CPCA sought to design the Trailblazer programme as a vehicle for lasting systems change rather than a short-term grant programme. According to CPCA strategic staff, the founding design principle was to connect, strengthen and coordinate existing provision across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This approach aimed to address what was consistently described by staff as a fragmented landscape in which providers operated in isolation, were often unaware of each other's work, and at times inadvertently duplicated or displaced provision.

The delivery of the first year of the YG Trailblazer was significantly impacted by the implementation delays at the start of the programme. This has significant impact on all aspects of the programme design and delivery.

Implementation delays

The implementation of the YG Trailblazer in year one was significantly affected by delays, with cascading effects on the volume of participants reached, the depth of co-design achievable with partners, and the pace at which provider collaboration developed. CPCA staff, strategic stakeholders and delivery organisations alike consistently noted that compressed timelines were the result of the short window given by DWP to Trailblazer areas in which to design, bid and mobilise.

The delivery period was reduced, as a result, from an anticipated nine months to approximately three for some providers, by the time commissioning was in place and providers were fully operational. Several stakeholders also noted that DWP's parameters shifted during the design period, requiring CPCA to respond to changing requirements at the same time as it finalised its commissioning approach.

The compressed timescales had several impacts on the programme, including on:

- **The reach of the programme.** The initial delivery target of 1,0000 participants was subsequently re-profiled downward once a realistic assessment of available time had been made. A shorter delivery window also limited meaningful co-production with key partners during the design phase - including young people, employers and strategic stakeholders.
- **Providers' own capacity to invest in partnership working.** Some providers noted that shorter delivery timescales increased their delivery costs, reduced their capacity to invest in outreach and engagement, and affected their ability to plan. This was particularly the case for providers who were testing and developing new interventions:

If we have got a shorter delivery period to get it [provision] off the ground, then we know that will cost us more to do because you have no long lead into it. You can't plan in the same way.

- Education Provider

Delivery was further affected by the absence of a dedicated programme manager during the initial months of delivery, which resulted in delays to provider onboarding, MI data communication, and convening activity. The all-provider event that proved central for collaboration did not take place until November 2025, by which point some providers had been delivering in isolation for several months.

Another factor which impacted mobilisation was the commissioning of a high volume of providers to deliver activities. Staff spent significant time reviewing applications and making decisions. Alongside this, CPCA's limited internal capacity affected both the speed of the commissioning process and the flow of payments to providers - a particular pressure for smaller voluntary sector organisations operating without reserves. Other providers reported a similar experience, noting that uncertainty around funding agreements delayed the mobilisation of staff and activity even after bids had been confirmed.

Overall, the programme's first year operated more as a mobilisation and test-and-learn phase than a full delivery year, with many of the structures, relationships and pathways necessary for effective implementation only consolidating in its later months.

Impact of programme delays

Compressed timescales also limited the reach of the programme and the ability of the programme to be more ambitious than its original targets. While the initial delivery target of 1,000 participants was met, CPCA re-profiled the targets for the individual interventions once a realistic assessment of available time had been made. A shorter delivery window also limited meaningful co-production with key partners during the design phase - including young people, employers and strategic stakeholders.

Providers' own capacity to invest in partnership working was also negatively affected by implementation delays

The impact of the lack of early delivery-level coordination was, in some cases, mitigated by providers' pre-existing relationships within Peterborough and Cambridge.

I've worked in this area for a very long time and we all know our areas, and we all know who our partners are (...) I think in Cambridge, we have been okay at it, everyone's been very proactive. We've just had a lack of resources in order to support here. I think the Trailblazer can build on that and put something even better in place.

- Youth Support Service

Providers' capacity to mobilise their own resources to build partnerships varied substantially depending on their existing networks and the extent to which they had previously delivered in the CPCA region. This has meant that providers with greater experience of delivering in the region and for whom Trailblazer provision resembled

provision delivered as business as usual had pre-existing relationships of trust they could tap into.

According to some of the delivery staff, the reliance on pre-Trailblazer partnerships has affected the referrals and signposting to other YG Trailblazer provisions during the early stages. This, in turn, has limited the diversity of provision young people could access during the early stages of the programme.

Collaborative and partnership working

Delivery providers have generally valued the networking opportunities provided by CPCA from late 2025 and see them as key in facilitating greater partnership working across the different interventions. Interviews with delivery staff have consistently evidenced young people being referred on to complementary provision. This was especially the case with more established providers, who were working with young people furthest from the labour market, over a longer period of time.

However, delivery staff noted that there was a lack of convening of providers by CPCA during the early stages of the programme. According to delivery staff, the absence of a programme directory or provider meetings during the early implementation phase affected their understanding of the overall programme, of who the specific providers were and of programme requirements, such as data collection, which were set by DWP. This, in turn, negatively impacted their ability to establish partnerships with other providers, which are key in encouraging cross-referrals.

There is limited evidence of competition among providers despite them having similar target cohorts and high participation targets during a short delivery timescale. Where competition did occur, it limited young people's referrals onto further provision:

We have to get referrals and they're [other providers] in the market for referrals, like we're in the market for referrals. So it's (...) great to know they exist, but it's a distraction.

- Youth Support Service

Delivery providers have been explicit – both in interviews and in provider workshops – about the need for and benefits of regularly convening spaces at an operational level to network, partner up and share insight. Providers have called for regular networking opportunities, such as speed networking, using a hybrid format of online and in-person. These convening spaces should focus on sharing what works well and less well in provision, learners' profiles and on revising delivery to ensure alignment (e.g. in timescales, type of provision).

Programme governance

Programme board

The programme board sits alongside the existing governance structure within CPCA – including the Skills Committee and Skills Board. It brings together key partners from the local systems that the YG Trailblazer aims to influence and provides advice on programme design and strategy.

The board began meeting from the onset of programme implementation and has, according to some members, generated an important convening space for partners around the YG Trailblazer. Overall, it is perceived to have the right membership and to be bringing together organisations who are not necessarily convened in other spaces:

The fact that there are different partners around that table and partners that [we] wouldn't normally work with at that level...is positive.

- Programme board member

Board members have described board meetings as trustful spaces – facilitated by CPCA's transparency regarding the information it shares, genuine engagement from organisations in the room and an alignment in the commitment to support young people who are NEET:

[There is a] good healthy culture around the programme board in terms of an ability for and encouragement around openness.

- Programme board member

There's a genuine appetite to do something different, to work together: the moral imperative is right.

- Programme board member

Board meetings were well-attended during the first year of delivery and brought together a large group of organisations. Despite this being positive, it has presented challenges in terms of meaningful engagement of members, with some describing meetings as focused more on information-sharing and not sufficiently on strategic discussions. Others also highlighted difficulties in having substantive discussions as a large group and pointed to the benefits of breakout rooms for online meetings and of face-to-face meetings:

The last session we had that was in-person was really, really productive and it was a good conversation for us to solve problems. It was definitely a two-way flow of information... I think getting a balance of perhaps half the meetings in-person would be really helpful moving forward - there's the opportunity to problem solve and chew through things.

- Programme board member

Strategic stakeholders involved in the board have called for clarification of the programme's scope and role, with several members finding they do not have sufficient oversight of Trailblazer delivery and strategic considerations – such as the programme's sustainability. One board member noted that the underlying uncertainty about the programme's continuity has likely affected CPCA's ability to see and plan into the future – including the board's work in the mid-term:

We didn't really know how long this was going to last. So no one knew if it was a one-year programme or a two-year programme and actually if you know it's a multi-year programme, then you know that your job as a board is to check you're doing what we said we were going to do, but more importantly, to then plan ahead for whatever comes next.

- Programme board member

Youth Forum

The Youth Forum demonstrated clear value as an advisory body during the first year of delivery, with young people providing meaningful input across several key areas of the Trailblazer programme. Members contributed to the design of the internship programme - advising on appropriate duration and the kinds of wraparound support needed - and fed into the specification for the grants funding programme, advocating for innovative provision rather than more of the existing employability support. According to the Forum's coordinator, it supported members' personal development through a bespoke digital badge suite recognising skills such as public speaking, leadership and critical thinking. CPCA stakeholders noted that young people consistently offered new perspectives.

Despite this, engagement by some members of the Youth Forum was inconsistent due to the complexity of their lives - including caring responsibilities, anxiety, and limited comfort with travel - and the group remained small, with around eight members. Critically, the Forum was established at the same time as the programme it was intended to shape, meaning it lacked the maturity and trust needed to meaningfully influence early design decisions. A strategic stakeholder noted that Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council already had established youth councils in place with embedded, trusted networks and that not tapping into these networks represented a missed opportunity.

5.2 Contribution of the YG Trailblazer to system level change

CPCA's YG Trailblazer seeks to foster greater coordination, engagement and accountability across the local employment support, education and training system for young people. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have combined the expansion of existing provision, the creation of new interventions and the deployment of a systems change approach to strengthen the support ecosystem for young people who are NEET. As set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, supporting young people into education, employment and training requires systems which are easy to access and navigate by both young people and organisations.

This evaluation has explored the programme's system-level outcomes through interviews with strategic stakeholders, including board members, and CPCA delivery staff, a review of programme documentation (including the policy framework), observations of programme board meetings and two provider workshops.

Need for systems change

The CPCA YG Trailblazer operates across multiple systems which impact young people's ability to engage with education, employment and training, and aims to improve access to those systems for young people who are NEET. These systems have been described – at both national and local levels – by strategic programme stakeholders as highly complex, with multiple government departments (e.g. DfE, DWP, DHSC) and statutory and voluntary services operating in parallel.

Stakeholders also suggested that there is fragmented accountability for young people who are NEET, including different duties for under 18-year-olds and those aged over 18 and no single accountability for young people post 18. Problems with CPCA's local systems are aligned with the national picture, described in the Get Britain Working White Paper, linked to lack of coordination, engagement and accountability.

According to the programme's policy framework and drawing on some of the themes in the Youth Futures Foundation's **Youth Employment Systems Map and stakeholder interviews**, CPCA's Trailblazer aimed to shift the following local systems using a series of change mechanisms:

System	Description	Issue	Change mechanism
Youth support system	Encompasses statutory and voluntary sector services that support young people with IAG, coaching and pre-employability. This includes statutory NEET services, youth justice and leaving care teams, and services provided by the voluntary and community sector.	There was insufficient youth provision prior to the Trailblazer, with fragmented and geographically uneven support and gaps at key transition points.	The programme has sought to impact this system through expanded provision and wraparound support, improved tracking and identification capacity and strategic level coordination.
Education and training system	Includes further education (FE), higher education (HE), independent training providers and schools as the main stakeholders.	Similar to the youth support system, there was insufficient FE provision prior to the Trailblazer – especially in geographical ‘cold spots’ – following an increase in demand.	The programme aimed to convene key education and training providers and influence the development of provision through the CPCA's other adult skills funding streams, as well as funding pre-education and training provision to ensure more young people were inspired to and able to access the existing offer.
Employment system	Includes DWP, employment support providers, employers and representative bodies, such as the Chamber of Commerce, as key actors.	The Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce has reported stagnant recruitment activity in Cambridgeshire, which is compounded by a lack of knowledge and confidence in recruiting young people, as noted by strategic stakeholders. In addition to this, there was limited information sharing between DWP and CPCA on young people in the 18–21-year-old cohort who are NEET, thereby limiting the capacity to identify and support this group. In addition to this, there has been a decrease in the number of vacancies available in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – 16% less in 2024 than in the previous year.	CPCA's Trailblazer offer includes employer incentives and support to promote work experience opportunities, connect young people with employers – led in part by employment support providers, such as Reed in Partnership – and equip employers with tools to support young people when recruited. At a strategic level, the programme also aims to promote greater coordination and partnerships with DWP and employers, through the Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce.
Transport system	Includes CPCA, Greater Cambridge Partnership and travel operators as the core stakeholders involved in shaping transport plans and designing transport infrastructure.	Transport links available to young people in CPCA are insufficient both in frequency and geographical availability. Transport is also often described as inaccessible, primarily due to cost. This impacts young people's ability to participate in education, employment or training.	According to the programme's policy framework, the Trailblazer intends to strengthen local transport policy.
Health system	Spanning across primary and secondary health stakeholders, such as GP practices, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), mental health service providers, such as Kooth, and strategic actors such as the Integrated Care Board (ICB).	Having a limiting disability or a physical or mental health condition are risk factors for being NEET among young people and also likely to affect their ability to access support services. Research conducted by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough points to long waiting times experienced by young people seeking to access local mental health services and to fragmented transitions to adults' services.	The Trailblazer policy framework sets out that the programme will work with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB to strengthen links for young people seeking employment. CPCA have also commissioned specialist health and wellbeing interventions, such as Kooth and Mind.

Conditions for system change

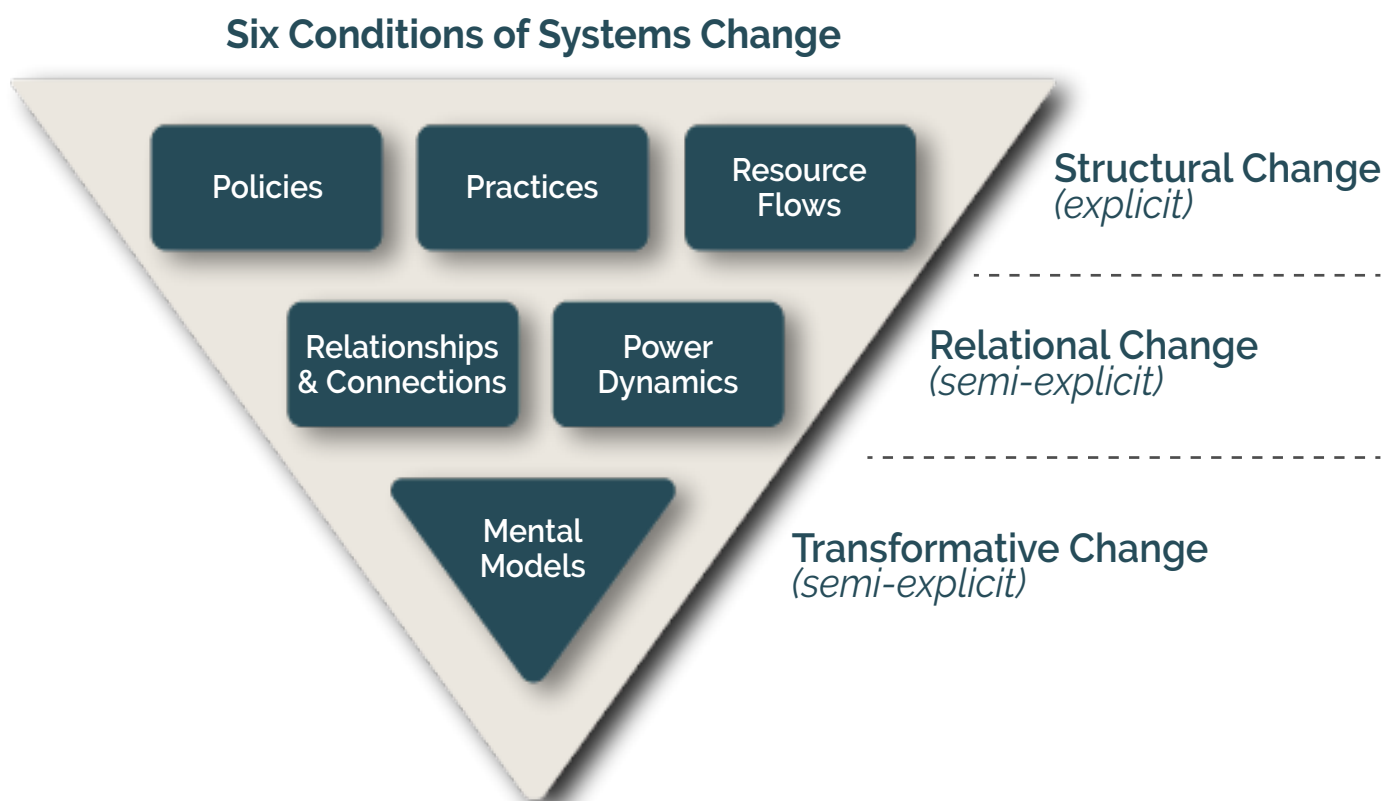
The evaluation uses the Water of Systems Change framework developed by FSG – Re-imagining Social Change, to explore the systemic change the CPCA Trailblazer programme has generated within its first year of delivery.²² The Water of Systems Change framework sets out key conditions to successfully achieving sustainable systems change.

These span three different levels:

- Structural change (*explicit* - involves developing new policies and materially investing in new practices).
- Relational change (*semi-explicit* - entails investing in relational work to develop new relationships and/or shift power dynamics).
- Transformative change (*implicit* - refers to shifting implicit assumptions and mental models).

According to this framework, shifts in systems conditions are more likely to materialise and be sustained when programmes operate at all three levels of change.

Figure 18: The Water of Systems Change framework



Source: https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

²² Kania, J. Kramer, M. Senge, P (2018) The Water of Systems Change. FSB. Available here: https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/#resource-downloads

Shifting the dial: working towards systemic change

The Water of Systems Change framework sets out that most programmes operate at a structural level, where change tends to be faster and more visible. Change at a transformative level is seen as the more complex to generate, requiring longer timescales and sustained investment.

Evaluation findings suggest that:

- Despite containing a clear outline of programme priorities and systemic gaps, the policy framework did not have an explicit blueprint for the system change the programme sought to achieve. Interviews demonstrate that strategic CPCA staff held the most clarity about the systems the YG Trailblazer sought to influence.
- Interviews with CPCA strategic staff point to two key tools designed to influence system change: the commissioning process and CPCA's convening role. Through the former, CPCA have sought to fund interventions and the infrastructure necessary to sustain it – improved tracking services, data sharing, partnership working – across all five systems listed above, in line with the priorities identified in the policy framework. Through the latter, the authority has aimed to generate new relationships across system actors – both at an operational and strategic level.
- The limited timescales of the YG Trailblazer funding have reduced the scope of what is possible from a system change perspective, especially in light of the operational challenges previously discussed in the programme section. The initial commitment of one-year funding, though this was subsequently expanded into a second year of delivery, meant that there was limited ability to generate substantial systemic change in the time available.
- Despite observing a shift in resource flows in year one through the commissioning of new provision, it is challenging to determine how much of it is likely to be sustained once Trailblazer funding has ended. However, there is emerging insight that CPCA's work to design a Youth Employment and Participation Strategy is positioned to create structural change and sustain the infrastructural work conducted during the Trailblazer's lifetime.
- There is a mixed picture of *relational* work across the youth support ecosystem generated by the programme, but the efforts in the second half of the year to convene delivery providers and programme board members is facilitating new relationships and greater connectivity, with further work required to strengthen networks.
- Transformative change requires longer timescales as it involves shifting mental models, or implicit assumptions, and this level of change has not been observable within the first year of delivery.

Structural change

Delivery and strategic stakeholders interviewed report that the YG Trailblazer has increased the volume and diversified the type of support available for young people who are NEET in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The increase in support is seen to be the result of increased capacity within existing teams and of the commissioning of new organisations delivering a mix of IAG, career coaching, work experience, education and training opportunities, and health and wellbeing support.

This increase in resource flow has been accompanied by infrastructural work sustaining new provision, including investment in Peterborough's and Cambridgeshire's NEET services, improved programme data monitoring and relationship building initiatives.

While it is difficult to determine how much of new or expanded young-person-facing provision is likely to be sustained once Trailblazer funding has ended, it is likely that some infrastructural change will remain. An example of this is Peterborough's new tracking of Year 14s, with delivery staff pointing to the upfront investment in new partnerships and data sharing agreements with colleges and sixth forms, and a new online tracking system in year one, with limited mobilisation required in year 2 of delivery.

There is early evidence that CPCA is investing in future structural change through its development of a Youth Employment and Participation Strategy for the region, supported by Youth Employment UK and the programme board. The Strategy aims to reduce NEET levels and economic inactivity among 14–25-year-olds; strengthen the labour market and support inclusive growth; create clear, sustainable pathways through education, skills, and employment; and build a coherent, preventative and collaborative system across education, employment, health and community services. The Strategy emerges as a key lever through which CPCA is building on the momentum of the Trailblazer – its new positionality as a regional coordinating entity, new relationships developed and an increased visibility of young people who are NEET – to give the programme continuity once funding has ended.

Case study: Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council NEET services

CPCA used 24% of its YG Trailblazer funding to strengthen existing local authority NEET services, including their tracking systems and support offer. This investment responded to gaps in tracking and support provision for young people over the age of 18 who are NEET.

- Cambridgeshire expanded its existing statutory tracking service for 16–18-year-olds to include those aged up to 21, or 24 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Cambridgeshire also expanded personalised one-to-one support from Youth Progression Advisors (YPA) to the new age cohort and introduced the Youth Impact Programme (YIP), which was adapted from National Citizen Service (NCS) provision and provides group-based support for young people with more complex needs.
- Peterborough introduced a new Year 14s tracking function to identify 18–19-year-olds who would previously have fallen outside routine tracking.

Across both local authorities, the investment aimed to strengthen the local support system by improving local intelligence about young people who are NEET and create clearer pathways into support.

What works well

Identification: Identification of young people who are NEET has strengthened referral pathways into support. In both local authorities, tracking teams work closely with support staff to ensure young people can move into appropriate provision once identified - in Cambridgeshire, young people are routed into YPA or the YIP, and in Peterborough they are referred to an EET coach.

Flexible, relationship-based support: Support provided by Cambridgeshire's YPA and Peterborough's EET coaches is tailored to individual needs, delivered at the young person's pace and is not constrained by fixed timescales. Staff emphasised that building trust is essential, particularly for young people experiencing anxiety, poor mental health or previous negative experiences of education or services. In Cambridgeshire's YIP programme activities such as cooking, games and day trips helped young people to engage in a low-pressure environment. Delivery staff described the residential trip towards the end of the programme as a turning point that "cements trust" with young people.

Increased service capacity: The YG Trailblazer investment has increased service capacity. In Cambridgeshire, funding addressed a gap in support after age 18 by introducing dedicated progression advisors and the YIP for this age cohort. In Peterborough, tracking Year 14s also addressed a gap in support for 18-19-year-olds, while expanding the EET coaching team reduced caseloads, allowing staff to spend more time with each young person and introduce new tools such as personalised EET plans and progression journeys.

What worked less well

Implementation challenges: Some delivery staff described challenges during early stages of delivery, including changing data collection requirements, complex paperwork, and unclear referral expectations with providers, particularly in Cambridgeshire due to rapid mobilisation. These issues increased administrative burden, delayed some referrals and made it more difficult for staff to confidently signpost young people to the wider range of support available.

Limited opportunities to build relationships with other CPCA providers early in delivery reduced opportunities for collaboration and cross-referral.

Peterborough staff also highlighted that there is **limited provision for young people at the most disengaged end of the spectrum**, such as those with anxiety and who are housebound.

Relational change

The programme's relational work has operated at different levels during the first year of delivery, with varying degrees of coordination, aiming to shift relationships:

- Among delivery providers, to encourage greater **partnership working**, and
- Among strategic stakeholders, to develop a **systems lens**.

Delivery providers

As previously noted in the programme level section, there is evidence that the programme has effectively supported providers who had not previously worked together in developing new relationships, though convening at an operational level began in the later stages of year one.

There are strong examples of interventions designed to facilitate new relationships across stakeholders from different parts of the system through co-location models, with varying degrees of formality. This includes the Peterborough Youth Hub (see case study in p. 47) in addition to other providers organically creating co-location partnerships, such as Cambridgeshire's NEET Service. These models are an example of the autonomy, flexibility and adaptability providers have demonstrated at an operational level to generate a more cohesive system for young people to navigate. They may also represent an early indication of structural change in how providers organise and partner to deliver place-based services, which may be sustained over time due to the infrastructural work developed during Trailblazer implementation. Interviews conducted with DWP stakeholders point to the systemic impact the Hub can have, by enabling DWP to support and sustain engagement with young people who they might not otherwise be able to reach.

Despite this, there is a risk that new relationships may weaken following the Trailblazer programme and that partnership working does not reach its full potential in the absence of more substantive support from CPCA. Areas of support identified by providers as important included more frequent facilitation of provider convening events – perceived as central to improving providers' understanding of partners and building durable relationships. Evidence on what works in system change interventions²³ also points to the importance of generating a shared ownership of the programme, improving partners' understanding of the delivery and systemic context, fostering greater links between the operational and the strategic, improving the flow of information, and encouraging evolution in relations through regular monitoring. This can be offered to providers within grant management relationships – described as supportive but light touch by delivery organisations – and as programme wide activities.

²³ Orlando, C, Newton, B, Jain, S, Mantri, S, White W. (2024) What works in systems change Interventions A review of national and international evidence. [YFF-What-works-in-systems-change-interventions.pdf](#)

Strategic stakeholders

From CPCA's perspective, the experience of delivering the YG Trailblazer has enabled the Authority to elevate youth unemployment as a cross-cutting priority, embedding it within the wider Get Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Working Plan and the Local Growth Plan, thereby extending its strategic relevance beyond the life of the programme itself.

According to CPCA's strategic and operational stakeholders, the programme board has been a key mechanism in forging new strategic relationships around a shared goal. CPCA perceives the Trailblazer programme as a catalyst for shared convening at a board level, with ripple effects on the Combined Authority's wider positionality as a coordinating entity regarding youth unemployment within the regional youth employment ecosystem:

We've used the work we've done to lobby our constituent councils and public sector leaders on the proposal for us to lead the creation of a Youth Employment Strategy [now referred to as the Youth Employment and Participation Strategy] for the region. And that was met with a resounding kind of yes, please (...) I don't think we could have secured the endorsement for that had we launched that at the beginning of the Trailblazer.

- CPCA strategic stakeholder

Despite being effective in consolidating CPCA's coordinating role, the board has generated different relational outcomes for different types of stakeholders. Evidence from stakeholder interviews points to considerable variation in the nature and depth of board members' existing relationships with CPCA. This has implications for how the programme board functions in practice and what complementary engagement each member requires beyond formal meetings:

- There are members who hold governance roles across multiple CPCA bodies, engage with the authority on a regular basis through other programmes and funding relationships, and in some cases have been involved in the Trailblazer's design. For these members, the risk is less one of insufficient contact than of board fatigue or role confusion - particularly where the same individuals are asked to contribute to multiple advisory structures simultaneously.
- Other board members engage with CPCA principally or exclusively through the programme board itself. For these members, the board meeting may represent the primary - and in some cases only - structured point of contact with the programme, making it a less reliable mechanism for building the shared understanding and genuine advisory contribution that CPCA intends the board to provide.

Some board members whose organisations are also commissioned delivery partners hold a dual role that limits their capacity to contribute to strategic deliberation in an independent way. This suggests that a more differentiated approach - including bilateral relationship management and targeted pre-meeting briefings - would be necessary to realise the board's advisory potential more fully.

6 Outcomes from the programme

Key findings

Education, employment and training (EET) outcomes increased but are uncertain due to missing data. EET participation rose from 20% to 37%, with 14% of those initially not in EET progressing. However, 34% missing end data limits confidence in these findings.

Progression into EET varied widely across interventions (8% to 70%), partly due to inconsistent data completeness. Providers also found it difficult to directly attribute outcomes to the programme given short delivery timelines, though qualitative evidence suggests positive impacts, particularly where strong employer links created direct pathways into work.

Females had slightly higher progression rates than males (26% compared with 21%), and participants without health conditions were more likely to move into EET than those with health conditions.

Qualitative findings suggest improvements in confidence, wellbeing, and work-readiness, but survey results show limited or mixed change, however the survey had a small sample size.

Both survey and qualitative evidence indicate participants developed practical skills to find work (e.g. CV writing, interview skills, job searching) and increased awareness of career options.

Although outcomes data for programme participants are presented descriptively, they are not compared with a counterfactual, as this is not an impact evaluation.

6.1 Education, employment, and training outcomes

Education, employment, and training (EET) status was collected at the start and end of the programme for all participants. Furthermore, the data was set up to capture young people's progression, and the creation of a unique reference number by CPCA allowed for additional demographic analysis to be conducted. However, it is important to note that EET status was missing for 294 participants at the end of the programme, which represents 34%. This undermined the ability to interpret outcomes data, particularly for young people's progression into EET.

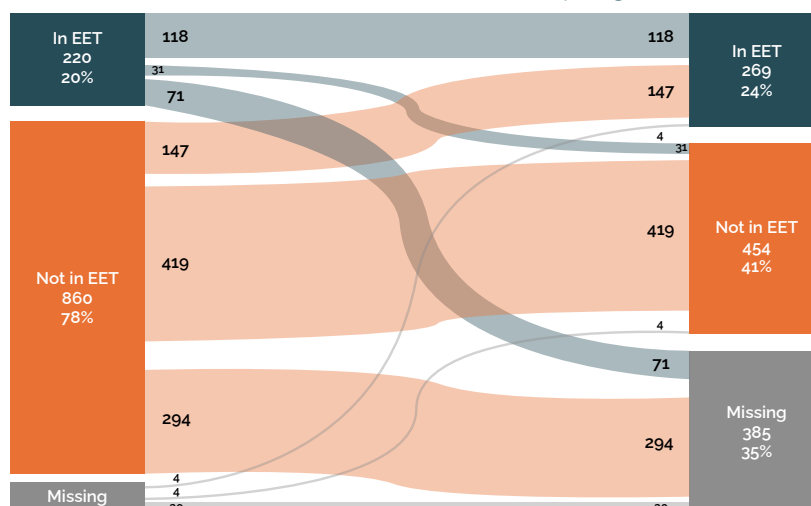
- MI was collected for only 27 interventions out of the 35 because:
- Two interventions consisted in investing in both constituent local authorities' NEET tracking services and they were not providing support to young people directly.
- One intervention is an employer membership, so they were not providing support to young people directly.
- One intervention consisted in providing anonymous mental health support.
- Two interventions consisted in the creation of online/virtual resources, accessed anonymously by young people – or with limited data collected.
- Two interventions did not provide any MI data due to the challenges they faced, with one of them not delivering any support and another one delivering support to a very small number of young people towards the end of year one.

Progression into education, employment, and training

Analysis of the MI data showed that the proportion of young people in EET (excluding missing EET status) increased by 17 percentage points at the end of the programme, from 20% to 37%.

Looking at the progression of individual young people, 147 young people had moved into EET by end of March 2026 (Figure 19). This represents 14% of all participants who were not in EET at the start of the programme. However, it is important to note that EET status was missing for 294 participants at the end of the programme, which represents 34%.

Figure 19: EET status at the start and at the end of the programme



Base: All participants with an EET status at the start and at the end of the programme = 715.

Progression into EET varied by interventions, ranging from 8% to 70% of participants moving to EET.²⁴ However, the results need to be treated with caution due to the high variation in completeness of the data. For example, only nine of the 65 participants in the Cambridgeshire County Council Youth Progression Advisor programme had outcomes data recorded. As a comparison, 100% of the outcomes data was recorded by Reed in Partnership. In general, providers offering non-time-limited provision were more likely to have a larger number of participants with missing EET status by the end of March 2026 than providers offering time-limited interventions (see section 3.3: Participation and Completion rate).

Some providers reflected that it was hard to attribute EET outcomes to the YG Trailblazer because of the compressed delivery timelines.

We'll submit a spreadsheet and it will say, x person got a job. This happened. That happened. But it, it's hard to actually prove, from an evaluation point of view that that was direct, because it's such a short space of time.

– Delivery provider

This reinforces the need to encourage providers to provide data at a specific point in time, even if the young person has not exited a programme, to ensure a better understanding of the challenges they face.

Year two represents an opportunity to strengthen the data collection process to ensure it is more consistent. In planning for year two, it is important that CPCA factors in the resource and time needed to gather data throughout and towards the end of year two.

Providers shared anecdotal examples of young people moving into full and part-time work, self-employment, and volunteering. Young people were working in a range of different sectors and roles such as in a youth club, in local government, childcare, or factory work. Those who had set up their own business had done so in a range of industries, including commerce, beauty, and construction. One young person shared their experience of finding work through the YG Trailblazer and attributed their success in securing a job to how support helped them to expand their job search to roles they hadn't considered before.

Well, this, the programme is more in a respectful way, forced me to look out for these jobs, rather when before I wasn't really I was so closed, like I'd only go for certain looking jobs, because I worried about, like, the disadvantages of other jobs. But being part of [intervention name] has kind of forced me to have a look at these other jobs, which is a good thing, obviously.

– Young person

²⁴ These proportions correspond to the number of young people who were not in EET at the start of the programme who moved to EET at the end as a proportion of participants who had an EET status recorded.

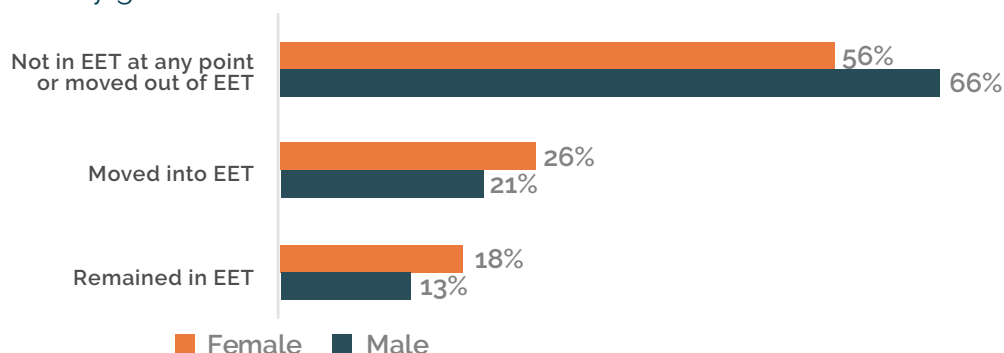
Employers also reported employing young people they initially met at Inspire 2 Ignite's Industry Taster Days. These young people completed internships that were funded through the Trailblazer's employer grants, before progressing into paid jobs. The success of these two interventions at moving young people into work highlights the value in providers building strong relationships with employers and providing support that links directly to workplace opportunities.

Young people were also reported to have progressed into training and other education opportunities. For example, some young people went on to apprenticeships, A Level qualifications or other college courses, university, or vocational training such as forklift operation or CSCS for construction. Other young people progressed onto different YG Trailblazer provision that had a training element to it.

Progression into education, employment, and training by gender and health status

MI data analysis shows that progression into EET varied depending on participants' demographic characteristics. Young females had a slightly higher progression rate than men (26% compared with 21%) (Figure 20).

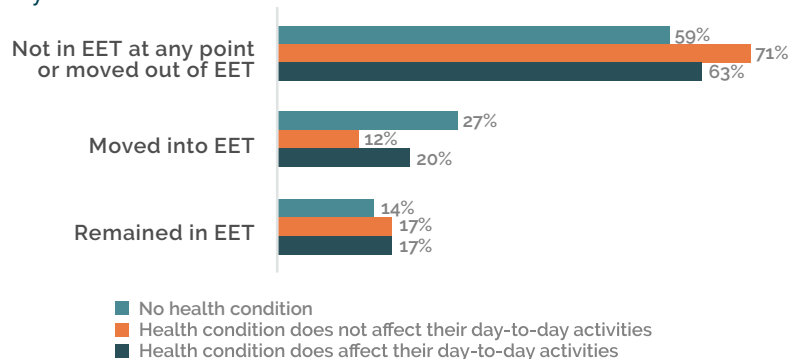
Figure 20: EET status by gender



Base: Female with EET status recorded at the start and end of the programme = 190. Male with EET status recorded at the start and end of the programme = 390. * Moved out of EET has been included within the group of young people who were not in EET at any point to meet the disclosure threshold.

Young people who did not report a long-term health condition were more likely to experience a positive progression into EET than people with a health condition (Figure 21). Just above one in four (27%) young people with no health condition progressed into EET, compared to 20% of those with a health condition that affects their day-to-day activity and 12% of those with a health condition that does not affect their day-to-day activity.

Figure 21: EET status by health status



Base: All participants with health status as well EET statuses at the start and end of the programme were recorded. No health condition = 290, health condition does not affect their day-to-day activities (n=58), and health condition does affect their day-to-day activities (n=142). * Moved out of EET has been included within the group of young people who were not in EET at any point to meet the disclosure threshold.

6.2 Wider outcomes

The YG Trailblazer aimed to move young people towards or into education, employment, and training. For young people who did not achieve EET outcomes by the time they finished provision, some still achieved intermediate outcomes that are likely to help them on their journey into work in the long term. This section draws on fieldwork with delivery providers, employers, and young people and a survey young people completed as they started support and again once they had finished. The survey helps to measure distance travelled on a number of intermediate outcomes. A small number of young people (30) completed both the pre- and post-survey, so the findings cannot be generalised to all YG Trailblazer participants.

Confidence

In the qualitative interviews, providers, employers, and young people reported increased confidence as one of the most common outcomes of participation. Confidence was linked to improved self-esteem, self-belief, mindset, motivation, social skills, building relationships with peers, and stepping out of their comfort zone.

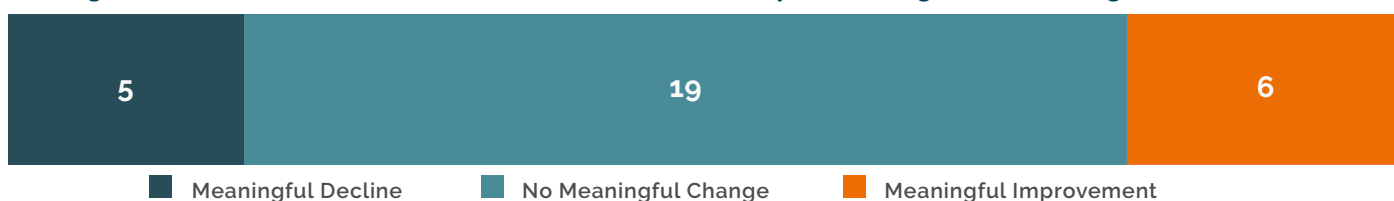
My confidence has been never better.

– Young person

Some providers also linked confidence to the achievement of other outcomes, in particular, work-readiness. They felt that confidence underpinned the ability to move towards and into work, education, or training because of the importance of self-belief in setting and achieving goals.

However, similar increases in confidence were not reported among most young people who completed the surveys. The surveys asked young people a set of eight questions designed to measure self-efficacy; the belief that you can overcome obstacles and get things done.²⁵ This was explained to young people as questions about their confidence, resilience and ability to manage tasks and goals. Figure 21 shows that 19 young people saw no meaningful change in their confidence, resilience, and ability to manage tasks and goals by the end of support.²⁶ Six young people did see a meaningful increase in their confidence, but almost the same number (5) saw a meaningful decline.

Figure 22: Overall confidence, resilience, and ability to manage tasks and goals



Base: 30 young people, validated measure used: New General Self Efficacy Scale, resilience, and ability to manage tasks and goals

²⁵ Full survey questions can be found in [Appendix 2](#). Survey methodology can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

²⁶ Meaningful change was defined as a change of at least half a point up or down the response scale for the questions that used a standard 5-point likert scale, or at least one point change for the health and wellbeing questions that used an 11-point scale.

The disparity in the survey and fieldwork may be because:

- Confidence is subjective and encompasses a range of different things. The survey explored confidence through the lens of self-efficacy while in interviews confidence was discussed more broadly.
- Young people who completed the survey generally reported relatively high confidence before starting support. Provision may have helped young people become more reflective and identify challenges or barriers they had previously overlooked. This may have had a short-term impact on young people's feeling of self-efficacy, while still supporting longer-term improvements in confidence.
- Only a small number of young people completed the survey (30) and therefore results are not representative of the YG Trailblazer cohort as a whole. Young people who agreed to participate in focus groups are also likely to be more confident than their peers, meaning fieldwork with young people relating to confidence needs to be treated with caution.

Health and wellbeing

Young people who completed the survey predominantly saw no meaningful improvement in their health and wellbeing between starting and finishing support. The survey asked young people four questions about their life satisfaction, extent to which they felt the things they do are worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety. Of the 30 young people who completed the survey, a third (10) saw a meaningful improvement in their health and wellbeing, 16 saw no meaningful change, and 4 saw a meaningful decline (Figure 23). Declines were driven by a substantial portion (13) of respondents reporting that they were more anxious the day before completing the post-support survey than they were the day before completing the pre-support survey. The fieldwork highlighted anxiety as one of the key barriers young people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough face to both participating in support and moving into work and training. Support provided through the YG Trailblazer was mostly short term and not intended or expected to address long-term health conditions like anxiety, explaining why this decline may have been seen.

Figure 23: Overall health and wellbeing



Base: 30 young people, validated measure used: Office for National Statistics personal wellbeing questions.

Most providers did not speak about the impact of support on young people's health and wellbeing. However, those that did discussed the benefits support had for young people's mental health by helping them overcome social anxiety and building a sense of accomplishment as they make progress. With many young people coming into provision feeling isolated and struggling with mental health issues, one provider described how support can transform young people:

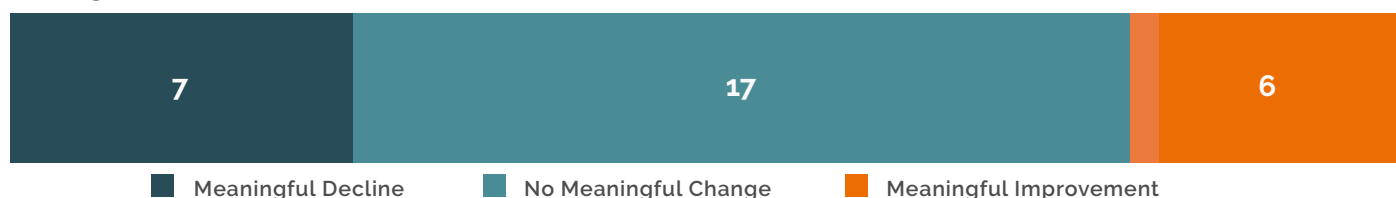
I've seen complete transformations of people, how they hold themselves, how they hold their body language, how they interact with the world around them, their perspectives of the world. There's a couple of young people who just come to mind of you can tell when we first met them, they were, like, deeply depressed, and now they have community. They give back there. They've just got a whole different awe and energy about them.

– Delivery provider

Readiness for work

Young people who completed the survey were asked a series of questions about how ready they felt to start working. The questions covered attitudes towards getting a job in the future, available career options, skills and experience to find work, and the value of education and qualifications. Figure 24 shows that most young people who completed the survey (17) saw no meaningful change to their readiness for work by the end of receiving support. A much smaller number saw meaningful improvement (6) or meaningful decline (7) in their readiness for work. The measure of work-readiness that saw the biggest improvement was how positive young people felt about their chances of getting a job in the future, where 15 young people saw an improvement. By contrast, questions about the value of education and studying to gain qualifications saw larger numbers of young people scoring worse after support compared to before.

Figure 24: Overall work-readiness



Base: 30 young people, validated measure used: the National Citizen Service 2016 Evaluation.

By contrast, the providers and young people in the fieldwork reported how support improved how ready for the workplace young people were. Young people had a better understanding of professional behaviour, appropriate clothes for the workplace, and different industries they might want to go into. Some young people said they had more direction and knew what they want to do because of engaging in support, even if they were not ready to start working yet.

"I definitely feel more prepared and more ready to actually be able to go and apply for a job and actually do that job."

– Young person

Local engagement

Participating in the YG Trailblazer made some young people feel more engaged with the local youth support system. The survey asked young people about how listened

to and included they feel in local decision making and planning for youth projects and opportunities. Of those that completed the survey, 13 young people saw a meaningful improvement in their overall feelings of involvement in local engagement, 15 saw no change, and only 2 saw a meaningful decline (see Figure 25). Across survey categories, this was the smallest number of young people who saw a decline. However, local engagement was not mentioned at all in the fieldwork, so it is hard to draw any conclusions about the effect the YG Trailblazer had on this from the small number of young people who completed the survey.

Figure 25: Overall local engagement

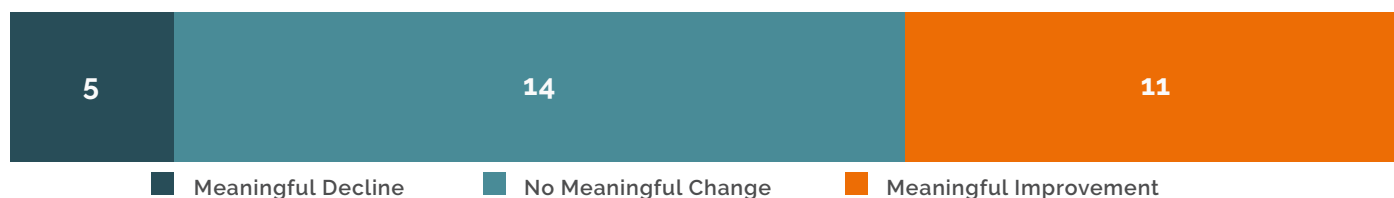


Base: 30 young people, no validated measure used.

Skills to find work

Young people generally came out of support with more skills to find work than they went in with. The survey measured change in young people's skills to find work by using an adapted version of the job search self-efficacy scale. Questions focused on young people's confidence in successfully being invited to interviews and get job offers. Among respondents, 11 young people saw meaningful improvement in their overall skills to find work, 14 saw no change, and the remaining five saw a decline.

Figure 26: Overall skills to find work



Base: 30 young people, validated measure used: adapted version of the job search self-efficacy (JSSE) scale.

The fieldwork highlighted that young people were better equipped to:

- Know where to find opportunities such as apprenticeships
- Write a strong CV
- Search effectively for a job
- Perform well in an interview
- Be resilient in the face of rejections
- Manage their own time.

Young people also came away from support with a better idea of careers that are available in their local area and beyond.

I think it opens your eyes to how many possibilities there are in terms of careers. I think it's the fact that Peterborough isn't really a city that has all of them opportunities listed it makes you think that there's not that many careers you can choose to pursue. But in the whole world, even if it means you'd need to relocate, there are so many opportunities out there.

– Young person

Young person case study: Max (pseudonym)

Background, referral pathway and initial goals

Max is 21 years old and lives just outside Peterborough. He graduated with a First-class degree in journalism last year and spent several months applying for jobs, both in journalism and in entry-level roles such as retail, office work and warehousing. Despite submitting many applications, he was not progressing to interviews and began to feel unsure how to bridge the gap between his qualifications and employers' expectations.

Alongside a lack of work experience, Max described low confidence when reading job descriptions and feeling overwhelmed by role requirements, which often discouraged him from applying.

I was kind of just overwhelmed by certain jobs, so much so that at the beginning of my job search, if I didn't think I could do the job, I just wasn't applying for it.

- Max

Max first saw the Peterborough Youth Hub advertised on Facebook and his granddad also told him about its opening after seeing a Peterborough Telegraph article. Two Peterborough MPs and other politicians attended the launch, which demonstrated to Max that the Hub's opening was a big deal. The Hub opened when Max had also begun engaging with Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

It promised to provide people like me with like tailored support to aid them into work. At the time, I was just hopelessly applying for jobs and being rejected. It was kind of a perfect storm for me.

- Max

While Max initially found it difficult to locate the Hub at the stadium due to a lack of signposting, once inside he found the sign-up process easy. He met with an employment coach who asked about his job-search situation and his needs and talked through the next steps in his support.

Experience of support

Max received one-to-one support from an employment coach at the Youth Hub. Support focused on practical employability skills including CV development, understanding employer expectations and interview preparation. Max described the support as personalised and responsive, with the coach remembering previous conversations and tailoring advice to his goals. He found the CV support valuable, as it helped him recognise and articulate transferrable skills from his degree. He described mock interviews as the most helpful element of the support.

If it weren't for me practising a full-length interview with Alicia at the Youth Hub, then I don't know where I would have got my confidence from in the actual interviewing. (...) I kind of surprised myself as how confident I went into the interview as a result of what Alicia was able to help me with.

- Max

Max compared the tailored support he received from the Hub favourably with JCP appointments, noting that it allowed more time for in-depth discussion.

I'd say the Jobcentre is better at signposting you to specific training courses and that kind of thing that work closely with the Jobcentre itself. But I'd say the Youth Hub probably has an edge with tailored support to what you want to do, in terms of, like, you can't turn up to the Jobcentre and have a mock job interview. You can't show up to the Jobcentre and they've got time to look at your CV.

- Max

During a JCP session hosted at the YouthHub, Max was signposted to a list of CPCA-funded internships. He applied via the My Skills Pass website and secured a 12-week paid internship in HR and customer service. His role includes supporting an applications portal, learning recruitment processes, drafting job descriptions and handling customer enquiries. Max has also been proactive in asking his employer if he could contribute to a new journalism publication at the College, enabling him to continue building skills and gaining experience in his field of study alongside his HR responsibilities.

Max identified the internship as a key opportunity to overcome his main employment barrier (lack of experience) and upskill to become more competitive in the job market.

Outcomes, changes and next steps

Max reports increased confidence in interviews and a stronger understanding of how to present himself to employers. He feels more confident he can transfer skills gained through the internship across sectors when applying for jobs. The combination of tailored coaching through the Youth Hub and gaining experience through the internship has improved his confidence and motivation.

After completing his internship, Max plans to apply the skills and experience he has gained to find a job. He is open to pursuing roles in HR or journalism. He feels he can return to the Youth Hub for further interview preparation and motivational support, and would recommend the service to other young people who are struggling with job applications and feel unsure about their next steps.

I think for people like me who genuinely don't know what next step to take to aid them in their job searching process, I think there's no reason not to give the Youth Hub a go.

- Max

7 Recommendations

Drawing on learning from the year one evaluation, below are a series of recommendations to inform year two and future delivery, as well as implications for wider CPCA policy and the roll out of the Youth Guarantee nationally. While the recommendations have been tailored to the regional context, some of the learning is applicable to other areas or to other programmes with similar institutional arrangements.

7.1 Recommendations for future delivery of the YG Trailblazer in CPCA

The YG Trailblazer aims to set the foundation to move from a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to addressing youth employment in the region, to a more joined-up and coherent system. Building on the momentum created during year one of the Trailblazer, several improvements can be made to strengthen delivery and outcomes in year two and beyond.

1. The YG Trailblazer programme team should strengthen its strategic relationships with key stakeholders through engagement beyond Board meetings.

While Programme Board meetings have enabled strategic partners to meet regularly to discuss updates and advise the programme team, engagement with partners outside these forums is also needed to inform planning and to ensure alignment between the programme and wider partners. Key partners include DWP, the Integrated Care Board and stakeholders in the criminal justice system.

Year two presents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration, particularly with partners in systems or organisations that are likely to engage with high volumes of young people who are NEET. For example, engagement with stakeholders in the criminal justice system could help to inform priorities and identify best practice in supporting young people at risk of offending into education, employment or training.

CPCA should lead a mapping exercise across the region to identify all potential stakeholders and partners, current touch points, and delivery and strategic partners with the capability, capacity and local relationships needed to support young people. An engagement plan should then be developed to support the YG Trailblazer team to prioritise building connections with organisations where there is most opportunity for impact, using data available on young people who are NEET across the region to shape engagement priorities, including partners who have been less engaged to date but are in contact with a high volume of young people. This would promote more consistent delivery, reduce start-up friction, ensure future provision builds on existing strengths rather than duplicating effective local infrastructure, and strengthen CPCA's role in providing strategic leadership and coordination of youth employment across the region.

Where gaps are identified, CPCA and the constituent local authorities should invest in long-term and local capacity building, such as partnership or consortium models and phased commissioning approaches. CPCA should also consider working with other local areas to make the case for longer-term funding, while mapping and accessing local and national funding sources to create a more joined-up support network for young people.

Over time, this would help ensure every locality has access to stable, place-based support which is embedded in the local system and able to sustain delivery beyond individual programmes.

2. The YG Trailblazer programme should regularly convene Trailblazer delivery partners to improve coordination, facilitate referrals and signposting between the interventions that form part of the YG Trailblazer, and beyond.

While delivery partners who already operate within the region have strong local knowledge and resources to signpost and refer young people to other provisions, this evaluation has shown that there was limited knowledge of the overall programme. The YG Trailblazer programme team should improve understanding and coordination between Trailblazer providers, to ensure young people are referred to the best support for their needs. Leveraging the mapping exercise and engagement plan set out in recommendation one, options for CPCA to improve coordination and referrals include:

- Developing an interactive directory, referencing all the organisations providing support to young people in the region. The map could be co-developed with delivery partners to ensure it captures key information needed for partners to better signpost young people to the right support.
- Facilitating timely and regular in-person and online networking opportunities to help Trailblazer partners develop a better understanding of the other support provided through the programme, alongside other existing support available across the region. This will also help partners build understanding and trust in other services and provision.
- Promote best practice for signposting and referrals between Trailblazer-funded services, to ensure all providers understand the range of support on offer, and to ensure they have the confidence to refer young people to other support in the region.

3. The YG Trailblazer programme team should focus on reviewing and streamlining interventions to maximise additionality, efficiency and impact.

A wide range of organisations were commissioned during year one of the YG Trailblazer, providing a variety of support for young people in the region. As CPCA further develops regional intelligence, it will be important to review and streamline provision with a focus on additionality and impact. Year 2 commissioning, which is already underway, is based around the Pathways framework and will take into account this feedback. This should continue to be built upon for future delivery. The CPCA YG Trailblazer team should:

- Undertake further collection and analysis of data to build a comprehensive labour market assessment for young people. Drawing on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), this should cover the characteristics of young people in the region (to understand those groups facing the greatest challenges), mapping the existing support to understand what is already on offer and where there are gaps (as set out in recommendation 2 above), and demand side information (vacancy information and growth sectors in the region). While CPCA undertook some profiling during year one, and commissioned services in response, undertaking a comprehensive assessment would help to ensure that there is strong and effective linking of services to need and opportunity across the region.

- Encourage providers to develop partnerships ahead of a bidding process. For example, one lead partner planning to deliver a universal offer for all young people in a certain geographical area, while also bringing in expert partners to focus on specific demographics or needs (e.g. young mothers, or care-experienced young people).
- Prioritise partnerships with trusted local services, who have a strong track record and are already embedded in the local infrastructure. This will provide reassurance and confidence that provision will be high quality, tailored and delivered efficiently to meet the needs of young people.
- Ensure that providers have the capacity and capability to deliver high-impact interventions, and meet the requirements of the programme, including collecting information on young people and providing destination data.

4. In year two, increase the proportion of initiatives in the Trailblazer that directly connect young people with employers and the demand side.

While most year one provision was designed to enable young people to develop the skills and experience to progress towards employment and some provision offered employer incentives, year two presents an opportunity to increase direct links with employers. For example, increasing work experience opportunities, or direct connections that enable young people to engage with employers, such as mock interviews or job shadowing, should be a priority during year two. This will help to ensure that once young people receive support and are work-ready, or are closer to employment, there are suitable and sustainable opportunities and jobs for them to move into.

Employer engagement should be a key priority in year two. CPCA has a crucial convening and co-ordination role to play in leveraging existing employer networks within the Authority, and through the constituent councils, which also have established partnerships. This will benefit all providers and lay the foundations for an embedded system of employer engagement within the region. In addition, as a local employer and commissioner, CPCA should look at how they can lead by example by providing opportunities through their own recruitment, as well as leveraging procurement. CPCA should consider implementing measures and provision that:

- Focuses on building partnerships with employers to increase the number of jobs available to young people who are NEET in the area.
- Offers in-work support. Continuity of support before, during and after placements is critical to generating positive outcomes for young people who have spent a significant period NEET. In-work support reduces the risk of young people disengaging or cycling back into unemployment or economic inactivity. This has been commissioned with one provider, for year 2 delivery, and should be evaluated to understand effectiveness and impact.
- Focuses on pathways into local growth industries, areas where there is investment in regeneration, or substantial economic development. For example, through further promotion of virtual work experience resources created during year one.

5. The CPCA YG Trailblazer team should explore options to reduce the burden on providers to collect administrative and monitoring information.

Administrative and reporting requirements required substantial provider staff resource, which diverted time and capacity away from relationship based support and delivery. This was particularly the case for providers who delivered time-limited support. CPCA should therefore work with delivery providers to explore how the administrative burden can be reduced or better managed within programme design. This could include:

- Identifying opportunities to share information across providers, reducing duplication if a young person moves between support, while capturing the data requirements as efficiently as possible.
- Exploring options for trusted professionals to verify information on young people's behalf. While this would not be appropriate for all participants, in some cases, for example where a care-experienced young person receives ongoing support from a personal adviser, this would reduce the burden.
- Developing online forms to help delivery providers collect data from young people more effectively.
- Working with DWP to design data collection that is proportionate to the length and intensity of the provision, ensuring shorter interventions (e.g. two-days course) have limited reporting requirements, focusing on young people's pathways and destinations.

6. The CPCA YG Trailblazer team should work with delivery providers to set expectations and explore options to ensure more accurate and complete MI.

While it is important to manage the burden of administrative and reporting requirements on provider staff resource, it is essential that this information is completed fully and available for monitoring and reporting. The evaluation has been limited in understanding the progression of programme participants due to incomplete outcomes data. CPCA should explore the challenges providers have faced in collecting outcomes data, particularly for those providers offering non-time-limited support, to ensure greater consistency. In planning for year 2, it is important that CPCA factors in the resource and time needed to gather data throughout and towards the end of year two. CPCA should:

- Work with delivery providers to explain the importance and the use of MI, and how it can support programme design, improvement and continuation,
- Prioritise working with providers offering non-time-limited support to identify the issues they face and ways they could be supported to provide full MI by the end of year 2,
- Work with providers to understand MI challenges and improve compliance with contractual arrangements, and
- Monitor data completion and proactively manage any issues with incomplete data collection or reporting.

7.2 Recommendations for future CPCA local policy

Structural and long-term challenges are influencing the numbers of young people who are NEET in the region, and the barriers that young people face extend beyond the youth employment and skills system. Joined-up working across different teams within CPCA, as well as wider strategic partnerships, is essential to creating a more integrated infrastructure of support that is accessible to all young people and provides high-quality pathways to education, training and employment.

7. The CPCA Skills team and the YG Trailblazer programme team should work together to develop clear leadership and accountability for young people who are NEET in the region, strengthening their convening role to improve coordination and joined-up provision.

A key purpose of the YG Trailblazers is to develop clear local leadership and accountability for young people who are NEET. There is an opportunity and need for CPCA to strengthen their role in providing this leadership across the region, beyond the Trailblazer. They should:

- Convene partners and support constituent local authorities to track young people who are NEET after they turn 18 years old. Year one of the CPCA YG Trailblazer has demonstrated the importance of networking to facilitate collaboration and reduce competition among providers. The combined authority is ideally placed to play a convening role to boost the effectiveness of partnership working in future delivery
- Work with constituent local authorities to deliver their statutory duty to identify, track and support young people to participate in education or training up to the age of 18. Alongside this, CPCA should work closely with DWP and other local partners to identify and support young people aged 18-24 who are NEET, to prevent cliff edges. Year one of the CPCA YG Trailblazer demonstrated the importance of building the local evidence base, particularly on the regional challenges faced by young people and the priority of needs.

8. CPCA should ensure the planned Youth Employment and Participation Strategy is grounded in evidence and informed by the lessons from the Trailblazer.

CPCA is currently using the momentum created by the YG Trailblazer to develop a Youth Employment and Participation Strategy. The strategy represents an opportunity for the region to further refine its vision and positioning of CPCA in supporting local young people to access education, employment and training.

It is important that the strategy is informed by lessons from the YG Trailblazer evaluation, from engagement with local providers of training and employment support, as well as insights from the Youth Forum. This will ensure that the strategy addresses the key challenges faced by young people, as well as reflecting the reality of training, education and employment support providers in the region.

CPCA's Youth Employment and Participation Strategy should focus on early intervention, personalised support, strong employer engagement, skills development, and targeted support for young people furthest from the labour market. The strategy should set a clear ambition that every young person can access employment, training, apprenticeships or further learning, while prioritising those who are NEET, economically inactive, or at risk of long-term unemployment. It should include coordinated pathways that link different providers, Jobcentre Plus, employers and voluntary sector organisations; expanded access to work experience, apprenticeships and sector-based training; and wraparound support to address barriers linked to mental health, transport, confidence, housing and financial pressures. The strategy should include a strong focus on labour market intelligence to align skills provision with growth sectors, and meaningful youth voice in service design.

9. CPCA should consider how it can supplement national provision by focusing resources on reaching young people that will not benefit from mainstream employment support.

As part of a universal support offer which is accessible to all young people, CPCA should prioritise reaching young people who are not receiving employment-related benefits. Nationally, three in four young people who are NEET do not receive unemployment-related benefits and do not receive employment support from DWP. DWP has announced additional support related to the national Youth Guarantee - the Job Guarantee (a fully funded six-month paid job) and the Youth Jobs Grant (a £3,000 hiring incentive for employers hiring young people). However both require the young person to be on Universal Credit, and to have been out of work for a specified period. CPCA should consider how it can supplement this national provision and focus its resources on reaching these young people that will not benefit from mainstream employment support.

CPCA should work closely with DWP to ensure that young people who receive employment-related benefits also have access to high-quality community-based support and training that can help them overcome barriers to employment. For example, this could include co-located provision delivered through youth hubs, mental health support, work experience, internships and provision to develop in-demand job-specific skills, such as IT and digital skills.

10. CPCA should make the case for greater investment in the local transport infrastructure, raise awareness of the Tiger Pass across the region and learn from best practice to overcome transport challenges.

Lack of investment in infrastructure is an endemic issue across the UK, with levels of investment far below other similar economies.²⁷ In CPCA, structural underinvestment is having a significant impact on young people's ability to travel around the region and access employment, education and training opportunities. More investment in transport infrastructure is critical to ensure better connectivity.

The Tiger Pass, which provides subsidised bus travel to young people under 25, is a valuable intervention, as the affordability of public transport is identified as a barrier to education, employment and training by young people across the region. CPCA should prioritise opportunities to preserve and extend access to the Tiger Pass, so that more local people are able to benefit.

²⁷ Economics Department Working Papers (2015) Improving infrastructure in the United Kingdom. Available here: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/improving-infrastructure-in-the-united-kingdom_5jrxqbqc7m0p-en.html

11. CPCA should develop and test an employer engagement strategy to support the range of programmes and objectives of the region, including employment support and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP).

Throughout year one of the YG Trailblazer, employer engagement was considered particularly challenging by providers. Employers in the region face a range of pressures and demands on their time. Evidence shows that many employers, particularly SMEs, are confused by the training and skills landscape, and need support to engage in ways that work for both their business and the wider region. CPCA is ideally placed to lead the development of strong and sustained networks and relationships with local employers. Like other Mayoral Strategic Authorities, CPCA plays a central role in working with partners to shape local plans such as their Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and their local Get Britain Working plan, alongside delivering large-scale employment support programmes, such as Connect to Work.

Drawing on in-depth local knowledge and experience of working with employers, CPCA should develop a comprehensive employer engagement strategy, which provides clear information and guidance for employers about the range of ways they can engage with the education, training and employment system. For example, through programmes such as the Sector Based Work Academies, the new Jobs Guarantee and apprenticeships grants and funding. Investment in a comprehensive employer engagement strategy would enable CPCA to leverage this quickly and efficiently when delivering future programmes that require the involvement of employers.

7.3 Recommendations for the future development of the Youth Guarantee nationally

The YG Trailblazer programme aims to test local approaches to inform the national blueprint for the Youth Guarantee. This evaluation has highlighted a number of points that should inform this.

12. National government should commit to moving from short-term Trailblazer funding to longer-term local funding to deliver the Youth Guarantee, ensuring coverage across the country.

Beyond the second year of Trailblazer delivery, the Government should commit to long-term local funding of the Youth Guarantee, ensuring coverage across all parts of the country, and building on evidence of what works. Over 1 million young people are currently NEET. To effectively address the scale of this challenge, the Government should shift from a focus on short-term funding of Trailblazers to a long-term commitment to fund local system change and joined-up provision, through the Youth Guarantee, which will be transformative in enabling young people to bridge the gap to employment. Longer-term funding of the Youth Guarantee at local level, alongside strong monitoring and accountability, will enable local policymakers and providers to build capacity and infrastructure to deliver tailored provision that makes a difference to young people in their region. Discontinuation of critical support, due to short-term funding, creates insecurity, high staff turnover and disrupts young people's journeys into employment.

The future commissioning and development of the Youth Guarantee at local level, which sits alongside national initiatives such as the Jobs Guarantee and the Youth Jobs Grant, should place a strong emphasis on effective early planning and consistent communication with partners from the beginning. This should include confirming programme objectives, funding arrangements and delivery requirements at an early stage, and providing adequate preparation time for delivery partners and employers to plan, develop and refine their approaches. Allowing sufficient time for mobilisation, implementation and learning is essential to prevent unnecessary pressure on delivery timelines and to ensure organisations can deliver the Youth Guarantee efficiently.

13. The Government should expand the age range of all the interventions that make up the Youth Guarantee, to provide a universal offer for all 16- to 24-year-olds who need support to access education, employment or training.

Evidence shows that NEET rates are highest among 22–24-year olds, yet the age range set by DWP for the YG Trailblazers was narrowly targeted at 18–21-year olds, while other components of the Youth Guarantee, such as the Jobs Guarantee and the Youth Jobs Grant are targeted at 18–24-year-olds. Expanding all components of the Youth Guarantee to consistently cover the full 16–24 age range would better reflect where need is greatest. It would also reduce complexity and improve understanding of eligibility criteria.

Young people face multiple and compounding challenges to accessing education, employment and training. The roll out of the Youth Guarantee nationally should reflect this. In doing so the Government should ensure that local areas have the flexibility and funding to provide a range of tailored support. This should be underpinned by strong and robust local intelligence to inform areas of greatest need and deliver high impact interventions.

14. Expand the eligibility of the Jobs Guarantee.

Evidence from CPCA has shown that with targeted and tailored outreach and support, it is possible to effectively engage young people outside of the benefit system. However, the impact of engagement was limited by the lack of local employment opportunities for young people. At national level, the Government's recent extension of the Jobs Guarantee to young people aged 18–24 is a welcome development. However, learnings from CPCA supports the case for further expansion of the Jobs Guarantee to better support young people who are disconnected from mainstream employment support to gain valuable work experience.

Eligibility should be widened to include young people on health-related benefits who have been NEET for 18 months or longer, many of whom receive limited employment and skills support.

As budgets allow, the Government should consider further expansion to maximise impact. This could include:

- Extending eligibility to young people who have been NEET for 18 months but are not claiming benefits, where they are referred by an approved organisation, and
- Reducing the eligibility threshold to 12 months for specific groups who face entrenched barriers to employment.

In time, the Government should work towards expansion to all young people who have been NEET for 12 months. Expansion should be combined with tailored outreach, training, and employer engagement. Evidence shows that well-designed placements—offering real paid work, training, and support—can prevent young people from long-term detachment and improve labour market outcomes. Scaling these placements further, and delivering them through local partnerships and community hubs, would build the confidence, skills, and work experience of young people who currently miss out and help deliver a meaningful reduction in NEET levels.

15. The Government should focus on building trust with young people by providing high-quality employment support and focus on promoting engagement.

As recognised in the *Get Britain Working* White Paper, the current employment support system often places too much emphasis on compliance rather than providing the tailored support needed to help people move towards employment. The redesign of the Jobs and Careers Service offers an opportunity to develop a more supportive and trusted system, focused around individual needs and aspirations. DWP should have a greater focus on engagement and personalised support, which is likely to deliver better outcomes. The CPCA YG Trailblazer demonstrates the value of an approach that builds trust, fosters sustained participation and enables young people to access support in ways that work for them.



Conclusion

The first year of the YG Trailblazer (March 2025 – March 2026) mobilised 30 delivery partners to test new and existing approaches to supporting young people aged 18-21 who are NEET. By the end of March 2026, 1,108 young people had started at least one intervention, with half completing by the end of the programme. A wide range of interventions were delivered during the first year (35 in total), varying in the type of support offered, length, format, and geographic coverage. Providers adopted flexible and tailored approaches to meet the diverse support needs of young people. Partners, delivery staff, and young people interviewed as part of the evaluation were generally positive about the programme, identifying personalised support and a supportive environment as best practice in encouraging young people's engagement.

However, structural barriers (such as limited transport options and a lack of job opportunities), alongside the complex challenges many young people face (including poor mental health), limited young people's progression into EET. These challenges were exacerbated by the short-term nature of the YG Trailblazer which, in turn, was compounded by external implementation delays. Alongside this, CPCA's capacity constraints, affected its ability to commission providers at pace. Many interventions operated for a shorter period than originally anticipated, limiting providers' ability to innovate and reach full potential.

By the end of March 2026, 147 young people had progressed into EET. While progression into EET was a key objective of the programme, wider outcomes including improved confidence and readiness for work have been reported by both delivery providers and young people as positive impacts of the programme. There is evidence that partnership working happened across the programme, with cross-referrals and signposting between delivery providers. This collaborative ethos was particularly fostered through face-to-face networking opportunities convened by CPCA. While providers noted that they relied on existing relationships and partnerships, there was also evidence of new partnerships being developed as a result of the YG Trailblazer.

It was observed that the youth employment and skills systems are fragmented and disjointed – a similar observation to what was observed nationally and in other regions. Year one of the CPCA YG Trailblazer has laid the foundation for a more holistic, joined-up system of support for young people who are NEET in the region. Despite containing a clear outline of programme priorities and systemic gaps, the policy framework did not have an explicit blueprint for the system change the programme sought to achieve. CPCA has used the momentum created by the YG Trailblazer to develop a Youth Employment and Participation Strategy which will further cement CPCA's role to support young people who are NEET. Year two presents an opportunity to cement some of the systemic changes that have happened as a result of the programme, and take steps to sustain those changes beyond March 2027.

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