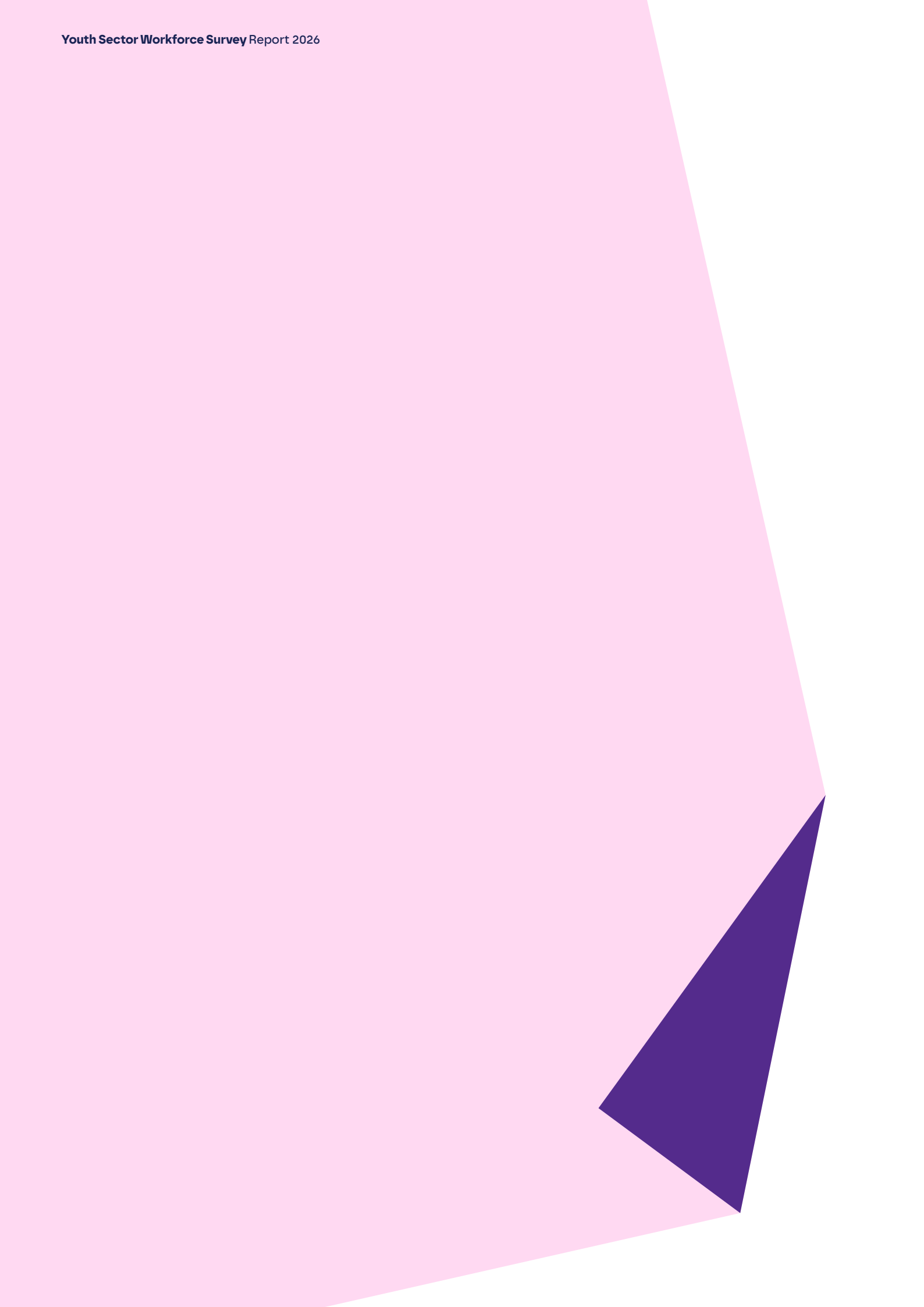




Youth Sector Workforce Survey Report 2026



Contents

Summary	4	Looking towards the future	24
Key findings	4	Appendix	26
Policy recommendations	6	Appendix A: Methodology	26
Introduction	7	Appendix B: Further graphs	27
Research findings	8		
Recent trends in the youth sector workforce	8		
What is youth work?	9		
Who completed this survey	10		
Motivations to becoming a youth worker	12		
Experience and qualifications of the youth sector workforce	13		
Current roles within the youth sector workforce	16		
Average salaries of youth workers	17		
Training and support needs of the youth sector workforce	20		

Summary

Key findings

This year the Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey received responses from more than 1,100 participants, providing a comprehensive overview of the current youth sector workforce. The findings highlight the vital role youth workers play in meeting young people's needs, while also continuing to navigate significant challenges such as funding pressures, a shortage of qualified practitioners, and an increasingly complex operating environment. The results demonstrate that despite these challenges, youth workers remain dedicated to their work and maintain a strong commitment to youth work values and practices.

This year's survey placed greater emphasis on understanding youth workers' morale and prospects. While youth workers remain highly committed to their roles, many expressed ongoing concerns about career progression, job security, and having sufficient time to develop their practice. Strengthening recognition of youth work as a valued profession – across policymakers, allied sectors and the wider public – will be essential to addressing these concerns and ensuring a sustainable pipeline of qualified youth workers.

As a result, the National Youth Agency (NYA) is committed to ensuring that the recommendations in this report are adopted by policy-makers and key funders to support our goals to build back a strong and sustainable workforce.

Key finding 1

Youth workers continue to view personal experience as a major motivation for entering the sector. Volunteering remains an important pathway into youth work, and participants stressed the need to strengthen and incentivise volunteer routes to help sustain the workforce.

Key finding 3

Youth workers remain committed to upholding the core principles of youth work practice. However, short term funding cycles, an increasing emphasis on targeted provision, and inconsistent and demanding evaluation requirements continue to add administrative pressure and shape the way youth work is delivered.

Key finding 2

Formal qualifications, career progression and ongoing professional development remain essential to sustaining the youth workforce. With a declining number of qualified youth workers and increasing complexity in young people's needs, it is vital that youth work qualifications continue to serve as the foundation of effective practice.

Key finding 4

Youth workers remain knowledgeable of key youth work practices and principles but have acknowledged they would benefit from more training and support with working with young people with SEND, online safety and harm, tackling misogyny, digital and IT skills as well as impact reporting.



Policy recommendations

The NYA has developed the following policy recommendations in line with its strategic commitment to support the growth of a confident, skilled and sustainable youth work workforce.

1. Strengthen the statutory duty to ensure a sufficient local youth offer

Government should strengthen the statutory duty to ensure a sufficient local youth offer so that every local area is required to assess needs, plan, and resource a sufficient, skilled youth work workforce to deliver high-quality provision. This should include clear sufficiency benchmarks, supported by the funding required to deliver them.

2. Ensure the National Youth Strategy's workforce commitments deliver in practice

Government should set out how the National Youth Strategy's £15 million workforce investment will support training for youth workers and volunteers, particularly at Levels 1 to 3, and ensure that voluntary-sector organisations, where most youth workers operate, can fully access this support.

3. Expand diverse pathways into the workforce

The government should expand on its National Youth Strategy pledge to supporting diverse, accessible career paths and promoting youth work careers.

This should include supporting new qualification levels and modular learning, improving access to – and the flexibility of – youth work apprenticeships through the reform of the Growth and Skills Levy, and providing the guidance needed for effective use of Apprenticeship Levy funds. It should also include confirming a funded Youth Work V Level within the reformed post-16 Level 3 qualification system, maintaining an accessible, high-quality entry route into the profession. Together, these measures will enable youth organisations to attract, grow and develop the future workforce.

4. Recognise and embed youth work across local support for young people

Government should ensure that youth work is recognised and reflected across local systems of support for young people including, but not limited to, Local Youth Transformation and Young Futures Hubs. This should extend to areas such as school attendance, school enrichment, employment support, public health, and violence prevention, where youth workers' relational and developmental approach to engaging with young people adds value. Local areas should be expected and supported to draw on qualified youth workers within multi-agency teams as they design and deliver wider support for young people.



Introduction

Youth Sector Workforce Survey 2026

This is the third year that the National Youth Agency (NYA) has conducted a nationwide Youth Sector Workforce Survey. It builds on learning and insight from last year to continue to gather a comprehensive understanding of the current youth sector workforce.

This survey forms a vital part of creating a full picture of the current extent and breadth of the youth sector workforce. It should be read alongside the [National Youth Sector Census 2025](#), the only comprehensive survey of its kind, which provides a vital snapshot of the state of youth work in England.

Findings from last year highlighted a growing [shortage of qualified youth workers](#), facing increasingly complex needs of young people in a challenging funding environment. The findings from the survey can be found here [Youth Sector Workforce Survey 2025](#).

In response to this growing crisis, the NYA has proposed [reforms to the qualification framework](#), building on its consultation report '[Pathways to Practice](#)' to explore ways to improve the uptake and completion of youth work qualifications. The

NYA is now undertaking an ambitious programme to transform the youth sector workforce.

The NYA recognises that youth work is now delivered across a range of organisations, representing a variety of activities, services and settings in which youth work is delivered. Because of this, it is more important than ever to continue to survey the youth sector workforce to understand who works in it, identify the support and training they need, find ways to develop their work, and learn about their future career plans.

This report draws upon insights and learning from the research conducted between November 2025 and February 2026. In total, there have been 1,146 respondents to this year's survey, with 23 youth workers participating in a further eight focus groups (see [Appendix A](#) for a full description of the methodology).

The NYA would like to thank all respondents who took the time to complete the survey and participate in focus groups. Your views and responses have shaped the policy recommendations highlighted in this report.



Research findings

Recent trends in the youth sector workforce

For the third consecutive year, **findings indicate a decline in the number of youth workers holding a JNC recognised qualification**—from 65 per cent in the first year to 54 per cent this year. The evidence suggests that new entrants are now far less likely to begin their careers with a JNC qualification and more likely to pursue it after gaining several years of experience.

As in previous years, **most respondents were employed in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**, accounting for 56 per cent this year, although this has decreased from 69 per cent last year.

This year has also seen **a further reduction in youth workers employed on JNC terms and conditions**, now at just 23 per cent.

The survey also shows **an ongoing decline in full time roles** (from 59 per cent in 2024 to 50 per cent this year) and a rise in part time positions (from 22 per cent to 29 per cent). **Only 67 per cent of youth workers are now in permanent posts**, down from 83 per cent last year.

Youth work roles continue to diversify. **Targeted youth work has increased again**, with 56 per cent

of respondents focusing on targeted provision (up from 46 per cent in 2024). Demand has also grown in specialist areas such as mental health support, which remains the highest support need of young people. In addition, employability, work-related skills development, and crime and anti social behaviour, have also seen a growth in demand for youth provision.

Despite these pressures, **respondents continue to feel well supported in their roles**, with consistent access to essentials such as one to one supervision and networking opportunities. As in previous years however, many identified a need for improved access to peer supervision and clinical supervision.

Motivation and sense of purpose remain strong amongst youth workers. Across all three survey years, youth workers have demonstrated high levels of commitment to the profession. This year, 90 per cent reported still feeling motivated, and more than three quarters intend to stay in their roles over the next year. Overall, the findings show **a workforce deeply committed to supporting young people and achieving positive outcomes, despite operating within an increasingly challenging environment.**

What is youth work?

The NYA recognises that the key purpose of youth work is to...

‘Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.’¹

Youth work helps young people to learn new skills, embrace their passions and develop a sense of identity and independence. It offers something different from traditional education and play through informal and flexible youth-centred support. The NYA, with its partners, has developed a [National Youth Work Curriculum](#) that sets out how to undertake quality youth work and supports youth workers to develop their practice.

Youth workers are critical in developing youth work and play a crucial role in the lives of many thousands of young people. They bring fun, a sense of structure and a whole host of new opportunities to the people they work with, broadening their horizons, boosting their social skills and giving them a place to simply be themselves. Youth workers build voluntary, trusted relationships with young people, away from many of the other pressures they may be facing in their lives.²

For the Annual Youth Workforce Survey, the NYA adopted a broad definition of a youth worker to capture this varied and vital role. This is described as:

“Youth workers support young people between the ages of 11 and 25 to help them with their personal, social and educational development. Youth work happens in a variety of spaces, and the trusted adults that deliver youth work range from volunteers to part-time or full-time professionally qualified practitioners.”

Because youth work is not confined to a single location and because it embraces the flexible National Youth Work Curriculum, it can engage young people where they are at and where they may benefit from the support of a trusted adult.



Who completed this survey

Overview

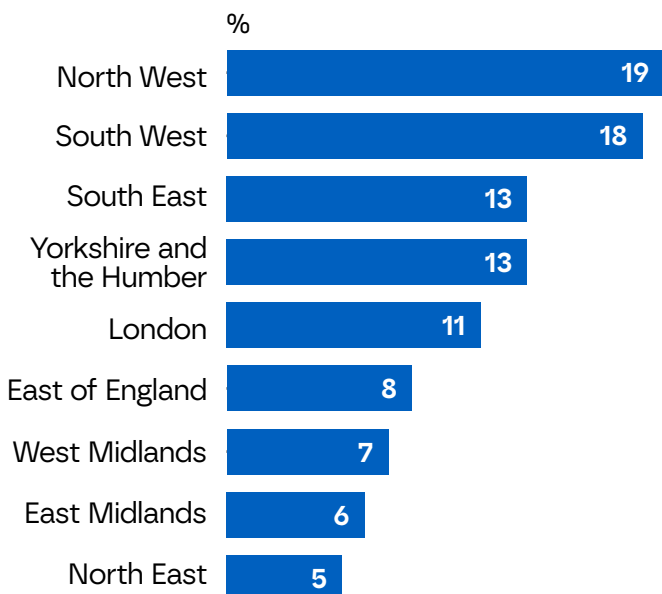
- 1,146 ‘qualifying’ (see [Appendix A](#)) respondents to the survey – all identified as youth workers.
- All nine regions are represented in the survey, with particularly strong representation from the North-West (19 per cent) and South-West (18 per cent).
- The majority of respondents are White British (82 per cent of total) and Female (62 per cent of total).
- Respondents are also generally ‘older’, with 71 per cent of respondents aged 36 or over. 8 per cent of respondents were aged 25 or under.
- Respondents are also generally ‘more experienced’, with 62 per cent having worked in youth work for 10 years or more. 26 per cent of respondents have worked in the sector for 5 years or less (see [‘Experience and qualifications of youth sector workforce’](#) section for more details).



Regional breakdown of respondents

As we can see from Figure 1, all regions across England are represented through this survey, with particularly strong representation from the North West (19 per cent) and South West (18 per cent) but lower representation from the East Midlands (6 per cent) and the North East (5 per cent).³

Figure 1: Respondents by region (879 responses)

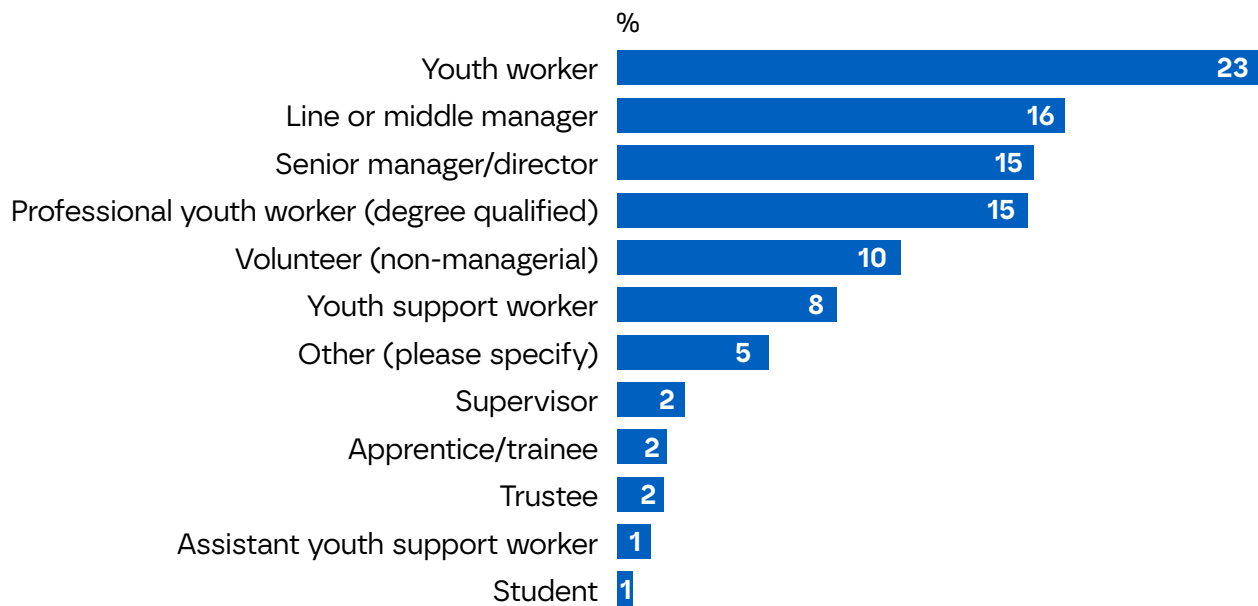


Representation of youth workers

All respondents are asked to indicate their current role or position within the youth sector. These were categorised into specific roles/positions as indicated in [Figure 2](#).

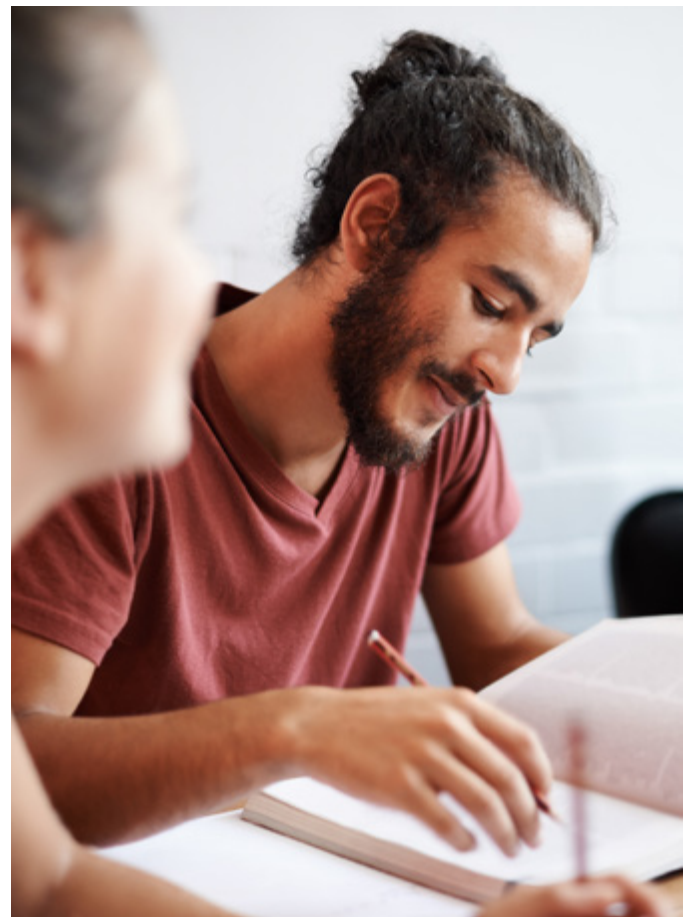
38 per cent of respondents consider themselves to be either at a ‘Youth Worker’ level or a ‘Professional Youth Worker’, whilst 33 per cent of respondents are in a Line Manager/Supervisor role or Senior Manager role. Of all respondents, 58 per cent are in full-time roles, 29 per cent are in part-time or casual roles and 14 per cent are in volunteer (unpaid) roles.

Figure 2: Current roles of respondents within the youth sector (903 responses)



Demographic representation

- The majority of respondents are Female and White British, accounting for 52 per cent of respondents who provided their ethnicity. Overall, those classified as ‘White British’ accounted for 82 per cent of respondents who provided their ethnicity.
- The majority of respondents are aged 36 years or over (71 per cent), whilst 7 per cent of respondents are aged under 25.
- 29 per cent of respondents stated they have a long-term health condition. Of these respondents, 68 per cent stated this affects their ability to do day-to-day activities.
- 79 per cent of respondents consider themselves to be ‘straight or heterosexual’, 6 per cent are ‘gay or lesbian’, 5 per cent are ‘bisexual’ and 1 per cent prefer to ‘self-describe’.



Motivations to being a youth worker

Why do people become youth workers?

All respondents were asked why they chose to work or volunteer in the youth sector, and were then asked to rate how strongly they agreed with a series of statements. From this it has been found that:

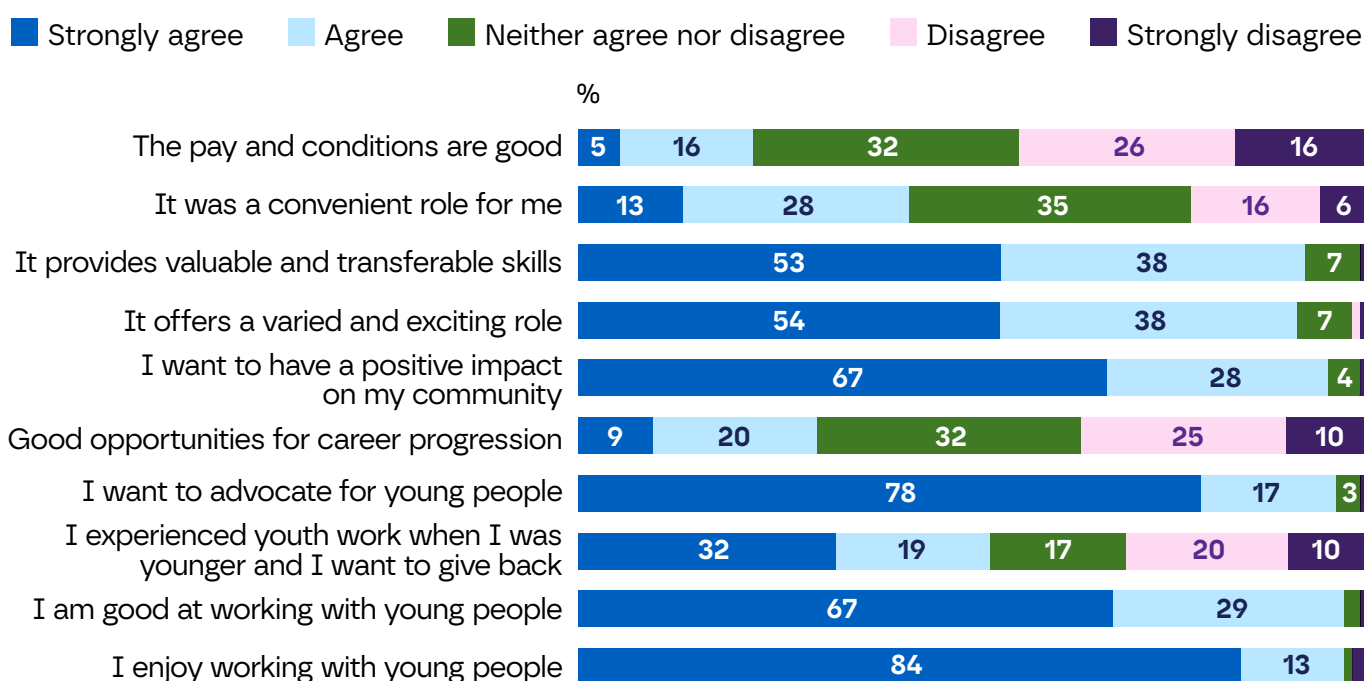
- The most **popular reason** for choosing to enter the youth sector is ***'I enjoy working with young people'*** (97% agreed or strongly agreed) followed by ***'I am good at working with young people'*** (96% agreed or strongly agreed) and ***'I want to advocate for young people'*** (95% agreed or strongly agreed).
- 51% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they entered youth work because they *'experienced youth work when they were younger and wanted to give back'*.

- 74% of respondents **did not** agree with the statement *'the pay and conditions are good'*.
- Similarly, 67% of respondents **did not** agree with the statement that there are *'good opportunities for career progression'*.

Focus group discussions revealed a range of reasons why people choose to become youth workers. Many were motivated by the desire to make a positive difference to young people in their community or to provide support outside of the classroom.

When talking about how they first entered the profession, many participants explained that youth work was not their original career choice. Instead, they often found their way into the sector through volunteering.

Figure 3: Reasons for choosing to work or volunteer in youth work (915 responses)



“I decided that I wanted to do something with people and then I spent a lot of time trying to think about whether I wanted to work with adults or young people or children and I decided I wanted to work with young people. So I tried volunteering years ago, in like one of those old youth shops if you can remember them (...) and I really enjoyed it. And so, then I got like a part-time unqualified job, then got qualified locally and then you know, went on and did my qualifications. So that’s how I got into it.”

Focus Group Participant

In several cases, participants were either working with young people in other roles and saw youth work as a more rewarding path or decided to change their careers to find something more meaningful for themselves.

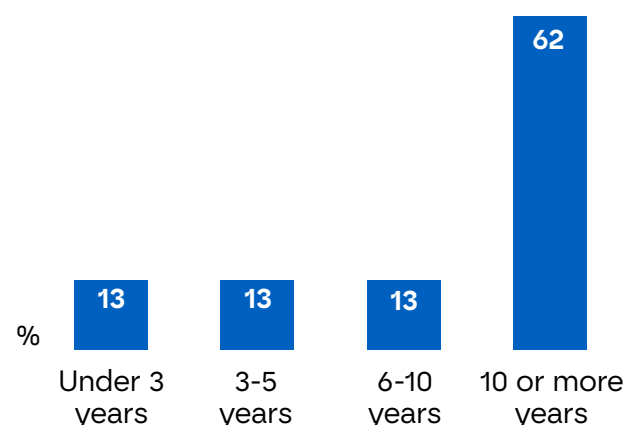
“I think it was a natural progression because I’ve been working in the colleges. I’ve been working with that age group initially as a lecturer, but then as a manager and overseeing quite a wide spectrum of delivery. I always enjoyed working with young people and really for me, it’s important that I fly the banner for rural youth work.” **Focus Group Participant**

Experience and qualifications of the youth sector workforce

Current experience of the youth sector workforce

- Over half of respondents (62 per cent) to the survey have been in the sector for 10 or more years and so are typically ‘more experienced’ youth workers.
- 26 per cent of respondents have been in the sector for five years or less, with 13 per cent having been in the sector for less than three years. 12 per cent have been in the sector for between 6-10 years.
- Respondents from a ‘White British’ background are slightly more likely to have longer years (63 per cent with 10+ years) than those from a ‘non-White British’ background (59 per cent with 10+ years).
- Male respondents have slightly longer years of experience (68 per cent had 10+ years) than Females (60 per cent had 10+ years), although females are more represented within the survey.

Figure 4: Length of time in youth sector of respondents (1,146 respondents)



Current qualifications of the youth sector workforce

- Over half of respondents have a JNC⁴ recognised youth work qualification (55 per cent)⁵.
- 45 per cent of respondents indicated they did not have a JNC recognised youth work qualification, up slightly from last year's figure of 36 per cent.
- Just over a third of respondents have a professional youth work qualification (Level 5, 6 or 7 youth work qualification).
- 21 per cent of respondents were currently studying towards a youth work qualification. 9% of respondents were studying towards a professional youth work qualification and 7% studying towards a level 3 youth support worker qualification.
- Female respondents showed they were slightly more likely than males to have a formal youth work qualification. 61 per cent of female respondents have a formal youth work qualification compared to 57 per cent of males.
- 'Non-White British' respondents, were just as likely to have a JNC recognised youth work qualification (58%) than White British respondents (57%).

- Those with a long-term health condition were just as likely to have a JNC recognised youth work qualification (58 per cent) than those without (57 per cent).

Further analysis showed **that the longer a respondent had been in the sector the more likely they were to have a youth work qualification**, reflecting results from last year. For example, respondents who have been in the sector for 10 or more years accounted for 84 per cent of those with a professional youth work qualification. **No respondents who have been in the sector for under three years had a professional youth work qualification** (see [Figure 6](#)). Only 10 per cent of those who had been in the sector for less than five years had a professional youth work qualification. This is supported by findings from the NYA Higher Education Institution Monitoring Report, which shows that the number of students on youth work qualification programmes has reduced by 84% between 2014/15 and 2024/25.⁶

Figure 5: JNC recognised qualifications of youth workers (1,047 responses)

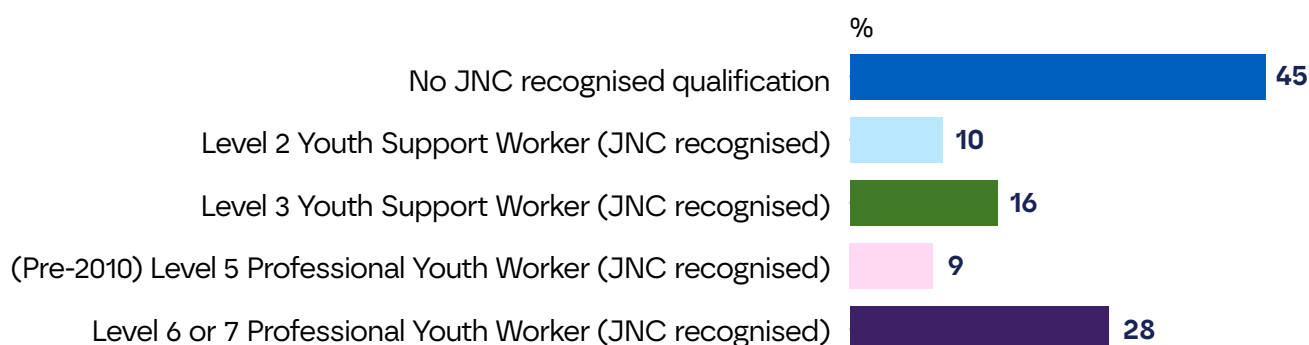


Figure 6: Qualification by years of experience (1,047 responses)

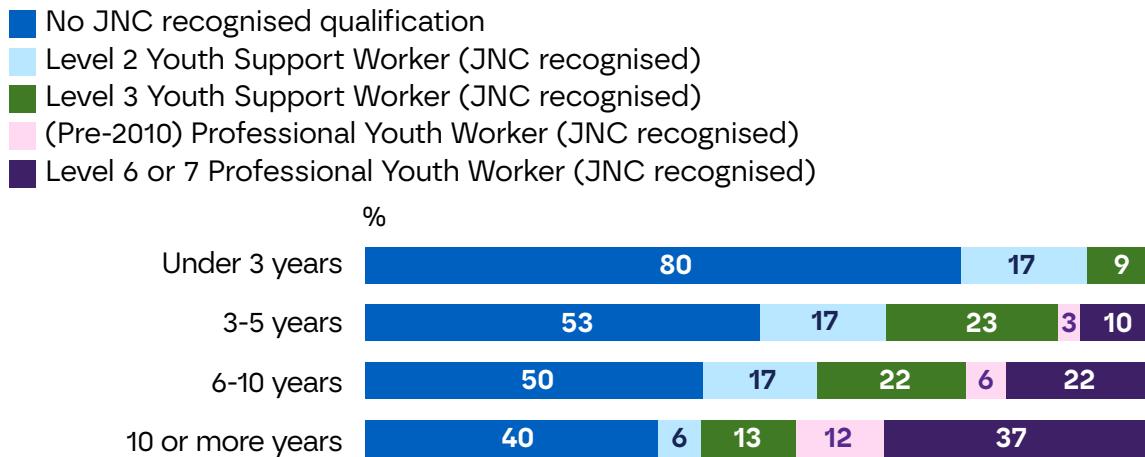
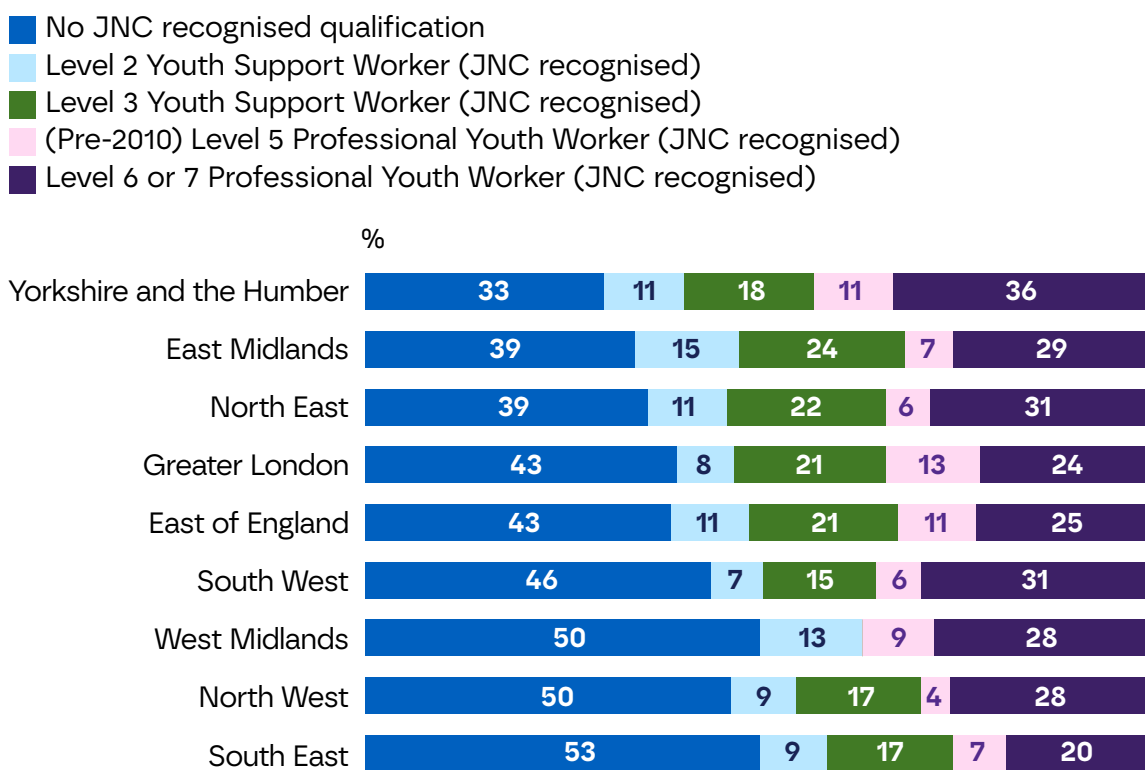


Figure 7: Youth work qualifications by region (1,047 responses)



Regional variations in youth work qualification⁷

There are regional variations in the level of qualifications for respondents, with Yorkshire and Humber (67 per cent), the East Midlands (61 per cent), the North East (61 per cent) and

Greater London (57 per cent) having the highest proportion of youth workers with recognised JNC qualifications and the North West (50 per cent) and the South East (47 per cent) having the lowest (see Figure 7).

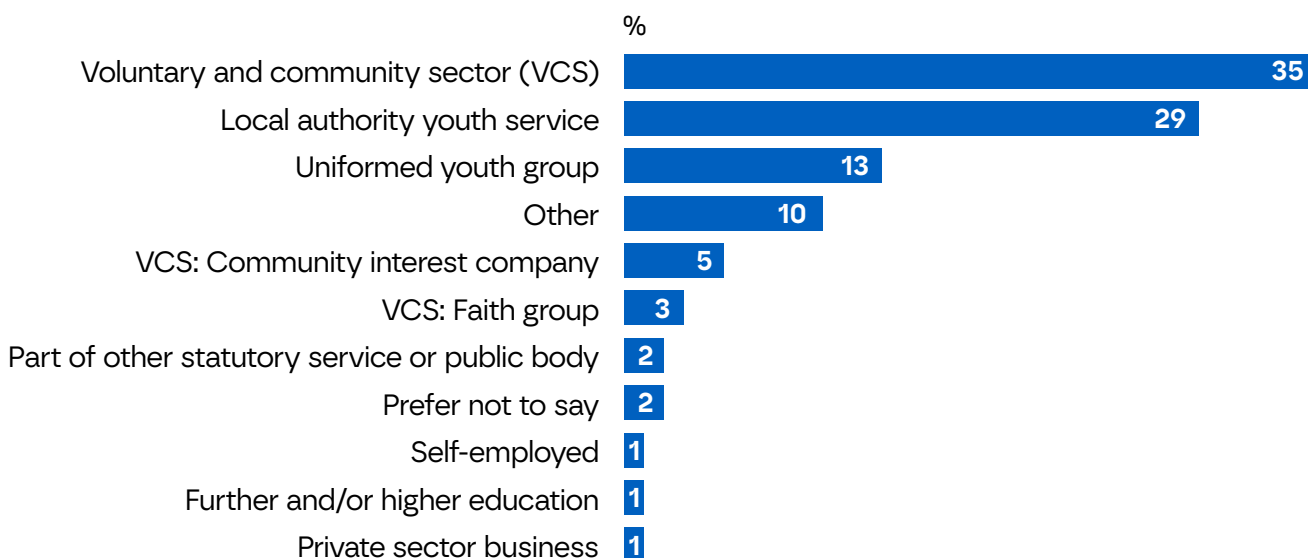
Current roles of the youth sector workforce

- The majority of respondents (58 per cent) are in full-time youth worker roles, 29 per cent are in part-time or casual roles and 14 per cent are those in unpaid volunteer positions.
- 67 per cent of respondents are in permanent roles (down from 83 per cent last year) and 11 per cent are in Fixed-Term/Temporary roles.
- Of those employed, just 23 per cent of respondents are employed on JNC Terms and Conditions⁸, 52 per cent stated they are not and 23 per cent stated they ‘did not know’.
- Of those employed, 37 per cent were required or expected to have a JNC recognised youth work qualification, 51 per cent were not and 10 per cent ‘did not know’.
- 61 per cent of respondents are engaged in targeted youth provision on a weekly basis (up from 46 per cent last year), 54 per cent

in universal open-access provision (up from 40 per cent last year), 43 per cent in one-to-one support and 70 per cent in group-based activity (up from 54 per cent last year). 31 per cent of respondents are engaged in detached or street-based youth work (up from 23 per cent last year) (see [Appendix B: Further Graphs](#) for a full breakdown).

In addition, respondents are asked to indicate which type of organisation they work within. As shown through Figure 8, the majority of respondents (56 per cent) are employed by a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation, whether that is a youth organisation, uniformed group, part of a faith group or community interest companies (CICs). 29 per cent of respondents are employed by a local authority youth service and two per cent are part of other statutory services or public bodies.

Figure 8: Types or organisation youth workers are employed by (902 responses)



Average salaries of youth workers

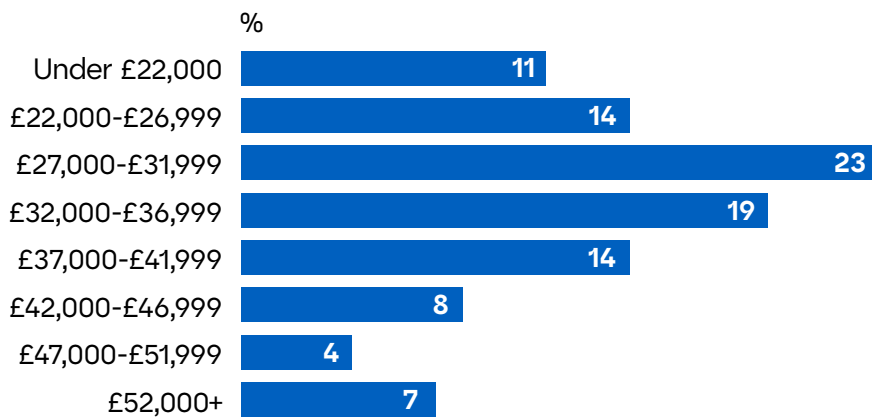
This year, the NYA asked survey respondents to indicate their salary range based on a full time equivalent (FTE) role. Figure 9 gives the results of these responses. Overall, up to a quarter (25 per cent) are likely to have a salary of less than the national living wage.⁹ Over two-thirds (67 per cent) have a wage below the national median average.¹⁰

There are some differences in average salaries between youth workers who are in the public sector and those in the voluntary and

community sector.¹¹ For example, youth workers in the public sector are more likely to have a living wage or above (85 per cent) than those in the VCS (71 per cent). They are also more likely to have a salary that is above or equivalent to the national median salary (47 per cent) than youth workers in the VCS (26 per cent).

As potentially expected, youth workers with fewer years of experience generally have lower salaries than those who have been in the sector longer. For example, 48 per cent of respondents with less than five years' experience earn below the living wage, compared with just 17 per cent of those with more than six years in the sector.

Figure 9: Average salary range of youth workers (FTE) (662 responses)



Current youth worker feelings about roles

Some additional questions were asked of the sector to understand their current feelings about their roles and the potential impact on morale. The findings from this are shown in Figure 10.

Youth workers reported high levels of pride in their work, confidence that they make a positive difference to young people, strong motivation, and good working relationships with professionals in allied sectors. However, they expressed greater concern about job security and having sufficient time to plan and reflect on their practice.

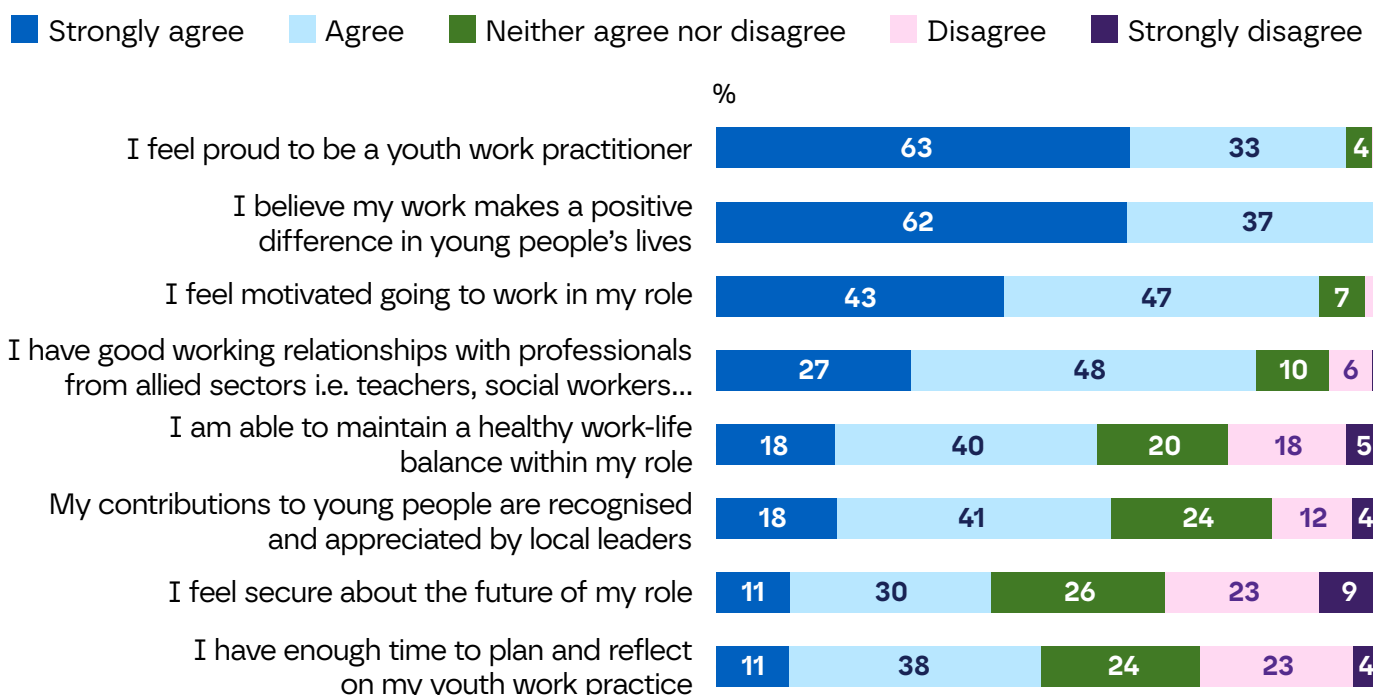
In focus groups, youth workers identified aspects of their roles they valued most, including:

- **Building relationships with new groups of young people** who have recently begun attending their provision.
- **Delivering local events** that give young people opportunities to express themselves and celebrate their identities.

- **Observing young people's personal growth**, such as developing new skills and participating in new activities.
- **Supporting young people to reintegrate into education** following periods of absence.
- **Strengthening youth voice** and using young people's feedback to influence local decision making and service commissioning.



Figure 10: How much do you agree with the following... (898 responses)



“Our annual Youth Pride event takes place in our centre across Manchester Pride weekend. And the joy, like, seeing the joy of young people realising that their community is actually massive and the negative noise that seems to be loud and in front of them all the time isn’t necessarily the majority voice. So that sense of community that comes from those bigger scale events is fantastic. And the other thing we’ve done recently is put on events called LGBTQ+ Youth Summits where we’ve really tried to draw out youth voice on a number of topics.” **Focus Group Participant**

Current challenges faced by youth workers in their roles

In addition, during focus groups, youth workers were also given the opportunity to reflect on the main challenges they currently face in their roles. Funding issues were cited as a common concern, particularly the reliance on short term and targeted funding, which makes it difficult to plan and sustain long term provision. The need to re-apply for funding and manage short-term contracts was also highlighted as creating an administrative burden that was reducing options for front-facing youth work.

“You’re always working towards the next fund, the next opportunity. You have to measure things you know, measure impact. The amount of time you have to measure things and the amount of time you have to ask young people the same question, the same thing, like they can’t be bothered.” **Focus Group Participant**

Youth workers also highlighted several additional challenges, including:

- **An increase in young people with complex needs** accessing their provision, particularly those with recognised SEND who are not engaged in any other services¹².
- **Difficulties recruiting and retaining suitable volunteers and sessional staff**, who are often essential to sustaining youth provision. This was felt most strongly among volunteer led organisations, such as uniformed groups, which have seen a notable decline in volunteer numbers.
- **A reduction in qualified youth workers with specialist knowledge of youth work practice**, leading to less emphasis on personal, social, emotional and political development in service delivery.
- **Managing increasingly high risk situations**, with youth workers feeling they are being required to provide emergency support rather than delivering intentional, planned youth work.



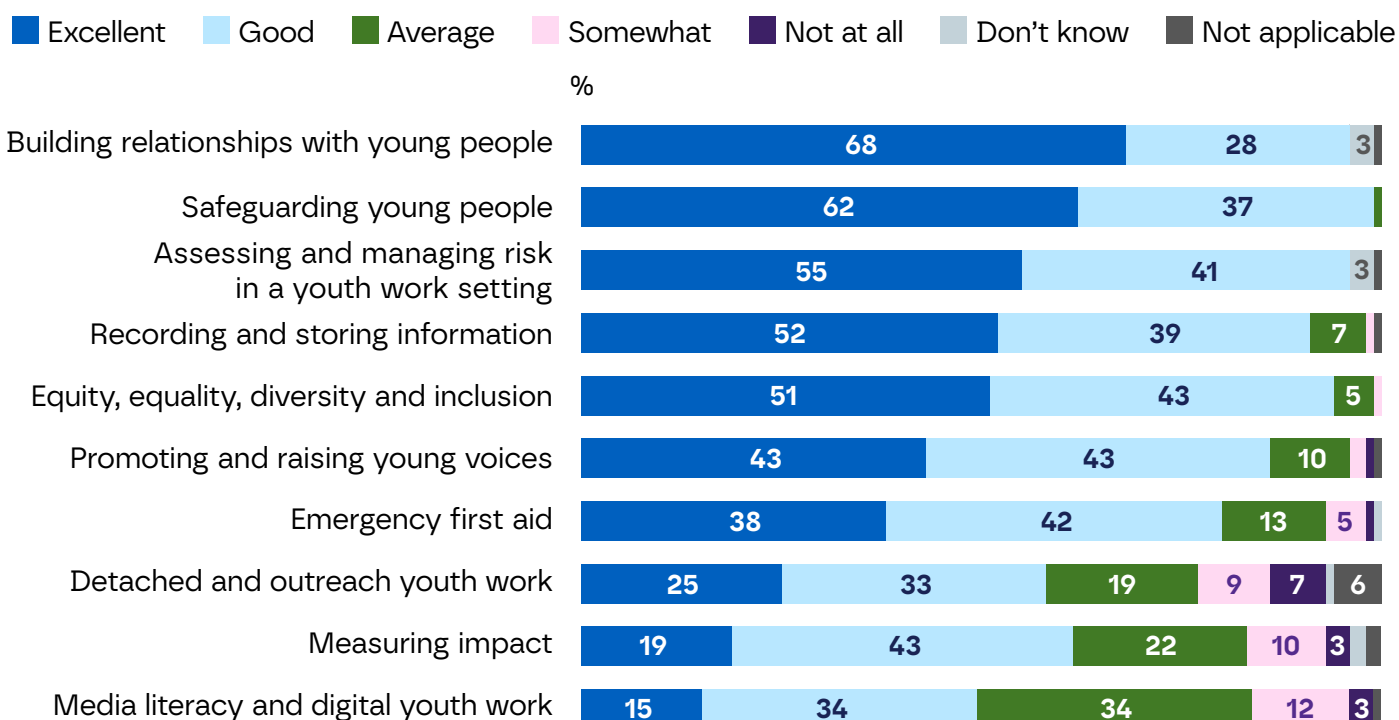
Training and support needs of the youth sector workforce

Similar to last year’s findings, respondents to the survey continue to have a high level of confidence and understanding of essential youth work skills. Notably, they identify ‘building relationships with young people’, ‘safeguarding young people’ and ‘assessing and managing risk in youth settings’ as areas where there is strong understanding. There was less understanding in ‘emergency first aid’, ‘detached and outreach youth work’, ‘measuring impact’ and ‘media literacy and digital youth work’.¹³

In the past year, 84 per cent of respondents reported having the opportunity to access training or continuing professional development (CPD), while 13 per cent said they did not. This represents a slight change from last year’s figures of 91 per cent and 7 per cent respectively.

Over the coming year respondents indicated they are ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’ to undertake training in safeguarding young people (81 per cent), equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (64 per cent), assessing and managing risk (64 per cent) and recording and storing information (53 per cent) and emergency first aid (52 per cent). Respondents were a lot less likely to undertake training in detached and outreach youth work (27 per cent), media literacy and digital youth work (36 per cent) and measuring impact (44 per cent) (see [Appendix B: Further Graphs](#)).

Figure 11: The extent youth workers have a good understanding of the following (874 responses)



Findings from the focus groups show that youth workers would welcome further training and development in several areas, including:

- **Supporting young people with recognised SEND**, particularly neurodivergent young people, through appropriate engagement activities and effective advocacy with other services.
- **Promoting Personal, Social, Emotional and Political (PSEP) development**, reaffirming its importance within youth work practice and improving ways to measure young people’s progress.
- **Strengthening digital and IT skills**, including effective use of online platforms to work efficiently and to guide young people in navigating digital spaces.
- **Enhancing online safety and safeguarding knowledge** to ensure young people are kept safe when engaging with online platforms.

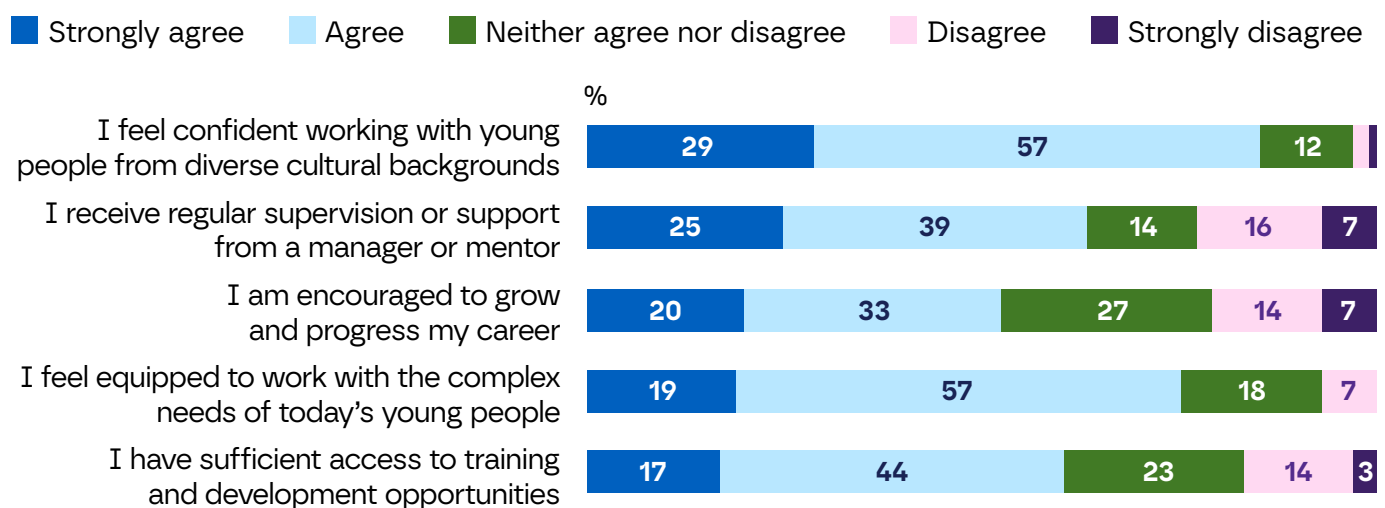
managers, or access additional training if they feel it is needed to help them meet challenges within their roles. However, focus groups also raised concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers in the sector. High workloads, stress and burnout, working in isolated roles, and limited opportunities for career progression were all highlighted as factors that negatively affect morale.

Additional findings from the survey, where youth workers were asked to rate how equipped they felt in their roles against a series of statements, (see Figure 12) highlighted the importance of supporting staff to train, develop and grow their careers. Through the findings, it was found that most youth workers ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ that they are ‘confident working with young people from diverse cultural backgrounds’ (86 per cent) and ‘feel equipped to work with the complex needs of today’s young people’ (76 per cent). Where there was room for some development was ‘receiving regular supervision or support from a manager or mentor’, ‘having sufficient access to training and development opportunities’ and ‘encouragement to grow and progress career’.

The support needs of youth workers

Overall, **youth workers reported feeling well supported in their roles**. They said they could seek advice from colleagues, speak to their line

Figure 12: How equipped youth workers feel in their role (854 responses)



To deepen understanding of support needs, the NYA asked respondents about the various opportunities they have access to and where there is potential for development. 49 per cent indicated they often have ‘one to one supervision’, 48 per cent have ‘opportunities for networking’, and 37 per cent often have ‘opportunities for reflective practice’ (see Figure 13).

Similar to last year’s findings, focus group participants welcomed further opportunity to attend formal training and qualification but recognised that having time and funding to do so remained a barrier. Access to ‘in-work’ support remains important to youth workers, with peer supervision, communities of practice and opportunities for ‘skills-sharing’ across sectors all welcomed as important areas for development.

Changing needs of young people and the demand for youth work

Continuing trends from last year, it was highlighted by youth workers that there is increasing demand to meet the rising needs of young people, particularly around their mental health and well-being (77 per cent), safeguarding and online harm (64 per cent), addressing youth employment, training and skills for work (57 per cent) and crime and anti-social behaviour (54 per cent).

Figure 13: How often youth workers have access to these current opportunities (844 responses)

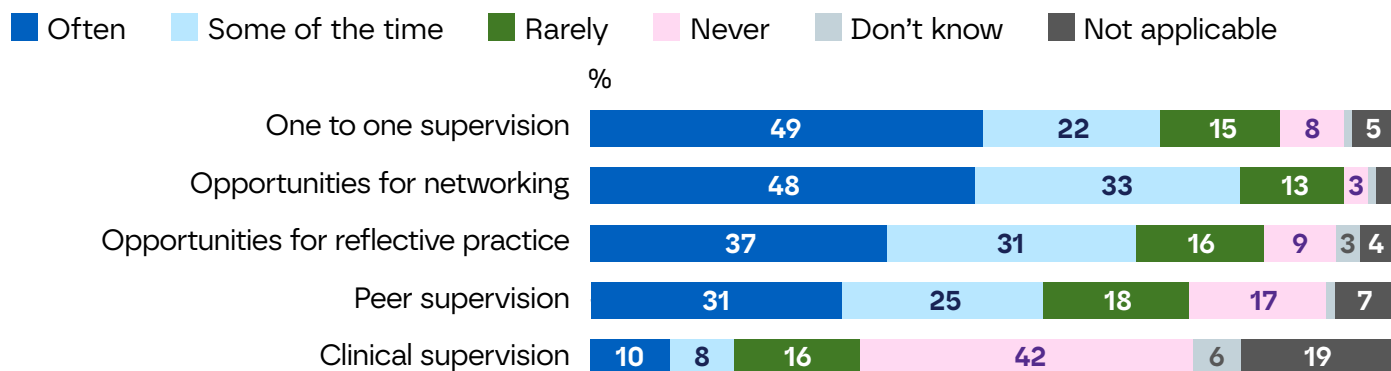
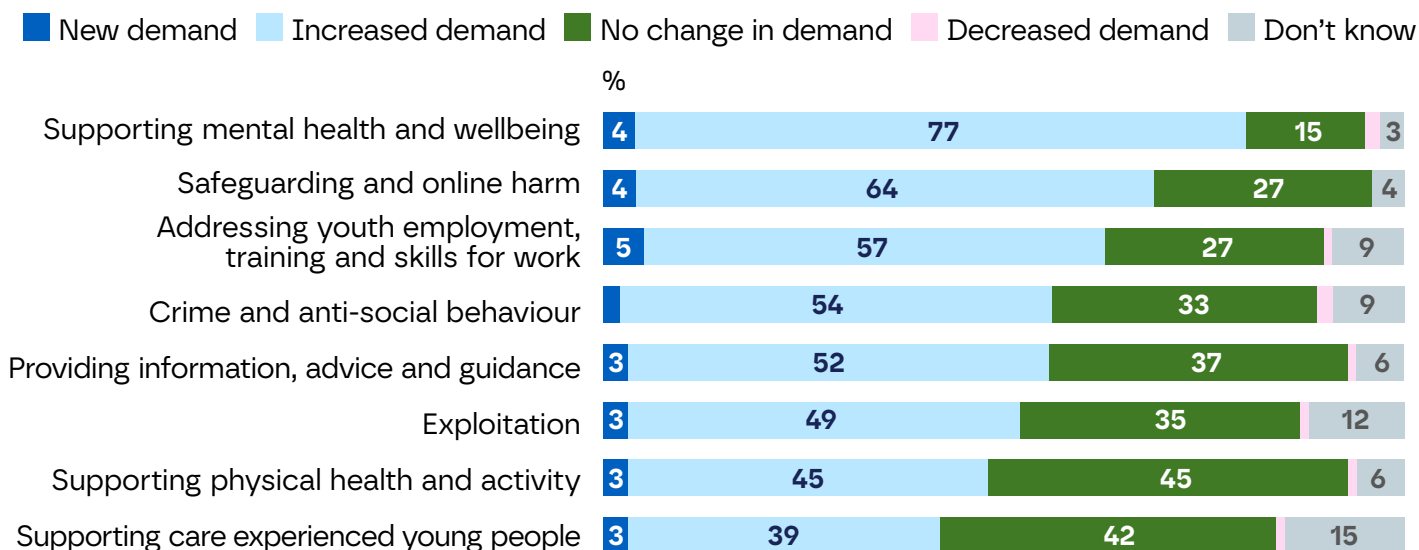


Figure 14: Changes in the needs of young people engaged with (844 responses)



In addition to these findings, through focus groups youth workers also highlighted other areas where they were seeing increased demand for support, including:

- **Youth workers reported a significant increase in young people with SEND**, particularly neurodivergent young people, being referred to their provision. They highlighted that many of these young people rely on youth services for personal and educational support as they waited for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), or accessing additional support.

“In terms of our staff and requesting training, they’ve asked for CPD that tries to meet the needs of young people that have ADHD or autism, for example. We’ve seen a big rise in that, with young people being more open about it and talking about it more. It’s definitely something we are seeing increasing and we know we need to meet that challenge.” **Focus Group Participant**

- **Youth workers reporting increasing numbers of young people seeking support as they explore or understand their gender identity**, go through transition, or experience prejudice and discrimination related to gender. They noted a growing need for informed discussion, guidance, and mental wellbeing support for young people navigating these issues or facing discrimination.

“We’ve seen, like we’ve seen more young people wanting to talk about gender, trans identity and things like that. We know it is something that young people want to understand more. We know we need to educate ourselves more on this issue and we’re thinking about how to do that.” **Focus Group Participant**

- **Youth workers reporting increasing numbers of young people needing basic necessities such as food, clothing or sanitary products** to support engagement. It was recognised by youth workers that they felt they had a duty to try and provide these, in part because it was difficult to do meaningful and intentional youth work without meeting these needs first.

“We now regularly provide food or take donations for clothing. We’re careful about it. We don’t want to be seen to do this but we don’t know what else to do. It’s difficult to do things, you know, if they’ve not. like. eaten, they’re distracted. We kind of feel like we have to” **Focus Group Participant**





Looking towards the future

Sustaining the youth sector workforce

The majority of respondents (76 per cent) said they were ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’ to be in a youth work role within their organisation in a year’s time, with 78 per cent stating they will stay with their current organisation. Supporting this, 64 per cent of respondents say it was unlikely that they would move to a different sector in the next year.

However, it is also clear that these findings depend on a range of contextual factors, including funding, local and national decision making, and the visibility of youth work across related sectors. When youth workers were asked about how local contextual issues affect their roles, they presented a more complex and varied picture (see [Figure 16](#)).

Figure 15: How likely are youth workers to... (837 responses)

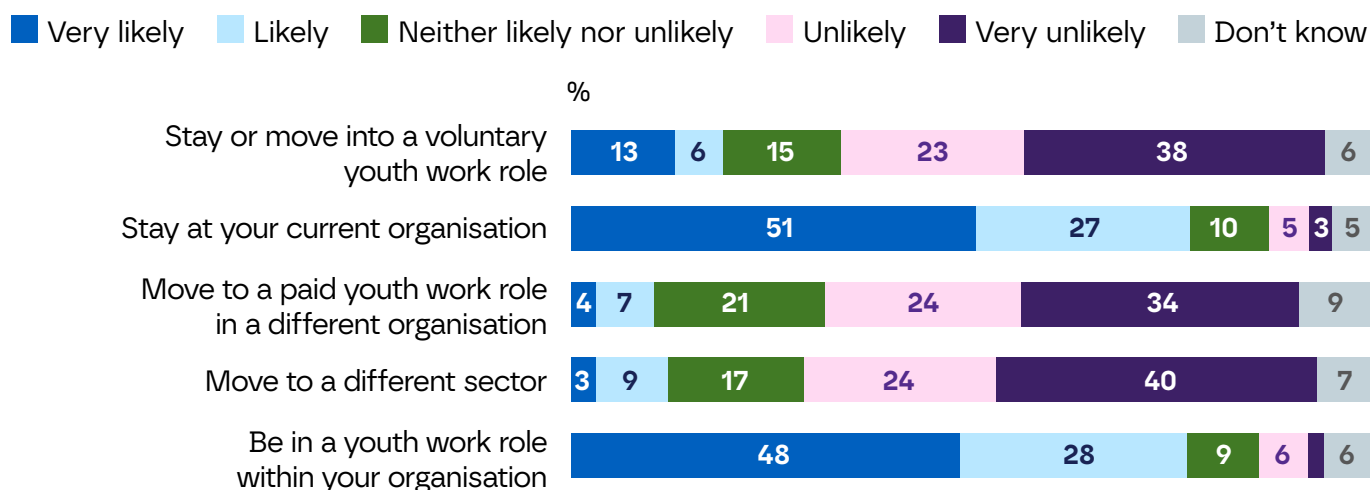
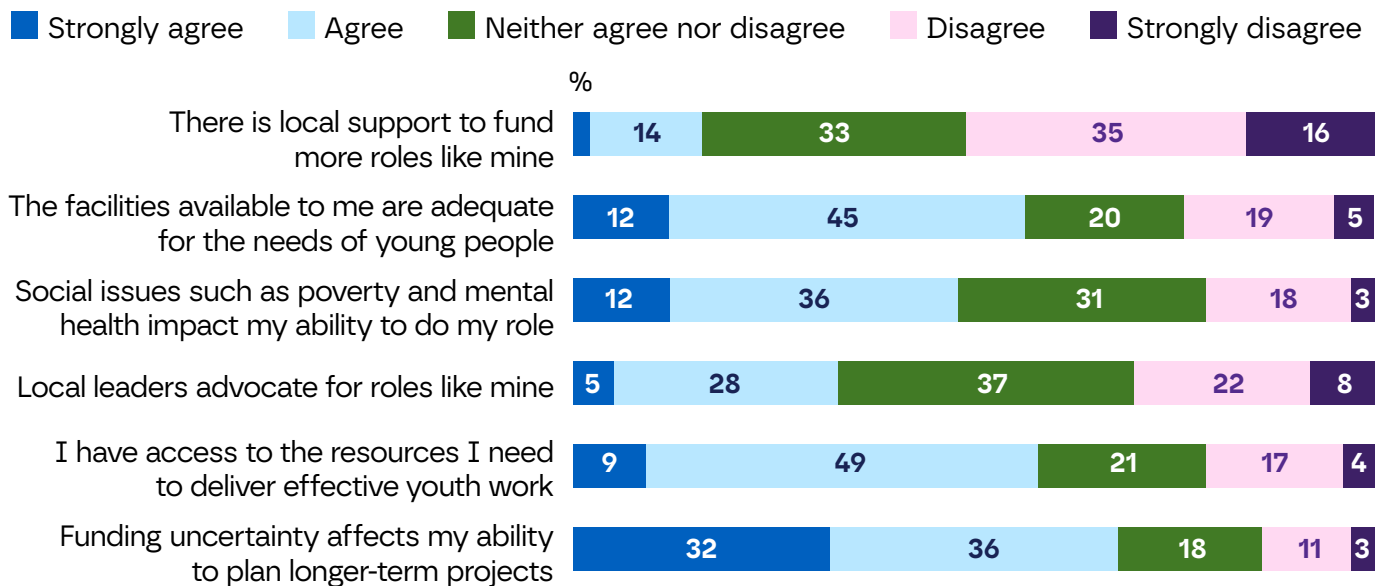


Figure 16: How much do youth workers agree with the following... (898 responses)



Youth workers raised concerns about the level of local support and advocacy for their roles, as well as the uncertainty of funding that limits their ability to plan long-term projects and deliver effective services to young people. **Only 57 per cent of respondents agreed that they had access to facilities that met the needs of young people.**

Participants also highlighted wider concerns about the overall sustainability of the sector without longer-term funding commitments to support youth worker employment, ensure access to training, and maintain appropriate facilities.

Focus group discussions also explored the future of the youth sector. Participants provided thoughtful insights that identified several key areas needed to strengthen and sustain the workforce, including:

- **Sustainable and equitable funding** that is accessible across the sector. Participants emphasised that funding must include core provision, not solely targeted programmes, to maintain facilities and create genuinely youth led, safe spaces for young people.
- **A renewed national framework for youth work qualifications** that recognises the central role of professionally qualified youth workers in developing high quality practice across communities.

- **Stronger cross sector collaboration**, with a clear effort to help allied sectors understand the value of youth work and, where appropriate, incorporate youth workers into their services.
- **More consistent and realistic monitoring and evaluation requirements** from funders to reflect the nature of youth work and reduce the administrative burdens placed on youth workers.

Across all focus groups, the recent launch of the National Youth Strategy was cited as a source of optimism for the sector’s future. Participants felt that the strategy signalled genuine government support for developing youth work nationwide. Although full details were yet to be released, many believed the strategy provided an important framework for elevating youth work within local decision making.

“The strategy, I think, I think it will help to put youth work more on the map. I hope, I don’t know, but maybe it will help to give us more recognition for what we do so we can talk to local politicians, make a better case. I don’t know if it will work but it feels like a way forward.” Focus Group Participant

Appendix

Appendix A: Methodology

The Youth Sector Workforce Survey is a national online survey that ran from November 2025 – January 2026. In total there were 1,146 ‘qualifying’ responses to the survey. Currently, the National Youth Agency estimates that there are between 21,000 – 22,500 paid youth workers across England, which means that between 6 - 7 per cent of the youth sector workforce was represented in the survey. This provided a confidence level of 95 per cent to the findings.

To qualify, all respondents were asked to indicate whether they considered themselves a youth worker, with those who responded either ‘No’ or left it ‘Blank’, filtered out to ensure data validity.

The survey was a mixture of closed (a combination of single and multiple-choice options) and open questions that drew upon respondents motivations for becoming a youth worker, their levels of experience and

qualifications, their current training needs and future career plans. Essential demographic information, in line with the Equalities Act 2010, was also captured to understand the level of representation amongst respondents.

Further focus groups were also conducted with respondents to the survey who indicated they would like to take part in further research. In total eight focus groups were conducted with 23 youth workers in attendance.

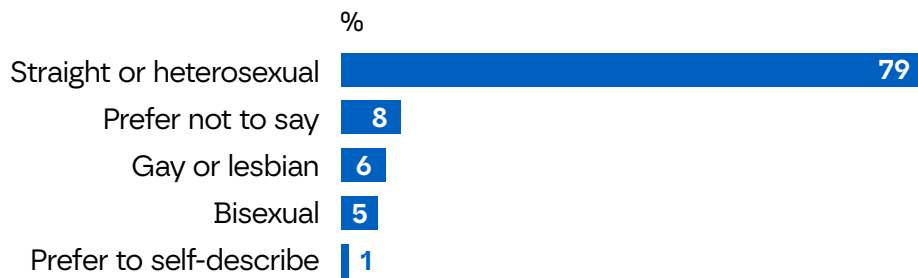
The Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey is a national survey and therefore provides a representation of the national picture of the current workforce. It is not intended to give a regional or local picture of the youth sector workforce and therefore no regional findings have been presented here (as they may not be representative of those areas).



Appendix B: Further graphs

Respondents demographics

Figure 17: Sexual orientation of respondents (by classification) (905 responses)



Current delivery

Figure 18: Activities engaged per week by respondents (898 responses)

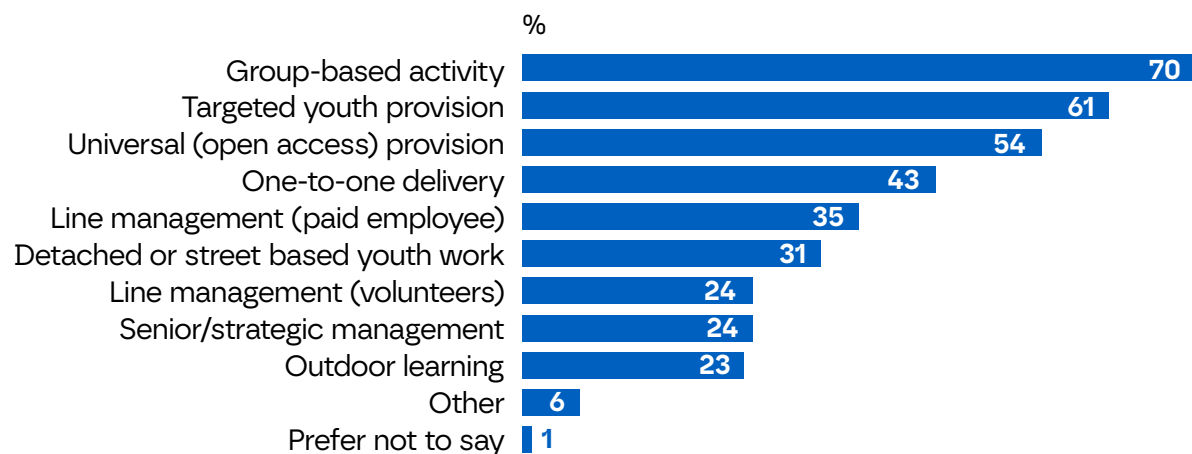
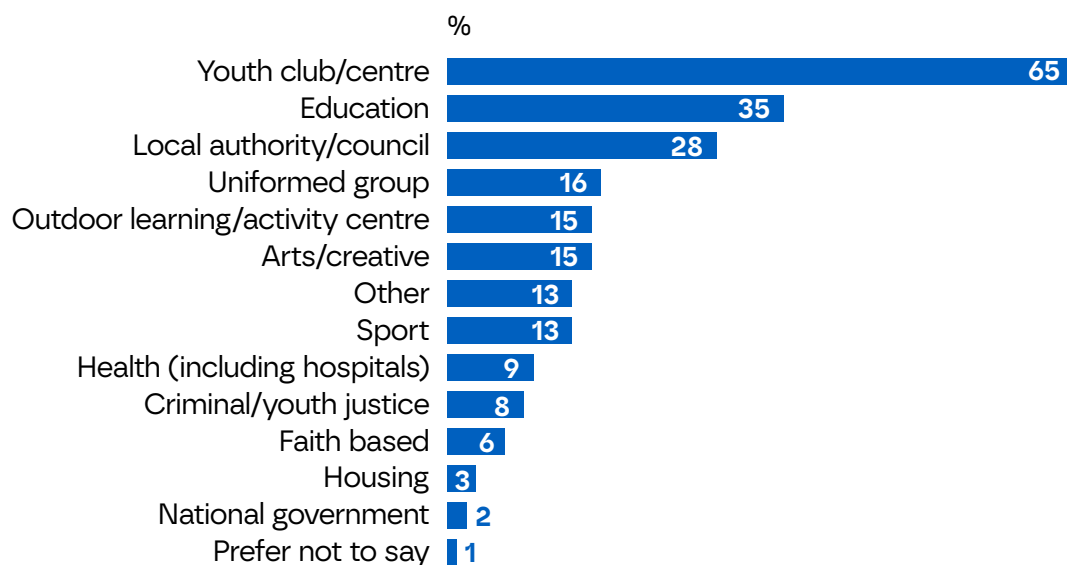
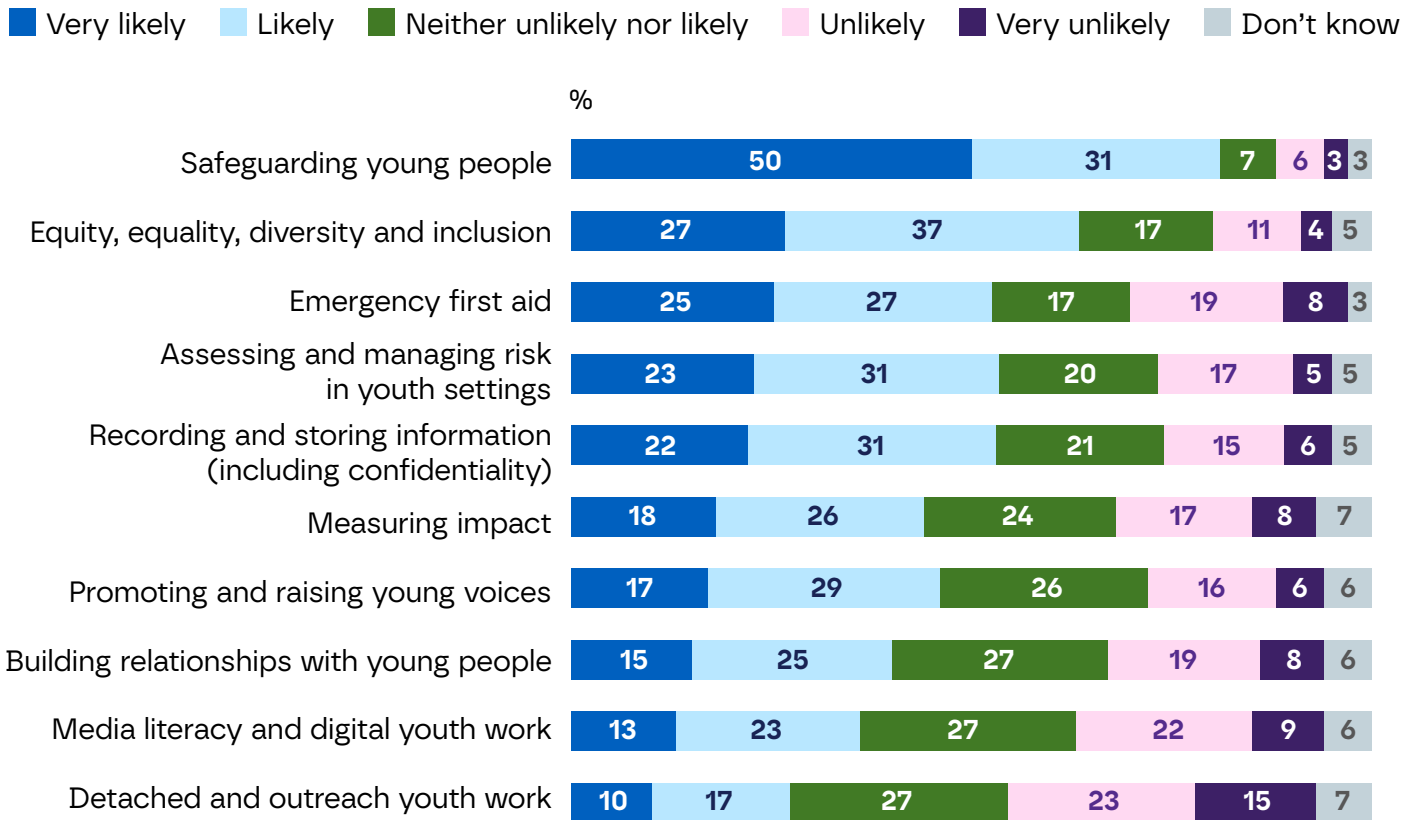


Figure 19: Settings that respondents are practicing in (900 responses)



Training and support needs

Figure 20: Undertake CPD or training in the following areas... (853 responses)



Endnotes

- 1** NYA (2024) [Youth Work in England and the National Occupational Standards](#).
- 2** Taken from NYA [‘What is Youth Work?’](#)
- 3** These are based on the youth worker’s organisational postcodes provided through the Annual Youth Sector Workforce Survey and not where the respondents were personally based.
- 4** Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC).
- 5** This question was a multi-option question meaning that respondents could indicate more than one qualification.
- 6** This includes all students on level 2,3,4,6 and 7 qualifications.
- 7** In some cases respondents will have more than 1 qualification and therefore percentages will be more than 100%.
- 8** Current details of these can be found in the JNC ‘Pink Book’ https://uniteforoursociety.org/assets/JNC_Report_2024.pdf
- 9** There is no official ‘national living wage’ but the [Living Wage Foundation](#) provides insight into what this may be in different parts of the country.
- 10** The Office for National Statistics calculates this to be approximately £39,039. [Employee earnings in the UK 2025](#).
- 11** As findings from the survey show.
- 12** Evidence from [Youth Matters: State of the Nation \(summary report\) - GOV.UK](#) suggests that young people with SEND face the most barriers to accessing youth provision and are less likely to agree that they are receiving sufficient support with their employment and training needs.
- 13** This was a new category introduced by the NYA this year to capture understanding of digital youth work, which is a growing and developing area [NYA Digital Youth Work](#).

National Youth Agency

9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN

Company registration no. 2912597

Register charity in England and Wales no. 1035804

nya.org.uk