

DELIVERING THE National Youth Strategy TOGETHER

Regional Roadshow
January–March 2026

Network of
Regional
Youth Work Units

Partnership
for Young
London



**EAST OF ENGLAND
& EAST MIDLANDS**
REGIONAL YOUTH WORK UNIT

**Youth
Focus**
SOUTH WEST

**Youth
focus:**
North East

**YOUTH FOCUS
SOUTH EAST**
#LETSTALKYOUTH

**Youth
work unit**
Yorkshire &
The Humber

NYA
National Youth Agency



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

UK YOUTH



Foreword

Thank you to everyone who participated in the regional roadshow events. I have heard from attendees about the energy and depth of the conversations that took place across the country.

On 10 December 2025 we published 'Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy', the first cross-government strategy for young people in England in 15 years. This is a 10-year plan created together with young people to ensure that every young person in England – no matter where they're from – should have a safe place to go, someone who cares for them and a community they feel a part of.

The insights gathered from over 1,300 practitioners and the regional data shared during these sessions are key in understanding the current needs and priority areas for improvement.

As you heard during the roadshow sessions, the Strategy includes two clear ambitions by 2035: halving the participation gap in enriching activities between disadvantaged young people and their peers and ensuring half a million more young people have access to a trusted adult outside of their home.



We recognise that these targets cannot be met by the government alone. Achieving these goals requires fundamental reform and a collaborative effort to ensure services work together effectively across government and local communities.

As we covered in our sessions, the Strategy commits to three vital shifts to make this a reality: moving from national to local, empowering local authorities with a place-based approach to funding and leadership; shifting from fragmented to collaborative cross-government action; and moving from excluded to empowered, ensuring young people remain at the heart of every decision we make.

While we are at the very start of this decade-long journey, work is already underway. We are moving quickly to prioritise investment in the youth sector and its workforce, funding spaces and activities for young people as well as reforming access to mental health support or prevention.

My thanks go to the NYA, UK Youth, and the Regional Youth Work Units for facilitating these sessions. Thank you for your honesty about the challenges we face and for your continued ambition for our young people.

We are also incredibly grateful for the parallel sessions held with young people, delivered in partnership with #IWill, which ensures that the voices of those at the heart of this Strategy continue to lead our direction.

–Stephanie Peacock MP

Minister for Sport, Tourism, Civil Society and Youth

Regional roadshow events - dates and locations

Online event
26 Mar 2026

Durham
10 Mar 2026

Wigan 29 Jan 2026
Leeds 13 Feb 2026
Hull 25 Feb 2026

Nottingham
16 Mar 2026

Birmingham
18 Feb 2026

Chelmsford
24 Feb 2026

Basingstoke
4 Mar 2026

London
26 Feb 2026

Plymouth
6 Mar 2026

Theme and purpose of the events

Across all regions, the events were tailored to local context while maintaining a clear and consistent purpose. They were designed to build shared understanding of the National Youth Strategy, explore its three shifts and three chapters, surface regional barriers and identify opportunities.

The sessions created space to strengthen cross-sector collaboration, providing an early opportunity for partners to begin shaping locally led approaches to implementation, grounded in the realities of place and the needs of young people.

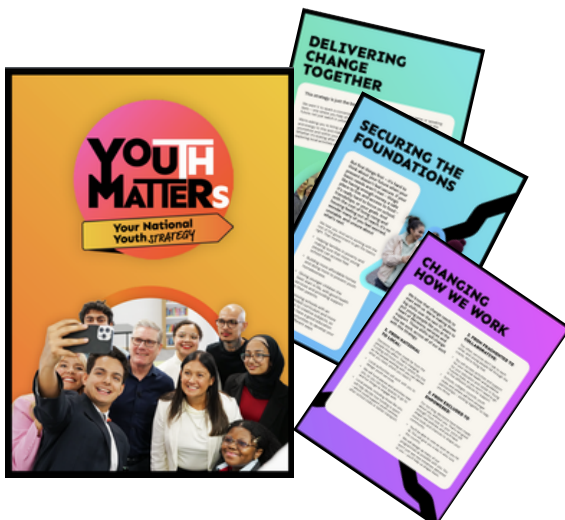
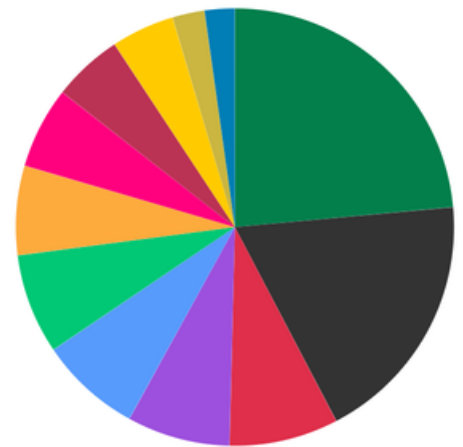
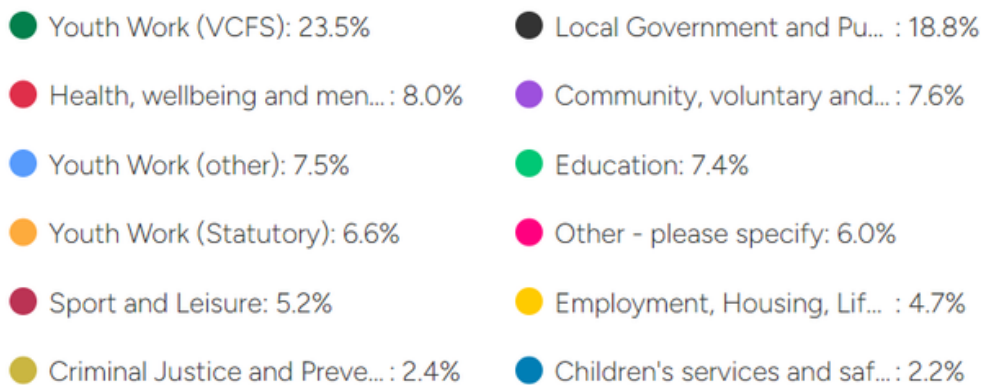
Attendance overview

Across all events there was a high demand for places, with most events operating a waiting list. There was some travel disruption for some events, but overall attendance was very strong. Delegates represented a broad range of commissioners, practitioners and others in the youth sector for whom the National Youth Strategy was relevant. Young people were involved in separate youth focused events held by DCMS and #iWill in parallel. Youth workers represented approximately 37% of attendees.

Representation included:

Registered: 1,928

Attended: 1,320



Headline insights

The publication of the Strategy in December 2025 had been eagerly anticipated and widely celebrated across the youth sector. Across all events there was overwhelming support for the ambition and principles of the National Youth Strategy, coupled with a strong and urgent demand for action, clarity and follow-through.

Participants consistently emphasised that delivery will succeed only if national intent is matched by long-term funding, sustainable structures, professional recognition of youth work, and genuine power-sharing with young people and local systems.

Participants consistently asked:

“How will national ambition translate into practical, equitable change for young people in our communities?”

Key strengths of the roadshow engagement:

Extensive regional engagement

Roadshow conducted across nine English regions, plus a national online event, ensured comprehensive geographic representation.

Shared motivation and reflection

Participants expressed readiness to engage meaningfully, reflecting on challenges and opportunities beyond daily pressures.

Diverse youth sector participation

Attendees represented sectors from youth services to education, health, safety, arts, and voluntary groups, showing broad engagement from across the youth ecosystem.

Foundation for collaboration

The roadshow built a strong base for future cooperation and local strategy implementation, emphasising ongoing communication.

Many attendees fed back that it was excellent to see DCMS team members engaging in person with the sector; sharing local data, being open to challenge and feedback, answering questions and listening to the concerns and suggestions from the sector. The visible collaboration between the Network of Regional Youth Work Units, UK Youth and NYA was also valued and demonstrated a commitment to adopt the principles of the strategy of working together to maximise the opportunities Youth Matters brings.

Constructive feedback on the individual event logistics and planning has been gathered through feedback from participants and will be taken into consideration for future planning. This document focuses on the insights shared regarding the strategy and its implementation.



Event insights

The overall sentiment across the roadshow was very positive, with attendees sharing a strong appetite for taking on the Strategy and creating change for young people, with clear determination and motivation to collaborate and put young people's voices at the centre of meaningful change.



Cross cutting themes

All the events followed a similar structure, with aspects of each day's agenda tailored to local context. Many discussions were aligned with the three shifts and/or the chapters of the National Youth Strategy. Participants were asked to consider how these the shifts could come to life in their areas; what are the considerations for their local contexts; the barriers; and the support needed to overcome these barriers. Common themes arose, with overall strong support for the three shifts, accompanied with the desire for clear frameworks and detail on implementation.

National to local

Participants welcomed this approach, whilst also highlighting lack of clarity on timelines, funding routes, governance and accountability. For example, there was concern about local authority gatekeeping, postcode variation and uncertainty for grassroots organisations as to whether they will be able to benefit.

Participants frequently voiced that funding criteria overly rely on IMD and population size, disadvantaging rural, coastal and semi-rural areas. Uncertainty created by devolution, combined authorities and local government reorganisation was frequently mentioned.

The impact of this was described as delayed mobilisation, fragmented approach to implementation and loss of institutional memory and best practice where there might be significant restructure.

There was a clear desire for a clearer and stronger statutory duty for local authorities' youth provision with sufficiency benchmarks and expectations to protect existing services and lay the foundation for building youth offers.

Calls to help this change in practice included:

- **Transparent and equitable funding distribution**

- Participants recognised that the funding available through the Strategy is not going to reach every area, but urged Government to be transparent about the criteria used and decision making.

- **Changes to funding structures to enable more collaboration**

- For example: Long-term (3-5 year) funding cycles, reduction in delays of funding being released and more flexibility for mobilisation and partnership development, reducing how often funding needs to be spent in-year and other structural barriers that undermine sustainability

- **Funding that reflects the cost of delivery, transport barriers, prevention, rurality**

- A move to support core costs that invests in good quality, professional youth work practice achieves outcomes for young people, rather than 'project' based work

- **Support and clear guidance**

- For councillors, senior leaders and decision makers to understand and value youth work

- **Decision making brought close to local practitioners and young people**

- E.g: co-production, devolved budgets, enabling genuine decision making through youth voice structures, better data and information sharing locally

Fragmented to collaborative

Participants universally supported collaboration, whilst also describing it as hard to sustain. The key message is that collaboration must be intentional and funded.

Challenges raised centred mostly on:

- Competitive, short-term funding which undermines partnership working
- Capacity (staff time, travel, infrastructure) is the biggest barrier therefore collaboration needs to be resourced
- Grassroots and VCSE organisations feel disproportionately disadvantaged, but are often the most connected to the community and understand need and solutions
- Poor system navigation and data sharing weakens impact, with many feeling that too often they are operating in silos

Discussions emphasised the need for:

- Collective impact approaches, to bring partners together behind common goals and outcomes. This can be brought about through aligned commissioning and pooled funding
- There are calls for funding and support for existing and developing local partnership infrastructure (e.g. alliances, partnerships and networks) to bring together the legitimate voice of the sector in an area/region. Calls for clear convening roles, governance and structures
- Sufficient core cost that funding will enable capacity for collaboration, recognising the time it takes to develop relationships. VCFSE organisations often act as connectors but lack capacity
- Reducing bureaucracy and duplication through consistent mapping of local provision, gaps and youth voice structures. Collaboration that will simplify local service structures for young people e.g. clear distinction between different types of hubs, joined up approaches to referrals and pathways between professionals
- Sub-regional and cluster-based approaches, especially for large regions and rural areas

Excluded to empowered and seen and heard

Participants recognised existing challenges and saw the launch of the Strategy as an opportunity to develop this area. Current challenges mentioned across many regions included:

- Current youth voice can often be tokenistic or consultative rather than supporting genuine decision making
- Youth voice is dominated by confident or already-engaged young people, with representation of other voices missing
- Feedback loops are not strong and there is little visible change for young people to see

Participants emphasised the need for:

- Youth voice embedded in governance, commissioning and accountability
- Paid, accessible and supported participation, including political education in view of voting rights at 16
- Outreach-led and creative engagement (including with NEET, home-educated, disabled and rural young people). In addition, detached youth work is essential for seldom heard groups
- Clear standards for “meaningful participation” e.g. rights-based approaches, diverse representation
- Stronger links between local youth voice and national policy spaces with clarity on the roles of each

People who care: Workforce and trusted adults

Across all regions workforce issues emerged as the most critical barrier to delivery. Youth work is fundamentally a relationship-based professional practice, and a supported, sustained workforce is essential to rebuilding opportunities for young people to access youth work and achieve the goals of the Strategy.

Challenges frequently raised:

- Insecure, short-term funding leads to churn and burnout. Including the implications of young people experiencing new projects that close after a short time, breaking trust with them
- Low pay and limited progression deter recruitment, with many services struggling to recruit and retain trained, suitable staff
- Shortages of qualified youth workers, tutors and assessors
- Fragmented and inaccessible training and qualification routes, often owing to the cost and lack of funding and the availability in the local area
- Lack of professional recognition for youth work

Participants called for:

- Protecting the title of youth worker
- Clear, funded, flexible pathways from volunteering and introduction to youth work through degree and beyond. Including apprenticeships that genuinely work in practice, and place-based qualifications
- Long-term funding that covers salaries which can protect time and provide support for supervision, wellbeing and reflective practice, CPD and backfill
- Developing volunteers, mentors and trusted adults to be appropriately skilled to engage young people alongside qualified professionals
- National clarity on what constitutes a trusted adult, without diluting professional youth work
- Stronger promotion and understanding of youth work across systems (education, health, policing)



Places to go and things to do:

Across multiple regions, participants highlighted that the biggest investment by government in recent years has been towards capital projects. Whilst welcome and needed in many areas, this prompted discussion on the sustainability of services and the need for revenue funding to deliver services from new or refurbished venues.

Other challenges raised included:

- Acute shortages of safe, welcoming, youth-friendly spaces
- Transport poverty as a major barrier to access
- Over-reliance on hub models that fail rural and hyper-local communities
- The importance of doorstep, outreach and mobile provision

Practitioners described thriving youth offers as:

- **Free or low cost.** Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in spaces for all who would like to attend without a monetary barrier
- **Local and within walking distance.** If a young person needs money, a lift or is faced with incompatible public transport timetabling/reliability attendance drops. There is strong support for small, hyper local spaces, use of existing community assets, mobile and pop-up provision and outdoor and green space-based activity
- **Friendly, relational and inclusive.** Safe spaces are described as more than safeguarding policies or CCTV, but as places where young people can develop trusted relationships through consistent staffing and a sense of belonging
- **Offering universal, outreach and detached work.** Detached youth work was repeatedly described as essential, and many felt this was missing from the strategy. Outreach, (the practice of engaging young people where they are at, with the aim of linking them to existing provision), is essential for offering a route to young people who are disconnected to services e.g. those who are NEET, experiencing poor mental health, have additional needs and/or are isolated geographically
- **Accessibility of provision is vital.** Health, long term conditions and SEND are key considerations for the roll out of the Strategy. Young people with additional needs should be systematically included in youth voice activities and there needs to be stronger cross-sector working between health, youth and education

Local decision making and co-design with flexible funding (as emphasised above) that enables local sector stakeholders and young people to design what is needed in specific areas, will lay the foundation to achieve the aims of the Strategy in this domain.

Next steps

Participants were asked what support they need, both nationally and locally, to help them overcome barriers to achieving the ambitions of the National Youth Strategy. National and regional bodies and government should take the opportunity to drive system change in the following areas:

- **Clear communication, timelines and accountability**
 - Regular updates on funding, timelines and expectations
 - Continuing opportunities to convene and network locally
- **Fair and transparent funding models**
 - Support to create trusted spaces for collaboration
 - Funding navigation and joint bid support
- **Long-term investment in workforce and infrastructure**
 - Workforce development pathways and accessible training
 - Development of CPD options for continued learning whilst ensuring core cost funding supports regular supervision for practice quality
- **Connecting, listening and uplifting grassroots and VCSFE organisations**
 - Ensure small and rural organisations are being heard, connected and supported
 - Advocacy for smaller organisations, including support to influence local authorities and senior leaders
- **Practical tools, guidance and shared learning**
 - Mapping of youth provision and data tools
 - Tools for implementation and accountability
 - Case studies, templates and practical examples
- **Clear standards and accountability for youth voice**
 - Stronger youth voice structures
 - Youth voice resources

Working with the DCMS

‘The NYA and UK Youth, together with the Regional Youth Work Units are committed to continue engaging with DCMS as the detail of the Strategy is developed. As set out in the “Holding us to account” section of Youth Matters, DCMS has committed to ongoing dialogue with practitioners, partners and young people, alongside regular updates on progress and clear mechanisms for scrutiny and feedback. This includes creating continued opportunities for the sector to shape implementation, share learning and challenge where needed, ensuring that accountability is not a one-off exercise but embedded throughout delivery. Building on the strong foundations of these roadshow, maintaining this open, two-way engagement will be essential to ensuring the Strategy remains responsive, evidence-led and rooted in the lived experience of young people and those who support them.

Conclusion

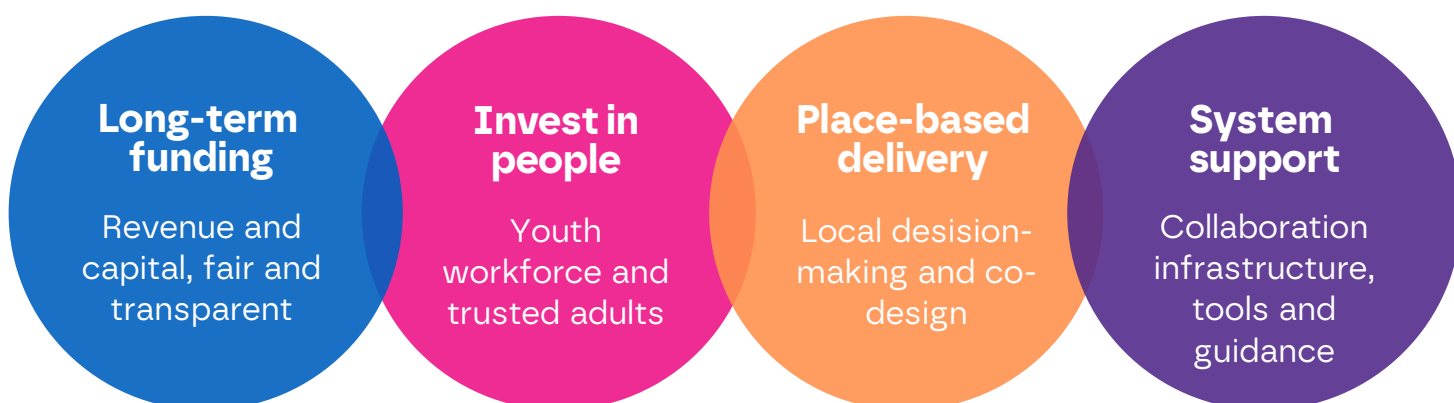
Overall, the events were highly valued by participants, who engaged in meaningful discussions of what the National Youth Strategy means for their work and the young people they support.

They demonstrated a strong shared commitment across the youth sector, local systems and government to translating national ambition into meaningful change for young people. Participants welcomed the clarity of the Strategy's direction and its emphasis on local leadership, collaboration and youth voice, while also being clear about the conditions required for delivery to succeed.

These insights are already informing ongoing dialogue with government. DCMS officials' engagement throughout the roadshow was widely valued, and the openness shown to challenge and take on board local realities and sector expertise has helped establish a constructive basis for continued conversation. The issues raised through these events – particularly around funding structures, workforce sustainability, local decision-making and accountability – are now a shared reference point for further policy development and implementation planning.

The NYA, UK Youth and the Network of Regional Youth Work Units are committed to using these findings to shape our ongoing work with government, local authorities and sector partners. This includes embedding learning into national and regional support offers, contributing evidence to policy discussions, and supporting local areas to develop place-based approaches aligned with the Strategy's ambitions.

The roadshow made clear that delivery will depend not only on investment, but on trust, clarity and partnership over time. Maintaining open communication, sharing progress transparently and continuing to involve practitioners and young people in shaping solutions will be essential as the Strategy moves from vision to implementation.



Appendix 1. Partner resources

- [Join the UK YOUTH network](#)
- Sign up to our regular [NYA Network Newsletter](#) for youth work updates, and our [Policy Newsletter](#) for research and Westminster updates
- Make sure your provision is mapped as part of the National Youth Sector Census: [complete the Census](#)
- Regional Youth Work Units: [Find your local unit and join their network](#)
- [Sign up to the DCMS Youth newsletter](#)



Department
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Network of
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UK YOUTH

National Youth Agency

9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN

Company registration no. 2912597

Register charity in England and Wales no. 1035804

nya.org.uk