

Impact that lasts:

Ensuring Young Futures Hubs fulfil their potential



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Introduction: The Potential of Young Futures Hubs

The government's commitment to deliver Young Futures Hubs is welcome. In particular, it is encouraging that the government has recognised the need for increased provision of:

- Accessible mental health support for young people within their local communities
- Youth work support
- Careers guidance
- Dedicated youth spaces

Growing up in Britain is far more challenging than it should be, given that we are among the wealthiest nations in the world. Adolescence is always a time of change and will always involve difficulties, but the right policy decisions and the right provision can help to ensure that our young people are well-supported to navigate those difficulties, and to thrive.

At best, Young Futures Hubs could make a profound difference to young people across the country. First and foremost, on the most basic level, they must be places that young people are happy to go to, to see people that they are happy to speak with. Without that, they will fail. **At best, they should be accessible, welcoming, permanent spaces, much-loved by young people of all backgrounds, providing services and support which are: well-tailored to local needs; well-integrated into other local provision; and delivered by deeply passionate and highly skilled people, who work effectively in inter-disciplinary teams.**

Hubs should improve young people's mental health and wellbeing; weave them into supportive community networks; help them to stay safe; connect them with trusted adults who become significant positive figures in their lives; and guide them towards high-quality employment opportunities. They should become youth social infrastructure: not just a base for the delivery of services, but a place which enriches young people's social lives, in which they feel a strong sense of belonging, mattering, purpose and identity.

But the success of Young Futures Hubs is far from guaranteed. There are a range of factors which could impede or limit their effectiveness – factors which have all-too-often undermined other forms of youth provision in recent years. It is vital that these new Hubs do not repeat past mistakes.

Following a list of organisations who have endorsed this briefing, it contains three sections:

1. Headline recommendations
2. A detailed breakdown of key determinants for the success of Young Futures Hubs
3. A list of sources drawn upon for this paper

Organisations who have endorsed this briefing

This briefing – including its recommendations – has been endorsed by a range of national and local organisations spanning the youth work, youth advocacy, youth justice, mental health, criminal justice and housing support sectors. These organisations are listed below.

- UK Youth (www.ukyouth.org)
- Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition (www.cypmhc.org.uk)
- National Youth Agency (www.nya.org.uk)
- The Children’s Society (www.childrensociety.org.uk)
- Youth Access (www.youthaccess.org.uk)
- Alliance for Youth Justice (www.ayj.org.uk)
- National Association for Youth Justice (www.thenayj.org.uk)
- Association for Young People’s Health (www.ayph.org.uk)
- Centre for Mental Health (www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk)
- MAC-UK (www.mac-uk.org)
- Action for Race Equality (www.actionforraceequality.org.uk)
- YMCA George Williams College (www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk)
- Social Investment Business (www.sibgroup.org.uk)
- Football Beyond Borders (www.footballbeyondborders.org)
- National Youth Advocacy Service (www.nyas.net)
- London Youth (www.londonyouth.org)
- Partnership for Young London (www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk)
- Kinetic Youth (www.kineticyouth.co.uk)
- New Horizon Youth Centre (www.nhyouthcentre.org.uk)
- Reaching Higher (www.reachinghigher.org.uk)
- Young Somerset (www.youngsomerset.org.uk)
- High Trees Community Development Trust (www.high-trees.org)
- Depaul UK (www.depaul.org.uk)
- National Academy for Social Prescribing (www.socialprescribingacademy.org.uk)
- The Howard League for Penal Reform (www.howardleague.org)
- Unlock (www.unlock.org.uk)
- Wipers Youth CIC (www.wipers.org.uk)
- Clinks (www.clinks.org)
- Black Box Research & Consultancy (www.blackboxresearchandconsultancy.com)
- 1625 Independent People (www.1625ip.co.uk)
- Captiva Learning (www.captivalearning.com)
- Winston’s Wish (www.winstonswish.org)
- Crisalys Foundation (www.crisalys.org)

[List last updated 26/09/2024]

1. Headline Recommendations

These five recommendations represent key principles for the success of Young Futures Hubs. They are grounded in a detailed analysis of determinants of success for the Hubs, which can be found in the next section of this paper. These principles spell out the apt acronym LASTS. Young Futures Hubs must be an initiative that lasts, delivering a positive impact which lasts – rather than a short-lived and hastily forgotten policy concept.

- 1. Long-term: Young Futures Hubs should pursue long-term, collaborative, community-level impact.**
This must be prioritised over the pursuit of short-term, narrow, headline-grabbing outcomes. Effectively embedding youth provision within a community takes time. This necessitates long-term, secure funding arrangements, the incentivisation of collaborative working between different sectors and services (both within and beyond Hubs), and sophisticated evaluation. Measures of success must be multi-faceted, guided by a vision for youth flourishing, rather than narrow ‘performance targets’ which may inordinately focus on individual service agendas.
- 2. Area-based: Young Futures Hubs should be carefully contextualised to meet local needs and localised in their commissioning, design and delivery.** Hubs should be integrated into existing provision. In some cases, this may mean adding additional service capacity to existing youth spaces, rather than creating new hubs. The location and services of Hubs should be based on detailed understanding of local strengths, assets, needs, and gaps in provision. Commissioning of Hubs and Hub services should enable the participation of locally-rooted and smaller VCS organisations. Quality assurance principles and key parameters can be set nationally, to ensure consistency across the country, but this should not be at the cost of local adaptation.
- 3. Shaped by youth voice: Young Futures Hubs must be guided by the voices of local young people.** This is crucial if they are to be places that young people want to access and benefit from accessing. Hubs should have clear, positive identities which make them relevant and appealing to a broad range of local young people. Youth participation and influence should be integrated into their governance and service improvement plans. The scope of young peoples’ decision-making power within Hubs should be both expansive and well-defined, to avoid tokenism. Their look and feel should be shaped by local young people’s ideas and preferences.
- 4. Tailored to relational working: Young Futures Hubs should provide conducive conditions for relational practice and cultural humility.** Hub staff should be provided with the best possible working environment in which to develop trusting relationships with young people, as well as with other professionals. Relationships with young people should be grounded in clear boundaries but responsive to their needs and experiences. Hub staff practice should be rooted in an understanding of local young people’s cultural backgrounds, including their experiences of racism, discrimination and prejudice.
- 5. Social infrastructure: Young Futures Hubs should become youth social infrastructure.** Rather than just a physical base for the delivery of services, Hubs should be places in which young people feel a strong sense of belonging, mattering, purpose and identity. This requires the delivery of more open-ended, flexible, relational support, alongside specific services and programmatic interventions. This may involve both group-based and individualised initiatives, as well as both targeted and open-access provision. If they are to be accessed by a large number of young people from a wide variety of backgrounds, Hubs must become ‘part of the furniture’ in local neighbourhoods, rather than being perceived by young people as generic council buildings or clinics. Combined with recommendations 1-4, this means that there should be a diversity of forms of Hub provision in different places. This represents an excellent opportunity to develop evidence and learning about how well-tailored local provision can effectively meet local need.

2. Determinants of Success

Outlined below are a set of factors which could ‘make or break’ the success of Young Futures Hubs. The factors are organised into themes. Enablers of and barriers to success are identified for each factor.

Theme	Factor	Enablers of success	Barriers to success
COMMISSIONING AND OVERSIGHT	Competition	Fair commissioning processes which minimise dysfunctional competition, especially on a local level. Collaboration encouraged.	Competitive commissioning which pitches multiple under-funded agencies (and/or local authorities) against one another. Tendering processes favouring larger, less locally-rooted providers, led by expedience over rigour.
	Commissioning agency/agencies	Commissioning led by agencies with strong, on-the-ground understanding of local needs, e.g. experience of running local provision.	Commissioning led by agencies with only a ‘desk-based’, superficial understanding of local needs, e.g. restricted to published data.
	Decision-making process	Young people involved in shaping tenders and making commissioning decisions. Decisions guided by more than written bids.	Tick-box decision-making process favouring those with the most administrative and bid-writing capacity.
	Longevity	Long-term, secure funding arrangements enabling Hubs to be built to last, guided by long-term plans.	Short-term, precarious funding could drive inefficiencies, e.g. by necessitating the perennial pursuit of insecure core funding grants.
	Centralised vs localised	Standards and parameters set from the centre, but localised commissioning, enabling the participation of grassroots, locally-established VCS organisations.	Centralised, generic commissioning, favouring national organisations with minimal local reach or reputation. Limited analysis of local ecosystems of provision prior to commissioning.
	Timescales	Adequate time allowed for the development of local commissioning arrangements which are attentive to the needs and particularities of local neighbourhoods.	Inappropriately tight timescales: commissioning agencies under pressure to get ‘money out the door’; prospective providers forced to rush their proposals.
	Strategic oversight	Clear lines of local oversight, involving one or more partnership body such as Health and Wellbeing Boards, Integrated Commissioning Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, and Police and Crime Commissioners. Effective oversight in place whilst respecting the operational autonomy of Hubs.	Confused strategic oversight. Multiple bodies seeing Hubs as under ‘their’ jurisdiction. ‘Mission creep’ as Hubs are pulled towards the imperatives of a single strategic body inappropriately (e.g. PCC pulls Hubs towards overweening focus on crime). Strategic overseer(s) micromanaging operational delivery.
DESIGN PHASE	Needs assessments	Plans for Hubs are developed with close attentiveness to the specific need profile of local young people – tapping into expertise of local youth professionals and full breadth of existing data and evidence bases (e.g. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments).	Hubs could be developed too generically, without sufficient attentiveness to local need. Or extensive local needs assessments and provision mapping could be initiated which merely duplicate existing data and evidence, and/or neglect local professional expertise.
	Youth participation	Local young people should be involved in every aspect of local Hubs’ design.	No involvement or highly tokenistic involvement of local young people in Hub design.
	Physical design – look & feel	The look and feel of the Hubs is carefully thought about, in close consultation with young people and youth professionals, to ensure that they are welcoming, accessible, inclusive, comfortable, and safe youth-friendly spaces.	Physical designs could be unwelcoming and off-putting. Hubs could feel too clinical, impersonal or securitised. Their design could lead Hubs to become associated inordinately with particular issues, needs or services, meaning that they are viewed as only relevant to a narrow range of young people.

Theme	Factor	Enablers of success	Barriers to success
LOCALISATION	“One size fits all” vs tailored	Hubs should be tailored to local areas. This could involve bolstering existing provision rather than creating a new Hub – e.g. mental health, youth work or careers provision could be added to existing youth spaces, or hub-and-spoke models could be used.	A generic Hub model could be imposed on all areas, resulting in a lack of tailoring to local need, including potential duplication. Every area could feel obliged to create a new Hub, even in places where there is an existing ecosystem of trusted organisations working with young people.
	Integration with other provision and services	Hubs should be carefully integrated into existing local provision. In particular, they should have strong working relationships with local education settings, social care, health services, VCS organisations, VRUs, youth services and careers provision.	Hubs could exist in isolation from other services. Other services could be confused about what Hubs offer or which young people they can support. Other services could view Hubs as competitors.
	Location	Hubs should be carefully located, to maximise all young people’s access.	Hubs could be located without consideration of potential territorial issues or other boundaries, such as travel connections.
	Identity	Hubs should have a clear, positive local identity, which helps them to appeal to a broad range of young people.	Hubs could lack identity, viewed as a merely clinical space, or could have a stigmatised identity, if associated with particular issues.
SERVICES AND PROVISION	Multi-agency working	Hubs should be a base for mutually respectful and supportive collaboration – both between the professionals based in the Hub, and others working locally, including both strategic and case-by-case collaboration.	Services within Hubs could remain siloed and uncommunicative. They could work to different agendas and view young people through incompatible lenses – e.g. criminal justice and welfare. They could lack a collective vision of what youth flourishing means in and for the Hub.
	Relational practice	Hubs should provide conducive conditions for relational practice: all aspects of their operation should support the development of trusted relationships between staff and young people, and amongst professionals.	Due to large caseloads; inadequate support, supervision or training; high pressure; or burdensome paperwork (for instance), staff could be prevented from building trusting relationships with young people, or each other.
	Programmatic delivery and flexible support	Hubs should provide a blend of specific services, programmatic interventions (i.e. with set thresholds, timescales etc.), and more flexible relational support, responsive to young people’s needs.	Hubs could deliver only very specific services or rigid interventions which do not meet local needs. Or Hubs could go too far in the other direction – only delivering very flexible, ill-defined support.
	Evidence base & service improvement	Hub provision should be guided by a range of evidence, including formal evaluations, quantitative and qualitative research, lived experience, and professional expertise.	Hubs could be inadequately evidence-informed, or could be inordinately directed by a narrow range of evidence. The appearance of innovation could be pursued at the expense of quality.
	Youth participation & voice	Hubs should have robust structures for ensuring that they are responsive to young people’s needs and preferences.	Hubs could lack any structures or processes for youth participation or voice in their governance or operations. Youth voice could be tokenistic.
	Cultural adaptation and humility	Hubs must be responsive to the cultures of young people, and attentive to their experiences of racism and discrimination.	Hubs could perpetuate injustice, discrimination and prejudice. Hubs could fail to respond to cultural diversity, richness, assets, and needs.
	Access and referrals	It should be very clear who can access Hubs for what, how and when – especially to young people. Referral processes should be clear and simple.	Young people could be confused about whether/how they can access Hub provision. Referral processes could be complex and burdensome.

Theme	Factor	Enablers of success	Barriers to success
STAFF	Recruitment	As far as possible, staff should be recruited locally, on the basis of expertise and experience, understanding of local needs and provision, and capacity to build relationships with young people. This should be supported by local anchor institutions (e.g. NHS, local authorities, universities).	Recruitment processes could favour generic competencies, resulting in a staff body which does not reflect the local area, and which is ill-equipped to effectively build relationships with young people. Or, by contrast, recruitment processes could inadequately assess competencies, experience and expertise.
	Training, development and retention	Hubs should prioritise the training, development and retention of their staff, including through activities which bring together staff from different services and professional backgrounds, and connect Hub staff with other local professionals.	Hubs could inadequately train and develop their staff. Training could all be offered in-house, such that opportunities are missed for Hub staff to share learning and expertise with other local professionals. Staff turnover could become a significant problem.
	Working conditions	Staff pay and working conditions should enable them to live in the local area (if desired), and to have a good standard of living, enabling them to provide the best possible service to young people.	Inadequate Hub staff pay and working conditions could severely undermine their capacity to effectively support young people. This could also cause severe recruitment and retention problems.
	Supervision and support	Hub staff should receive supervision as appropriate to their roles. They should have opportunities for individual and group reflective practice.	Insufficient support could result in staff burnout, especially through vicarious trauma. Inadequate supervision could result in harmful practice.
PRIORITY OUTCOMES	Measures of success	A range of quantitative and qualitative measures should be used to evaluate Hubs' success, including over the long term, factoring in sufficient time for Hubs to bed in. These measures should be carefully consulted on, both at a central government and more local level – there should be a mix of national 'headline' measures and more locally-defined indicators (e.g. derived from local children and young people's strategies). Measures should combine direct impact on young people supported, and relevant data trends in Hub areas.	A rigid set of simplistic performance targets could drive Hubs towards a narrowed focus. An inordinate focus on particular measures could contort service provision, e.g. through perverse incentives. Too much emphasis on short-term, high-stakes audit, especially if tied to funding arrangements, could detract from adequate attentiveness to long-term impact and service improvement. Too much emphasis on quant measures could result in vital non-numerical insights being neglected, restricting learning and improvement, especially with regard to good practice in relational working.
	Evaluation and learning activities	A range of both process and outcome evaluation activities should be used, including well-designed user voice exercises. The focus of such activities should be on learning and improvement.	Onerous monitoring and evaluation could detract from direct work with young people. External evaluators could be incentivised to provide a low cost, poor quality service through commissioning arrangements for evaluation.
	Collaborative impact and societal change	Hub staff should be incentivised and supported to work closely together to support the flourishing of young people – without any single 'service agenda' holding inordinate power. Hubs should be incentivised and supported to work closely with other local provision in pursuit of shared goals, including significant societal change – e.g. reduced youth poverty and homelessness, increased local employment.	Hub services could work to their own agendas and outcome measures, hampering collaboration and undermining young people's experiences of Hubs. Particular services or objectives could dominate. Hubs could be incentivised to compete with other services, 'credit claim' or 'hoard' young people, rather than collaborating and sharing credit for successes.

3. Sources drawn upon

The analysis in this paper draws upon a number of sources. This includes academic research directly undertaken by the author, as well as other research studies, policy reports and relevant strategy documents.

The Public Health, Youth and Violence Reduction study

This paper draws most substantially upon the four-year, ESRC-funded Public Health, Youth and Violence Reduction (PHYVR) study (ESRC project reference ES/T005793/1), which the author worked on as a Research Associate. The study focused on the policy and practice contexts of violence reduction in England, Wales and Scotland, and therefore involved an extensive examination of various forms of youth provision.



The research for this study took place between 2021 and 2023, involving qualitative interviews with 112 key actors in violence reduction policy and practice. This included actors involved in the development and evaluation of policy at a strategic level in Holyrood and Westminster, as well as the public sector, and included senior civil servants, current and former Ministers, strategic leads for violence within the police, leaders of key public sector agencies, and the Directors of all twenty Violence Reduction Units in England and Wales. At the level of practice, interviews focused on social workers, youth practitioners and leaders of third sector organisations working in Glasgow and London. Interviews were supplemented by observations at meetings, events, and workshops in an effort to situate interviews within the ‘assumptive worlds’ of policymakers. Preliminary analyses were presented to groups of policymakers in Edinburgh and London.

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