

EY Foundation 2025-26 Impact Report TEXT ONLY document

Powering young futures

Welcome

Hello and welcome as we reflect on the EY Foundation's impact over the last year (July 2025 to June 2026).

I am immensely proud of our achievements this year and the positive changes we've seen in the young people we work with.

It's been an exciting year where we've seen growth in our influencing activity. And it is so wonderful to see the different strands of our work combining to identify insights that can help to achieve society-wide change.

Personal highlights for me include meeting the new Youth Voice Forum members and attending one of our programmes in Edinburgh.

As we work towards enabling all young people from low-income backgrounds to have an employment and earnings potential that is equitable to other young people in the UK, we will continue to drive insights that will enable us to work with decision makers, employers, and schools to make this a reality.

Thank you for reading our impact report and we appreciate your continued support.

Edel Harris OBE

Board Chair, EY Foundation

Hello, we're Amena and Humaira, Programme Representatives as part of the Youth Voice Forum (YVF) and EY Foundation alumni.

Our journey with the EY Foundation began as programme participants, where we gained the confidence, skills and opportunities to take the next steps towards our careers. Today, we're proud to give back by helping ensure that even more young people can benefit from the same life-changing support that has had a positive impact on us.

The Youth Voice Forum was created to ensure that young people's voices remain at the heart of the EY Foundation's work. Since joining in January, we've collaborated with fellow members, shared our lived experiences, and worked alongside EY Foundation colleagues to help shape programmes and initiatives for future participants. From co-creating and piloting new workshops to contributing to the development of Smart Futures interview questions, we've seen how listening to young people can lead to meaningful change.

As we continue our tenure, we're excited to build on this work, amplify more young voices and contribute to projects that create opportunities for young people from low-income backgrounds across England and Scotland.

Thank you to everyone who supports the EY Foundation and its initiatives. We hope this report demonstrates the impact that can be achieved when young people, employers and communities work together to drive social mobility and create brighter futures.

Amena and Humaira

Youth Voice Forum Members and EY Foundation Alumni

Our purpose

Our ambition and approach

Who we are

All young people have the talent and potential to succeed in the workplace. But while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not, with young people from low-income backgrounds twice as likely not to be in education, employment, or training ([NEET](#)).

The EY Foundation is an independent charity founded by EY in 2014 with the ambition to enable all young people from low-income backgrounds to have an employment and earnings potential that is equitable to other young people in the UK.

What we do

Operating in regions across the country, we bring young people and employers together to deliver high- quality employability skills training, paid work experience, and mentoring. Our programmes build skills, confidence, and a greater sense of purpose that young people need to thrive in the workplace.

It's not just the young people who benefit — by collaborating closely with employers, we can support them to change how they recruit and develop young people. By working with local talent, employers can build a more diverse workforce and increase staff engagement.

In addition to directly supporting young people, we generate research and insights to help achieve systemic change at a regional and national level. Insights from across our work, including programme delivery, original research, and piloting new interventions, enable us to influence policies by making recommendations to decision-makers that have been tested with young people and employers.

How we work

We centre young people's voices throughout our work, engaging them directly to ensure the system-wide changes we recommend are based on their experiences and needs. We also work closely with employers so that our recommendations can be implemented and delivered successfully.

Across all aspects of our work, we are data-led, following the evidence of what works and using it to inform new ideas and solutions to deliver systemic change. And we continue to extend our impact by seeking opportunities to collaborate and partner with our main supporter EY, other employers, policymakers and non-profits in our sector.

Key highlights this year

Our young people and programmes

- Supported 3,780 young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) across our programmes and workshops.
- Launched our new Youth Voice Forum with 10 young people.
- Delivered new programme content focused on intrinsic motivation training, wellbeing at work guidance, as well as additional support linked to apprenticeship applications. This included numerical reasoning practice and preparation for assessment activities.

- Piloted a Business Academy model as an additional way to provide meaningful experiences of work where 150 young people took part in structured “day in the life” sessions with different teams, employers and sectors.

Our systems change work

- Delivered Beyond Horizons, a place-based pilot in Bradford bringing together schools, employers and local partners to provide a more impactful and accessible experience of the workplace for Year 8 students, in line with updated statutory careers guidance.
- Launched an AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize — a first-of-its-kind UK initiative supporting ventures using AI and emerging technologies to improve social mobility outcomes for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Convened three employer roundtables exploring what further actions employers can take to drive social mobility.
- Hosted two events at the Labour Party Conference on work experience, AI and opportunity as well as our intrinsic motivation work with the Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW).
- Joined the Social Mobility Alliance, strengthening our collaboration with organisations committed to improving social mobility across the UK.
- Submitted evidence to both the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and Alan Milburn’s Youth Employment Review, drawing on insights from our programmes.

Original research

- Contributed to an All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Future of Work event exploring the impact of technological disruption on young people’s working lives, where a member of our Youth Voice Forum also shared their lived experience, helping to inform parliamentary discussions.
- Published three complementary reports with the Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW) to help educators, employers and policymakers embed motivation-based approaches within existing skills training and careers-focused programmes.
- Partnered with Demos to explore how employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), can boost social mobility for young people.
- Ran a workshop with Year 12 students on what they want from companies designing generative AI for education. Learnings from this event informed the Department for Education (DfE) report on how AI education tools can be better aligned with the needs of young people.

Our Impact

A year at the EY Foundation

- 3,780 FSM-eligible young people supported
- 43 high impact programmes delivered
- 299 employers engaged
- 9 regions reached across the UK
- 3,294 volunteering opportunities
- 1,805 unique volunteers
- 115 short term interventions
- 30+ organisations engaged in the Discovery Phase of the Challenge Prize
- 5 reports published

- 1st parliamentary reception event with 100 attendees
- 8 committed project partners delivering the UK's first AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize

Who are our young people?*

Gender split**

- 48% identify as female
- 52% identify as male

Demographics

- 45% Asian
- 29% Black
- 2% Chinese
- 4% Mixed Heritage
- 4% Arab
- 13% White
- 2% prefer not to say
- 1% other

* These statistics are based on 1,327 responses from participants on our Smart Futures and Your Future programmes.

** 10 young people identify as either non-binary or preferred not to say.

Where they go next

Through our destinations survey, we track whether alumni are studying, working or combining both. Since 2020, we have received 1,989 responses. This analysis focuses on 418 alumni who completed the survey on at least two occasions. Comparing their first and second responses gives us a clearer view of how their education and employment changed over time. The findings show a gradual transition into work, with education continuing alongside employment.

Outcomes

First and second responses

	First response	Second response
In education only	44%	28%
In education and employment (including apprenticeships)	36%	39%
In employment only	14%	27%
In neither	5%	7%

Employment increased while education continued

The proportion of our alumni working increased from 50% at their first response to 65% at their second. This did not come at the expense of learning. At the second response, 39% were combining education and employment, while a further 28% remained in education only.

For many alumni, the transition into a career is gradual. Education and employment overlap as young people complete qualifications, gain experience and move towards work as their main activity.

What this means for our work

Following alumni journeys helps us understand routes from education into careers and where barriers remain. Combined with our programme learning, research and insight from employers, this evidence can strengthen our direct support for young people and inform our approach to achieving wider systems change.

“If you’d asked me last year, I never would’ve imagined myself in a corporate setting, but thanks to the guidance... on the Smart Futures programme I’m achieving things I never thought possible. Even presenting and pitching my own ideas with confidence (a huge win in my books as someone with a stutter)!”

Caine, Smart Futures Participant 2026

The Voice of Young People

Youth Voice Forum

Youth engagement is essential at the EY Foundation because it ensures young people are at the centre of the organisation’s work and are active partners in shaping programmes, policies, and opportunities that affect them. By embedding youth voice across the EY Foundation, we recognise young people’s expertise and insight, and create meaningful opportunities for them to influence decision-making.

This year’s transition from the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to the Youth Voice Forum (YVF) reflects our commitment to strengthen and broaden youth voice across the organisation. While the YAB played a vital role in ensuring young people could share their perspectives and influence the Foundation’s work, the YVF builds on this foundation by creating a more integrated model of engagement, where young people contribute to strategic projects and organisational decision-making from the beginning through their new representative roles across key areas of the Foundation.

In December 2025, the YAB Celebration Event, marked the end of the 2024–25 YAB cohort’s tenure and provided an opportunity to celebrate their impact. The event showcased key achievements and major projects such as the Comms Takeover, Board Away Day, and Youth Town Hall, and highlighted the personal and professional growth of YAB members throughout their two-year journey.

Hear from the Youth Voice Forum

We are the Youth Voice Forum (YVF), a group of 10 young people from across the country who are passionate about improving opportunities for young people from low-income and free school meal (FSM) backgrounds. Our role at the Foundation is to help ensure that youth voice remains at the heart of its work, with each of us representing key areas such as Communications, Fundraising, Corporate Partnerships, Programmes, Digital and Impact.

Since the beginning of our two-year term, we’ve supported a range of initiatives, including:

- Supporting the Foundation’s Mud Trial
- Speaking at an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the future of work
- Attending the Social Mobility Alliance breakfast event in Parliament
- Facilitating a social mobility workshop on AI for an EY Social Mobility Network event
- Contributing to the Foundation’s brochure presented to potential corporate partners, as well as the annual Impact Report
- Supporting the Foundation’s communications by featuring in Reels and promoting the Impact Awards

These experiences have given us the opportunity to have our voices heard to shape initiatives driving social mobility for young people. And, we've had the pleasure of meeting and working with other amazing individuals with the same passion, from EY Foundation staff and supporters to educational institutions and partner organisations.

Spotlight Stories

James Manley, EY Foundation Programme Alum and EY Apprentice

I think one of the biggest barriers is access to opportunities. Not everyone grows up knowing what professional careers are out there or how to get into them, so even understanding the different pathways available can be a challenge.

The programme gave me my first real insight into a professional environment and helped build my confidence quickly.

A big part of the experience for me was the support I received, especially from my mentor. They helped me with things like writing my first CV for a part-time job, improving my revision techniques, and giving guidance on UCAS personal statements and apprenticeship applications. That kind of support made a huge difference at an early stage.

I chose to pursue a degree apprenticeship ... [and] I'm now working in the same team I first did my work experience in, and I've never looked back.

Read James's [full blog](#) to find out about ...

- His time on the programme
- His thoughts on barriers to employment for young people
- What more schools and employers should be doing to support social mobility
- And his advice to young people from low-income backgrounds looking to enter the same sector

Olivia Agbe, Programme Coordinator at Envision, Ex-EYF YAB Member, and EY Foundation Alumnus

Before the Smart Futures programme, my first-hand experience with the world of work and specifically the professional services industry was extremely limited. The programme shone light on the opportunities available to me and encouraged me to see myself in spaces I hadn't even previously considered. Coming from inner city Birmingham, it sometimes feels like you are in a bubble and it takes one opportunity or person to show you that there is so much outside of that bubble.

For me, Smart Futures and my time on the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) were pivotal in supporting my growth in confidence, networking skills and fostered my passion for youth empowerment. Meeting other young people from different walks of life also helped me to diversify my worldview and helped me to meet like-minded peers on the journey.

I am now in a full-time role, at another social mobility charity working with young people, after graduating last year — the Foundation was such a driving force in supporting my growth, direction, and success!

How we create change

By bringing young people and employers together, we impact both sides of the labour market. Our programmes support young people to have the employability skills, experience and mindset needed to thrive. We support employers to change how they work with young people. And we generate original insight to support broader systems change by trialling new interventions and through original research.

Our programmes

Smart Futures

Smart Futures provides paid employability skills training, paid work experience and up to twelve months of mentoring for 16- and 17-year-olds.

Young people develop their understanding of careers alongside core employability skills such as leadership, communication, presenting and networking.

The programme can be delivered virtually, face-to-face or through a hybrid model, allowing us to respond to the needs of young people, employers and local labour markets. Each version is tailored to specific sectors and career pathways, helping young people build the knowledge, confidence and experience they need to take their next steps.

We continue to evolve the programme based on feedback from young people, employers, volunteers and EY Foundation teams. Recent developments include new content focused on intrinsic motivation, wellbeing at work, as well as additional support linked to apprenticeship applications, including numerical reasoning practice and preparation for assessment activities.

Transferrable skills development

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Self confidence	50%	95%	+45%
Presentation skills	39%	91%	+52%
Business networking skills	49%	96%	+47%

Careers advice received

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Knowledge of what employers are looking for when recruiting	43%	96%	+53%
Development of CV skills	44%	89%	+45%
Development of interview skills	48%	95%	+47%

Statistics based on 773 young people who completed both pre- and post-programme surveys and whose stated answer was 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

988 young people supported.

"This journey has not only boosted my confidence, communication, and teamwork skills, but also helped me realise my passion for marketing and gave me clarity on the direction I want to take in the future!"

Rubie, Smart Futures Participant 2026

"Judging the EY Foundation's Smart Futures business challenge gave me the chance to see first-hand how young people can thrive when they're given the opportunity to tackle real-world challenges. I was seriously impressed by the proposals the teams presented, their confidence in making their business case and the great way they worked together in their

teams. If we are serious about preventing more young people from becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) and advancing social mobility, programmes that bring together young people and employers have an important role to play by giving young people the confidence, experience and skills they need to succeed.”

Charlotte Cane, MP & Programme business challenge judge

Your Future

Your Future supports young people who are ready to move straight into employment after school or college. The programme provides two weeks of paid employability skills training and work experience, alongside dedicated employment coaching for up to six months.

Reflecting our ambition to help young people not only prepare for work but move into work, we partner directly with employers offering entry-level opportunities and apprenticeships. Young people build confidence, develop practical skills and gain exposure to the workplace, while receiving tailored support to help them take their next step.

Transferrable skills development

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Self confidence	50%	95%	+45%
Presentation skills	31%	91%	+60%
Business networking skills	41%	96%	+55%

Careers advice received

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Knowledge of what employers are looking for when recruiting	47%	93%	+46%
Development of CV skills	43%	97%	+54%
Development of interview skills	46%	95%	+49%

Statistics based on 113 young people who completed both pre- and post-programme surveys and whose stated answer was ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’.

- 132 young people engaged
- 74% of Your Future participants are currently in employment, education or training 12 months post programme

“This programme built me skills in leadership, negotiation, creativity, public speaking and professional communication. I hope to carry all of these into my apprenticeship ...”

Kledjan, Your Future 2025

Step into Business

Step into Business supports 16- to 19-year-olds who are interested in entrepreneurship but may lack access to the networks, guidance or funding needed to get started. The programme was created in response to the ambitions of young people on our programmes who wanted to explore starting their own business or social enterprise. Participants take part in an intensive full-day workshop, meet entrepreneurs and professionals, and are matched with a business coach for six months.

They also have the opportunity to pitch for a start-up grant of up to £2,000, helping them turn their ideas into practical action. Since launching, Step into Business has supported more than 400 young people and awarded grants to 19 young entrepreneurs to develop their business ideas.

Business knowledge, skills and network development

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Awareness and understanding of the different types of companies	29%	93%	+64%
Ability to communicate and explain your business idea	33%	89%	+56%
Understanding of how to research and grow your knowledge of your chosen market	30%	85%	+55%

Statistics based on 107 young people who completed both pre- and post-programme surveys and whose stated answer was 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

148 FSM-eligible young people supported this year.

“Step into business’ has given me the confidence and support to turn my business idea into something real. The grant has allowed me to invest in the resources and equipment I needed to get started, which would have been difficult otherwise. It’s helped me take meaningful steps towards building my business and has motivated me to keep developing my idea further.”

Zahrah, Step into Business Grantee

“Step into business’ has been massive for me and Trust Edge. The guidance really helped me figure out the best way to get practical financial skills out to young people. And getting the grant meant we could actually get things off the ground – building our site, sorting the branding and reaching out to schools. It’s given me the proper backing and confidence to take the idea and run with it.”

David, Step into Business Grantee

Employability workshops

Our employability and enrichment workshops support thousands of young people across England and Scotland to build confidence, develop workplace skills and better understand future career pathways.

These two-hour sessions help young people connect with employers, learn about the local labour market and explore routes into work, from apprenticeships to graduate careers.

Through career stories, team challenges and practical activities, young people develop skills such as communication, teamwork and presenting, giving them a stronger foundation as they prepare for the world of work.

Career awareness

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Awareness of different career paths	43%	68%	+25%
Awareness of what employers are looking for when recruiting	38%	60%	+22%
Understanding of what a job application requires	38%	60%	+22%

Motivation and confidence

	Pre programme	Post programme	Difference
Confidence and optimism felt about your future	60%	78%	+18%
Motivation felt towards achieving your future career goals	64%	88%	+24%
Confidence in working in a team with other people	62%	81%	+19%

Statistics based on 47 young people who completed both pre- and post-programme surveys and whose stated answer was 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

* We deliver these workshops in schools in areas of high deprivation; however, we do not filter participants by FSM eligibility, and therefore we work with some young people who are not part of the core group we aim to support.

- 2,392 employability workshop participants (FSM)
- 824 employability workshop participants (non-FSM)*

"I learnt a lot about career paths, and it has expanded my thoughts on what to pursue."

Mercator Workshop Participant

"The main thing I learnt was how different skills can be applied across different job roles and sometimes a skill from one job can be used in others to work more effectively."

Mercator Workshop Participant

Bringing employers and young people together

The EY Foundation designs and delivers structured work experience and skills programmes that bring together young people from low- income backgrounds and our employer partners.

The strength of these partnerships is where our impact lies. By connecting young people with businesses, we create meaningful outcomes for both: helping young people build the skills, confidence and networks they need to succeed, while supporting employers to develop more inclusive talent pipelines and workplace practices.

For young people, these programmes provide valuable insight into the world of work, exposing them to different career pathways, and demonstrating the contribution they can make in professional environments. For employers, we offer end-to-end programme delivery, creating rewarding opportunities for staff engagement, supporting inclusive recruitment ambitions, and providing practical, accessible ways to advance social mobility within their organisations.

Our partnership approach is industry-specific, working with employers across sectors that young people are most interested in pursuing careers in. Each programme is tailored to reflect the opportunities, challenges and trends shaping these industries.

This year we worked with over 20 employer partners who supported our programmes across a range of industries, including technology, real estate, private equity, banking and finance, sustainability, and actuarial services. Through funding, expertise and engagement, they helped us create more meaningful pathways into these sectors for young people.

Employer Case Study

Employer: Institute and Faculty of Actuaries

The actuarial sector is evolving rapidly and is often viewed as one of the most exciting and rewarding industries within which to develop a career. However, it is failing to attract and retain talent from diverse and low socioeconomic backgrounds.

We ran two programmes with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in London and Edinburgh, where we welcomed 24 young people, 8 businesses and 58 volunteers in total.

After the London programme, 92% of young people reported gaining a good understanding of the career opportunities in the actuarial sector, while 93% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would want to work in the actuarial sector following completion of the Edinburgh programme.

As part of our employer voice series, we've been working with our employer partners to spotlight why and how they work with us and what they are doing to actively support young people into their organisations.

- The Careers & Enterprise Company: [Understanding impactful work experience opportunities with Marnie Bourne](#)
- Ofcom: [Ofcom's Approach to Meaningful Work Experience: A Q&A with Kelly Godden](#)
- University of Warwick: [Inside University of Warwick's Social Mobility Journey: A Conversation with Claire Algar](#)
- BLGC: [How Bolton Lads & Girls Club is championing opportunities for young people: a Q&A with Emma Hutchinson](#)

"Overall, it was a great experience, and I definitely gained further insight into the actuarial world. ... I really liked one [a careers talk] that focussed on the use of analytics because we got to see the dynamics of a group of actuaries and I think that was helpful in gauging the work environment."

Salem, Data Driven Futures Participant

“Through this programme, and the partnerships that enable it, we’re opening up meaningful opportunities for young people who may face barriers into employment, while raising awareness of the value and impact of the actuarial profession.”

Chloe Duncan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Business Partner, Institute and Faculty of Actuaries

Spotlight Story

Ibraheem Ghanchi, Your Future Participant and EY Foundation Intern

Like many young people from lower-income backgrounds, I faced barriers when trying to enter employment. In particular, gaining meaningful work experience wasn’t always straightforward.

Joining the Your Future programme was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Over the course of the programme, I stepped outside my comfort zone, built meaningful relationships and developed confidence I didn’t realise I had. The programme wasn’t just about employability skills. It helped me grow as a person.

It also gave me the confidence to take a gap year rather than rush into a path that didn’t feel right for me.

Giving me time to grow, mature, and gain experiences that have shaped both my personal and professional development.

The programme gave me the confidence to apply for the EY Foundation Internship — it helped me realise how much I enjoyed connecting with people, building relationships, and supporting others. I knew that the internship would allow me to continue developing those skills while giving back to other young people.

In September, I will begin an Audit Degree Apprenticeship with RSM. My long-term goal is to qualify as a Chartered Accountant, but I hope to remain involved in opportunities that allow me to give back and help others reach their potential.

Read full blog [here](#).

Our systems change work

Programme insights

Beyond Horizons

Building on [commissioned research](#) and place-based workshops and co-design sessions, we developed Beyond Horizons, a place-based pilot designed for Year 8 students, aged 12–13, to build confidence, awareness and agency before key education and career decisions are made.

From April — June 2026, this pilot was delivered across four schools in the Bradford District, engaging over 100 young people from Keighley to Manningham.

The programme brings together schools, employers and local partners to provide a more structured and accessible experience of the workplace, moving beyond one-off encounters towards a more coherent journey, in line with updated statutory careers guidance.

Through the pilot, we have been testing several core elements:

- Starting conversations earlier — Introducing work-related learning at Key Stage 3

- A broader definition of work experience — Combining strengths- based learning, exposure to local labour market information, and immersive workplace experiences to provide a more rounded understanding of work.
- A place-based approach — Connecting young people to local employers, sectors and role models.
- Evolving employer engagement — Supporting employers, including SMEs, to engage meaningfully, by sharing career journeys and co-developing activities, exploring work experience that extends beyond placements.
- A more coordinated local system — Exploring how schools, employers and partners can work together to deliver more consistent and meaningful experiences, reflecting principles from the ‘economies of coordination’ approach.

Together, these elements aim to test a model that is practical for schools, accessible for employers, and grounded in local context, with potential for wider application.

“The change in some of the pupils on the course has been huge. Big changes in confidence and communication in a short amount of time. Never underestimate how this can change their lives — the impact is immeasurable. Students have already asked me for careers interviews and started being more communicative in school with members of staff.”

Maria Humpherson, Associate Assistant Head Teacher, Beckfoot Oakbank School

“I enjoyed it very much and I might have a new job I want that better matches my strengths and qualities.”

Beyond Horizons Participant

“Because today made me acknowledge some strengths that I didn’t even know I had.”

Beyond Horizons Participant

Following the pilot’s completion, several early insights are emerging from delivery. There are strong indications of progress in young people’s awareness and confidence:

- 75% of young people indicated progress in their understanding of general and local labour market information.
- Two in three young people reported development in key areas such as motivation towards future career goals, confidence, and identification of personal skills gaps and support needs.

Teachers responded positively to the programme’s structure, particularly its ability to bring together different elements of careers education into a coherent journey. Their feedback highlighted the ongoing importance of brokerage to connect schools with supportive employers.

Feedback from employers suggests the pilot is encouraging new ways of thinking about work experience, particularly at Key Stage 3 and the role they can and should play. This includes greater recognition of the value of earlier engagement, alongside increased confidence in supporting young people and a willingness to continue involvement.

Testing new models of work experience

This year, we piloted a Business Academy model as an additional way to provide meaningful experiences of work.

Rather than individual placements, young people took part in structured “day in the life” sessions with different teams, employers and sectors. This gave them exposure to a wider range of roles while still developing key workplace skills through practical, team-based activities.

Early feedback has been positive, with young people valuing the opportunity to meet professionals, understand different career pathways and build confidence, communication and teamwork skills.

The pilot also gave us useful learning, including the importance of keeping sessions interactive, varied and practical. Going forward, the Business Academy model will be integrated as a delivery option for programmes across the year, so we will have a mixture of traditional placements and the Academy model for programme business experiences.

Average feedback score: Rated their experience 8.2 out of 10. Based on 54 feedback responses across Manchester, London and Birmingham.

Future of work

Department for Education — AI in Education Consultation

As part of our work to understand the impact of AI on the young people we support, we asked a cohort of Year 12 students what they want from companies designing generative AI for education during a workshop designed by Connected by Data. Young people are aware of the benefits and risks of AI and have a range of views on where they want and don't want AI to be used in education. Most popularly they want AI...

- To help students research new topics
- To be used as a writing aid for students
- To help bring learning to life e.g., virtual worlds

Learnings from this session informed the Department for Education's (DfE) report exploring how AI tools can be better aligned with the needs of education, which was presented at their 2026 Summit on Generative AI in Education, with international ministers, experts and AI companies.

Challenge Prize

The AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize has launched as a first-of-its-kind UK initiative supporting ventures using AI and emerging technologies to improve social mobility outcomes for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Delivered by EY Foundation and Social Tech Trust, in partnership with the Social Mobility Commission, and supported by Microsoft, HSF Kramer, EY, Fieldfisher, and LinkedIn, the programme will back practical, responsible, and scalable solutions that help young people access pathways into education, skills, employment and long-term opportunity.

The programme responds to a growing need to ensure the opportunities created by AI and emerging technologies are shared more equitably. While there are growing concerns that technological change could reinforce existing inequalities, it also presents a major opportunity through AI, to widen access to personalised learning, career guidance, mentoring, digital skills, employability support, and professional networks for young people who have historically faced barriers to opportunity.

The AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize is seeking ventures developing solutions across all of these opportunity areas. Selected ventures will join a cohort programme focused on venture growth, impact development, and capital readiness.

"Too often, a young person's prospects are shaped by where they grow up, and despite decades of effort, social mobility in the UK remains stubbornly low. I believe AI can be a catalyst for change, expanding access to learning, creativity and opportunity for young people wherever they're from. We know there are entrepreneurs and exciting new businesses already working to deliver on that ambition, and through this programme, we're proud to support the next stage in their growth."

Hugh Milward, Vice President Corporate Affairs, Microsoft UK

"At the Social Mobility Commission, we are engaging across sectors as AI continues to rapidly transform our economies, education systems and job markets. Working with the EY Foundation on the AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize has allowed us to put social mobility at the forefront of this technological innovation – rather than an afterthought."

Alun Francis, Chair, Social Mobility Commission

“Being a Digital Representative has been one of those opportunities where you genuinely feel your voice matters. I’ve loved contributing to conversations around AI, the future of work and digital opportunity, particularly through the AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize. Being able to challenge ideas and make sure accessibility and fairness stay part of the conversation has been really rewarding. I’ve also come away more confident, curious and excited about the role young people can play in shaping technology.”

Gabriel, EY Foundation Youth Voice Forum Member

Building insights with employers

Employer network

We hosted three employer roundtables, convening employers across sectors including financial services, real estate, and beyond profit. From this, we’ve gained deeper knowledge of these sectors, insights on the skills employers are looking for from early talent, and business’ approaches to the future of work, emerging technology and AI. Through long standing employer relationships and employer surveys, we are tracking the progress employers make to engage and recruit young people from low-income backgrounds, and we have published a [series of blogs highlighting best practice](#) from employers in our network.

Insights and practical tips from our employer network on increasing engagement with and recruitment of young people from FSM backgrounds:

- 1) Making sure organisational culture shines through, whether people are joining your organisation for work experience, or another short placement.
 - 2) Consider how you can encourage applications from local people and beneficiaries — for example you could hold open days so people can get to know your organisation and consult young people to understand barriers and what might deter them from applying.
 - 3) Employers are finding increasing difficulty in assessing genuine capability and motivation using AI. As a result, employers are moving back towards in person assessment centres, live interviews, and observed group interaction, despite higher cost and effort.
- 3 Roundtables
 - 13 employers attended
 - Real Estate, Impactful Futures, Actuaries

Public Affairs

Evidence in action

Throughout the year, we used evidence from our programmes and research to influence national discussions on transitions from school to work and social mobility. We submitted evidence to both the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and Alan Milburn’s Youth Employment Review, drawing on insights from our programmes, including our joint research with the Institute for the Future of Work.

At the Labour Party Conference, we hosted two events. Our Youth Town Hall, delivered in partnership with the Fair Education Alliance, Child Poverty Action Group and the Education Policy Institute, brought together young people with

parliamentarians and education leaders to discuss work experience, AI and opportunity. We also co-hosted a roundtable with the Institute for the Future of Work to explore how channelling motivation can help young people from low-income backgrounds thrive in a changing labour market.

Engaging policymakers

This year, we also joined the Social Mobility Alliance, strengthening our collaboration with organisations committed to improving social mobility across the UK. Ahead of Social Mobility Day, the Alliance's parliamentary reception brought together members of our Youth Voice Forum with MPs, employers and sector leaders, to inform conversations about improving access to opportunity.

Original research

Intrinsic motivation with the Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW)

Building on our partnership with IFOW, this year, we translated research into practice by developing and testing an intervention to channel motivation among young people from low-income backgrounds.

Piloted through the EY Foundation's Smart Futures programme, the intervention demonstrated encouraging results, with participating young people reporting 20%-35% higher motivation related to school or work compared with a control group. The findings reinforce the importance of developing young people's confidence, purpose, and agency alongside technical skills as they prepare for future employment.

To support wider adoption, we published three complementary reports: a research and policy paper, an evaluation of the pilot intervention, and a practical framework to help educators, employers and policymakers embed motivation-based approaches within existing programmes.

We launched the research through a joint-webinar with IFOW, featuring Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE (Stemettes), Frank Bowley (Skills England), David Gaughan (West Midlands Combined Authority) and Peter Swallow MP, bringing together leaders from education, employment and policymaking to explore how channeling young people's motivation can help them thrive in a rapidly changing labour market.

Drawing on our joint research with the Institute for the Future of Work, we contributed to an APPG on the Future of Work event exploring the impact of technological disruption on young people's working lives. Alongside evidence from our programmes and research, a member of our Youth Voice Forum shared their lived experience, helping to inform parliamentary discussions on how best to prepare young people for the future of work.

EY Foundation website: [New approach focused on intrinsic motivation could boost young people's readiness for the future of work](#)

"Speaking at the APPG on the Future of Work gave me the opportunity to share my experiences of why so many opportunities still rely on informal networks that aren't accessible to everyone. It was encouraging to contribute to a discussion that brought together policymakers, employers, and practitioners, and to see the value placed on ensuring young people's lived experiences help inform the policies that will shape their futures."

Nana, YVF Member

EY Foundation Green Economy Research Project (with New Philanthropy Capital)

The UK Government has said the clean energy transition could create 650,000 jobs across the country by 2030.

We've partnered with New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to produce a report into how the emerging green economy can become more accessible to young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The project formed part of NPC's Everyone's Environment programme and aimed to build the evidence base on the barriers preventing young people from a low-income background accessing opportunities in green growth sectors.

The research combined evidence reviews, employer engagement and direct input from young people, including those supported by the EY Foundation. The work sought to better understand young people's perceptions of "green jobs", the pathways into these roles, and the practical steps employers, educators and policymakers can take to widen access.

A key finding was that many young people — particularly those from low-income backgrounds — are motivated primarily by secure, well-paid careers with clear progression routes, and often do not always identify with the term "green jobs". The research highlighted the importance of framing green economy opportunities around quality employment, skills development and long-term career prospects, rather than environmental outcomes alone. These findings have been used to support policymakers and employers to build a more diverse pipeline of young talent in the green economy.

The project supports the EY Foundation's wider ambition to equip young people to succeed in fast-growing sectors of the economy and influence employer behaviour.

EY Foundation website: [Job misconceptions risk excluding young people from the green economy, warns new report](#)

Employer behaviour — 'economies of coordination'

In addition to building insights from our own employer network through surveys and roundtables, we partnered with, Demos to explore how employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), can boost social mobility for young people. The report proposes "[Economies of Coordination](#)", a framework that brings employers and local partners together to pool resources, remove barriers, and support local growth. The research has attracted policymaker interest and responds directly to Alan Milburn's 'Young People and Work' interim report, which highlights that while many programmes exist to support young people, the system itself remains fragmented.

By exploring how employers and local partners can better coordinate around young people, the research contributed practical solutions to help create more coherent pathways into work and reduce the risk of young people falling through the cracks. Our Beyond Horizons pilot in Bradford provides a live example of this approach by bringing together schools, employers and local partners to deliver coordinated, meaningful workplace experiences that help Year 8 pupils explore future careers and make more informed decisions about their next steps.

EY Foundation Website: [Stronger links between SMEs, councils and local partners could unlock almost two million apprenticeships and up to £28bn each year in growth, new research finds](#)

Our Supporters

Volunteers

Both EY and external volunteers are vital to the delivery of our programmes. They bring invaluable experience, knowledge, and skills that impact the lives of our participants.

Key to this are also our young volunteers, often programme alumni, that not only return to share their early careers experiences with programme students but also contribute insightful ideas to our system change work.

In turn, we work to ensure that our volunteers benefit too by placing personal growth and purpose at the forefront of our approach. As a result of developing specialised skills and knowledge, volunteers report an increase in their communication skills and improvements in their general wellbeing and job satisfaction.

- 62% would talk about their experience volunteering with EYF at their performance review.
- 62% agree that the skills and experience gained from volunteering with EYF has put them in a better position for promotion.
- 98% would volunteer with EYF again.

Statistics based on 101 responses to our feedback survey from volunteers who agreed or strongly agreed.

“The overall execution of the sessions was highly professional, particularly considering it was the inaugural facilitation and delivery. The content and programme were both authentic and engaging. I found the entire experience to be immensely rewarding, and I am eager to participate in similar initiatives in the future.”

Charlotte Franklin, Smart Futures Volunteer

“I’ve worked with the EY Foundation in a number of ways, delivering talks, presentations, helping out students with advice on what to do next in their career and speaking with senior stakeholders. I’ve learnt networking skills, especially adapting to different conversations around students compared to stakeholders and senior partners.”

Rion, Smart Futures Alum

Fundraisers

Fundraising is critical to the EY Foundation growing its impact in support of young people. Hundreds of fundraisers have dug deep to raise money for the Foundation and we are exceptionally grateful for their support for our work.

Here are just a few examples of how people have raised much needed funds:

- In June 26, 17 trekkers took on gruelling heat, altitude, and icy paths to summit Mount Toubkal, the highest mountain in North Africa. So far, the team have raised an amazing £24.2k and counting.
- In May, we launched a new national fundraising week for all EY people — our first Power Young Futures week saw bake sales, an abseil, walkers, quizzes and the Power of an Hour, with every hour of learning matched with a £1 donation. £23,000 was raised.
- In April 26, EY Foundation had its first ever London Marathon places — two runners took on the challenge, raising over £5,000.

“Mount Toubkal almost conquered me with hazardous conditions, gruelling heat and exhaustion but with the support of my amazing EY trekkers, we did it! Exciting to raise money for young people, meet new people and style out my new trekking kit!”

Liz, EY Foundation Mount Toubkal trekker June 26

“It is an experience that I’ll never forget, especially that wall of noise, support and adrenaline spike you get as you head over Tower Bridge. All the hours of training; all the support from my family, friends and colleagues; and knowing that I was running the best marathon in the world on behalf of such a good cause carried me through ...”

Tobias, EY Foundation London marathon runner April 26

Looking to the future

Lynne Peabody CEO, EY Foundation

I'm incredibly proud of the EY Foundation team and the many supporters, volunteers, and partners who have helped us create opportunities for young people this year. Together, we've made meaningful progress towards our ambition, not only through the impact of our programmes, but by building evidence, insights and partnerships that can influence employers, educators and policymakers to create lasting change.

This year has reinforced something we've long believed: real change happens when we combine action with learning. Through our programmes, research, and external engagement, we've gained valuable insight into what works, where barriers remain, and how we can have a greater impact.

Three key insights have shaped our thinking over the past twelve months:

1. Embed, don't bolt on — meaningful change is more likely when new approaches are integrated into existing programmes and employer activity, rather than added as standalone initiatives.
2. Design with application in mind — insight only creates value when it leads to action, so we focus on work that can directly improve delivery, employer engagement or influence policy.
3. Connect research, delivery and influence — our greatest impact comes when learning from young people and programme delivery informs our policy recommendations and external engagement

In the year ahead, as well as core programme delivery, we will:

- Champion the integration of young people's voices into the implementation of emerging technologies like AI, helping to ensure innovation supports better employment outcomes.
- Build understanding of how emerging technology and core human skills can work together to help young people thrive in the future workplace.
- Facilitate collaboration across our network of employer partners to drive the adoption of evidence-based research and approaches that improve opportunities for young people.
- Embed new interventions into programme delivery and shape recommendations for wider system change using learnings from our research.

Projects we will be delivering:

- Our AI and Social Mobility Challenge Prize, with a public showcase event in Parliament in October 2026, highlighting selected ventures and demonstrating how responsible AI and cross-sector collaboration can help widen opportunities for young people across the UK.
- Additional job-readiness support, including apprenticeship and job application guidance, as well as social enterprise workshops.
- Private Equity and Real Estate programmes in additional regions, enabling us to support more young people eligible for free school meals across the UK.
- A refreshed employer value proposition that strengthens how we engage and work with employers.
- Our AI and youth voice report, produced by the University of Nottingham research report.
- Phase Two of our Beyond Horizons pilot, exploring sustainable ways to give more young people access to meaningful work experience earlier in their educational journey.

One thing I hear time and again from young people is, "I didn't think people like me could do jobs like this." This sentiment is a powerful reminder of the barriers that still exist and captures exactly why the EY Foundation exists. Behind every research project, partnership and programme are young people whose view of what is possible is changing.

That's what I'm most looking forward to in the year ahead. We have an opportunity to consolidate what we've learnt and turn it into action at greater scale — working alongside employers, educators, policymakers and young people themselves to create opportunities that last and contribute to a fairer future of work for everyone.

If you'd like to support this ambition, we'd love to hear from you. Whether you're a young person, employer, policymaker, educator or fellow charity, everyone has a role to play. By working together, we can help ensure that every young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Thank you

This year, we've had the pleasure of working with a wide range of passionate volunteers, fundraisers, employers, policymakers, schools, young people and funders across all our delivery and projects.

A special mention to EY for their generous funding, collaboration and encouragement.

And, a massive thank you to all of you who have helped create positive impact with us!

As we look to consolidate and scale our work to make a difference in the lives of young people, we hope you will join us in the next year.

Be a part of our success:

- [Volunteer](#)
- [Fundraise](#)
- [Partner with us](#)
- Promote our work

To find out more about our work and how you can get involved, please visit eyfoundation.com.

Get in touch to find out more: E: enquiries@eyfoundation.ey.com | T: 020 7951 3133

eyfoundation.com

LinkedIn: [@EY Foundation](#)

Instagram: [@EY_Foundation](#)

About the EY Foundation

The EY Foundation is a UK registered charity that works directly with young people and employers to create or support pathways to education, employment or enterprise. EY Foundation operates and is incorporated independently of EY and is governed by a separate trustee board.

The EY Foundation is a charitable company registered in England and Wales and Scotland with registered charity number 1157154 and SC045076. It is also a member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited.

The EY Foundation, 1 More London Place, London SE1 2AF

© 2026 The EY Foundation. Published in the UK, All Rights Reserved.

eyfoundation.com