

Youth Futures Foundation

Response to the report of the Quadrennial Review Panel

12 December 2023

Introduction

Youth Futures Foundation welcomes the Quadrennial Review Panel's report and findings which we have found to be constructive and helpful.

We are grateful to the Panel for their time and thoroughness, the Oversight Trust for their support, as well as to the stakeholders and partners who gave their time and reflections to inform the process. We particularly want to acknowledge the young people who work with us as part of our Future Voices Group for their contributions to the review.

As a learning organisation we embrace feedback and have found this review to be valuable in providing us with fresh perspective, insight and challenge which will aid our thinking as we review our future strategy.

We are pleased to formally respond to the Panel's report. Our response below will firstly address the report in general before responding to each of the specific feedback areas in turn.

Our regular meetings with the Oversight Trust provide a mechanism for frequent discussion of our progress against actions we propose to take in responding to this review and as we update our company strategy. Our annual December deep dive session with the Oversight Trust will provide an opportunity for us to provide an in-depth progress update against all actions collectively, and to receive further feedback to support our ongoing development.

Overall response to the Quadrennial Review of Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures consider the Panel's report to be a fair and accurate reflection of where we are as a young and maturing organisation, navigating our early life through the COVID-19 pandemic, and operating in a 'large, complex eco-system, in an area of public policy which is multifaceted and fragmented in nature'. We welcome the report's acknowledgement of our achievements and impacts to date; in particular the mention of:



- The milestone we have reached in becoming a **fully accredited What Works Centre**, and the first ever such centre for youth employment. This has strengthened our focus on using our grant funding to generate evidence of the highest quality. It has also enhanced our ability to support those working in the youth employment 'system' to better understand the issues and act to enable marginalised groups of young people to secure meaningful employment, based on 'what works'.
- Our **grant programmes**, which have been set up at pace, and which are both:
 - building capacity with those organisations we fund to directly support marginalised young people; and
 - testing and evaluating solutions to build the evidence base for what works and understand what change is needed.
- The positive feedback the panel received from local **stakeholders** involved in place-based programmes about working with Youth Futures.
- Our growing body of **research** to enable better evidence informed focus and action from all stakeholders who can effect change in the system for the benefit of marginalised young people; launching the world's first Youth Employment Toolkit, our Evidence and Gap Map and our recently launched Data Dashboard are milestone examples of this for Youth Futures.
- Our contribution to **'impactful policy design'** through co-founding the Youth Employment Group (YEG), informing Government responses to the growing rate of youth unemployment such as the Kickstart Scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently the development of policy recommendations to address the systemic challenges for key cohorts of marginalised young people. It was pleasing to see the report cite the positive engagement felt between multiple parts of Whitehall and Youth Futures.
- The emphasis the report placed on our achievements in putting **youth voice** front and centre of our organisation and our activities. We are proud of the "nothing about us without us" mantra and will continue to seek to strengthen our efforts.
- The efforts we have put into **organisational effectiveness**. We are working hard to be a collaborative, people-focused organisation which welcomes and fosters a diversity of talent. We apply that logic externally too and have prioritised engagement and collaboration across the system and are pleased to see this reflected in the findings of the Panel.

The report identifies four key areas of constructive feedback for Youth Futures. We address each of these in turn below.

The areas the Panel have highlighted align well with our own assessment of organisational need, development, and evolution as we approach our business planning for 2024 and undertake our strategy refresh for 2025 onwards to ensure that Youth Futures is robust, responsive and innovative in delivering change.



Response to area of consideration 1:

Youth Futures' focus and impact within a large, complex eco-system

We welcome the care and attention the Panel have taken to understand, dissect and articulate the complex context in which we are working within their report. We agree with the Panel that there is a risk we stretch ourselves too thin as an ambitious organisation. We are addressing this through:

- Refreshed future strategy: our planned 2025-2028 strategy refresh exercise will commence early in 2024 and will include reviewing our theory of change, our mission and vision, our long-term targets and goals and the definition and tracking of impact. The new strategy will provide a clear remit for the organisation for the period as well as giving clarity on our ambitions as a What Works Centre, and how our grant programmes will continue to generate high quality evidence for this purpose while giving support to young people through funded delivery. Our strategy development will include external stakeholder engagement to ensure we are able to utilise insights from across the sector and beyond.
- Strengthened Leadership: we are strengthening the skills and expertise at a senior level through a) recent senior leadership team appointments overseeing our policy, communications and youth participation work and our employer engagement work, and b) new incoming Board members as a means of ensuring that we have a depth and diversity of experience and thought to lead us through this next stage of our development.
- Collaboration, communication and convening of the sector: we will continue to work with the wider youth employment ecosystem to ensure we are amplifying collective value, filling gaps effectively and are helping to enable stakeholders to work better together. We will be focusing on engaging and communicating clearly to multiple audiences within the ecosystem in our refreshed strategy with the principle of ensuring that our purpose and place in the ecosystem are well understood by all our stakeholders, which is an area the panel identified needed to be strengthened.

Response to area of consideration 2:

Youth Futures' capacity for system change by influencing government at central and local levels

We appreciate the Panel's assertion that systems change is complex, multifaceted, multi-layered and takes a considerable amount of time, and recognition that the work we have already started on our theory of change takes account of this. We concur with the Panel that the macro problem we are addressing cannot be solved



by the time our current funding is due to end and that many actors need to stand alongside us in order to deliver on our shared ambition.

We agree that our ability to influence policy makers at a national and local level is essential and it is heartening to hear the positive feedback from government interviewees from across Whitehall on their engagement with us. As we move into 2024 and beyond, we will build on this through:

- Elevating the presence of targeted policy engagement and government relations in our corporate strategy refresh.
- Our strengthened policy and government relations capacity and expertise within our leadership, through our newly formed policy and communications directorate and new Board members who bring expertise from within government and the wider public policy arena to:
 - Build a more sophisticated and integrated engagement operation spanning central and local government
 - Build out relationships spanning different levels and disciplines across departments to drive collective change in the youth employment policy space
 - Focus on building expert partner coalitions and expert advisory support; including continuing to co-lead the YEG and working with other What Works Centres
- Further strengthening our ability to serve government and policy maker 'customer need' as a What Works Centre through:
 - Building further in-house evaluation expertise, including our use of linked, and archived administrative data such as Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) to track participants into employment.
 - Collaborating with the other What Works Centres, including the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and the Education Endowment Foundation. Progress is already being made through our work with YEF and the [Summer Jobs](#) programme.
 - Generating quicker evidence through moving more projects to trial stage and developing a series of more rapid Randomised Control Trials, including working with employers directly to test the effects of their practice on outcomes for young people.
 - Working with Government to improve awareness of and supporting them to maximise usage of our Youth Employment Toolkit, Evidence and Gap Map and Data Dashboard.
 - Demonstrating the impact of our funding by delivering our Evidence into Action programme (a focused delivery programme to directly engage and support practitioners to implement evidence-backed interventions) and also leverage match funding to address youth employment challenges for marginalised young people.



Response to area of consideration 3:

Disseminating and collaborating for real impact, especially with employers

It is pleasing to see the report recognise the important networks and forums Youth Futures have in place to enable us in our role and the recognition of the research and evaluation output we have delivered in the past 18 months. We agree with the assessment of the panel that we need to now put focused energy into translation of these assets for practical stakeholder usage - particularly employers. We are addressing this through:

- Ensuring our strategy refresh exercise includes clear focus on audience and actor need within the youth employment ecosystem – this will include a dedicated employer engagement approach which will be elevated in the refreshed corporate strategy.
- Strengthening both our employer engagement and communications expertise and capacity within leadership through our two newly formed directorates, and Board members which include individuals who bring specific expertise in these areas.
- In 2024 we will be focused on delivering our recently developed employer engagement strategy; key tenets include:
 - Partnering with established and well networked organisations who can firstly help to mitigate the risk of spreading ourselves too thinly overall, and secondly who can help us specifically with public sector and SME engagement.
 - Development and evolution of the Employer Advisory Board, which we founded, to strengthen representation across both employer size and sectors, helping to ensure our work best translates in a practical and accessible manner to foster employer behaviour change to better support marginalised young people.
 - Scoping out employer trials (testing evidence with and gathering evidence from employers) as well as considering self-employment and entrepreneurship practices.
- Our focus on core foundational communications and engagement streams of work in our 2024 business plan, which will include:
 - The website review project, inclusive of the Panel's advice to involve stakeholder participation.
 - Opportunities for using our convening abilities and the convening power of partners to maximise stakeholder communications, engagement and impact.
 - Working closely with stakeholders to ensure our insights are translated appropriately for specific audiences to use practically for impact (in particular for employers).



- Undertaking audience segmentation and persona work to better understand targeting, uses of channels and styles of content.
- Reviewing and improving our drumbeat communications activity across our corporate channels (social media, web, email).

Response to area of consideration 4:

Organisational Challenges – some of which Youth Futures shares with other start-ups and dormant assets operating companies

We are grateful to the panel for taking the time to dissect the unique challenges Youth Futures and other dormant asset entities experience. We agree that sharing learning across the entities together with Government and the Oversight Trust would be hugely beneficial. On the observations intended specifically for Youth Futures, we are addressing them as follows:

- Ensuring that the work to develop our next strategy takes into consideration the views expressed by our stakeholders to be bold and innovative, given the security our funding provides us in the medium term.
- Youth voice and youth participation – we are heartened to see the panel recognise our achievements in putting youth voice at the centre of our work; we are committed to ensuring that the experience of young people advising and working with us is as positive as possible and that they are well supported. We are undertaking the following in support of this:
 - Recent adjustment of the practice around terms of office for our Young Directors, in recognition of the significant value that they add to our Board
 - A review of how our Future Voices Group is working in practice for its members in early 2024 (in advance of the launch of the new strategy).
- Carrying on with our efforts to continuously improve our governance in line with evolving best practice and our recent adoption of the Charity Governance Code, including the following for 2024: delivering a Board development programme to embed our refreshed Board, carrying out a routine externally led Board Effectiveness Review towards the end of the year and delivering on our planned programme of governance improvements such as reviewing Committee terms of reference and our governance infrastructure (policies and processes).
- Ongoing planning for and oversight of appropriate resourcing for delivery and impact, ensuring that capacity (whether staff or externally sourced) is suitably geared to allow us to deliver our objectives.



Conclusion

The panel review has provided useful assurance that Youth Futures has secured a respected and valued position with system stakeholders and that we are recognised for impactful achievements spanning research and evidence, policy influence, grant programmes and youth voice. We acknowledge the areas which have been identified for improvement and agree these should be areas of focus as we continue to develop as an organisation.

The timing of the review is opportune in allowing us to ensure that the larger strategic issues identified are considered through the planned strategic review process during 2024, so ensuring we develop considered and lasting means of tackling the fundamental youth unemployment challenge we are here to help solve.

