



# Youth Fund Evaluation

Executive summary

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## About the Youth Fund

The [Youth Fund](#) launched in 2015 to provide core funding for organisations whose main purpose is to help young people (aged 14-25) in the most precarious positions, where making the transition to adult independence is most challenging.

Organisations must work with young people experiencing disadvantage in a way that recognises and builds on their strengths and potential, which Paul Hamlyn Foundation refers to as an 'asset-based' approach. Eligible organisations can apply for up to £60k of funding over two years. The Fund supports a broad range of organisations working with and for the benefit of young people across different sectors, demographics and themes. Second-tier organisations, as well as organisations working directly with young people, can apply.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015 and 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019, the Youth Fund had provided **129 grants** worth a total of **£7.5m**. The Fund is still open to new applicants.

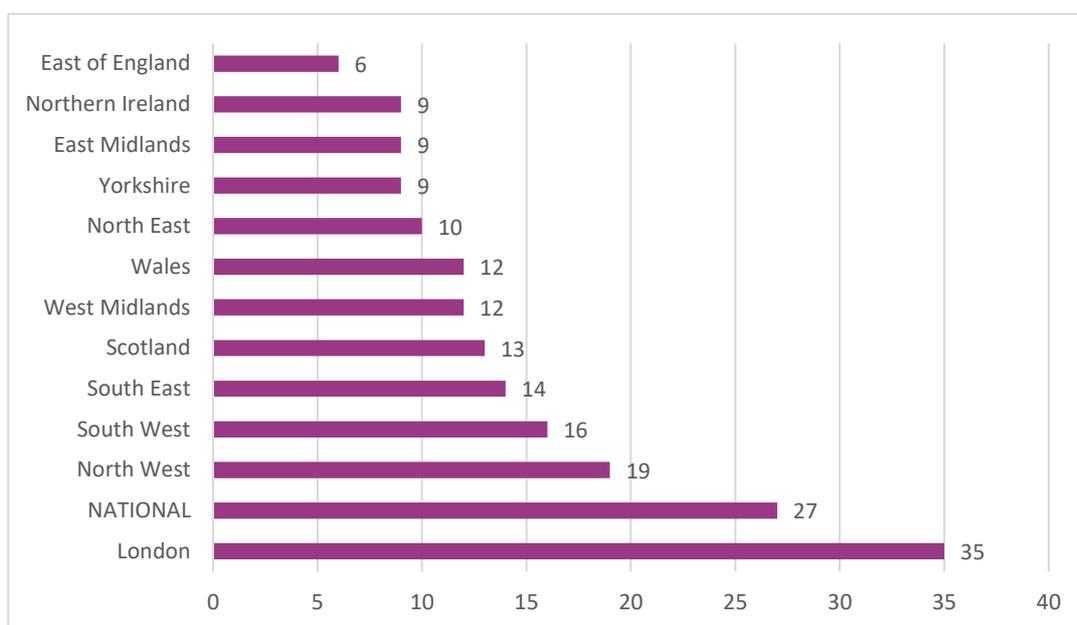
## Summary of key findings

1. The **cohort of organisations funded through the Youth Fund is diverse**. They work across a broad spectrum of sectors, geographies, themes and demographics, and they apply to the Fund at different stages of organisational development. They are a wide range of different sizes and operate in different contexts.
2. The **strengths** of the Youth Fund offer include the provision of core funding, the flexible and relational approach taken with funded organisations, and enabling organisations to use the funding to develop organisationally in a way that is appropriate for them.
3. The **limitations** include the length of each grant (two years was felt to be too short by several organisations in our sample), the difficulty in assessing progress and 'success' for each grant given the diverse ways in which this funding was used, and the limited opportunities for funded organisations to connect and support each other (funded organisations wanted more opportunities to meet in person).
4. The Youth Fund meets a priority need, and the amount of funding offered is generally thought to be appropriate. Organisations particularly **valued the provision of core funding**.
5. Organisations used the funding in a range of ways to **sustain, prepare to grow or grow their impact with young people**. This included investing in organisational strategy and development; income generation and diversification; programme improvement or expansion; improved ways of working with young people; and/or producing a specific output of value to the organisation or others in the sector.
6. Organisations were united in a **shared commitment to working in an asset-based way**, and this was reflected in how they articulated their purpose as an organisation. However, the precise nature of this work varied enormously. We found that organisations embodied asset-based approaches in their decision-making, delivery and/or internal operations, and this typically also led to influencing others outside of the organisation, through the way that they communicate or support young people to be heard.

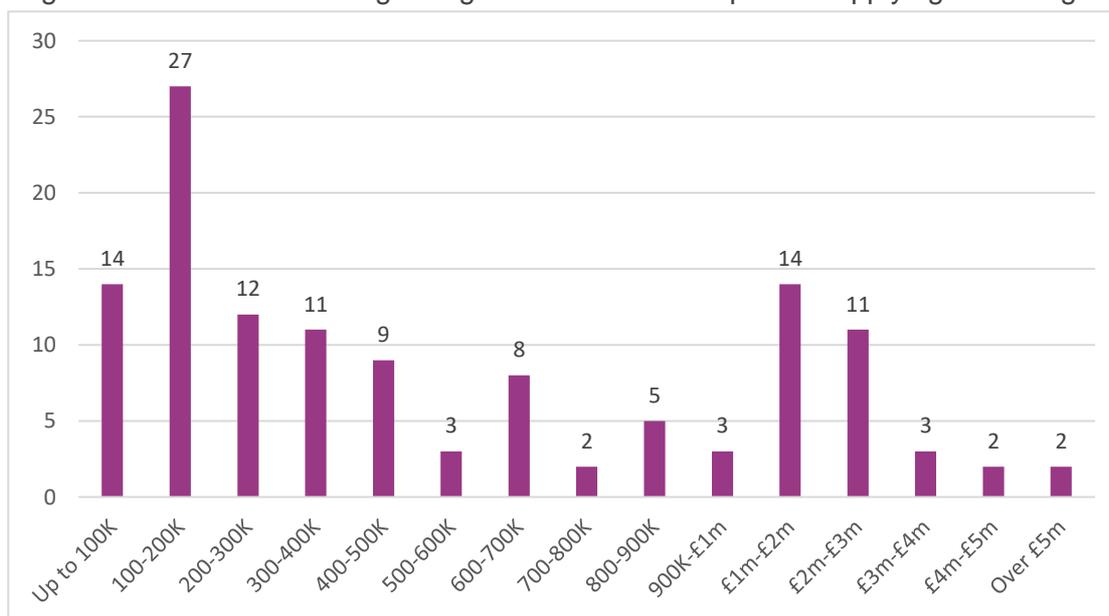
## Organisations supported by the Youth Fund

The organisations funded by the Youth Fund are united by a set of values and principles that inform their approach to working with young people. However, they work across a broad spectrum of sectors, geographies, themes and demographics, and they apply to the Fund at different stages of organisational development. They are a wide range of different sizes, and operate in different contexts. There is no 'typical' funded organisation, and talking about averages does not make much sense in this context.

Funded organisations work across the UK, some locally, others regionally, and some nationally. **The 129 organisations funded to date** work in the following regions (organisations can work in more than one region):



Organisations also had a large range in turnover at the point of applying for their grant:



## Core funding

Core funding is funding that can be spent on an organisation's core functions, for example senior management salaries, communications, operations, or other spending that is not project-specific.

- The Youth Fund provides restricted core grants to organisations that meet the Fund's criteria. Broadly, restrictions limit the grants to be spent on an organisation's strategic development (e.g. the Foundation does not provide capital funding).
- The funding can be spent on any revenue or equipment costs to support the organisation's objectives, including salaries, training costs, rent, website, or any other overheads. The funding cannot be spent solely on delivering a specific project.
- Broadly, organisations used their core grant to focus on one or more of the following strategic priorities. These align well with the Foundation's ambitions for the Fund:

### 1. Focusing on strategy, not operations

- Freeing up senior time to focus on strategic development work, by:
  - a) Reducing time spent applying for multiple other sources of funding in an effort to cover core costs
  - b) Paying for an operations manager post, or similar, to take internal operational matters off the CEO

### 2. New approaches to income generation

- Investing in the organisation's income generation capacity, by:
  - a) Paying for a fundraising post to increase and/or diversify income streams
  - b) Developing new income generating activity, e.g. a training offer

### 3. Developing programmes and services

- Focusing on the organisation's work with young people, by:
  - a) Developing new programmes or services in response to changing contexts
  - b) Expanding or improving existing services

### 4. Developing youth participation and involvement

- Building the organisation's approach and making young people's involvement more embedded and meaningful, for example developing a young leader's programme

### 5. Producing a specific output

- Paying for a specific role within the organisation to develop a particular piece of work or output, for example a quality framework. This approach was more common amongst second-tier organisations

## Asset-based work with young people

The term ‘asset-based’ covers a range of approaches to working with young people in a way that values their strengths, as well as addressing the problems they face. These approaches seek to empower people to have agency over their lives, and to develop their assets in a positive way.

- There is no single ‘model’ or ‘technique’ for asset-based work. The term encompasses a wide range of practices, approaches, methods and ways of working that are united by a core set of values and beliefs, rather than grounded in a particular model.
- The term also covers the work and approach of a whole organisation, not just direct work with young people.

We developed a simple framework to help organisations identify different ways in which they can apply asset-based working in practice. The framework is not intended to be used as a ‘checklist’ or incentive to box-ticking, but rather a starting point for organisations thinking about how to further embed their asset-based practices:



We don't expect every organisation to work in an asset-based way across all of the parts of the framework, though some are more essential than others:

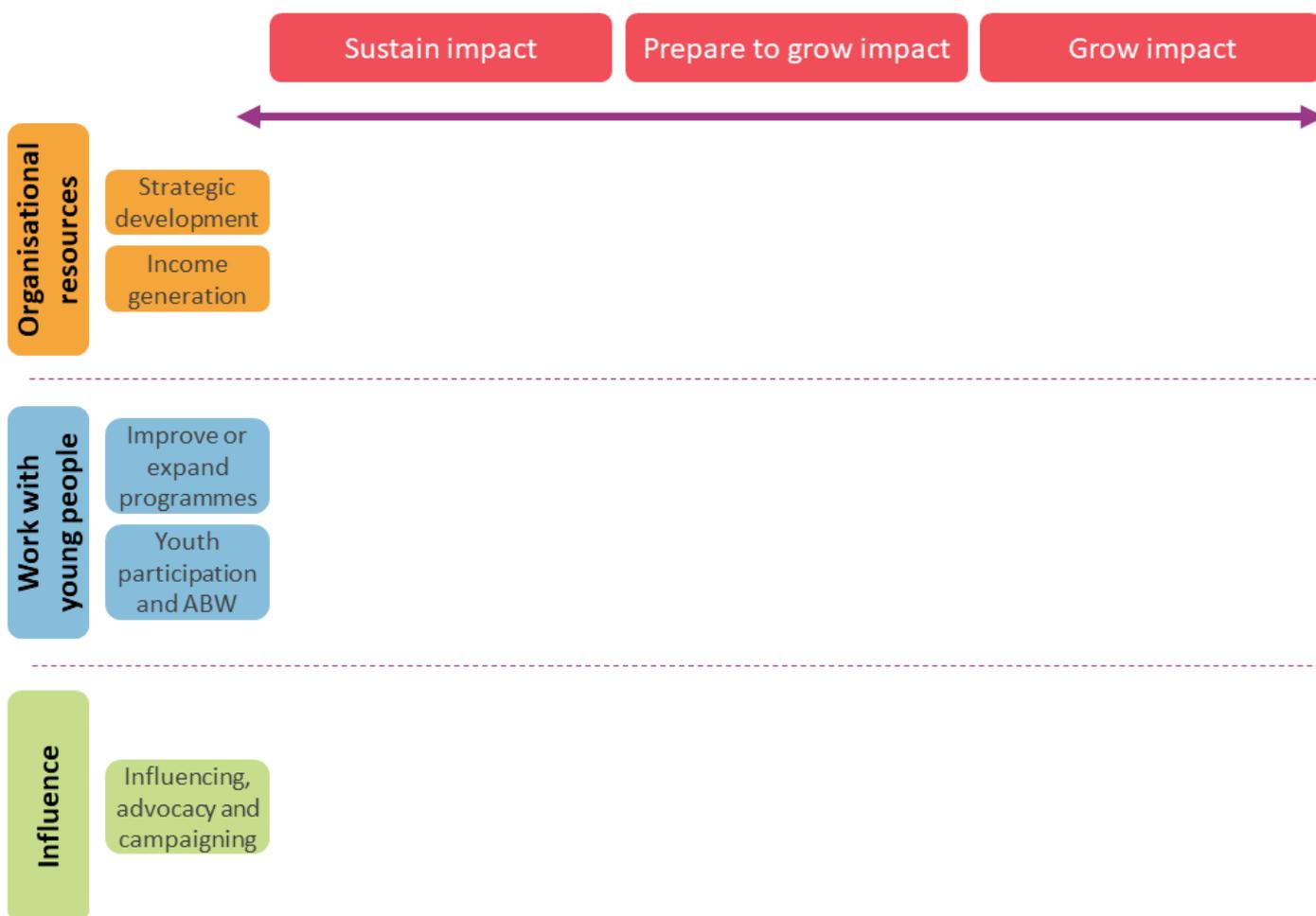
- **Purpose:** this is a necessary starting point for all asset-based organisations. It influences the organisation's approach in every other area of work.
- **Decision-making, Delivery and Operations:** these are three areas in which organisations might embed asset-based principles. To be asset-based, you have to do something in at least one of them – otherwise your purpose will ring hollow.
- **Influence:** this is about how your asset-based purpose and ways of working creates influence, through the ways that you communicate with others, and the ways that you help young people to get their voices heard. We found that it is an almost inevitable outcome of trying to work in an asset-based way within a wider context that is typically not asset-based.

## Supporting organisations to sustain or grow their impact

Organisations have used their Youth Fund grant to invest in and develop three broad areas of work, to help them sustain or grow their impact with young people:

1. **Organisational resources** – to buy time for senior members of the organisation to focus on strategic development, or new approaches to income generation, with the aim that this will ultimately lead to greater impact.
2. **Work with young people** – to improve or expand the organisation’s programme delivery, or to develop the organisation’s approach to asset-based working (ABW), either to enhance their impact or impact more young people than previously.
3. **Influence** – to engage in advocacy, campaigning or other work that influences policy and the external context in which young people live, ultimately impacting young people beyond the organisation’s immediate sphere.

The following diagram depicts the three areas of work against a spectrum of sustaining, preparing to grow or growing impact with young people.



The full paper provides some examples of the routes that organisations can take, mapped on this diagram.

## Developing the Youth Fund

We have used the evaluation findings and insights to advise Paul Hamlyn Foundation on some key implications for the Youth Fund, and how it develops in future. These include:

- Because the organisations are so varied in nature and context, it is not possible to apply the same success criteria to all of them. The aims and ambitions of the organisations in using this funding vary, and so the assessment of how well the funding has been used needs to reflect this diversity.
- Because organisations are at different stages of development when they receive the funding – they have different ‘starting points’ – there are not all aiming for the same ‘end point’, and not all funded organisations will make the same progress.
- Despite all of this variety and difference, the cohort does have something substantial in common – their commitment to working in an asset-based way. This is also the aspect of their work which is hardest to articulate and pin down, so it is important that the Foundation takes time to understand these organisations and how they work.
- Core funding is inherently more flexible, and for that reason the outcomes of funded work can sometimes be unpredictable. It is therefore important that the Foundation remains open to flexibility and change in funded organisations’ plans.
- It is challenging to support organisations to develop their asset-based approach, because it is so unique and ‘personal’ to each organisation. Funded organisations valued opportunities to share ideas and examples amongst the cohort.
- For many funded organisations, the ‘impact for young people’ (in the sense of positive outcomes) can be a quite indirect result of their investment, because most of the grants are about organisational development rather than directly improving work with young people.
- There is no ‘right way’ to fund organisations to do this type of work. Overall, we feel that the grant amount, the suitability of this funding for different organisations, and the support provided is about right.

## Find out more

More detail and explanation of all of the evaluation findings can be found in our other three published outputs:

1. [Core funding](#)
2. [Supporting organisations to sustain or grow their impact](#)
3. [Asset-based working with young people](#)

For more information about the evaluation and our findings, please contact Alice Thornton, Head of Learning at Renaisi: [a.thornton@renaisi.com](mailto:a.thornton@renaisi.com)