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# Youth Offer Process Evaluation

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# Executive summary

The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) "Youth Offer" aims to mitigate the unemployment impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on 16-24 year-old Universal Credit customers in the Intensive Work Search conditionality regime. The Youth Offer was initially for Universal Credit customers aged 18 to 24, in the Intensive Work Search Regime and extended to customers aged 16 and 17 from 1 December 2021. The Youth Offer comprises three strands: Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hubs, and Youth Employability Coaches. This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Youth Offer.

The evaluation employed a mixed methodology, incorporating a cross-sectional and longitudinal survey, along with qualitative interviews and observations. The sample, provided by DWP, consisted of customers who had started to receive Youth Offer support between August 2022 and January 2023. Fieldwork was carried out in waves between April and December 2023. The qualitative research involved 37 in-depth interviews with professionals and 60 with customers, along with two two-day visits to Youth Hub sites for on-site observations.

The survey of Youth Offer customers found that just over half were male and a third were aged 18-19 (34%). Almost half of customers reported having a long-term health condition or disability. Between wave 1 and 2 of the study customers reported an increase in low life satisfaction and high anxiety levels.

In line with the policy design, Youth Employability Coaches (YECs) primarily delivered employment support to customers with complex needs, who were often younger, from a white ethnic background, and had higher instances of health conditions.

Overall, nearly seven in ten (67%) customers agreed that the support they had received was tailored to their needs and circumstances. Youth Hub customers were most likely to have found the support tailored in this way. Customers were most likely to have found support useful in helping them feel more confident about looking for work (57% at wave 2). Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree.

The qualitative research found that Youth Employment Programme customers viewed it as a light-touch scheme and those who achieved an employment outcome attributed this primarily to their personal efforts, although some felt that regular appointments with their Work Coach helped them to stay motivated in their job-search. The Youth Hubs were praised for their personalised support and welcoming environments, although stronger partnership with local Jobcentres and more housing support were suggested improvements.

YECs were found to be highly experienced in working with vulnerable, young customers such as care leavers. However, capacity pressures in Jobcentre offices resulted in some YECs taking on non-YEC customers to reduce pressure, diluting the YEC role. Customers appreciated their relationship with their Work Coaches, however, some felt the relationship could be transactional due to short appointment

times and the formal nature of Jobcentres. This differed from the policy design of the YEC role, which intended for YECs to have greater flexibility in how they met with customers and was perhaps due to challenges reported by YECs of a lack of time to meet with customers with complex needs. Other challenges identified by YECs that may have contributed to customer experiences included limited knowledge and understanding of specific mental health conditions or forms of neurodiversity.

One-third (34%) of customers were employed. Although some customers gained work during the evaluation period, other customers moved out of employment. The overall employment level remained at 34% by the end of the evaluation. At wave 2, over one in five (21%) customers said that they had got a new job or were waiting to start a new job as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer. There was a reduction in the number of barriers identified by customers between waves, suggesting that customers were moving closer to the labour market. A proportion of customers also reported achieving intermediate outcomes which were likely to bring them closer to the labour market such as feeling more confident looking for work (35%) or more confident about their ability to work ten (31%). In contrast, customers' confidence in job-searching declined, indicating a need for ongoing support and direction. The YEC customers remained furthest from the labour market, highlighting a need for long-term support for this group.

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# Glossary

Term	Definition
Asian (ethnic background)	Individuals from the following background: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indian</li> <li>• Pakistani</li> <li>• Bangladeshi</li> <li>• Chinese</li> <li>• Any other Asian background</li> </ul>
Black (ethnic background)	Individuals from the following background: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caribbean</li> <li>• African</li> <li>• Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background</li> </ul>
Claimant commitment	A Universal Credit claimant's record of the responsibilities they have accepted in return for receiving Universal Credit, and the consequences of not meeting them.
Disability Employment Advisor (DEA)	People in this role support Work Coaches, Work Coach Team Leaders and Work and Health colleagues (for example, Front of House team, Employer Advisers, outreach workers, Case Managers), to develop their skills to work effectively with claimants to understand the interaction between individuals, their health and disability and employment, to help them to provide more personalised support, tailored to each claimant's individual needs. DEAs also work directly with claimants to help them move towards or into work.
Flexible Support Fund	Financial support available from the Jobcentre to support customers with the extra costs of finding or starting a job.
Intensive Work Search regime	At the time of the research, individuals who were not working or working and earning under £617 per calendar month or £988 per calendar month for a couple were placed in the Intensive Work Search regime. This group are expected to take intensive action to secure work or more work.

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	<p>Individuals from the following background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White and Black Caribbean</li> <li>• White and Black African</li> <li>• White and Asian</li> <li>• Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background</li> </ul>
Other ethnic group	<p>Individuals from the following background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arab</li> <li>• Any other ethnic group</li> </ul>
Jobcentre Plus (JCP)	<p>Jobcentre Plus is a government-funded employment organisation and social security office whose aim is to help people of working age find employment in the UK.</p>
Universal Credit	<p>Universal Credit is a UK Government state benefit to help eligible individuals who are out of work or working and on a low income with living costs.</p>
White (ethnic background)	<p>Individuals from the following backgrounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British</li> <li>• Irish</li> <li>• Gypsy or Irish Traveller</li> <li>• Roma</li> <li>• Any other White background</li> </ul>
Work Coach	<p>JCP adviser who works with DWP customers to support them into work. This includes, where appropriate, Work Coaches referring customers to employment programmes including the Youth Offer.</p>
Youth Employability Coach	<p>A strand of the Youth Offer designed for young people aged 16-24 in the Intensive Work Search regime with the most complex support needs which offers support for 6 months or up to 12 months if this is seen as necessary after a case conference. YECs also offer up to 6 weeks in work support. YECs can be based in a Jobcentre office or a Youth Hub.</p>
Youth Employment Programme	<p>A 13-week programme designed to help young people prepare for work and increase their chances of moving into paid employment. Customers aged 16-24 claiming Universal Credit in the Intensive Work Search regime automatically enter the Youth Employment Programme.</p>



<p>Youth Hub</p>	<p>A strand of the Youth Offer designed to facilitate access to a range of support services for customers in DWP’s partner’s premises, not Jobcentre offices. Customers referred to Youth Hubs can access intensive support for up to 6 months. Youth Hubs are funded in specific locations across the country.</p>
<p>Youth Hub Work Coach</p>	<p>Work coaches that operate within Youth Hubs.</p>
<p>DWP Youth Offer</p>	<p>The Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) ‘Youth Offer’ is part of the government’s strategic response to youth unemployment. It aims to ensure that young people (16 to 24) have support to help them find and keep employment. In this report we refer to the ‘Youth Offer’.</p>

# Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
DWP	The Department for Work and Pensions
ESR	Employment and Skills Review
YEC	Youth Employment Coach
YEP	Youth Employment Programme

# Summary

## Research context

Announced in 2020, DWP's 'Youth Offer' is part of the 'Plan for Jobs', a strategic response launched by DWP into the unemployment impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Youth Offer was initially for Universal Credit customers aged 18 to 24, in the Intensive Work Search Regime and was extended to customers aged 16 and 17 from 1 December 2021. The Youth Offer is made up of three strands: the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hubs, and Youth Employability Coaches.

All Youth Offer customers are first enrolled in the Youth Employment Programme which aims to help 16-24-year-olds prepare for and gain paid employment. This 13-week program includes support from DWP work coaches with CV development, online job-searching, identifying potential training needs, and exploring barriers to work-based opportunities.

Youth Hubs are in specific areas of the country and provide a range of support services in one location, in an external partner's premises, not a Jobcentre. They offer intensive support for up to six months, with the main point of contact being a Youth Hub Work Coach. Youth Hubs provide access to support through the Youth Hub partners, and wider community partners, in addition to DWP support.

Youth Employability Coaches are for those with the most complex support needs. They provide tailored support to help address their barriers to work, such as linking to partners to help address housing needs. The aim is to help these customers develop the necessary skills to help them prepare for employment in the future or find and keep employment. This support lasts for 6 months and can be extended to 12 months after a case conference if this is seen as appropriate. The support provided by Youth Employability Coaches includes CV, application, and interview preparation, identifying opportunities to develop employability skills, and advocating for customers with employers.

This multi-strand and mixed-method evaluation aimed to understand the outcomes of the Youth Offer policy in supporting DWP customers aged 16 – 24 and in Intensive Work Search closer to or into employment. It explored how the Youth Offer was being delivered in practice, its effectiveness, and how customer characteristics informed differences in experiences and outcomes.

## Methodology

The evaluation of the Youth Offer took a mixed-methodology approach, including a two-wave cross-sectional and longitudinal survey and qualitative interviews and observations. The quantitative survey was conducted in two waves, with the first wave achieving 2976 completed interviews and the second 1377 interviews, 400 of which were longitudinal. The sample for the survey was provided by DWP, of

customers who had started receiving Youth Offer support between August 2022 and January 2023.

The qualitative research comprised in-depth interviews in different regions and on-site observations of Youth Hub services. This included interviews with Work Coaches, Youth Hub partners, employers, and customers in eight diverse locations. A total of 37 in-depth interviews with professionals and 60 interviews with customers were conducted. Two two-day visits to Youth Hub sites took place, during which 12 appointments were observed and nine in-depth interviews held with customers.

## Key Findings

### **Demographic characteristics of Youth Offer customers**

Understanding the demographic characteristics of Youth Offer customers shows which groups of young people are represented on the programme, with the aim of ensuring that their needs are considered in the design and delivery of the support. The survey showed that just over half of Youth Offer customers were male whilst just over four in ten were female. Customers were not evenly distributed amongst the age ranges eligible for the Youth Offer. A third were aged 18-19, the single largest age group, a quarter aged 20-21 (26%) and 21% were aged 22-23.

Almost half of Youth Offer customers reported having a long-term health condition or disability. Over four in ten had a mental health condition, nearly 1 in five had a physical health condition and 1 in ten had both. Nearly 9 in 10 of those with a long-term health condition said it affected their ability to carry out daily activities a little (nearly half) or a lot (four in ten).

Between wave 1 and 2, the proportion reporting low life satisfaction and high anxiety levels increased. YEC customers or those with a health condition or disability reported lower life satisfaction and higher anxiety.

The qualitative interviews with Work Coaches identified that referrals for Youth Hubs and YECs were broadly in line with the policy intent. Work Coaches referred customers to a Youth Hub if they felt that the customer could benefit from the services offered. Some Work Coaches felt that the Youth Hub support offer was more holistic and wider ranging than the Jobcentre, and so could better meet the full range of customer needs, for example, health and wellbeing needs as well as job-search support. There was evidence from customers that this was how Work Coaches positioned the support to them.

Work Coaches often spoke of referring customers with multiple, complex barriers to YEC support. For this reason, care leavers would often be referred to YEC support as they were more likely to experience homelessness or be living in supported accommodation. The quantitative findings supported this, showing that customers were being referred appropriately. The profile of YEC customers was different from YEP and Youth Hub customers. YEC customers tended to be younger, from a white ethnic background, have more complex needs, and have higher instances of long-term health conditions. More YEC customers lived alone and had lower education levels. YEC customers were more likely to have no paid employment since leaving

education. YEC customers were also more likely to be care experienced or have experienced domestic violence.

## **Survey findings on interactions with Youth Offer**

Customers were asked about their recollection, interactions and experiences of the Youth Offer. Customers were most likely to recall support from one strand of the Youth Offer (45%), around a quarter (26%) recalled receiving two and three in ten (30%) recalled receiving all three.

When asked about the kinds of support they received, around seven in ten customers recalled receiving employment support at both waves. The most common types of employment support were finding out about available jobs or apprenticeships, and support to get a new job or preparing for a job interview. Youth Hub respondents were most likely to have received any employment support (84%) compared with YEP (69%) or YEC (61%) respondents. Youth Hub customers also reported receiving the most types of support through the Youth Offer, with a higher mean number of types of support (2.8) compared to YEP (2.5) and YEC (2.2) customers.

Around half of customers at each wave received wider support, such as mental health and wellbeing support, help to improve confidence, housing support or support from the Flexible Support Fund either through their Work Coach directly or through signposting. YEC customers were most likely to report receiving any wider support (62%) compared with Youth Hub (53%) and YEP (46%) customers. This reflects that they were more likely to have complex personal circumstances, as described above, and reflects that YEC was being delivered in line with policy intent. Youth Hub customers received the widest range of additional support through their Work Coach or from a separate service or partner which their Coach had supported them to access, with a mean number of types of support of 2 compared with 1.7 for YEP and 1.8 YEC. This is again reflective of the policy design.

The most common place to receive support across all three strands was in a Jobcentre Plus in person. Around a third (35%) of those who mainly or solely received support there said they would praise it. Although not many respondents were receiving support mainly or solely in a Youth Hub at the time of the survey, of those who were, two in three (67%) said they would praise it.

At wave one, customers were asked about the difficulties they had faced in taking part in the Youth Offer. The difficulties reflected the reported barriers customers had to work, namely their health condition or transport difficulties. Other common barriers to work at both waves included not enough full time jobs or well-paid available, and not enough opportunities customers were interested in. This highlights the importance of the employment support being designed and delivered with these in mind. In addition to the targeting of wider support, the survey found further evidence of this: customers who reported having a long-term health condition or disability were more likely to recall receiving support through remote channels such as online or telephone.

Customers were asked whether they felt the support they had received through the Youth Offer had been tailored to their needs. Overall, nearly seven in ten (67%)

agreed that the support they had received was tailored to their needs and circumstances. Youth Hub customers were most likely to have found the support tailored at both waves (67% at wave 1 and 63% at wave 2). YEP customers were least likely to agree with this, and agreement amongst customers on this strand dropped between wave 1 (68%) and wave 2 (48%).

Customers were also asked how useful they found the support they had received. They were most likely to have found support useful in helping them feel more confident about looking for work (57% at wave 2). Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree (68% at wave 2). Half (50% at wave 2) agreed that the support was useful in helping them feel more work ready. Again, Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree (60% at wave 2). Around half again (49% at wave 2) felt that the support was useful in helping them to get a job. Youth Hub customers were again most likely to agree (64% at wave 2).

Customers with a health condition or disability were asked how useful they had found the support in helping them talk to employers about reasonable adjustments. Around three in ten (wave 1, 28%) agreed that this support was useful. The qualitative findings indicated that the distance of some customers with a health condition or disability from the labour market meant that they had more elementary barriers which needed addressing to prepare them for work, before they were ready to have these discussions with an employer.

## **Youth Employment Programme: Customer and Work Coach Views and Experiences**

The qualitative research took an in-depth look at Work Coach and customer experiences of each of the Youth Offer strands. As part of the Youth Employment Programme (YEP), Work Coaches are required to have an Employment and Skills Review (ESR) and Progress Review with customers. The ESR (where a customer's job-search and basic skills are reviewed, alongside any potential barriers to employment) should be scheduled during the second week of a customer's claim, and the Progress Review by week eleven. In practice, Work Coaches reported continuously reviewing progress with customers throughout the first 13 weeks, which they felt removed the need for a standalone Progress Review.

Customers in the qualitative research who had taken part in the YEP often viewed the programme as light touch. Those who found employment primarily attributed their success to their own efforts rather than to their Work Coach. However, regular appointments with Work Coaches were found to be motivating, encouraging customers to stay consistent with their job applications. Where Work Coaches took a personal approach this was appreciated and was seen to foster an environment where customers felt comfortable discussing their circumstances. Challenges occurred when customers had to interact with a different Work Coach. They often felt these temporary coaches were less understanding of their circumstances and put more pressure on them to find employment quickly, without fully considering their personal barriers to employment.

Work Coaches delivering the Youth Employment Programme expressed a desire for more flexibility in scheduling customer appointments. They believed that removing

the requirement to see all customers weekly during the first 13 weeks of their claim including those who they felt were relatively close to the labour market would enable them to provide more intensive support to those further from the labour market.

In terms of improvements to the YEP, customers wanted to be sent more tailored job vacancies that aligned with their skills and interests by their Work Coach. Work Coaches noted a lack of work experience opportunities for young people and wanted to see more opportunities for meaningful experience over extended periods. They also mentioned the potential benefit of more short-term training opportunities across various sectors. Another identified gap was the lack of timely access to mental health support from specialist providers especially considering the high proportion of Youth Offer customers who had a mental health condition.

## **Youth Hub: Hub partner, employer, Youth Hub Work Coach and customer views and experiences**

The qualitative interviews found that the services offered by Youth Hubs depended on local partnerships and funding availability. However, all Hubs included in the research offered job-search support such as CV review and mock interviews. Other services included mental health support, vocational training, and careers advice. Some Hubs offered social activities to engage customers, build their social skills and help bring them closer to the labour market.

Youth Hub environments were seen as more welcoming and less corporate than traditional Jobcentres. This was seen by Work Coaches, partners and customers to encourage engagement amongst young people. The staff's approach was described as personable and relaxed, and customers felt that the support they received was tailored to their needs. Customers and Work Coaches in the qualitative research typically reported that appointments in Youth Hubs were around 30 minutes long. This longer appointment time was seen as being a particularly important and valuable aspect of the Youth Hubs, as it enabled stronger relationships to be built, which both Work Coaches and customers felt underpinned more effective employment support.

Customers praised the Youth Hubs for the personalised support they received, including job-search help, mental health support, and training opportunities. They also appreciated the social aspect of the Hubs, which allowed them to connect with others in similar circumstances and build confidence.

Areas for development identified included: the need for stronger partnership working between the Youth Hub and local Jobcentres, and a lack of awareness among local employers about the support needs of some young people, which led to unrealistic expectations about how job ready they would be. Customers felt that there could be more support for housing needs.

Employers engaged with the Youth Hubs for reasons such as giving back to the community, raising their organisation's profile, and recruiting young workers. Their engagements with the Hubs were generally positive, though some found it confusing to distinguish between different partners involved in Hub activity. Despite some

challenges, they see the Youth Hubs as a valuable resource for attracting young people to job opportunities.

## **Youth Employability Coaches: Customer and Work Coach views**

YECs worked to support the most vulnerable customers who were viewed as having multiple, complex needs. The qualitative research found that YECs tended to be highly experienced in working with vulnerable, young customers, such as care leavers. However, capacity pressures in Jobcentre offices resulted in the dilution of the YEC role, with some YECs taking on non-YEC customers to reduce pressure. In addition, YECs in Jobcentre offices reported that other colleagues could book appointments for them, reducing the time they had to spend with YEC customers.

The interviews showed that YECs felt that building rapport with customers was crucial for a productive working relationship, with some becoming confidantes for customers, often discussing mental health conditions. Customers felt comfortable discussing their needs with their coaches, although some felt the relationship could be transactional due to short appointment times and the formal nature of Jobcentres.

YECs had flexibility in adjusting appointment frequency and mode based on individual customer needs. The support provided included work-preparation and job-search skills, confidence building, and motivation.

Challenges included lack of time for YECs to meet with customers with complex needs, and limited knowledge and understanding of specific mental health conditions or forms of neurodiversity. For improvement, YECs suggested more training to understand varied customer needs, more formal working arrangements between YECs and Disability Employment Advisors, and alleviating pressure on personal and household finances for customers.

## **Outcomes**

The employment rate across two different waves of the study remained consistent, with both recording a 34% employment rate among customers. Although some customers gained work during the evaluation period, other customers moved out of employment. This varied across Youth Offer strand: customers who were part of the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) were most likely to be in work at both waves, reflecting their closer proximity to the labour market, in line with the policy design.

A quarter of those who were in work at wave two had increased their working hours in the past six months or since starting their job. Customers who did not have a health condition were more likely to be in work, suggesting the potential impact of health conditions on employment outcomes.

The number of barriers to employment identified by customers reduced between the first and second wave. The number of opportunity barriers, which could include factors like lack of relevant job openings or lack of required skills, decreased from an average of 2.2 to 1.9. Similarly, the mean number of personal barriers, which could include personal circumstances or health conditions, went down from 1.9 to 1.7. This



reduction in identified barriers suggests customers have moved closer to the labour market, even if this has not had chance to be translated into employment outcomes.

Customers reported a range of positive outcomes in progressing towards employment and these were most often attributed to their participation in the Youth Offer. The most common outcome was applying for a job (54%), attending a job interview (42%) or finding a job (29%). There were also positive shifts in confidence and attitudes towards work. Just over a third (35%) said they were more confident looking for work and around three in ten (31%) were more confident about their ability to work. Youth Hub customers were more likely than YEP or YEC customers to have applied for a job since they started on the Youth Offer or to feel more confident both about looking for work or their ability to work.

When asked about their job searching skills, the pattern of confidence customers reported followed the complexity of tasks. More customers were confident about completing the most straightforward tasks and least confident about more involved activities. Customers' reported self-confidence in job searching declined between wave 1 and 2. This downward shift is at odds with other measures of attitudes towards work broadly showing a positive uplift (such as a reduction in the proportion seeing availability of jobs as a barrier to work, despite ONS data showing there were fewer job vacancies).<sup>1</sup>

In terms of attitudes towards work, at wave 2, fewer customers held the view that paid work was not a realistic goal for them even with support, or that they would need longer than six months to achieve this. Increased uncertainty about what support they needed was reported, suggesting a need for ongoing support and direction. Customers from the Youth Employment Coach (YEC) strand remained the furthest from the labour market at the second wave. This indicates a need for further, long-term support for this group as they navigate their path towards employment.

Three quarters (74%) of unemployed customers identified residual support needs at wave 2. These were most commonly help with the cost of travel to work (35%), support with getting a new or different job (33%) or support to manage a health condition or disability (31%).

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 17 October 2023, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Vacancies and jobs in the UK: October 2023](#)

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# 1. Introduction and methodology

## 1.1 Policy background

The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) 'Youth Offer' was announced in August 2020 as part of the 'Plan for Jobs' the government's strategic response to the unemployment impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Youth Offer is for Universal Credit customers aged between 16 to 24, who are in the Intensive Work Search regime. The Youth Offer was initially for Universal Credit customers aged 18 to 24, in the Intensive Work Search Regime and was extended to customers aged 16 and 17 from 1 December 2021. Young people aged under 18 can only claim UC, and therefore enter the Youth Offer in specific circumstances.

Employment opportunities for this group were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They were nearly twice as likely to have become unemployed in its early stages compared to other age groups<sup>2</sup>. This was due to their relative lack of skills and experience, compounded by their overrepresentation in sectors most at risk, such as retail and hospitality. A specific employment programme was therefore seen to be needed for young people, to minimise the time spend unemployed and avoid the risk of the long-term scarring effects of youth unemployment.

The Youth Offer comprises three strands: the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hubs and Youth Employability Coaches. The intended policy design for these three strands is set out below. Youth Offer strands were intended to be adapted to meet local needs and one of the aims of the evaluation was to shed light on these local variations in practice.

### 1.1.1 Youth Employment Programme

Customers aged 16-24 claiming Universal Credit (UC) in the Intensive Work Search (IWS) regime automatically enter the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). The 13-week YEP programme is designed to help young people closer to the labour market prepare for work and increase their chances of moving into paid employment.

Following a customer's first commitment meeting, as part of the YEP, Work Coaches are expected to conduct an Employment and Skills Review (ESR) with the customer. As part of this review customers can get help to:

- develop and improve their CV
- receive support in understanding how to conduct online job-searches and applications

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/march2021>

- identify any work-related training they might need
- identify any basic skills they need support with (i.e. English, Maths or IT)
- explore any barriers that may prevent them from taking up work-based opportunities
- identify what work-based opportunities are available to them over the 13-week programme

Work Coaches are expected to conduct a progress review with customers by week 11 (or sooner if seen to be appropriate). This appointment should for an additional 10-minutes and include a full review of a customer's journey over the previous weeks. With a customer, a Work Coach should identify and agree next steps for the remainder of the 13-weeks and discuss work and training related options. Customers could also be referred to the Youth Hub or Youth Employability Coach strands of the Youth Offer for more intensive support.

In most cases, customers with health condition related claims are referred to the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments on day 29 of their claim. Under some circumstances, this referral can take place on day one of their claim. This results in some customers continuing to see a Work Coach until the outcome of their Work Capability Assessment has been determined.

For customers who are not referred on to a further Youth Offer strand, from this point routine appointments will take place between Work Coaches and customers. This will include a review of customers work search since their last appointment. Work Coaches may also signpost or refer customers to local support or job opportunities. Local support opportunities could include Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), work experience, apprenticeships or mentoring circles, which are sessions hosted by employers to help develop customers' CV writing, interview and application skills.

### **1.1.2 Youth Hubs**

The Youth Hub strand of the Youth Offer is designed to facilitate access to a range of support services for customers in one location, separate to the Jobcentre. Youth Hubs are typically located in community settings owned by partners with other organisations present. Some Youth Hubs operate on an appointment only basis, while others offer a drop-in service for all young people who need support to find work, including those not claiming Universal Credit. Customers referred to Youth Hubs can access intensive support for up to 6 months, during which time a customer's main point of contact is their Youth Hub Work Coach. Youth Employability Coaches can also be based in these settings.

Youth Hub Work Coaches have flexibility to set the frequency and length of appointments they have with customers supported in the Hub. The type of support provided depends on:

- the location of the Youth Hub
- providers that the work coaches are working alongside
- a customer's individual needs and barriers to work



### **1.1.3 Youth Employability Coaches**

The Youth Employability Coach (YEC) strand of the Youth Offer is designed for those aged 16-24 in the Intensive Work Search regime with the most complex support needs. YECs provide tailored and targeted support to young people with complex needs to develop the skills needed to look for, find and keep employment. Young people aged under 18 were intended to be referred directly to a Youth Employability Coach, reflecting that they were likely to have significant complex needs or vulnerabilities.

This intensive support is intended to last up to six months and can be extended to 12 months following a case conference, where appropriate. Across this time, YECs can provide and facilitate access to CV, application and interview preparation support, identify suitable opportunities to develop customers' employability skills, conduct in-depth conversations with customers about their work search and opportunities available to them, and advocate for customers with employers and providers where appropriate. They can meet customers in partner support services to facilitate warm handovers.

YECs provide and facilitate access to CV, application and interview preparation support, identify suitable opportunities to develop customers' employability skills, conduct in-depth conversations with customers about their work search and opportunities available to them, and advocate for customers with employers and providers where appropriate. Additionally, YECs can provide up to six weeks of in work support when a customer starts work or a work-based opportunity.

YECs are typically based in Jobcentres or Youth Hubs and can meet customers in public places where the customer is more comfortable if this is beneficial.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

This multi-strand evaluation aimed to understand soft and hard outcomes of the Youth Offer policy in supporting young people into/towards employment, including each of the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Employability Coaches and Youth Hub strands.

The evaluation explored how the Youth Offer has been delivered in practice and the extent to which delivery is meeting the policy intent. The survey findings draw on customer perspectives and the qualitative findings draw on staff, Hub partner and employer views. These findings look at each strand of the Youth Offer individually and consider how customer characteristics inform differences in experiences and outcomes.

## **1.3 Methodology**

The evaluation took a mixed-methodology approach comprising a two wave, cross-sectional and longitudinal survey and qualitative depth interviews and observations.

### **1.3.1 Quantitative research**

A two wave, quantitative survey was conducted with Youth Offer customers from across the three strands.

DWP provided a sample of customers for the survey, comprising customers from each of the three strands of the Youth Offer, who had started on their current strand of the Youth Offer between August 2022 and January 2023.

The first wave of survey research was conducted between 28 April and 3 July 2023 and achieved 2976 completes with Youth Offer customers. Wave two of the survey was conducted about six months later, between 27 October and 17 December 2023 and achieved 1377 interviews. Four hundred longitudinal interviews were conducted with customers who took part in both waves.

For analysis purposes, survey customers were classified according to the Youth Offer strand which was provided in the DWP sample. This meant that by the time of fieldwork, some customers could no longer be receiving support from the Youth Offer or could be receiving support from a separate Youth Offer strand.

The survey data were weighted by age (20 and under, 21 and older), gender and region based on DWP's profile of the Youth Offer customer population. A detailed breakdown of the weighting profile is set out in Appendix A.

Only statistically significant findings from the survey have been reported in the commentary (although charts and tables may include non-statistically significant differences)<sup>3</sup>. All tables and charts report weighted data but include the unweighted base.

The survey results are subject to margins of error, which vary depending on the number of respondents answering each question and pattern of responses. Where figures do not add to 100 per cent, this is due to rounding or because the question allows for more than one response.

### **1.3.2 Qualitative research**

The qualitative research completed as part of this project consisted of two elements: in-depth interviews across a mix of urban, rural and coastal locations in England (with or without Youth Hubs), Scotland and Wales, and two on-site observations of Youth Hub services.

In selecting areas for inclusion, a long-list was compiled covering the nine English regions as well as areas within Scotland and Wales. Areas selected included a mixture of rural, urban and coastal geographies, and differing local labour market and socio-economic contexts. Locations were also prioritised for inclusion based on whether Youth Hub services were being delivered in the area. At the time of the research, Youth Hubs were operating across 124 separate locations. A few areas were included in this long-list that did not have a Youth hub presence to compare how the Youth Offer was delivered in these locations.

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<sup>3</sup> At the 95% confidence level.

### **In-depth interviews**

This element of the qualitative research sought to explore Youth Offer delivery across eight locations in England, Scotland and Wales through in-depth interviews with Work Coaches across all three Youth Offer strands, Youth Hub partners, employers and customers. Six out of the eight locations selected had one or more Youth Hubs active in the area at the time of the research.

To achieve sufficient numbers of interviews with customers, customers were sampled from a wider area surrounding the eight locations and/or from areas with similar characteristics.

In total, 37 in-depth interviews with Work Coaches, Youth Hub partners and employers were conducted, and a further 60 in-depth interviews with customers across the three Youth Offer strands were completed. In-depth interviews were completed between May and July 2023.

### **Youth Hub observations**

To develop a more detailed insight into different Youth Hub contexts and how this affects the customer experience (their physical environment, the nature of customer appointments with Work Coaches, and the range of services available), two two-day visits to Youth Hub sites were completed. These were sites that participated in the in-depth interview strand of the research.

During these visits, 12 observations of appointments between Youth Hub Work Coaches and customers were completed, as well as nine in-depth interviews with customers who had accessed the support for several months.

The Youth Hub observations were completed between September and October 2023.

### **Limitations**

It should be noted that, as with any qualitative study, the qualitative research is not based on a representative sample. As such, the findings presented in this report are not generalisable to other Jobcentre staff, Hub partners, employers and customers within or beyond the local areas included in this research.

All the findings are self-reported and have not been verified. For instance, it was not possible for us to independently verify whether the customers interviewed were on the strand of the Youth Offer that DWP data indicated they were on. The findings presented here are based on customers stated answers and what they recalled about the support they received but should be interpreted with caution.

For example, sometimes customers did not recognise the name of the Youth Offer strand they were on or were unaware they had been referred. This was a particular challenge among customers whom DWP data indicated had been referred to Youth Employability Coaches. Interviews with DWP staff in selected areas highlighted that customers were not often told they were being referred to a Youth Employability Coach for more intensive support. In contrast, it was common for the Youth Hub customers interviewed to be told they were being referred to this strand and know it by this name. We also know that all 16-24 year old customers in the Intensive Work Search regime are automatically enrolled on the Youth Employment Programme,

even if they are often not made aware of this, so can report these and the Youth Hub findings with greater confidence.

The sample was taken from the population who were enrolled onto the Youth Offer at the earliest stage possible in the process of claiming Universal Credit. Some of the customers included in the YEP, Youth Hub, and YEC groups have moved on from the Intensive Work Search conditionality group to another conditionality group based on the outcome of their work capability assessment.

## 2. Youth Offer customer profiles and referrals approaches

This chapter describes the demographic profile of customers who received support from the Youth Offer programme, to provide context for the findings in later chapters. This includes the composition of the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hub, and Youth Employment Coach strands. It goes on to set out why Work Coaches referred customers to the Youth Hub or Youth Employability Coach strands, which offer more intensive support, drawing on the qualitative interviews.

### 2.1 Youth Offer Customer Profiles

Customers were asked about their demographic characteristics to understand whether and how the demographic profile of Youth Offer customers differs from the population as a whole, and to establish if there were relationships between these characteristics and their support needs. Around half of customers (52%) were male and 40% were female. One in twenty (5%) said they identified as a gender different to the one registered at birth. This is in line with the ONS estimate of the UK population from the 2021 Census<sup>4</sup> and GP Patient Survey<sup>5</sup>. Five percent said they preferred not to answer this question.

Over seven in ten customers (73%) identified as heterosexual, whilst nearly one in five customers (19%) identified as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or another sexual orientation. This is higher than the population data for this age group; in the England and Wales Census 2021 the figure was only 7%, showing that people identifying as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or another sexual orientation were over-represented in this customer group.

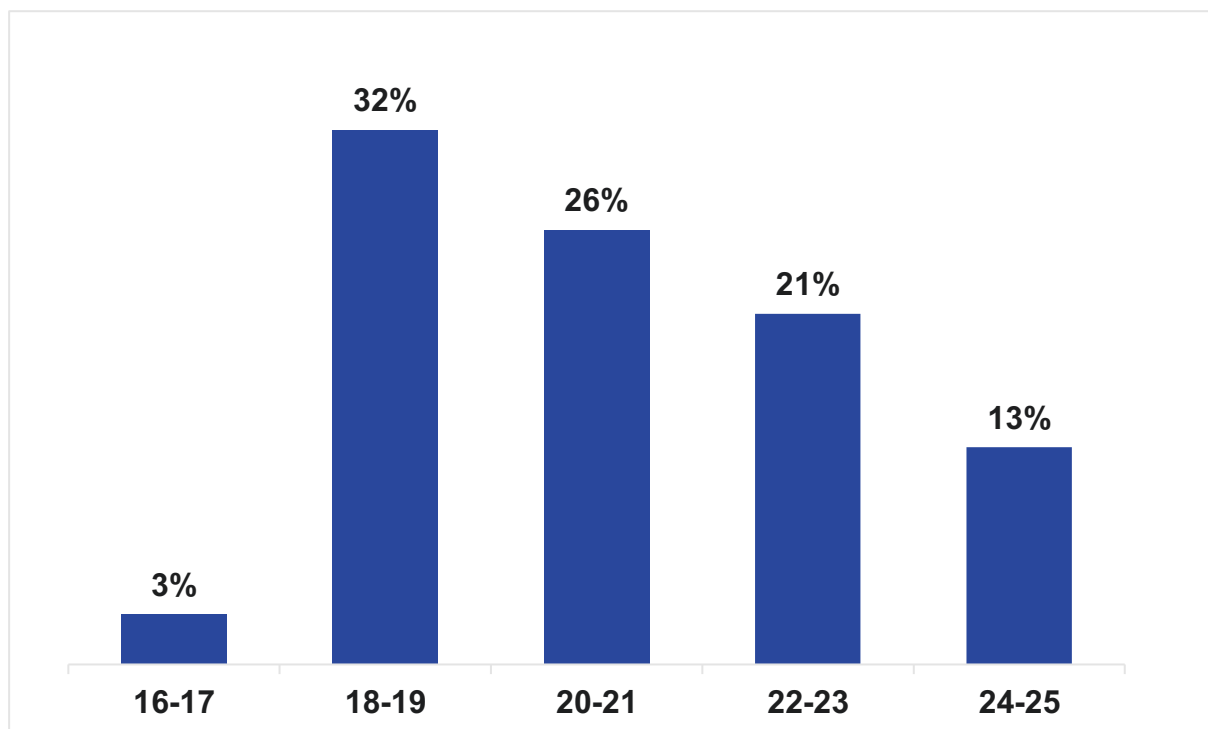
People aged 16-17-years-old are only eligible for Universal Credit in particular circumstances. These customers made up just 3% of the customer profile. One in three (32%) were aged between 18-19-years old. One in four (26%) were aged between 20-21-years old, and the remaining third (34%) were aged between 22-25-years-old (The group aged 25 would have been 24 when starting the Youth Offer and since had a birthday). Figure 2.1 provides a breakdown by age band.

#### Figure 2.1: Customer age

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>

<sup>5</sup> <https://gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports2021>

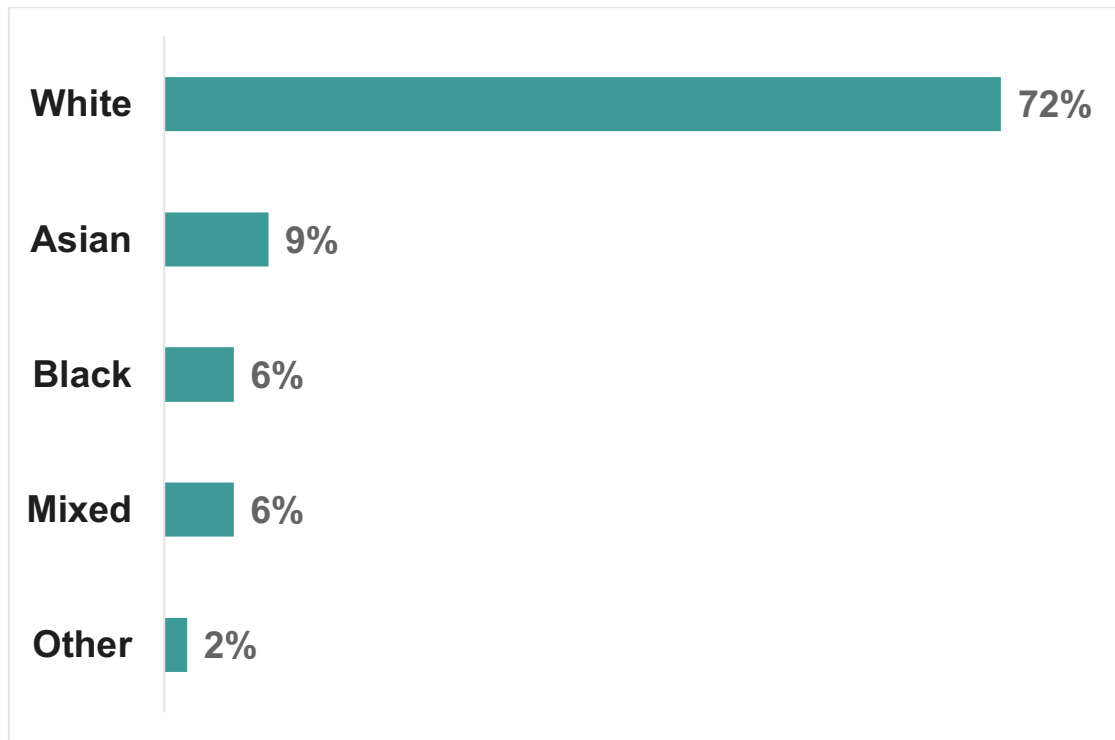


Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

Just over seven in ten customers were ethnically White including White ethnic minority (72%), while nearly one in four (23%) were from a non-white ethnic minority. Just under one in ten customers were of an Asian (9%) ethnicity. Smaller proportions said they were from a mixed (6%), Black (6%), or any other ethnic group (2%) background. This is slightly skewed compared with the 2021 Census<sup>6</sup> where there were a higher majority from a White ethnic background (81%) and one in five (19%) were from a non-white ethnic minority. Details of customer ethnicity is shown in figure 2.2 below.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>

**Figure 2.2: Youth Offer Customer Ethnicity**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

### 2.1.1 Health condition and disabilities

Almost half of customers had a health condition or disability (49%) expected to last 12 months or more. Four in ten had a mental health condition (42%), almost one in five (19%) had a physical condition and one in ten (12%) had both a mental and physical health conditions. Of those with a long-term health condition almost nine in ten (88%) answered that it reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This included around half (47%) of customers stating it had little impact and two in five (41%) stating it had a lot of impact on day-to-day activities.

Female customers or those of another gender were more likely than males to have a long-term health condition or disability. Over eight in ten customers of another gender (82%) and over half of females (56%) had a long-term health condition or disability compared with around four in ten males (42%).

Over half (55%) of people who were ethnically White including White ethnic minority reported having any long-term health condition, compared with 33% of those from non-White backgrounds.

Lastly, those with a long-term health condition were more likely to have no formal qualifications (15%) compared to those with no long-term health condition (9%).

## 2.2 Demographic profile of each Youth Offer strand

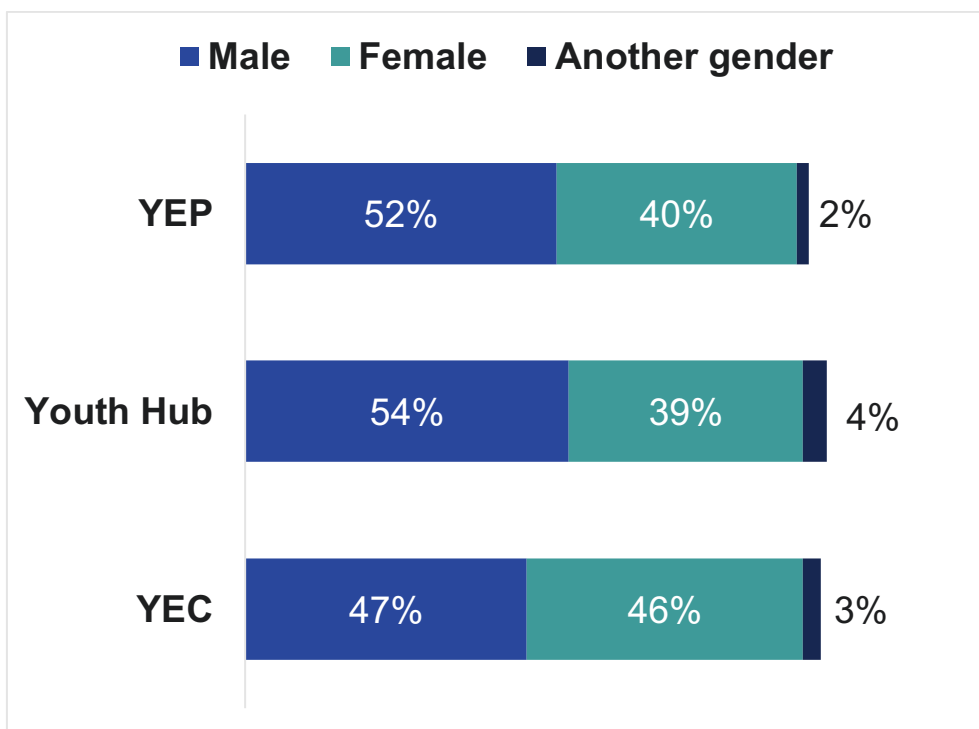
The Youth Offer programme is made up of the Youth Employment Programme, Youth Hub, and Youth Employability Coach strands. Each strand is targeted to support customers with different needs of varying intensity. The following analysis helps demonstrate how this targeting has taken place. Throughout the report, direct comparisons of satisfaction with support received and outcomes are intended to draw comparisons between the customer profile and needs of each strand. This does not necessarily relate to the underlying quality of the support, and instead may relate to the varied needs of the customer groups.

### 2.2.1 Personal characteristics by Youth Offer strand

#### Gender identity

Males accounted for 52% YEP customers, 54% of Youth Hub customers and 47% of YEC customers. For YEP and Youth Hub, females accounted for around two in five customers (40% of YEP and 39% of Youth Hub). The YEC strand had equal proportions of males (47%) and females (46%).

**Figure 2.3: Gender of customers across strands**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

Consistently across each strand, one in twenty or less identified as being a different sex to the one they were registered as at birth (YEP, 5%; Youth Hub, 2%; YEC, 5%).



### **Sexual orientation**

Sexual orientation was similar for each strand, with around seven in ten who identified as heterosexual (YEP, 73%; Youth Hub, 71%; YEC, 72%). Less than one in ten at each strand identified as gay or lesbian (YEP, 5%; Youth Hub, 4%; YEC, 7%) or bisexual (YEP, 5%; Youth Hub, 4%; YEC, 7%).

### **Age**

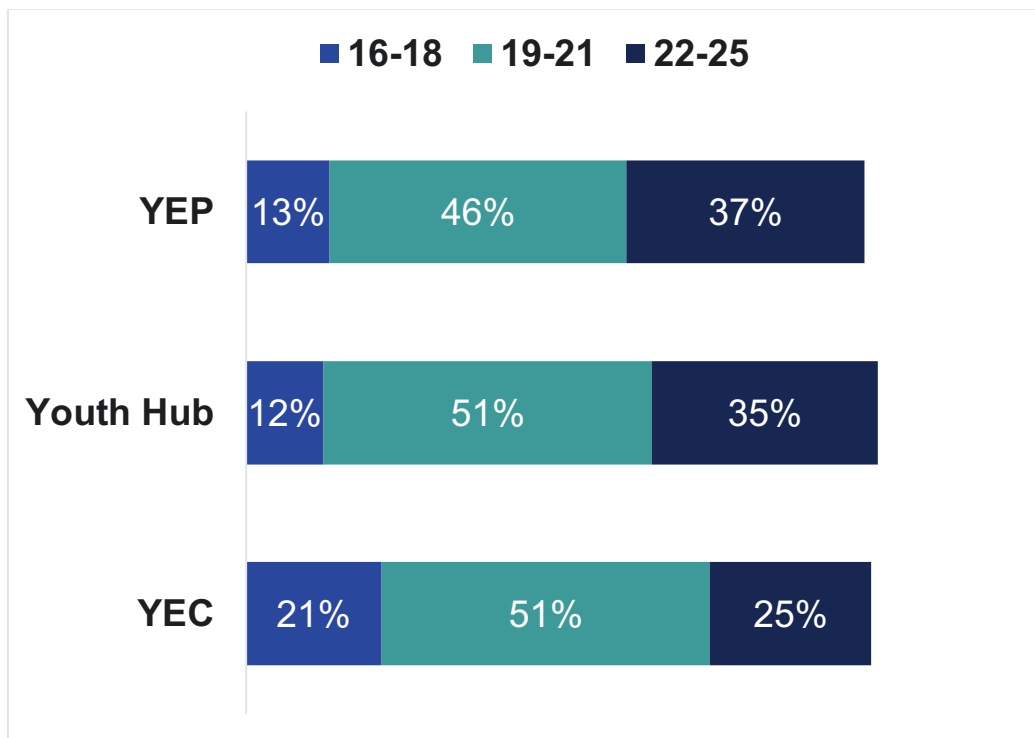
Customers aged 16-17 made up a higher proportion of YEC customers (8%) than they do YEP (2%) or Youth Hub (1%) customers. This reflects that this group can only claim UC in exceptional circumstances and thus will often meet the criteria to be referred directly to YEC.

This pattern is replicated, although less starkly, for customers aged between 18-19 where 42% of YEC customers fell into this age group compared with 31% for each of YEP and Youth Hubs.

Conversely, older customers (aged 20 or over) made up a smaller proportion of YEC customers (46%) than of YEP (63%) or Youth Hub (66%) customers.

Figure 2.4 below shows the breakdown of age bands across strands.

**Figure 2.4: Age of customers by strand**



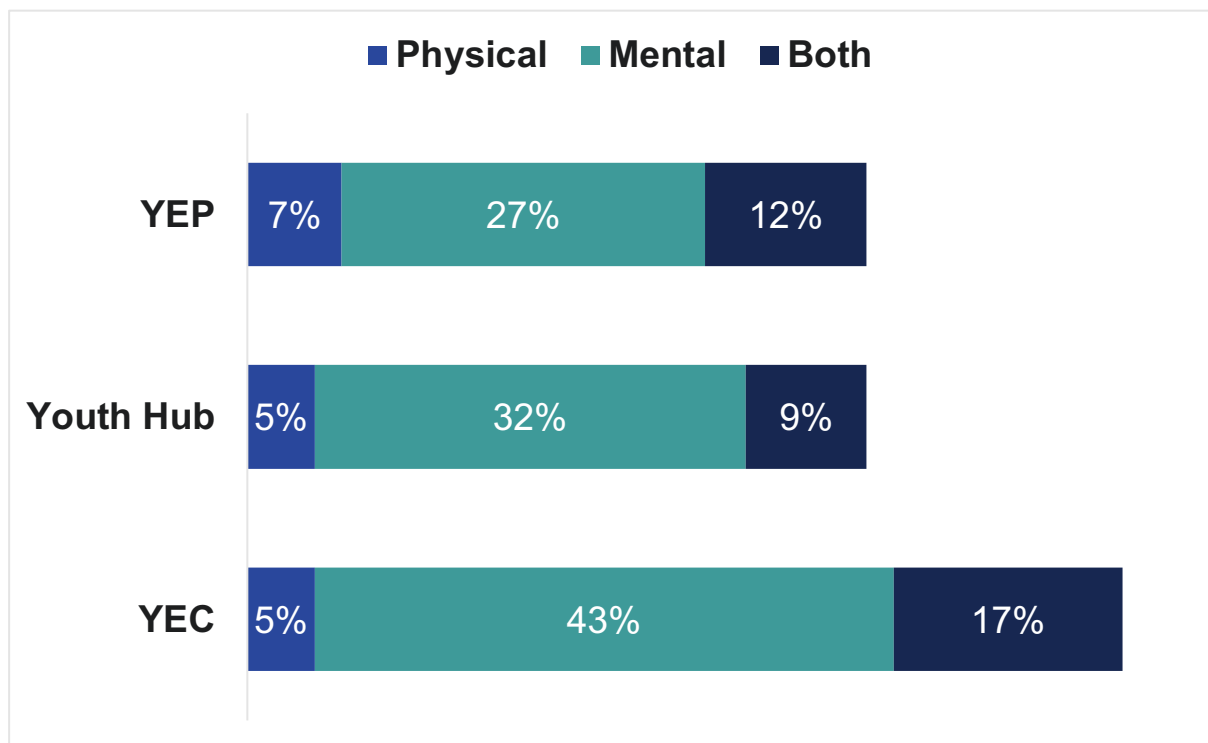
Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

**Long-term health conditions or disabilities**

YEC customers were most likely to have a long-term health condition. Two in three (65%) YEC customers said they had either, or both, a long-term mental or physical health condition, compared with less than half (46%) of YEP or Youth Hub customers. This suggests that appropriate referrals were made, with those likely to have more support needs being referred to YEC.

YEC customers were more likely to have a mental health condition (43%) than Youth Hub (32%) or YEP (27%) customers. Around one in five YEC customers (17%) had both a long-term mental and physical health condition, compared to around one in ten (12% of YEP and 9% of Youth Hub) customers. Similar proportions of YEP (7%), Youth Hub and YEC (both 5%) customers had a long-term physical health condition. This is shown in Figure 2.5.

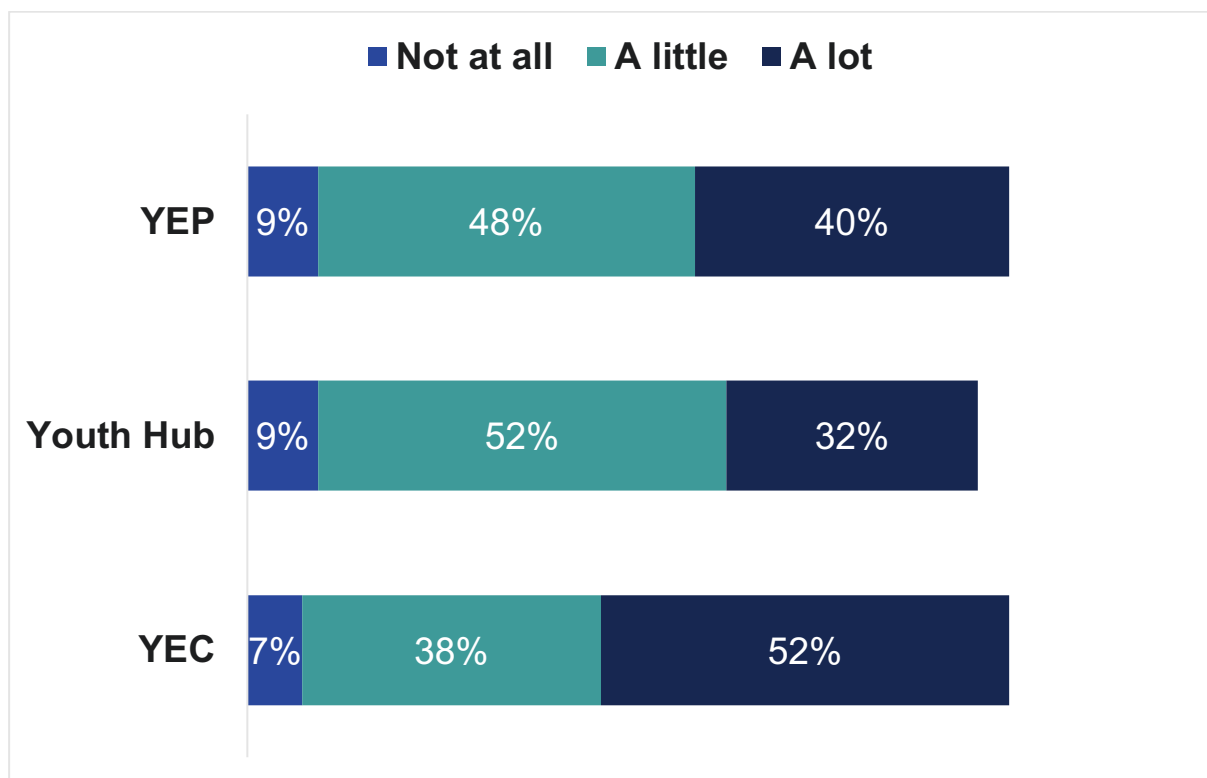
**Figure 2.5: Long-term health condition by strand**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

Overall, almost nine in ten customers with a long-term health condition or disability (88%) said that their condition reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This proportion was consistent across all three Youth Offer strands (YEP, 88%; Youth Hub, 85%; YEC, 87%). However, YEC customers with a long-term health condition were more likely to say the condition limits their ability to carry out day-to-day activities “a lot” (52%, compared to 40% for YEP and 32% for Youth Hub), highlighting the additional challenges people referred to this strand face. This can be seen below in figure 2.6.

**Figure 2.6: Impact of long-term health condition or disability on ability to carry out day-to-day activities**



Base: All customers at wave 2 with a long-term health condition (692), YEP (479), Youth Hub (84), YEC (129)

**Ethnicity**

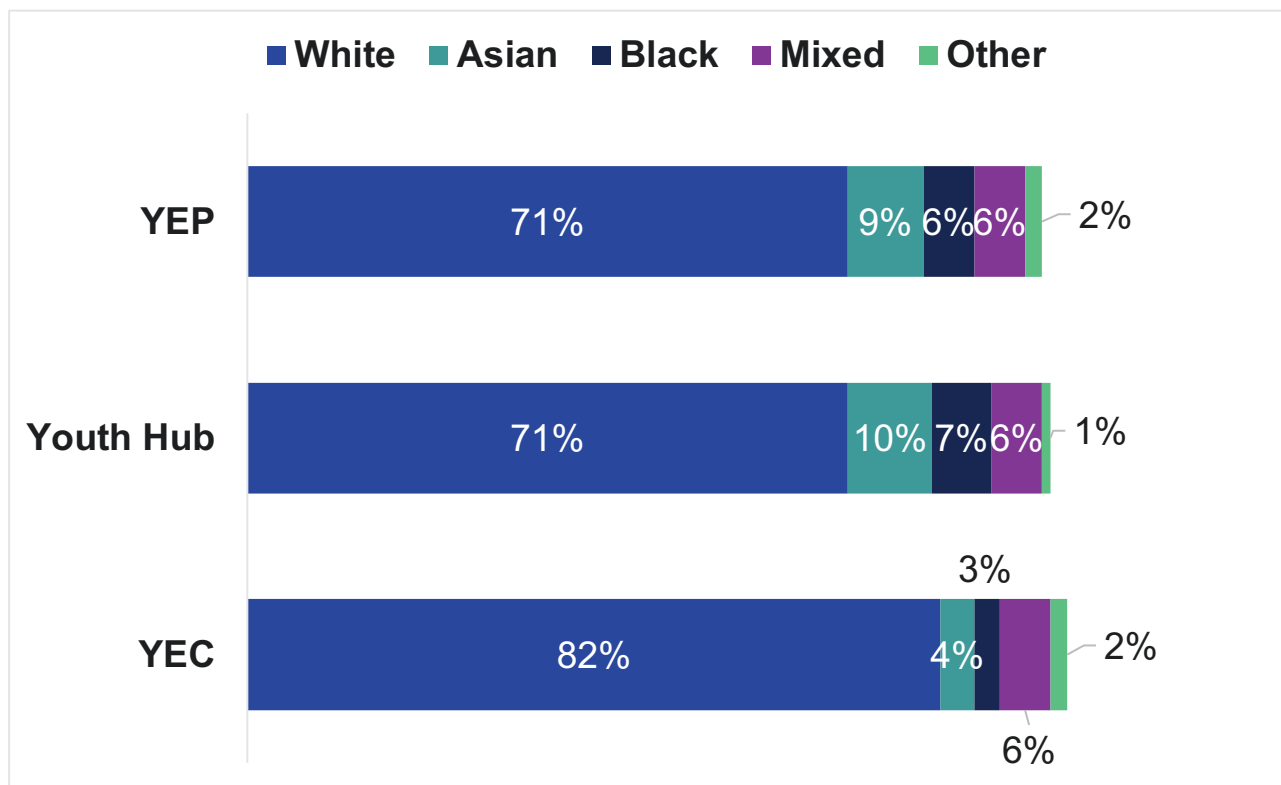
A quarter of YEP and Youth Hub (24%) customers and over one in ten (14%) YEC customers were from an ethnic minority.

Seven in ten (71%) YEP customers were ethnically White including White ethnic minorities. Almost one in ten (9%) were Asian, 6% were of a mixed ethnicity, 6% were Black and 2% of YEP customers were from another ethnic background not listed.

The same proportion (71%) of Youth Hub customers were ethnically White including White ethnic minorities. One in ten (10%) were Asian, 7% were Black, and 6% were of a mixed ethnicity and 1% were from another ethnic background.

YEC customers were most likely to be ethnically White, including White ethnic minorities (82%); 6% of YEC customers were of a mixed ethnicity, 4% were Asian, 3% were Black and were 2% of another ethnicity. A breakdown is shown in Figure 2.7. Customers who were ethnically White were most likely to have a long-term health condition or disability (55%), than those of a mixed ethnicity (43%), those who were Black (35%), Asian (24%) or from another ethnic background (35%).

**Figure 2.7: Ethnicity by strand**



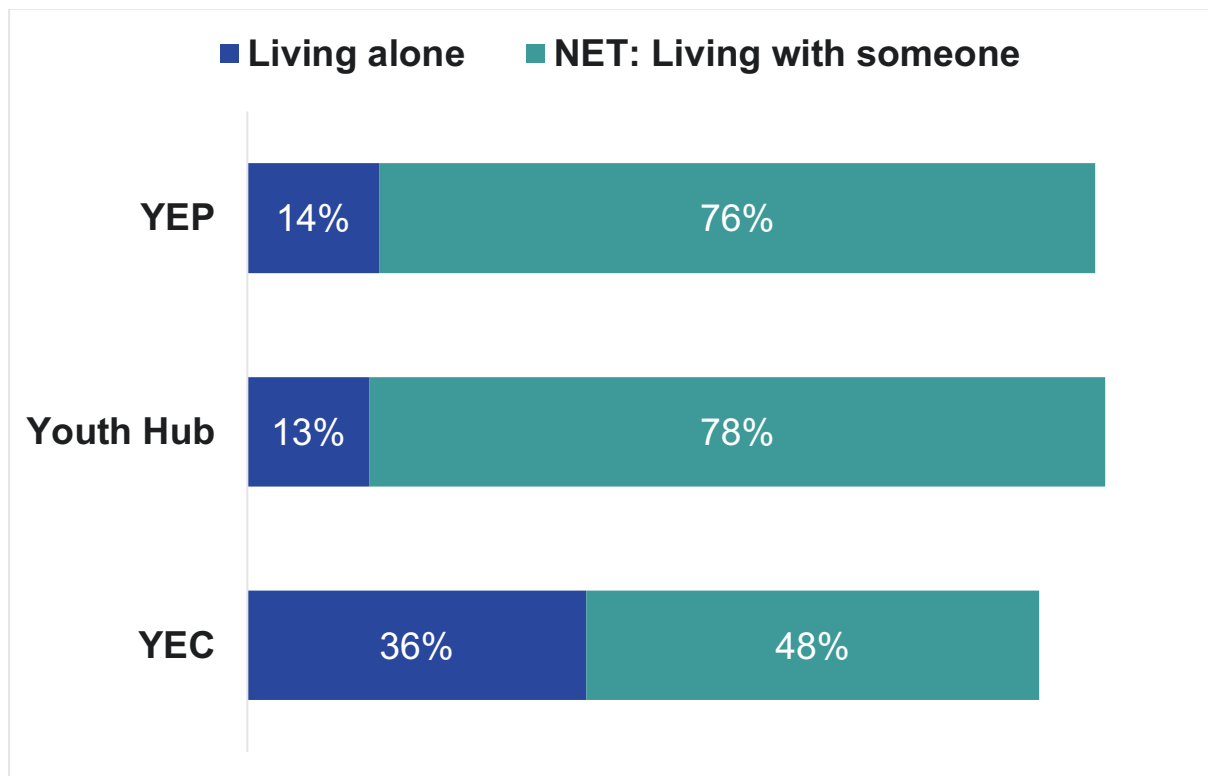
Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown 'Prefer not to say'.

**Living circumstances**

Just over three quarters of YEP (76%) customers and close to eight in ten Youth Hub (78%) customers lived with someone, compared to half (48%) of YEC customers. More than one in three (36%) YEC customers were living alone, compared to one in seven YEP (14%) or Youth Hub (13%) customers.

Over half of YEP (54%) and Youth Hub (56%) customers who lived with someone lived with their parents, compared to over a quarter (27%) of YEC customers. Figure 2.8 shows the percentage of customers who were living with someone YEC customers were more likely to be living alone and least likely to be living with their parents, despite also being more likely to be younger. This illustrates the prevalence of complex personal circumstances amongst this group, suggesting that referrals to YEC were being made appropriately. It also highlights how YEC customers' personal circumstances were likely to act as barriers to employment.

**Figure 2.8: Living circumstances by strand**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

Of customers who were living with someone, a quarter of Youth Hub (24%) customers had caring responsibilities as did close to one in five of YEP (19%) and YEC (17%) customers.

## 2.2.2 Education and employment history by Youth Offer strand

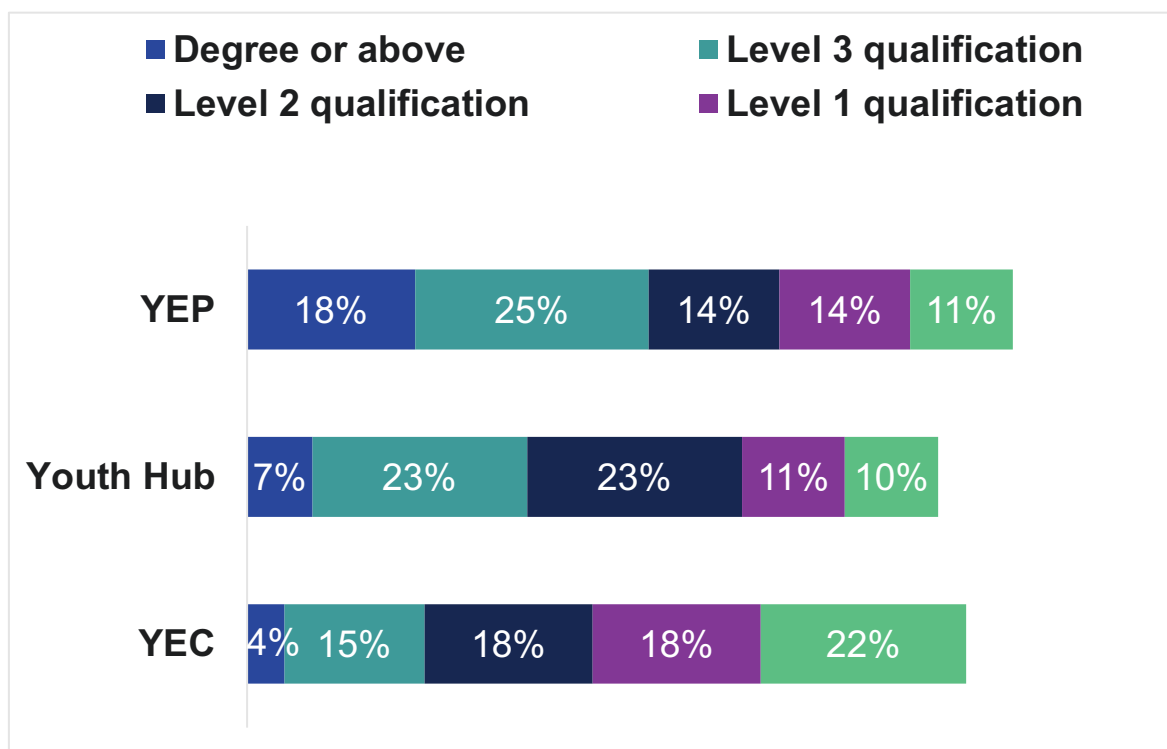
### Education

More than half of customers from each strand had qualifications equivalent to Level 3 (A-Levels or equivalent) or below: 57% of Youth Hub customers, 53% of YEP, and 51% of YEC.

YEP customers were more likely to be qualified to degree level or above (18%), compared to 7% of Youth Hub, and 4% of YEC customers.

YEC customers were most likely to have no qualifications (22%) compared with around one in ten of those part of YEP (11%) and Youth Hub (10%). Figure 2.9 shows qualification levels amongst customers on each strand.

**Figure 2.9: Highest qualification level by strand**



Base: All customers (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Not shown: ‘Something else’ and ‘Prefer not to say’.

### Employment history

At wave 1, unemployed customers were asked if they previously had any paid employment since leaving education (including apprenticeships but excluding traineeships). Just over half of customers on each strand had not had any paid employment since leaving education (52% of YEP and Youth Hub customers, and 53% of YEC). Those with no qualifications (61%) were more likely than those with any level of qualification (48%) not to have any work experience. YEP and Youth Hub customers were likely to be older than YEC customers. They were therefore likely to have had a longer period of unemployment between leaving education and starting on the Youth Offer. This suggests that these YEP and Youth Hub customers were also likely to be in need of basic employment support, and potentially targeted support to address this longer gap between education and employment.

### 2.2.3 Life satisfaction

At both waves of the survey, customers were asked how satisfied they were with their life nowadays on a scale from 0-10, with 0 representing ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 representing ‘completely satisfied’. The question wording followed the harmonised wellbeing question wording developed by the ONS.

The proportion of Youth Offer customers reporting low life satisfaction (a score between 0-4) increased from 29% at wave 1 to 33% at wave 2. Those with a long-

term health condition were also more likely to report low life satisfaction (46%) compared to those who did not have a long-term health condition (19%). This category had the highest proportion of customers, across each strand. YEC customers were most likely to report low life satisfaction (44%), compared to 36% of Youth Hub and 30% of YEP.

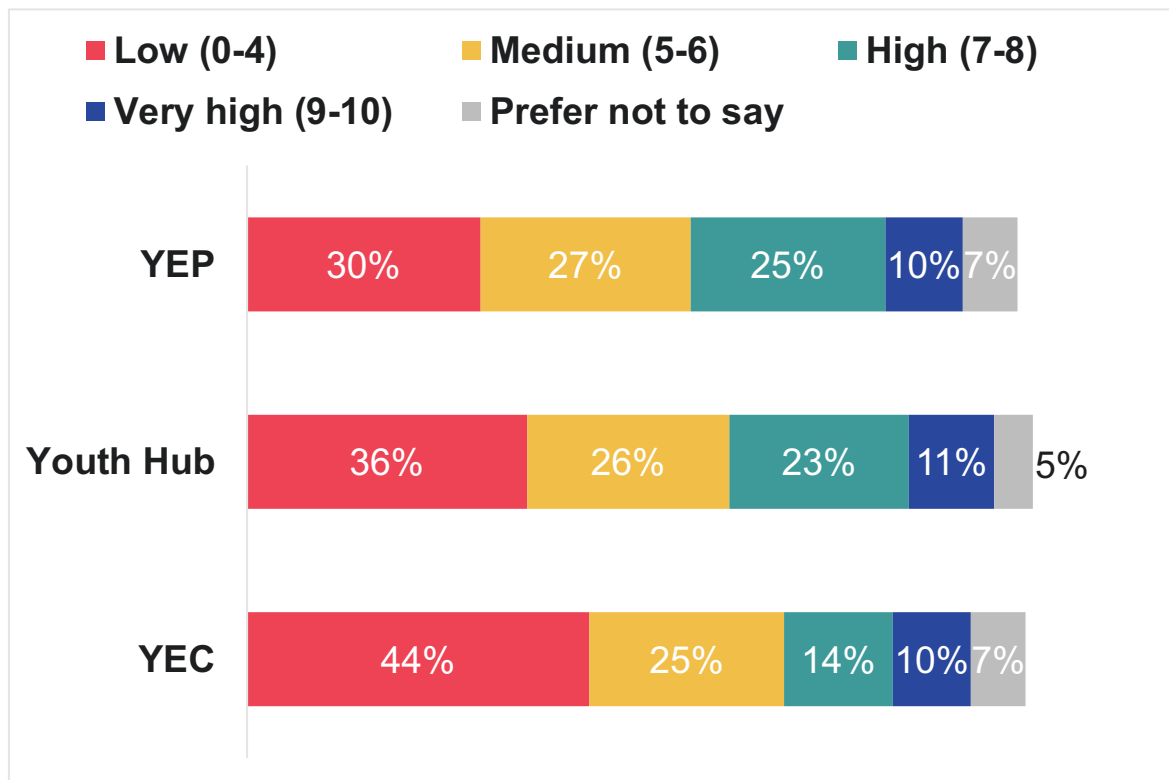
Life satisfaction ratings of 5-6 are classed as ‘medium’. Overall, 27% of Youth Offer customers reported this, consistent with wave 1 (25%). Similar proportions of customers in each strand selected this (YEP, 27%; Youth Hub, 26%; YEC, 25%).

Overall, nearly a quarter (23%) of Youth Offer customers rated their life satisfaction as high at wave 2, down from 29% at wave 1. YEP customers (25%) were most likely to rate their life satisfaction as ‘high’ compared with Youth Hub (23%) and YEC (14%).

At wave 2, one in ten customers rated their life satisfaction as ‘very high’ (9-10), down from 14% at wave one. This was consistent across the strands (YEP, 10%; Youth Hub, 11%; YEC, 10%).

Figure 2.10 shows the breakdown across strands of levels of life satisfaction.

**Figure 2.10: Life satisfaction by strand**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192)



YEP customers had the highest mean score for life satisfaction (5.46). This was closely followed by Youth Hub customers, where the mean score was 5.17. YEC customers had the lowest mean score at 4.49.

## 2.2.4 Anxiety

Customers were asked on a scale from 0-10, overall, how anxious were the yesterday, where 0 represented 'not at all anxious', and 10 represented 'completely anxious'<sup>7</sup>.

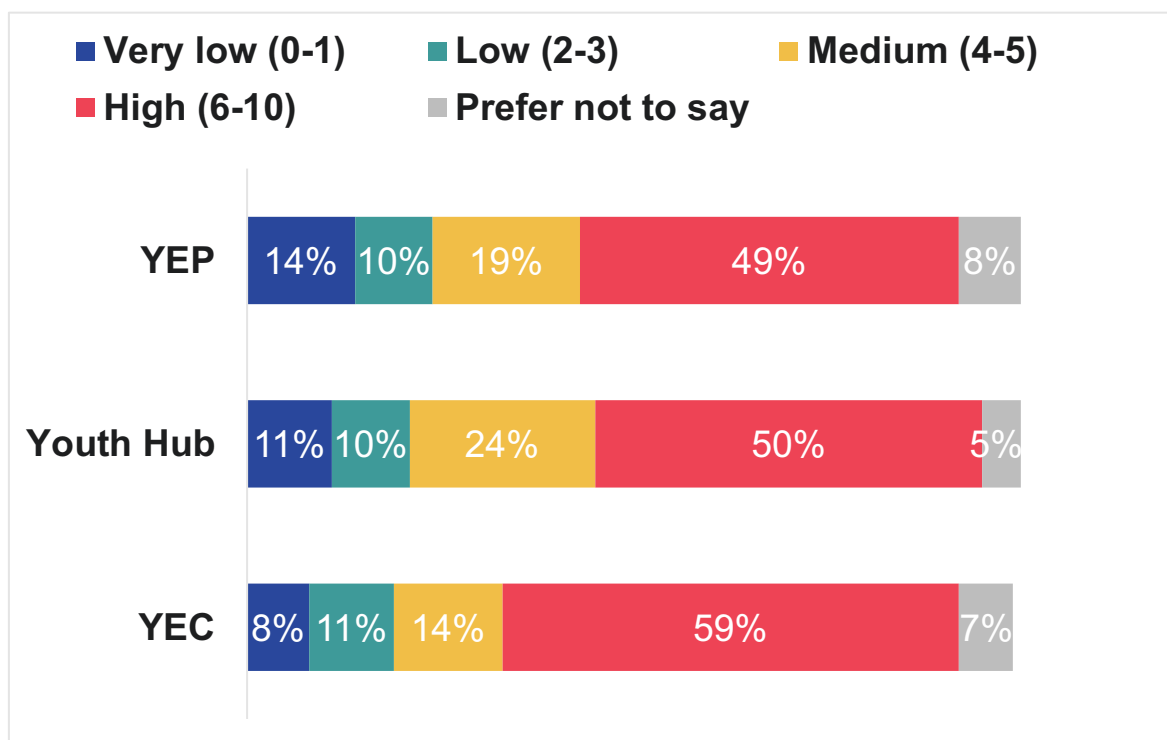
Between wave 1 and 2, the proportion reporting high anxiety (rating their anxiety as 6 – 10) increased from 45% to 51%. Two in three (66%) customers who had a long-term health condition reported high anxiety compared with around one in three (35%) of those who did not have a long-term health condition.

YEC customers were most likely to report high anxiety (59%) however this also applied to half of customers from YEP (49%) and Youth Hub (50%). Figure 2.11 shows the breakdown of anxiety levels across the different strands.

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<sup>7</sup> The proportion of customers reporting "stress or anxiety" as a long-term illness, health disorder or disability (wave 1: 26%) was lower than the proportion reporting high anxiety at the time of the survey (wave 1: 45%).

**Figure 2.11: Feelings of anxiousness the previous day, by strand**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192).

YEC had the highest mean score of 6.5, Youth Hub had a mean score of 5.7, and YEP had the lowest mean score of 5.5.

### 2.2.5 Additional needs

The survey measured the prevalence of various additional needs, including experience of the care system, domestic violence or addiction<sup>8</sup>.

YEC customers were more likely to have additional needs than YEP or Youth Hub customers. Half of customers from YEP (50%) and close to half (46%) of Youth Hub customers said that they had none of the additional needs listed, while just over one in four (27%) YEC customers agreed.

YEC customers were much more likely to be care experienced or a care leaver (20%), compared to 8% of YEP and 6% of Youth Hub customers. They were least likely to be in contact with their parents or wider family (17%), compared to one in ten of YEP (9%) and Youth Hub (10%) customers.

YEC customers were more likely to have experienced or been in a household where domestic violence took place (20%), compared to 14% of Youth Hub and 12% of YEP customers. They were twice as likely as YEP or Youth Hub customers to have

<sup>8</sup> A full list of needs mentioned by the questionnaire: Drug and/or alcohol addiction (their own), parents' drug/alcohol addiction, having to go without two or more essentials (food, heating, lighting, basic toiletries) in the past month because they could not afford them, care experience/a care leaver, a learning disability, a criminal record, experience of homelessness or housing difficulties, domestic violence, not in contact with parents/wider family, and physical, psychological or social trauma.

parents who were addicted to drugs and/or alcohol (13%, YEP 6% and Youth Hub 3%).

Perhaps reflecting their more vulnerable personal circumstances, YEC customers were most likely to have had to go without two or more essentials in the past month due to being unable to afford them, 29% compared with 18% of Youth Hub and 14% of YEP customers.

## 2.3 Factors informing Work Coach decisions to refer customers to different Youth Offer strands

This section explores the reasons provided by Work Coaches interviewed, delivering the Youth Employment Programme, to refer customers to either the Youth Hub or Youth Employability Coach strands of the Youth Offer.

### 2.3.1 Youth Hub referrals

In areas where Youth Hubs were active, this research found that Hubs are highly localised, each with different ways of working between Hub partners and DWP staff and different support offers depending on the needs of young people locally and the type of partnership organisations involved.

The most widespread reason why Work Coaches would refer customers to a Youth Hub was if they felt that the customer could benefit from the services offered at the local Youth Hub. Some Work Coaches felt that the Youth Hub support offer was more holistic and wider ranging than the Jobcentre, and so could better meet the full range of customer needs, for example, health and wellbeing needs as well as job-search support. Some of the Youth Hub customers interviewed recalled their Work Coach at the Jobcentre mentioning the holistic nature of the support as a reason for their referral.

*“I think she said it would just be a bit better for me in terms of my situation. She felt like it would be more helpful and it was a more relaxed place and I could work on like my CV there with someone and I think it was bit more holistic than just the Jobcentre”*

Youth Hub customer

In some areas, the Youth Hubs were Work Coaches' preferred referral option if customers needed help to write or develop their CV. In these instances, Work Coaches explained that the process of referring customers to the Youth Hub was more straightforward than for some of the other CV support services they could refer to. Work Coaches also noted that attending a Youth Hub provided an opportunity for young people to find out about other services they could potentially access.

Other reasons for Youth Hub referrals included if customers seemed anxious, reserved or were clearly uncomfortable in the Jobcentre environment. This could include neurodiverse customers or those with long-term mental health conditions. Work Coaches felt that Youth Hub settings were generally less busy and noisy than

Jobcentres. The more informal and relaxed atmosphere was felt to be more appropriate for these customers and more likely to enable them to achieve a positive outcome.

*“The last time I actually did see [my original Work Coach], she just told me she was going to sort me out and send me to this place and it's just a lot better. It's less formal, it's centred around young people and there's more opportunities, there's more fun, it's not overflowing with people either”.*

Youth Hub customer

In some locations, Work Coaches stated that they would refer customers to a specific Youth Hub if it was located within the postcode area where a customer lived. This was more common in local areas that had multiple Youth Hub settings. These Work Coaches felt it would be easier for customers to attend their regular weekly appointment in an inviting setting that was close by, which could result in better engagement in the support.

Finally, some Youth Hubs offered dedicated support to particular customer groups. Examples in the areas included in this research included Youth Hubs with dedicated services for care leavers or neurodiverse customers or those with learning differences. Work Coaches would refer customers to these specialist services if they felt these customers could benefit from this additional support.

It should be noted that Youth Hubs were not present in all Jobcentre districts, and so this referral option was not available in all Jobcentres. The research identified that in areas where Youth Hubs were not present, Work Coaches made use of non-DWP funded provision, often delivered by voluntary sector organisations, to address specific customer needs among this group (e.g. mental health support, digital job-search support).

### **2.3.2 Youth Employability Coach referrals**

Work Coaches often spoke of referring customers with multiple, complex barriers to YEC support. Care leavers would often be referred to YEC support for this reason. It was noted that young people who were care experienced were more likely to experience homelessness or be living in supported accommodation. Work Coaches recognised that these disruptive living situations, together with their early childhood experiences, could result in a range of acute mental health conditions for this group.<sup>9</sup>

Neurodiverse young people were identified as another group who may have multiple, complex needs and would therefore be considered for YEC support. Work Coaches explained that neurodiversity and the limited accommodations made for these needs in institutional and social settings could result in poor experiences of education, low educational attainment and the development of mental health conditions.

*“It [referral to YEC] would usually be if they have more than one barrier to getting them into work. For example, they may have health issues but they may also be a care leaver or they may also have an addiction or they may*

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<sup>9</sup> As also summarised in the What Works for Children's Social Care Centre paper on mental health services for care-experienced young people: [Review of mental health services for care-experienced young people - What Works for Children's Social Care \(whatworks-csc.org.uk\)](https://www.whatworks-csc.org.uk/review-of-mental-health-services-for-care-experienced-young-people)

*also be homeless or domestic abuse or learning difficulties. So, they tend to go to the YECs if they have multiple barriers”.*

Work Coach, Youth Employment Programme

Despite these considerations, Work Coaches recognised that many of the 16–24-year-old customers they were working with overall (not just on the YEC strand) had multiple support needs they need to address to move into employment. In the view of Work Coaches, those who were unable to find work at the time were likely to be experiencing multiple and severe barriers to employment. Work Coaches observed that these were most notably in relation to their mental health.

Given the sense that their caseload included a high proportion of young people with complex needs, some Work Coaches noted that they would not always automatically refer customers with multiple needs to YECs for support, unless their needs were particularly acute. In their view, it would mean they were referring much of their caseload for additional support, and Work Coaches wanted to use a customer’s first 13 weeks at the Jobcentre to build rapport with them, support them to open up about their needs and see whether they could help them make progress within this timeframe.

*“YEC - unless they were particularly difficult I wouldn’t [refer within the first 13 weeks on the Youth Offer]. I would want to persevere. Obviously if that person was really stand offish with me or said that they didn’t want to work with me then I might pass them on, but you need that 13 weeks to get to know them properly and a lot of them just start opening up to you within that amount of time so whilst I could [refer during the first 13 weeks], I don’t tend to”*

Work Coach, Youth Employment Programme

## 3. Interactions with Youth Offer

This chapter describes customers' interactions and experiences with the Youth Offer. It examines customers' recollection of the Youth Offer strand and types of support they received, and the location and environment in which they received this support. It also examines customers' views on the kinds of support they received and their perceived usefulness in helping them enter the labour market.

### 3.1 Youth Offer strands recalled

Youth Offer customers were asked which strands of Youth Offer support they had received and were given a description of the types of support offer for each to help support recall. At wave 2, just under half (45%) of customers recalled receiving one strand, around a quarter (26%) recalled receiving two, whilst three in ten (30%) recalled receiving all three.

Customers at wave 2 were most likely to recall receiving YEP support (82%). They were also more likely to recall YEC (47%) than Youth Hub (38%) support. As identified in the qualitative research, customers did not always know or recall the name of the Youth Offer strand they were on. The language which is used about and during referrals varies by individual Work Coach, which helps to explain this, as well as variations in customer recall.

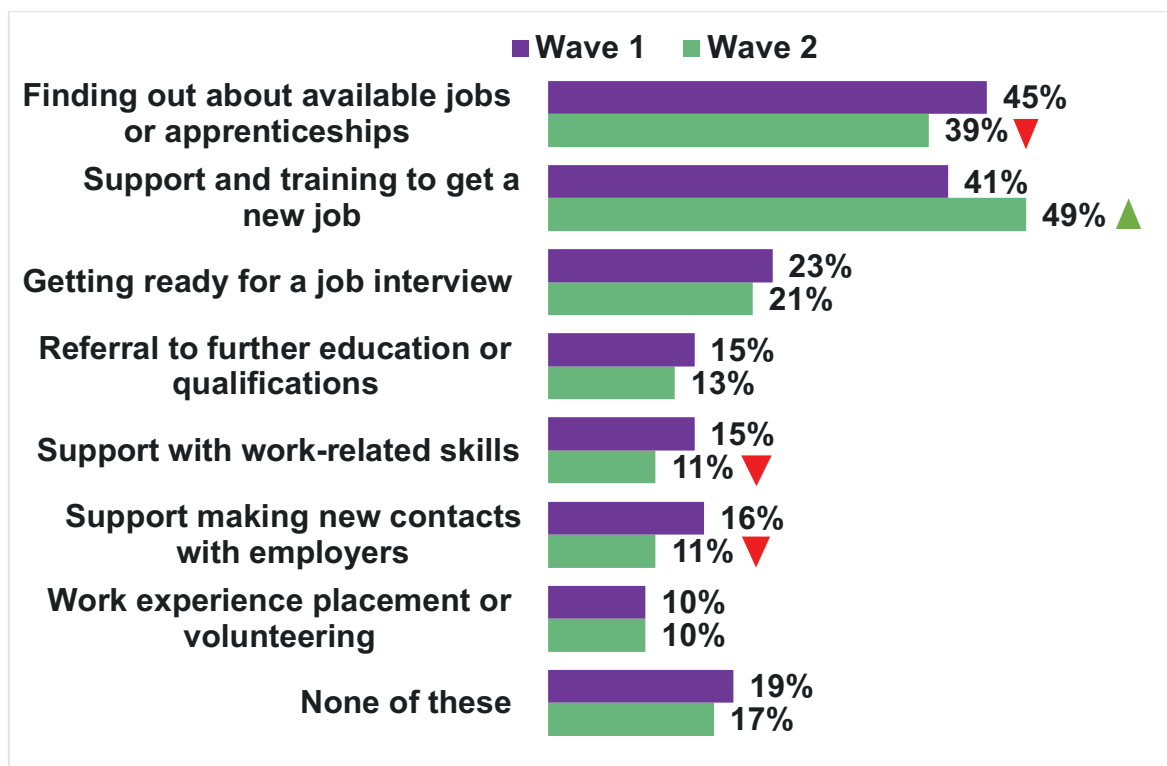
### 3.2 Support received

#### 3.2.1 Employment support received

##### **Employment support received at waves 1 and 2**

Customers were asked about the types of employment support they had received through the Youth Offer at waves 1 and 2. The proportion of customers recalling employment support was consistent across both waves (69% at wave 1 and 70% at wave 2). At wave 2 customers recalled receiving fewer types of support (average 2.51) than customers at wave 1 (average 2.9). Customers who had taken part in both waves of the survey recalled more types of support on average (3).

**Figure 3.1. Support received through the Youth Offer by wave**



Base: All who have received / are receiving Youth Offer support at wave 1 (2976), at wave 2 (1122). Arrows indicate significant differences. Top seven responses and 'None of these' are shown.

As shown in Figure 3.1 above, there were changes in the types of support recalled at wave 2. Customers at wave 2 were most likely to say they had received support and training to get a new job (49%). This increased by 8 percentage points from wave 1 (41%), when the most commonly received support had been finding out about available jobs (45%). The proportion mentioning this type of support dropped to 39% at wave 2. The proportion saying they had received support with work-related skills (15% at wave 1 and 11% at wave 2) also dropped, as did support making new contacts with employers was also less common at wave 2 (11%) compared with wave 1 (16%). A wave 2 a quarter (23%) of customers reported still receiving support from the Youth Offer. Although the survey questions asked about the support specifically received through the Youth Offer, customers may have been more likely to answer about the support they were currently receiving.

Almost one in five respondents (19% at wave 1 and 17% at wave 2) said that they had received none of the types of employment support listed, although some received wider support, discussed further below.

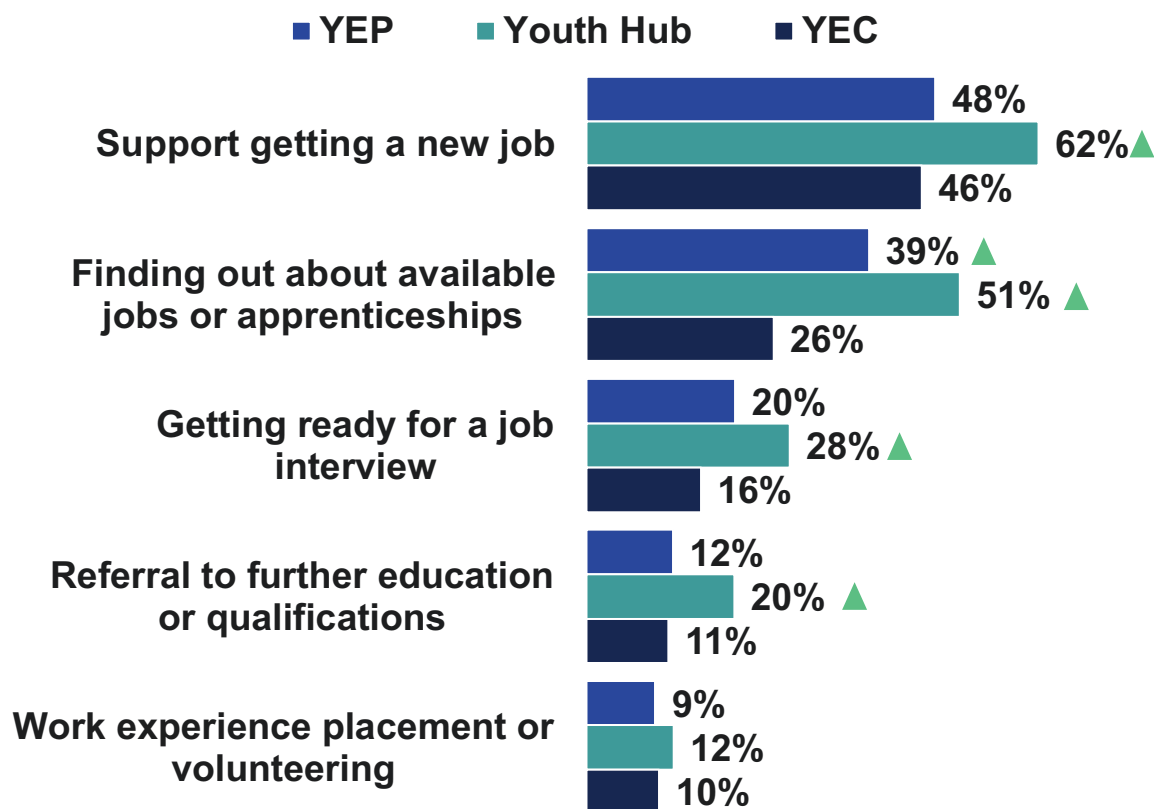
**Employment support received by Youth Offer strand**

Youth Hub respondents were most likely to have received any employment support (84%) compared with YEP (69%) and YEC (61%) respondents.

Youth Hub customers reported receiving the most types of support through the Youth Offer, with a higher mean number of types of support (2.81) compared to YEP (2.48) and YEC (2.23) customers. As covered further in chapter five, the qualitative findings identified that the Youth Hub environment helped to build engagement with the

employment support on offer. This helps to explain why Youth Hub customers were more likely to report both receiving support and more different types of support.

**Figure 3.2. Support received by Youth Offer strand**



Base: All who have received / are receiving Youth Offer support wave 2 (1122), YEP (803), Youth Hub (160), YEC (159). Arrows on charts on chart indicate statistically significant differences. Top five responses shown.

As shown in figure 3.2 above, Youth Hub customers were more likely to have received several specific types of support, including support getting a new job (Youth Hub, 62% compared with YEP, 48%; YEC, 46%), finding out about available jobs (Youth Hub, 51% compared with YEP, 39%; YEC, 26%), getting ready for a job interview (Youth Hub, 28% compared with YEP, 20%; YEC, 16%) or referral to further education and qualifications (Youth Hub, 20% compared with YEP, 12%; YEC, 11%). The higher proportion of Youth Hub customers being referred to further education or qualifications suggests that the Youth Hubs may have had better referral paths for further education or qualifications. The qualitative research found evidence that the strong relationships between Youth Hub Work Coaches and customers meant customers were more receptive to their suggestions. See chapter 5 for further detail. As a result, this support could be setting them up for more sustainable future employment.

The patterns in the most and least received types of support are consistent across strands. There is least difference between strands in the proportions receiving work experience placements or volunteering, however lack of work experience was identified by Youth Offer customers as a significant barrier to work. The qualitative



strand (chapter 6) further identified that lack of suitable placements was a barrier to Work Coaches offering more work experience opportunities.

The pattern of differing support by Youth Offer strand suggests that the policy was being delivered as intended. It would be expected that YEP customers would receive least types of employment support, as they were intended to be closest to the labour market. Youth Hub customers were most likely to receive any support reflecting the intent of the programme to serve customers with wider support needs. YEC customers were furthest from the labour market and likely to need additional support before being ready for employment support.

Customers who reported receiving support from three strands were more likely to have received a greater number of types of employment support, 2.89 on average compared to 2.11 for those receiving one strand and 2.4 for those receiving two. This suggests that the types of support varied, and progressed, for those receiving multiple strands of provision.

Male customers were more likely than female to say they had received certain types of support. This included help getting ready for a job interview (23% compared to 18% of females), a referral to further education or qualifications (16% compared to 10% of females), or support making contact with new employers (12% compared to 8% of females).

Black, Black African, Black Caribbean or Black British customers were most likely to have received the most types of support (3.22, compared to 2.51 overall).

Customers with a long-term health condition or disability (22%) were more likely to say that received none of the employment support types listed (17% overall).

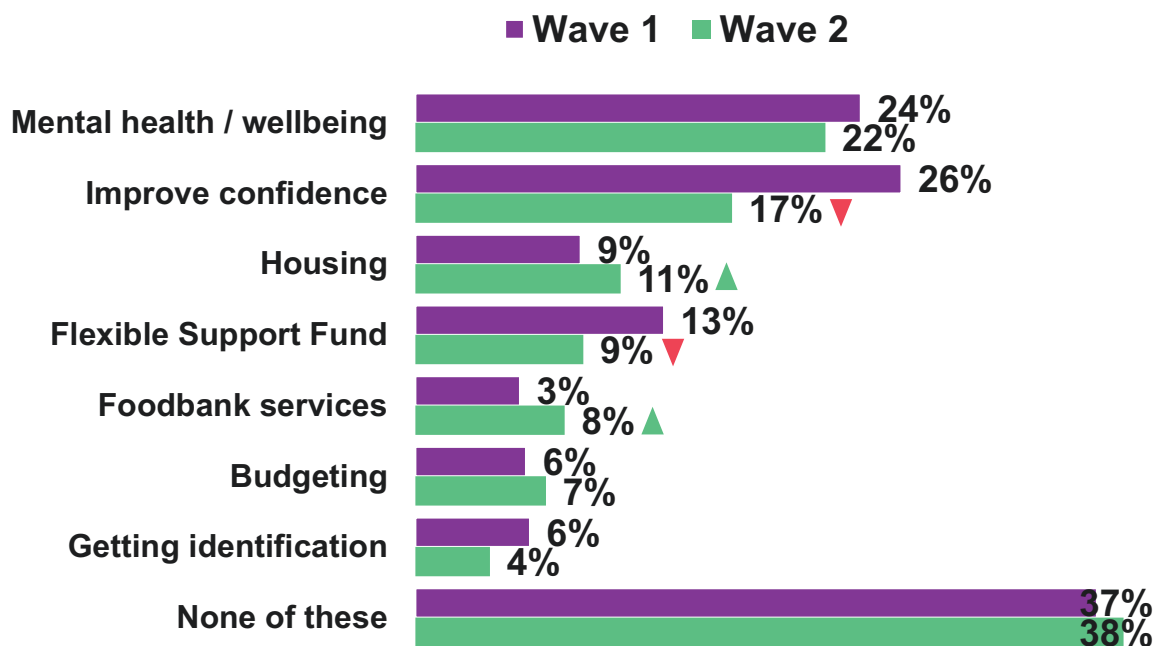
There were some differences in types of support received by age group. Customers aged 19-21 and 22-24 were more likely than the youngest customers (aged 16-18) to receive support arranging interviews with prospective employers (10% for 19-21 and 22-24 compared with 4% for 16-18). Customers aged 25 (this group would have been 24 when starting the Youth Offer and since had a birthday) were more likely than those aged 19-21 to report receiving none of these types of support (27% compared to 15%). A possible reason for this is that, due to their age, those aged 25 may have returned to business as usual.

### **3.2.2 Wider support through the Youth Offer**

#### **Wider support received at wave 1 and wave 2**

Customers were asked about the types of wider support they had received through the Youth Offer. This question included support not directly related to finding employment, but which could facilitate finding a job in the future. Unlike the proportion of those who recalled receiving employment support, the proportion of customers receiving these broader types of support remained consistent between waves 1 and 2, at around half at both waves (51% reported receiving any of the support listed at wave one, 49% at wave two).

**Figure 3.3 Wider support through the Youth Offer by wave**



Base: All participants, wave 1 (2976) and wave 2 (1377). Arrows indicate significant differences. Top seven responses and 'None of these' shown.

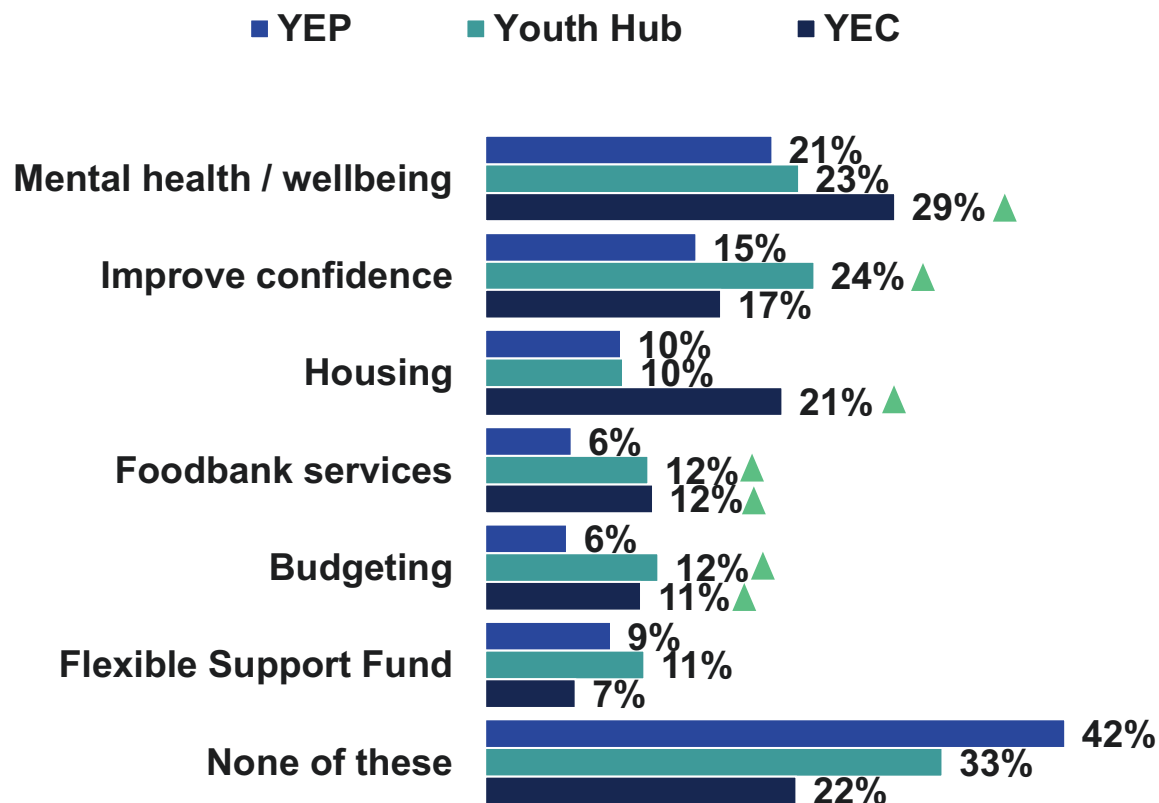
As shown above in Figure 3.3, the most common form of additional support at both waves was mental health and wellbeing support, and this remained consistent between wave 1 (24%) and wave 2 (22%). Other types of wider support received changed between waves. At wave 2 there was less recall of support to improve confidence (wave 1, 26%; wave 2, 17%) or access to the Flexible Support Fund (wave 1, 13%; wave 2, 9%) and more of practical support, with housing (wave 1, 9%; wave 2, 11%) and foodbank services (wave 1, 3%; wave 2, 8%).

Nearly four in ten customers at both wave 1 (37%) and wave 2 (38%) recalled none of the types of wider support listed.

**Wider support received by Youth Offer strand**

YEC customers were most likely to report receiving any wider support (62%) compared with Youth Hub (53%) and YEP (46%) customers. Youth Hub customers received the widest range of broad support, with a mean number of types of support of 2 compared with 1.72 for YEP and 1.81 YEC. As discussed in reference to employment support (3.2.1), this is reflective of the policy design and suggests that customers were appropriately referred to different Youth Offer strands.

**Figure 3.4. Wider support received through the Youth Offer by strand**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377), all customers who received YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192). Arrows on chart indicate statistically significant differences. Top six responses and 'None of these shown'.

As shown in figure 3.4, YEC customers were most likely to mention receiving mental health and wellbeing support (YEC, 29%; Youth Hub, 23%; YEP, 21%) and housing support (YEC, 21%; Youth Hub, 10%; YEP, 10%).

Around one in four (24%) Youth Hub customers mentioned receiving support to improve confidence compared to around one in six YEP (15%) and YEC (17%) customers.

Youth Hub and YEC customers were more likely to mention support accessing foodbank services or budgeting than YEP customers (foodbank services: Youth Hub, 12%; YEC, 12%; YEP, 6%) (budgeting support: Youth Hub, 12%; YEC, 11%; YEP, 6%). This reflects the programme design for customers on these strands to receive more intensive and holistic support than on YEP.

In contrast to employment support, customers with both a long-term physical and mental health condition or disability reported receiving a higher number of wider types of support (mean number of mentions of 2.2) compared with customers with a physical condition or disability only (1.7), a mental health condition only (1.8) or no condition at all (1.7).

This reflects the qualitative findings, in which both Work Coaches and Youth Offer customers identified the necessity of support to address customers' wider barriers prior to being ready for employment support. As shown below, patterns in the

characteristics of customers who were more likely to recall receiving mental health or wellbeing support suggest that Work Coaches were identifying the need for additional support amongst particular groups and tailoring the support they offered. Support with mental health or wellbeing was more likely to be reported by:

- those with a long-term health condition or disability, 34% compared to 8% of those without
- female customers than male customers, 27% compared with 19%
- those aged 16-18 (28%) were more likely than the total population (22%) to have received this support
- customers of white ethnicity (25%) than Asian (13%), Black (12%) or those from another ethnic minority group (16%)
- those with low levels of life satisfaction (30%)
- those who reported high levels of anxiety (25% of those who were anxious (5-9 on anxiety scale) and 35% of those who were completely anxious (10 on anxiety scale)

As with employment support, customers who had recalled receiving support from three strands were likely to have received a greater number of types of wider support, 2 on average compared to 1.7 for those receiving one strand and 1.6 for those receiving two. This suggests the support offered was progressive, with different strands offering different types of support.

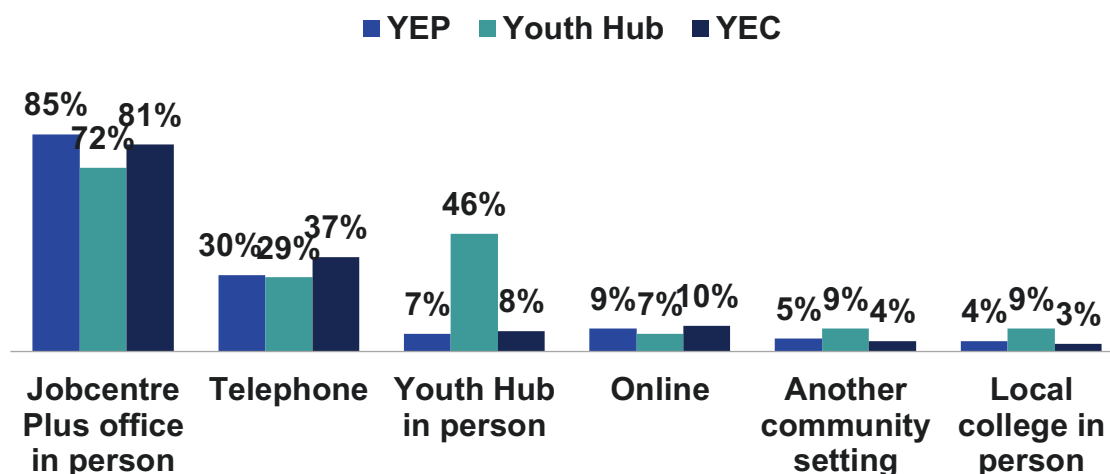
Youth Hub customers were asked specifically if they were referred to any other support services offered in their Hub. The proportion reporting this increased between waves 1 and 2. Almost three in ten (29%) who had received or were currently receiving Youth Hub support at wave 2 had been referred to services other than seeing their Work Coach compared to around one in five (23%) at wave 1. As covered in further detail in Chapter 5, the qualitative interviews found that some Youth Hubs provided wider support directly to customers. Youth Hub customers mentioned receiving life skills training, vocational training courses, mental health support such as on-site counselling, financial services advice, and access to foodbanks at the Youth Hubs.

## 3.3 Location and environment of Youth Offer support

### 3.3.1 Location of Youth Offer support

Participants at wave 2 were asked where they received Youth Offer support. As shown in Figure 3.5 below, this was most commonly received in a Jobcentre Plus office in person across all three strands. YEP (85%) and YEC (81%) customers were most likely to have received support at a Jobcentre office in person, compared to around seven in ten (72%) of Youth Hub customers. Youth Offer support over the telephone was mentioned by at least three in ten customers across all strands (YEP, 30%; Youth Hub, 29%; YEC 37%).

**Figure 3.5. Location of Youth Offer support by strand**



Base: All who have received / are receiving Youth Offer support (1122), YEP (803), Youth Hub (160), YEC (159). Not shown: ‘Somewhere else’.

Youth Hubs were co-located in partner settings and this could be a Youth Hub or other community setting. Overall, 56% of Youth Hub customers identified receiving support in a Youth Hub, another community setting or a local college.

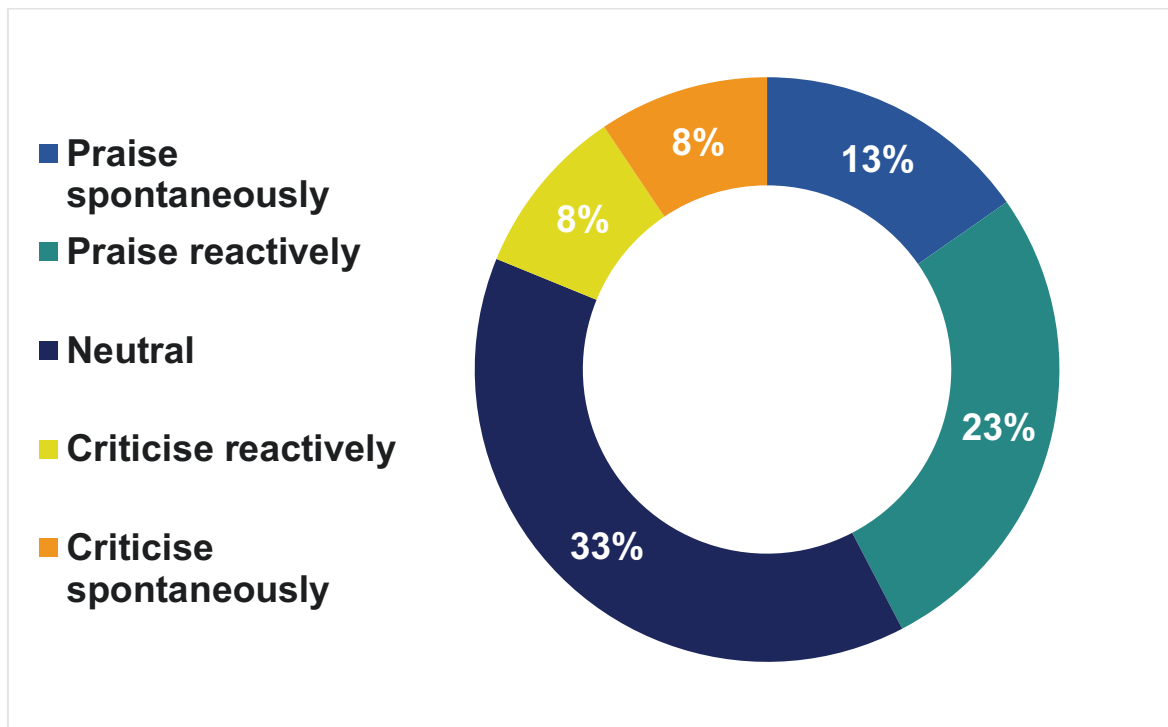
Online support was mentioned as a channel for receiving support by around one in ten customers (YEP, 9%; Youth Hub, 7%; YEC, 10%).

Customers with a long-term health condition were more likely to have received support over the telephone (38% compared with 23% of those without) or online (11% compared to 7% of those without). This suggests that Work Coaches were tailoring the support modes to customer needs.

### 3.3.2 Environment of Youth Offer support

Customers were asked how they would speak about the location in which they received support. Although the base size for this group was small, customers who received support solely or mainly in a Youth Hub were more likely to praise the environment as somewhere to receive support to help them find a job. As shown in figure 3.6 below, amongst customers who received support solely or mainly at a Jobcentre office, around a third (35%) would praise it. Just over one in ten (13%) said they would praise it spontaneously, and almost one in four (23%) said they would praise it if asked. A third (33%) said that they would speak neutrally about the Jobcentre. Sixteen percent said that they would criticise the Jobcentre environment as a place to receive employment support, with around one in twelve saying they would criticise it reactively (8%) or spontaneously (8%).

**Figure 3.6. How customers would speak about Jobcentre Plus as a place to receive support to help find a job**



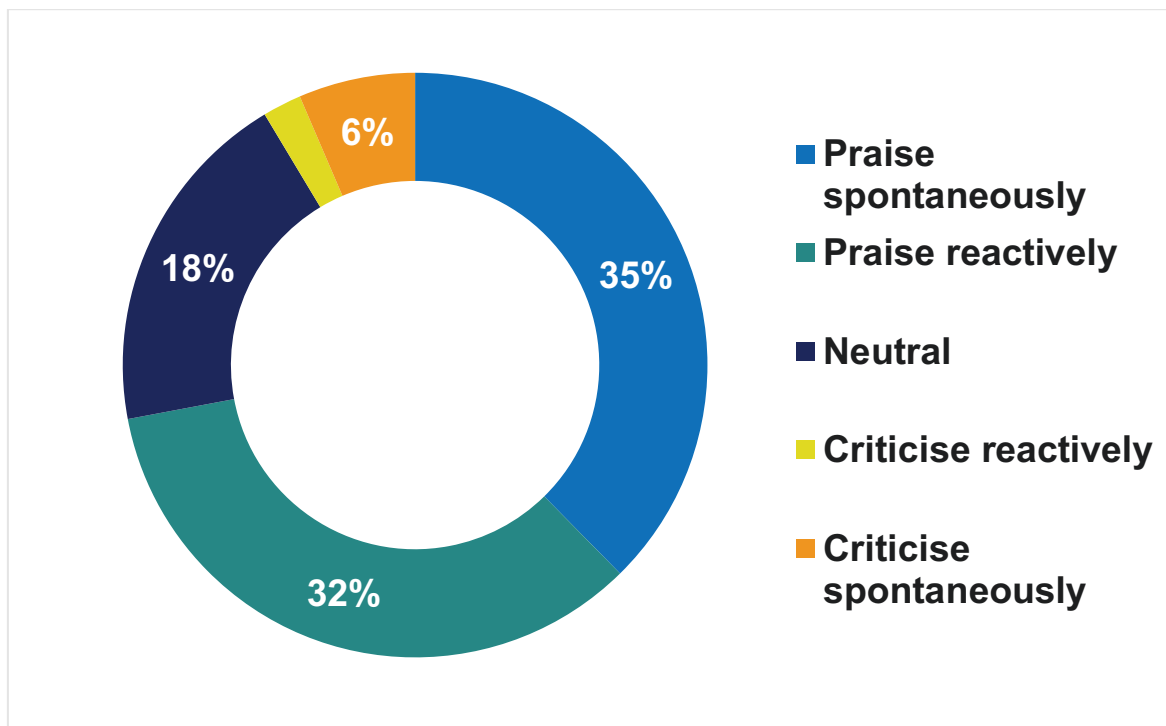
Base: All who have received support only or mainly in Jobcentre office (880)

Customers with a long-term health condition or disability were more likely to criticise (20% compared with 12% without) and less likely to praise the Jobcentre Plus.

For the small number of customers who received support only or mainly at a Youth Hub, two in three (67%) overall said they would praise it by wave 2. Of these customers, around one in three (35%) said that would praise it spontaneously, and a further one in three (32%) said they would praise it if asked.

Less than one in five (18%) customers who mainly attended the Youth Hub said they would be neutral when describing it as a place to receive support. Around one in twelve would criticise the Youth Hub environment, either reactively (2%) or spontaneously (6%). This is shown in Figure 3.7 below.

**Figure 3.7. Description of Youth Hub**



Base: All who have received support only or mainly in Youth Hub (84)

### 3.4 Difficulties taking part in the Youth Offer

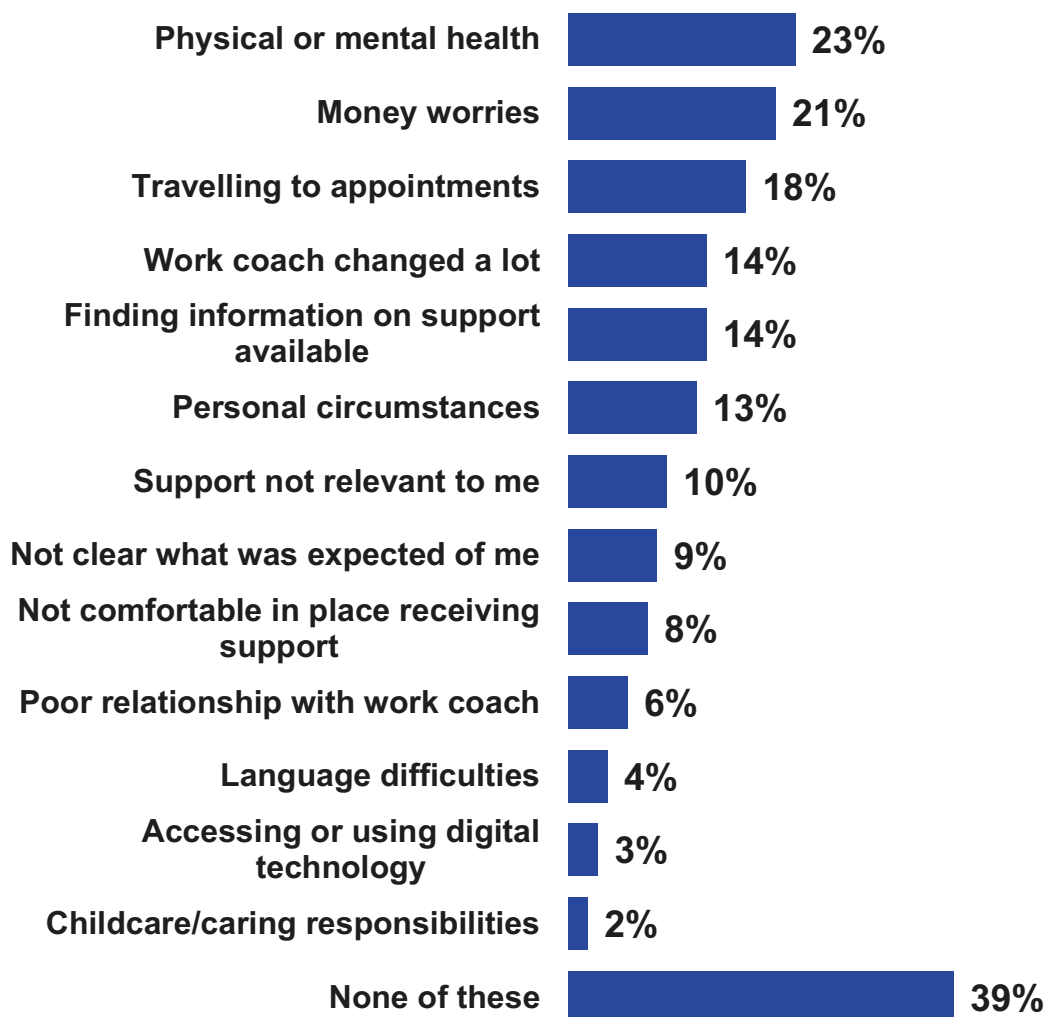
#### 3.4.1 Difficulties taking part in the Youth Offer at wave 1

Customers were asked about any difficulties they experienced taking part in the Youth Offer. Just under six in ten customers from each strand reported difficulties taking part (total reporting any difficulty: YEP, 58%; Youth Hub, 55%; YEC 57%). On average, customers mentioned 2.6 difficulties each.

As shown in Figure 3.8 below, almost two in five customers (39%) said that they had experienced no difficulties to taking part in the Youth Offer.

Amongst those who did experience difficulties, this was most commonly a physical or mental health condition (23%). Around one in five customers identified practical barriers such as money worries (21%) or difficulties travelling to appointments (18%). Just over one in seven identified challenges with the support itself, such as their Work Coach changing a lot (14%), difficulty getting information about available support (14%) and around one in ten saying the support did not feel relevant to them (10%) or they were not clear on what was expected of them (9%). One in ten (10%) cited their personal circumstances and a similar proportion said they were not comfortable receiving support (8%). Customers who had a long-term health were more likely to report that their physical or mental health was a difficulty to them taking part in the Youth Offer (41%), however, not all customers in this group experienced this as a challenge to taking part. As outlined in section 3.3.1 there was evidence of DWP staff tailoring the support they gave to customers to help address these barriers, for example, by offering support online or over the telephone.

**Figure 3.8. Difficulties taking part in the Youth Offer at wave 1**



Base: All wave 1 respondents (2976)

The barriers to attending the Youth Offer mirror customers’ wider barriers to employment. A health condition or disability was the most common barrier to employment for customers at both waves (wave 1, 37%; wave 2, 35%). Similar proportions identified transport was also a barrier to employment customers (wave 1, 35%; wave 2, 30%). This illustrates the importance of designing employment support with a strong understanding of the barriers customers face to employment, as these can also act as barriers to participation in the programme.

### **3.4.2 Difficulties taking part in the Youth Offer at wave 1 by strand**

YEC customers experienced the greatest number of difficulties at wave 1, reporting an average of 3.0 difficulties compared to 2.3 difficulties amongst YEP or Youth Hub customers. YEC customers were more likely to cite difficulty with their physical or mental health (34%) than the overall population (23%). YEC customers were also



more likely to cite their personal circumstances (22%) than the overall population (13%). This is in line with policy, which intends for customers with additional barriers to be referred to YEC.

Youth Hub customers were least likely to identify difficulties getting information about the support available (10% compared to 14% of YEP or 15% of YEC customers), suggesting that this was more effective in Youth Hubs.

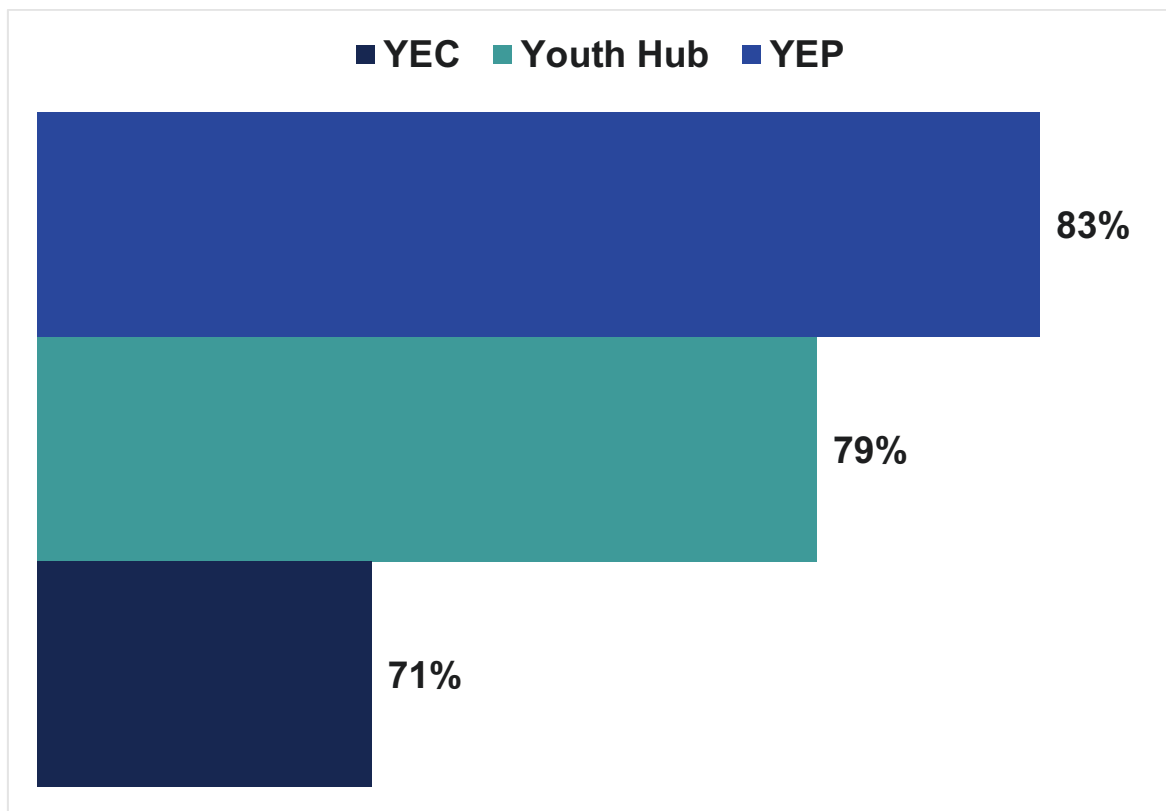
## 3.5 Reflections

### 3.5.1 Impact of claimant commitment

At wave 1, customers were asked if, after agreeing to their claimant commitment, they understood what was required of them whilst receiving support. A claimant commitment is each Universal Credit customer's record of the responsibilities they have accepted in return for receiving Universal Credit, and the consequences of not meeting them. The claimant commitment is agreed with customers before they are assigned to a Youth Offer strand.

As shown in Figure 3.9, around eight in ten YEP (83%) and Youth Hub (79%), and seven in ten YEC customers (71%) agreed that they clearly understood what was required of them whilst receiving Youth Offer support.

**Figure 3.9. Agreement that after agreeing to their Claimant Commitment, customers had a clear understanding of what was expected of them whilst receiving support**



Base: All customers at wave 1 (2976)

Customers without a long-term health condition or disability were more likely to agree that they understood the requirements (84% compared with 79% of those with a long-term health condition or disability).

## 3.6 Reflections on Youth Offer support by wave

### 3.6.1 Reflections on whether support was tailored to their needs and circumstances

Customers at both waves were asked whether they agreed that the types of support they received through the Youth Offer were tailored to their needs and circumstances. Around seven in ten customers at both waves agreed (67% at both waves).

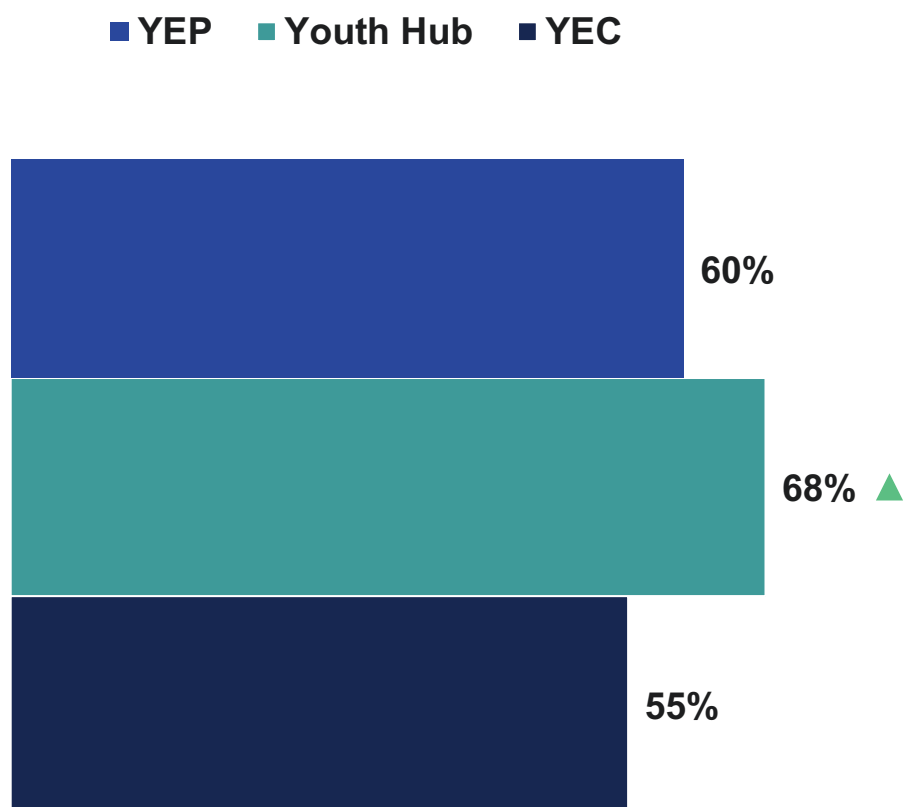
Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree that the support was tailored and the proportion agreeing was consistent between wave 1 (67%) and wave 2 (63%). Agreement amongst YEC customers was lower and consistent at around 6 in 10 (59%) at both waves. YEP customers were least likely to agree that the support was tailored to their needs. Amongst YEP customers, agreement with this statement

dropped between wave 1 (68%) and wave 2 (48%). This may reflect the programme design, of Youth Hubs and YECs providing more targeted forms of support to those who needed it. As outlined the qualitative research in chapters five and six, Youth Hub and YEC customers could have longer appointments, which created a better opportunity to get to know their Work Coach and more opportunities for holistic, tailored, support.

### 3.6.2 Future engagement

At wave 2, unemployed customers were asked if they would like more support designed for people their age to help them find a job. Over six in ten (61%) agreed that they would like more of this type of support.

**Figure 3.10. Customers who would like more support designed for people their age to help them find a job**



Base: All unemployed customers (907), YEP (625), Youth Hub (121), YEC (161). Arrows on chart indicate significant differences.

As shown above in Figure 3.10, Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree with this statement (68%) compared with YEP (60%) and YEC (55%) customers. This may reflect the greater levels of agreement that the support was tailored and greater feelings of positivity towards the Youth Hub environment, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The qualitative findings in Chapter Five, also identify that the Youth Hub

environment and support offer led to higher engagement with and take-up of the support offer, which could also be underpinning this.

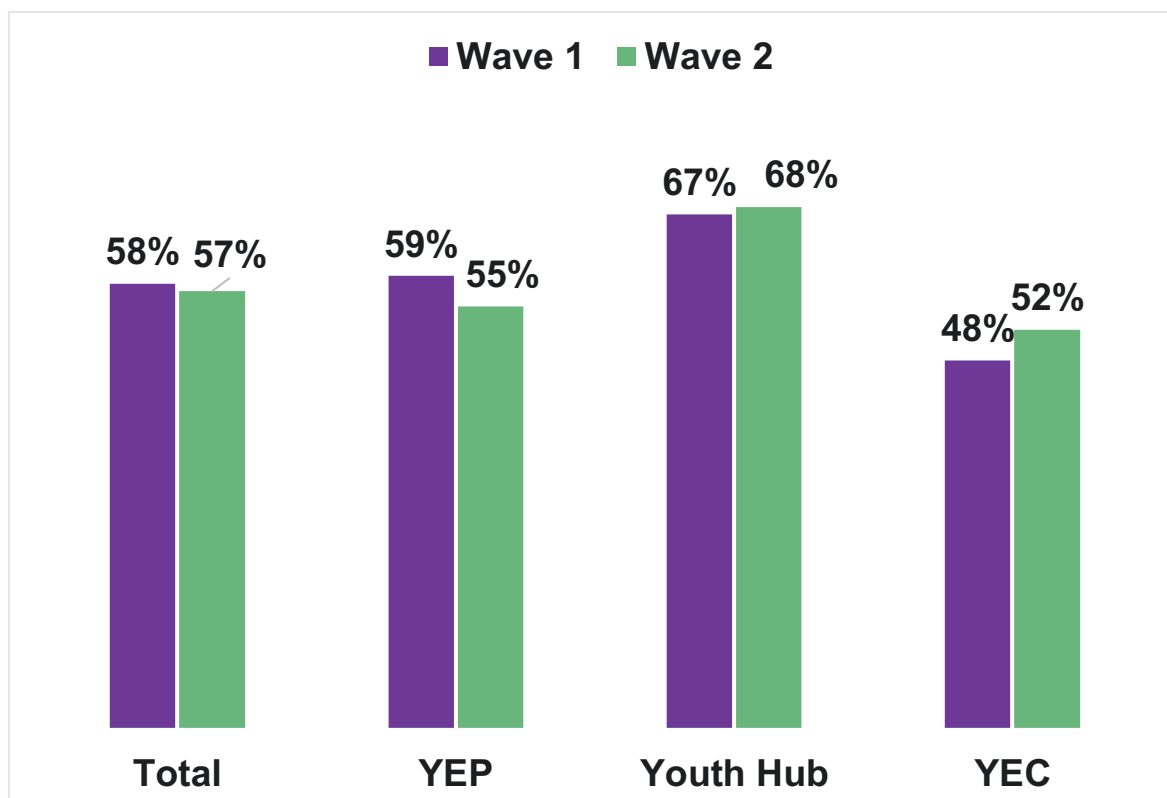
### 3.7 Usefulness of Youth Offer support

Customers were asked a series of questions how useful they felt the support they received through the Youth Offer was in achieving certain types of progress towards finding employment. Of these, help to feel more confident about looking for work was seen to be most useful across the three Youth Offer strands. Youth Hub customers typically found the types of support listed more useful than YEP and YEC customers.

#### 3.7.1 Usefulness helping customers feel more confident about looking for work

Overall, around six in ten customers agreed that the support they received through the Youth Offer was useful in helping them feel more confident about looking for work. This was consistent at wave one (58%) and wave two (57%). As shown in Figure 3.11, perceptions of the usefulness of the support in helping customers feel more confident looking for work was consistent within each strand at both waves and varied between strands. Almost seven in ten Youth Hub (wave 1, 67%; wave 2, 68%), six in ten YEP (wave 1, 59%; wave 2, 55%) and around five in ten YEC (wave 1, 48%; wave 2, 52%) customers agreed that the support they received helped them feel more confident about looking for work.

**Figure 3.11: NET usefulness helping customers feel more confident about looking for work**

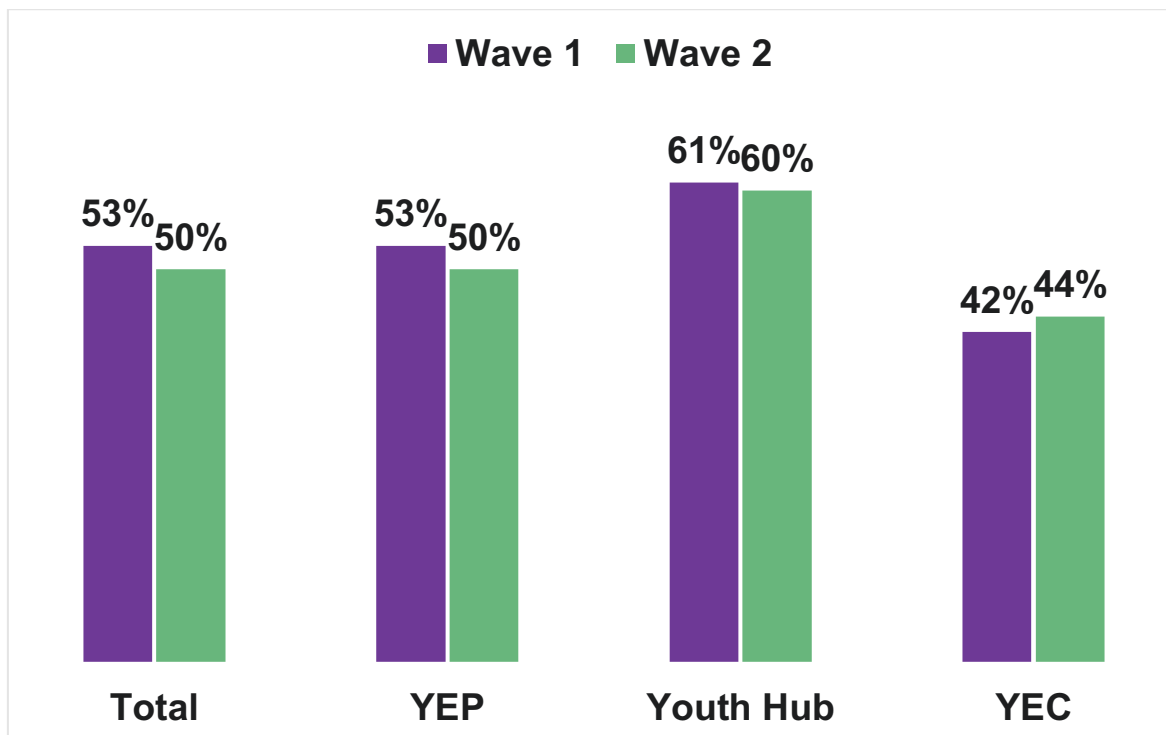


Base: wave 1 YEP (2289), Youth Hub (360), YEC (332); wave 2 YEP (803), Youth Hub (160), YEC (159)

### 3.7.2 Usefulness helping customers feel more work ready

Around half of customers at both waves (wave 1 53%, wave 2 50%) agreed that the support they received from the Youth Offer was useful in helping them feel more work ready.

**Figure 3.12. Total usefulness helping customers feel more work ready**



Base: wave 1 YEP (2289), Youth Hub (360), YEC (332); wave 2 YEP (803), Youth Hub (160), YEC (159)

Perceptions of the usefulness of the support in helping customers feel more work-ready was also consistent at both waves within each strand. Youth Hub customers were again most likely to say they found this support useful, with about six in ten agreeing across both waves (wave 1, 61%; wave 2, 60%). Around half of YEP customers (wave 1, 53%; wave 2, 50%) and over four in ten YEC customers (wave 1, 42%; wave 2, 44%) agreed that support from the Youth Offer made them feel more work ready.

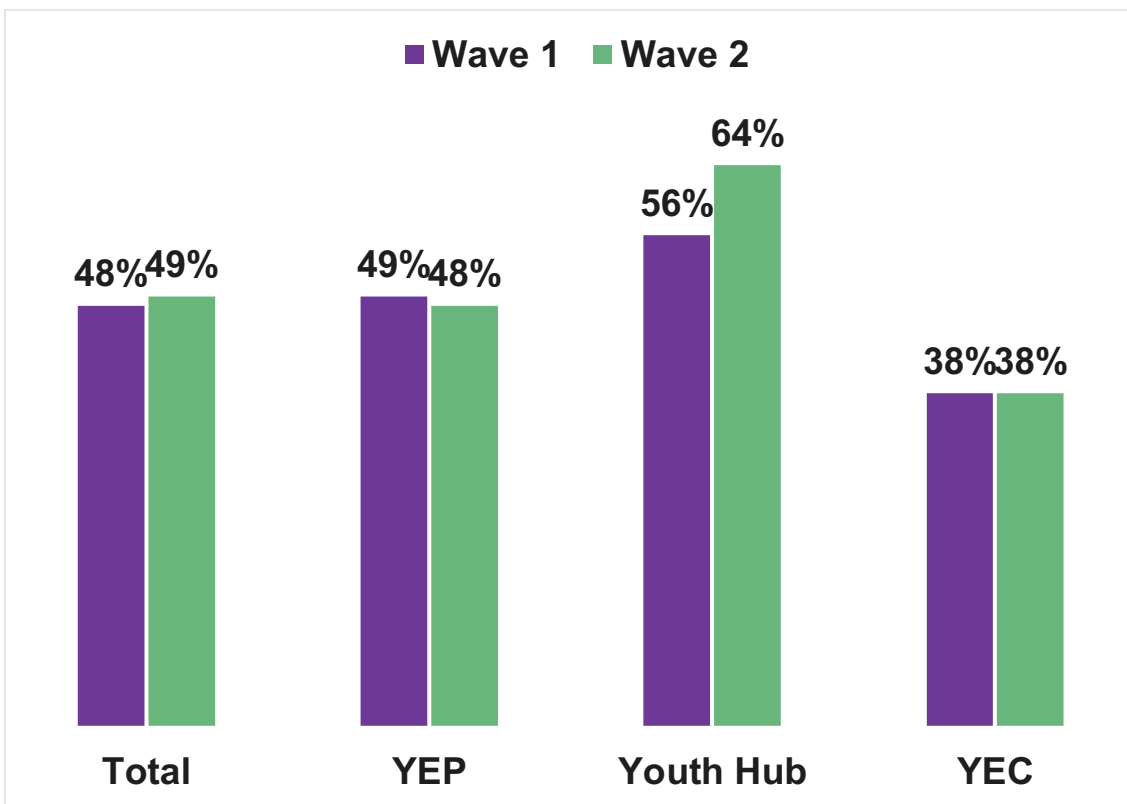
### 3.7.3 Usefulness helping customers get a job

Almost half of customers at both waves found the Youth Offer support useful in helping them get a job (wave 1, 48%; wave 2, 49%).

As shown below in Figure 3.13, within each Youth Offer strand, the proportion of customers who found this support useful remained relatively consistent between waves. Around six in ten Youth Hub customers (wave 1, 56%; wave 2, 64%) found support in getting a job useful, the greatest proportion of Youth Offer strands. Almost

five in ten YEP customers (wave 1, 49%; wave 2, 48%) and almost four in ten YEC (38% at wave1 and 2) found this support useful.

**Figure 3.13. NET usefulness helping customers get a job**

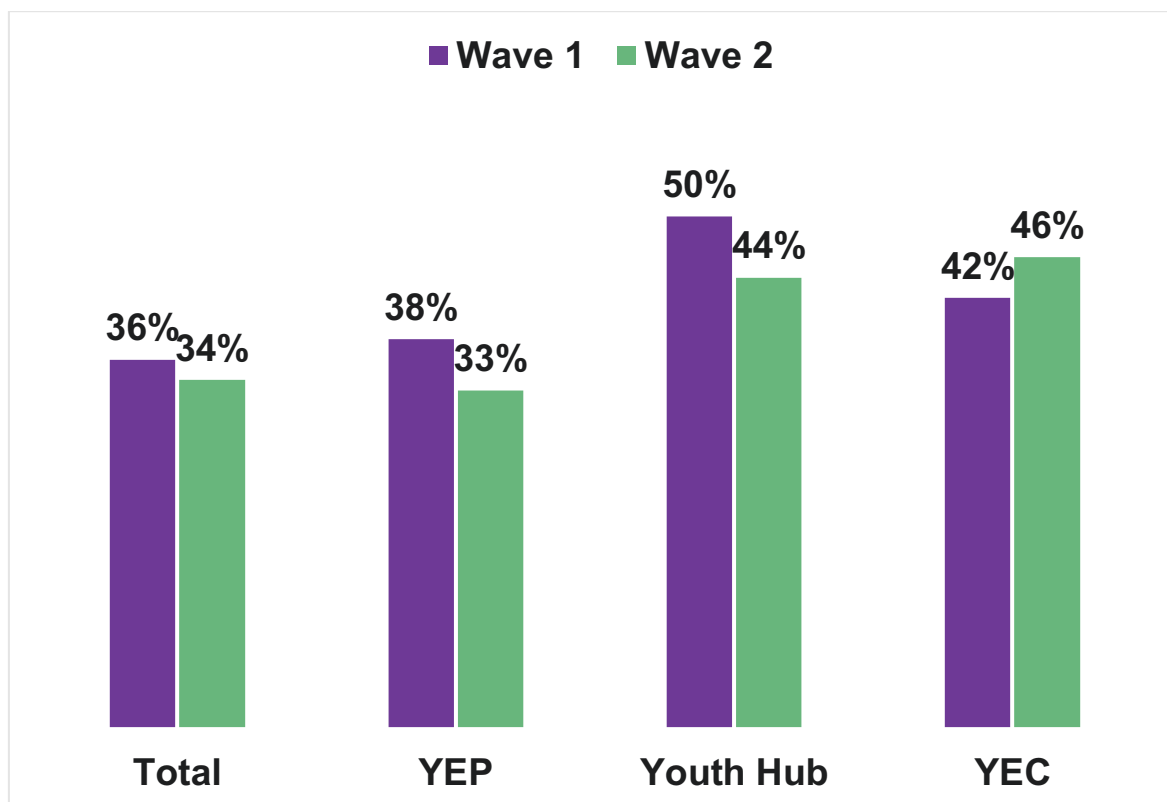


Base: wave 1 YEP (2289), Youth Hub (360), YEC (332); wave 2 YEP (803), Youth Hub (160), YEC (159)

### 3.7.4 Usefulness helping employed customers progress in work

Employed customers were asked if they agreed that the support they received through the Youth Offer was useful in helping them to progress in work. Almost four in ten customers at both waves agreed with this statement (wave 1, 39%; wave 2, 36%).

**Figure 3.14. NET usefulness helping employed customers progress in work**



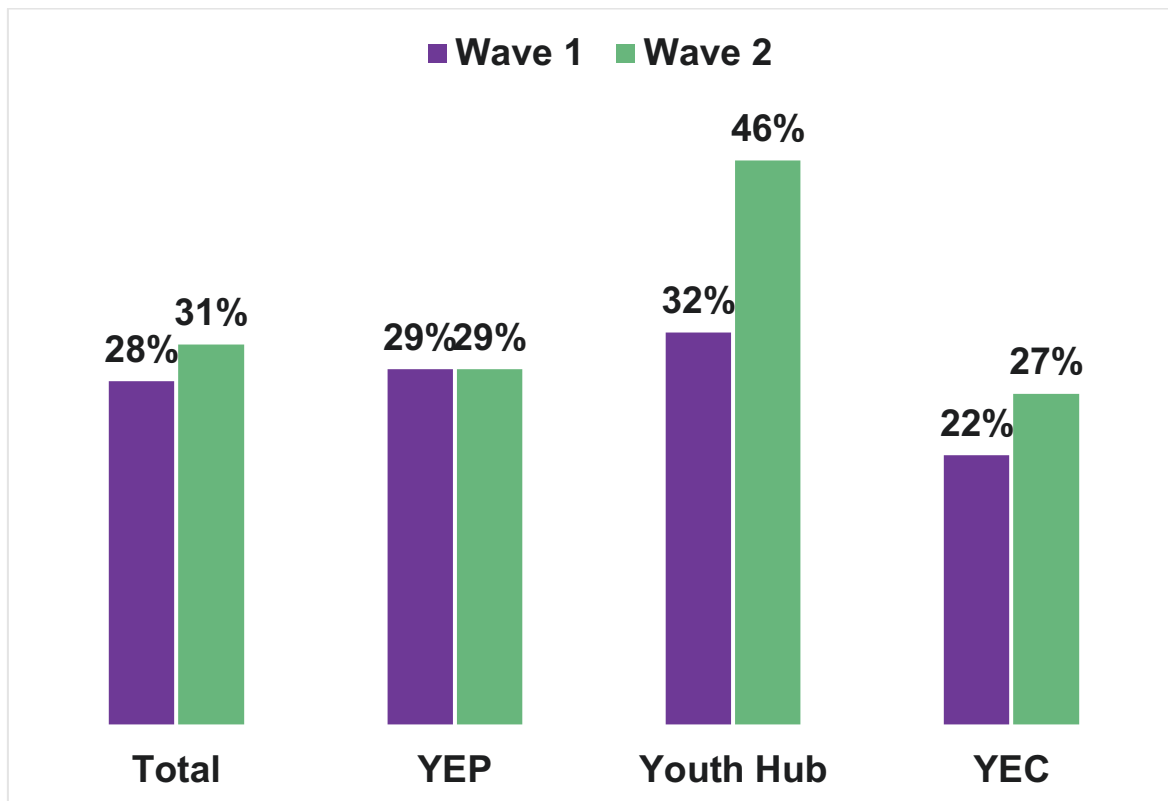
Base: wave 1 YEP (836), Youth Hub (95), YEC (53); wave 2 YEP (309), Youth Hub (56), YEC (28)

As shown in Figure 3.14, the proportion of employed customers who found the support useful to help them progress in work remained relatively consistent at around one in three for YEP customers (38% at wave 1, 33% at wave 2), around half for Youth Hub customers (50% at wave 1, 44% at wave 2) and over four in ten for YEC customers (42% at wave 1 and 46% at wave 2). As shown below the chart, the base sizes for employed Youth Hub and YEC customers were small, so these findings should be treated with additional caution.

### 3.7.5 Usefulness helping customers with a health condition talk to employers about reasonable adjustments

Customers with a long-term health condition or disability were asked if they found Youth Offer support useful in helping them speak to employers about reasonable adjustments. Around three in ten (wave 1, 28%; wave 2, 31%) customers agreed that this support was useful.

**Figure 3.15. NET usefulness helping customers with a long-term health condition talk to employers about reasonable adjustments**



Base: wave 1 YEP (1045), Youth Hub (179) YEC (229); wave 2 YEP (367), Youth Hub (75), YEC (105)

As shown in Figure 3.15, the small number of Youth Hub customers with a long-term health condition or disability at wave 2 were more likely to say they found this support useful (46%) than at wave 1 (32%). The proportion of YEP and YEC customers agreeing with this question remained consistent across waves, with around three in ten YEP (wave 1 and 2, 29%) and YEC (wave 1, 22%; wave 2, 27%).



# 4. Youth Employment Programme: Customer and Work Coach Views and Experiences

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative interviews completed with customers and Work Coaches on the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). It outlines the timing, length and content of the two main elements of the Programme - the Employment and Skills Review and the Progress Review – as well as the on-going support Work Coaches provided outside of these appointments. Customer views and experiences of these reviews and their regular appointments with Work Coaches are also explored. Finally, the effective features of the YEP, and gaps and improvements identified by Work Coaches and customers are presented.

## 4.1 Youth Employment Programme strand description

Customers aged 16-24 claiming Universal Credit (UC) in the Intensive Work Search (IWS) regime were automatically entered into the Youth Employment Programme (YEP).<sup>10</sup> The 13-week programme was designed to help young people closer to the labour market prepare for work and increase their chances of moving into paid employment.

Following a customer's first commitment meeting, as part of the YEP, Work Coaches were expected to conduct an Employment and Skills Review (ESR) with the customer. As part of this review customers could get help to:

- develop and improve their CV,
- receive support in understanding how to conduct online job-searches and applications
- identify any work-related training they might need

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that 16-17 year olds can only claim UC and therefore take part in the Youth Offer if their circumstances fit specific criteria.

- identify any basic skills they need support with (i.e. English, Maths or IT)
- explore any barriers that may prevent them from taking up work-based opportunities
- identify what work-based opportunities available to them over the 13-week programme

Work Coaches are expected to conduct a progress review with customers by week 11 (or sooner if seen to be appropriate). This appointment should for an additional 10-minutes and include a full review of a customer's journey over the previous weeks. With a customer, a Work Coach should identify and agree next steps for the remainder of the 13-weeks and discuss work and training related options. Customers could also be referred to the Youth Hub or Youth Employability Coach strands of the Youth Offer for more intensive support.

For customers who are not referred on to a further Youth Offer strand, from this point routine appointments will take place between Work Coaches and customers. This will include a review of customers work search since their last appointment. Work Coaches may also signpost or refer customers to local support or job opportunities. Local support opportunities could include Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), work experience, apprenticeships or mentoring circles, which are sessions hosted by employers to help develop customers' CV writing, interview and application skills.

## 4.2 Timing, length and content of the Employment and Skills Review

### 4.2.1 Timing and length of the Employment and Skills Review (ESR)

The policy guidance stated that the Employment and Skills Review (ESR) should take place during the second week of a customer's claim. The recommended length for this appointment was 20 minutes.

While completing the ESR during the second week of a customer's claim was common practice among the Work Coaches interviewed, their feedback showed that the amount of time they could allocate for the ESR varied between offices. While Work Coaches in some offices could allocate 20-30 minutes to complete an ESR with a customer, those working in different sites stated that their diaries were so busy they were not able to book an appointment of this length. In latter cases, Work Coaches said that the most amount of time they could book for customers was 15 minutes, although restrictions on their diary meant that even this was not possible on occasions.

Work Coaches who could book in longer meetings for an ESR saw this time as valuable in getting to know customers at an early stage of their claim and providing space to explore their work and education histories in detail. There was also a

recognition among Work Coaches that this additional time was beneficial for customers as it provided space for them to settle into the conversation and feel more comfortable in opening up about their personal circumstances and how this may affect their job-search.

However, some Work Coaches commented that, in their view, it was not always necessary or possible to cover the content of the ESR in a single appointment during the second week of a customer's claim. These interviewees found they had time to cover most of the ESR content in their first commitment appointment with a customer, which is typically 50 minutes. Others had limited availability in their diaries for a standalone ESR appointment and took the same approach out of necessity.

Interviewees who chose to cover most of the content of the ESR during their first appointment with a customer noted that completing the ESR as a standalone appointment during week two was only valuable if a different Work Coach completed the first commitment appointment, which could happen on occasions due to lack of capacity. On these occasions, completing the ESR during the second week of a customer's claim (where Work Coaches had the flexibility to fit these in) provided Work Coaches with time to develop a better understanding of a customer's circumstances at this early stage and develop an appropriate action plan. This evidence suggests that if the Work Coach can remain consistent from the start of a customer's time on the YEP, the content of the ESR can be adequately covered during the first two appointments.

## 4.3 Content of the ESR

The Work Coaches participating in this research outlined what they typically cover with customers as part of their ESR appointment. This closely matched the policy guidance and included:

- checking whether customers had a CV and reviewing and providing feedback on this
- asking customers about their work history and what skills and qualifications they hold
- exploring customers' knowledge of how to complete online job-searches and apply for roles
- asking customers about their career interests, as well as their short and long-term career goals
- checking whether customers have some of the essentials needed to enter employment (i.e. valid ID, appropriate work attire)
- exploring how customers intended to travel to and from work and their knowledge of the different transport options available to them
- exploring any potential barriers customer may face to entering employment such as transport costs and caring responsibilities, and discussing how these might be overcome

## 4.4 Customer experience of the ESR

Customers were asked about the ESR in wave 1 of the survey. The topics most commonly covered were their ambitions and interests (44%), CV review (40%), skills (36%), their understanding of job searches and applications (35%) or challenges finding a job (27%). Just over one in five (22%) reported discussing work-based opportunities. Just over one in ten (12%) said they had not had the review and a further two in ten (21%) said they could not remember what was covered. Whilst a description of the ESR was given in the survey, and customers were prompted with the list of topics which were covered, recall could be affected by the gap between this being covered and the research taking place, or the content overlapping with that covered in other meetings.

The qualitative research found that Youth Offer customers who had taken part in the YEP could remember covering a few elements of the ESR early on in their claim during either their first or second appointment. Customers' accounts of what was covered during these appointments were less comprehensive than Work Coaches', which could be due to customer recall or variation in the language and terms used in an ESR.

Most often, customers recalled being asked to share their CV with their Work Coach so the Work Coach could review its content and provide feedback. In several cases, customers were told that their CV was fine and did not need any changes. When changes were suggested, customers stated that this could involve restructuring the CV, changing the order of content, and introducing headers and spacing to make its visual presentation more professional. Customers felt that the input of Work Coaches to support them to make these changes was not extensive.

Some customers also received suggestions for additional content they could include in their CV based on the discussions they had with their Work Coach about their skill sets. Customers valued these conversations and appreciated any feedback that could aid their job-search, although some already felt their CV was in good shape and the tweaks suggested were relatively minor.

*"[My Work Coach] looked at my CV and gave me ideas on how to order the CV so it would be a bit more professional. They looked at the skills I had and I told them what I'm able to do and what I have experience in so they said to me why don't I put that in there as well".*

Customer, Youth Employment Programme

A few customers were referred to other services for additional support and guidance with their CV, including their local Youth Hub or National Career Services.

Several customers recalled covering their work-related skills with their Work Coach as part of the ESR. This topic came up when discussing a customer's work history, their qualifications and what type of work they saw themselves doing in future. These conversations were felt to be helpful when they helped to clarify the types of role they would be suited to and could apply for. On occasions, customers said that Work Coaches made suggestions about the type of job they might consider based on these conversations.

*“She [Work Coach] asked me about the skills I have. I explained everything what I’m skilled with. She was like you would be good for this role, she was giving me advice on the jobs. It was making it easy for me to understand what department of work I can work with”.*

Customer, Youth Employment Programme

As well as helping to focus their job-search, some customers commented that these conversations made the support feel more personalised to their circumstances. However, customers noted that these feelings dissipated if they were subsequently sent job vacancies by their Work Coach that did not seem to reflect these conversations and the skills identified.

A few customers noted that, as part of the ESR, they were provided with additional information to support their job-search, such as particular online job boards they could use. While the customers interviewed who took part in the YEP were generally familiar with how to search for jobs, this information was valued by those who had less experience in this area.

## 4.5 Timing, length and content of the Progress Review

As part of the YEP, the Progress Review can take place during the 11<sup>th</sup> week of a customer’s claim (or earlier if appropriate). The suggested time for this appointment is again 20 minutes. As part of this appointment, Work Coaches are expected to discuss the support options that will be available to the customer following their time on the YEP. This includes opportunities such as work experience, Sector-based Work Academy Programme opportunities or DWP mentoring circles.

Across the areas included in this study, the Work Coaches interviewed consistently stated that the Progress Review was not taking place either at a defined time point or as a standalone appointment. Rather, Work Coaches spoke of continuously reviewing progress with customers and discussing possible referral options with them throughout the first 13 weeks. As a result, they saw less of a need for a Progress Review at the end of this period. They expected that most of their customers would be engaged in some form of further provision by week 11, unless they had already found employment or had barriers which prevented them from engaging,

*“To be fair with you I think a lot of our appointments are looking at the progress, so I might not be as strict with my weeks. The first three weeks I am, but then it can go off into so many different tangents depending on the customer. So yeah, we are regularly looking at the progress. Am I doing it on the right specific weeks? I have to confess probably not”.*

Work Coach, Youth Employment Programme

Another factor which influenced how and when Progress Reviews took place was Work Coach time. Several Work Coaches stated their Jobcentre office had been holding Progress Reviews with customers during the 11<sup>th</sup> week of their claim but that these had stopped, unofficially, as other demands took precedence. These included

the requirement for Work Coaches to see customers aged 16-24 either weekly or fortnightly during the first 13 weeks of their claim. Work Coaches stated that this requirement had made their diaries busier and restricted their ability to complete longer appointments.

*“I have to confess we’ve been really bad at doing the week 11 progress appointment and we used to be really good when it first came out. However, sometimes you’re told things take precedence so it could be to meet certain targets we are rushed into doing 10-minute appointments all day long which means you don’t have time in your diary to have that progress appointment”.*

Work Coach, Youth Employment Programme

As a result, none of the customers interviewed who had taken part in the YEP for at least 11 weeks recalled completing a standalone Progress Review during their claim.

At wave one of the survey, when all participants had been on the Youth offer for at least 3 months, around 4 in 10 (42%) said they had not had the progress review and a further three in ten (31%) said they could not recall what was included. Of those who did recall this, customers most commonly recalled discussing the past 10 weeks progress (15%) or preparations for starting work (11%). Whilst a description of the Progress Review was given, and customers were prompted with the list of topics which could be covered, recall is likely to have been affected by the time between this being covered and the research taking place, or the content overlapping with that covered in other meetings.

## 4.6 On-going support outside of ESR and Progress Review

### 4.6.1 Regular Work Coach appointments

Work Coaches and customers described regular appointments (in most cases weekly) lasting between 10-20 minutes. During these appointments, customers predominately recalled being asked for an update on their job-search. This covered the roles they had applied for and whether they had received any responses.

*“Normally when we chat we would talk about what jobs I had applied for and what I was looking at and if there was any sort of issues or something I was having. Maybe I was wondering about a certain job or a certain opportunity but most of the time it was just what have you applied for and have you had any responses”.*

Customer, Youth Employment Programme

During these conversations, some customers stated that their Work Coaches would make suggestions for how customers could improve their chances of finding a suitable vacancy. This included expanding their job-search radius or suggesting different ways to apply for jobs (for example, going door-to-door handing out CVs). Customers who recalled these suggestions tended to have less work experience and expressed less confidence in their ability to look for work. Those who had more

experience in job-searching did not recall receiving the same support. Some customers felt that this was because their Work Coaches recognised that they were largely self-sufficient in their job-search.

### 4.6.2 Additional support

As well as checking in on customer progress with their job-search, Work Coaches stated that they would make customers aware of additional support and provision they could access or possible work opportunities they could apply for during these appointments where relevant. This included:

- signposting customers to specific job vacancies
- signposting customers to provision to develop their CV and interview skills (e.g. through the National Careers Service, or local Youth Hubs)
- supporting customers to find out about job opportunities, develop their employability skills and make connections with employers through mentoring circles and job fairs
- signposting customers to short vocational courses
- signposting customers to mental health support services
- signposting customers to other support services they could access for help with essentials (e.g. housing services, food banks) or contacting these services on a customer's behalf

The customers interviewed had limited experience of accessing this additional support. Where additional support was received, help with essentials was often praised by customers, with some stating that this went beyond their expectations of what assistance the Jobcentre could provide and had strengthened their relationship with their Work Coach. Customers also valued Work Coaches signposting them to job vacancies where these suggestions were relevant to their work interests.

## 4.7 Effective features and difference made

Based on their experiences of being part of the YEP, customers were asked to reflect on the most effective elements of their 13-week journey. Customers reflected that the support offered felt light touch in its nature. As a result, customers who had moved into employment did not often attribute their work outcomes directly to their Work Coach. Often these customers had already been confident in their job-search skills and had worked previously, and so felt their success in finding work was based on their own efforts. This reflects the design of the YEP, which is aimed at the most work-ready customers.

Some customers felt that having regular appointments with their Work Coach helped them to stay motivated in their job-search. Alongside positive words of encouragement from their Work Coach, customers explained that having to discuss with their Work Coach what roles they had applied for week-to-week and being accountable for this work helped encourage them to keep applying.

*“One of the most useful parts is just the fact that you kind of have to put your work out there, you have to show what you have done [...] I don't think it's a*

*reason for people to do it but it definitely helps people to stay on top of it, stay motivated. The fact that you regularly see or regularly talk to someone about it. It helps you to keep it in your mind a bit more I guess”.*

Customer, Youth Employment Programme

Another positive feature of the support customers recalled was the personal approach of their Work Coach. Overall, the customers interviewed had a positive impression of the Work Coach they saw most regularly, describing them as friendly, supportive and understanding. Customers explained that this was important in helping them feel able to openly discuss their personal circumstances and raise any questions.

However, some customers encountered difficulties on occasions where they saw a different Work Coach to their regular one. In several cases, customers who experienced this change explained that the temporary Work Coach they saw seemed less understanding of their circumstances and appeared to have higher expectations in terms of their job-readiness and how they should be progressing their job-search. Where this happened, customers explained that they felt pressure to move into work quickly and that some of the personal barriers they faced in finding employment (such as transport, caring responsibilities) were not being taken into account.

## 4.8 Improvements and gaps

Work Coaches and customers who took part in the in-depth interviews were asked how they felt the YEP could be improved (if at all) and if there were any gaps in the support available.

### 4.8.1 Improvements to the support offer

Work Coaches interviewed consistently wanted a greater level of discretion in the frequency and length of customer appointments during the first 13 weeks of their claim. Work Coaches explained that the need to see customers aged 18-24 weekly or fortnightly for this time made their diaries very busy and limited the amount of time and support they could offer each individual customer. With greater control over their schedule, some Work Coaches suggested that they could see customers who were more work-ready and comfortable with their job-search less frequently. This was seen to free up time to provide more intensive support to those further from the labour market through regular, longer meetings.

Customers stated that they would like their Work Coach to send more tailored job vacancies through their UC journal. These customers noted that the vacancies they had been signposted to were not suitable to their circumstances (for example, in terms of travel). Customers felt that these vacancies did not reflect the discussions they had with their Work Coach about their skills, work interests and the sector they wanted to work in. Customers wanted to receive targeted vacancies that were relevant to these earlier discussions. Some explained that this was the type of support they expected to receive from the Jobcentre when they made their claim.



## 4.8.2 Gap in provision

In terms of gaps in the support offer, at the time of the research, several Work Coaches felt that there was a lack of work experience opportunities they could refer YEP customers to. This was important, as Work Coaches noted that lack of work experience was a persistent barrier for young people seeking employment. This was reflected in the survey findings presented in Chapter 3, where only around 1 in ten YEP customers (9%) recalled receiving work experience or a work placement through the scheme, despite this being identified as a barrier to work by nearly three in ten (28%).

Some Work Coaches commented that, in their view, there had been a noticeable decline in the number of work experience opportunities that Work Coaches could signpost/refer customers to since the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. While voluntary work opportunities could help fill this gap to some extent, Work Coaches highlighted that these opportunities do not always replicate a paid work environment. In any case, volunteering opportunities were not always widely available in some locations.

Some interviewees highlighted that local training providers were delivering short-term training opportunities in particular occupations (e.g. as a barista) followed by a work placement to provide young people with hands-on experience. They noted that it would be useful for there to be more of these types of opportunities available, in a range of sectors, to help increase customers' chances of finding work.

Another gap in provision identified by interviewees in a few areas was access to mental health support services. Work Coaches spoke of long NHS waiting lists presenting a barrier to young people accessing timely support. As identified in the quantitative survey, just over two-fifths of (42%) Youth Offer customers overall had a long-term mental health condition.

## 5. Youth Hub: Hub partner, Youth Hub Work Coach and customer views and experiences

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative interviews completed with partner organisations and Work Coaches involved in the delivery of Youth Hub services and customers who received this support. It focuses on Youth Hub settings across six of the local areas that were included in the qualitative research. Findings from two on-site observations to Youth Hub settings are also presented.

The chapter first covers how the Youth Hubs settings included in the research are staffed and the range of services they deliver. Second, stakeholder and customer views on the nature of the Youth Hub environment and how this affects young people's engagement in the support offer are explored. Third, how Hub staff work with customers during their regular appointments and customer views on the Youth Hub support offer is discussed. The effective features of the Youth Hub support model, and ongoing challenges and improvements that could be made to offer are presented. Finally, employer views and experiences of engaging with their local Youth Hub are explored.

### 5.1 Youth Hub strand description

The Youth Hub strand of the Youth Offer was designed to facilitate access to a range of support services for customers in one location, separate to the Jobcentre. Youth Hubs were typically located in community settings with other organisations present (often including a host organisation that had oversight over the premises and/or the services delivered within the Hub). Some Youth Hubs operated on an appointment only basis, while others offered a drop-in service for all young people who need support to find work, including those not claiming Universal Credit. Customers referred to Youth Hubs could access intensive support for up to 6 months, during

which time a customer's main point of contact was their Youth Hub Work Coach. Youth Employability Coaches could also be based in these settings.

Youth Hub Work Coaches have flexibility to set the frequency and length of appointments they have with customers supported in the Hub. The type of support provided depends on:

- the location of the Youth Hub
- providers that the work coaches are working alongside
- a customer's individual needs and barriers to work

## 5.2 Youth Hub staffing

The Youth Hubs included in this research had different staffing structures depending on the size of the customer population they served. DWP Work Coaches were based within the Hubs on either a full or part-time basis. Those who worked within the Youth Hub part-time split their working week between the Youth Hub and the Jobcentre. Areas also varied in whether the Hubs were staffed by Youth Hub Work Coaches or Youth Employability Coaches (who worked with 16-24 customers with complex needs) or a combination of the two.

Several Youth Hub host organisations also had their own staff members based in the Hubs who would work with young people on a one-to-one basis. In some cases, these staff members worked mainly in a triage role and would help customers identify the most appropriate support options for them within the Hub. Others would work with young people in an advisory or mentoring capacity alongside the Work Coaches based within the Hub, and would support customers with their job-search, accessing other Youth Hub services, with their confidence and motivation and providing emotional support where appropriate.

Several Youth Hub partner staff who worked directly with customers were experienced youth workers, sometimes with expertise in working with particular groups of young people (such as care experienced, neurodiverse). In two of the Hubs included in this research, the host organisation was clear that how their staff worked day-to-day with young people was informed by person-centred therapeutic approaches where customers are offered empathy (understanding of their situation), unconditional positive regard (a non-judgemental approach) and where the advisor/mentor is authentic and genuine in their interactions with the young person.

## 5.3 Services offered within selected sites

In-depth interviews were completed with a host organisation in one Youth Hub setting in each of the six local areas to gain insight into the range of services they offer. The organisations which oversaw the delivery of Youth Hub services were diverse and included local youth charities, local authorities and training providers. Services varied between sites based on the nature of the partnerships established in each location and the types of support these organisations had historically delivered or currently

had funding for. As set out below, there were common themes in what support customers could access.

All the Youth Hubs included in the study **supported customers with their job-search**. This could take the form of one-to-one support from mentors/advisors or Work Coaches and focused on reviewing customers' CVs, completing mock interviews with customers, identifying and discussing relevant vacancies and helping customers to clarify the type of work they were looking for. Some Youth Hubs also delivered group sessions on these topics. In one case, this was combined with arts and crafts and recreational activities to support young people's engagement in the sessions and create opportunities to socialise and build their confidence further.

A few of the Hubs included in the research also provided **access to careers services** (i.e. the National Careers Service). Careers advisors would visit the Hub on set days of the week to deliver advice and guidance and support aspects of a customer's job-search where needed.

Many of the Youth Hubs also provided access to some form of **training provision**. The nature of the provision varied between sites and included access to short vocational training courses, life-skills training (e.g. communication, confidence), Further Education courses, and traineeship and apprenticeship provision. Several of the Hubs could connect customers with this provision through their networks, which included local training providers. In some cases, these providers would visit the Hub on set days of the week for drop-in sessions or as part of industry taster days. A few of the Hubs were registered training providers and had the facilities to deliver training on-site. One of these Hubs for instance delivered its own vocational training courses and could provide access to an on-site commercial garage, trades unit, beauty salon and a commercial grade kitchen.

Several of the Hubs supported young people to **gain an insight into working in different industries and provided opportunities to make connections with local employers**. The Hubs had differing approaches and common types of activity included industry talks by local employers, job fairs, industry taster days and workplace visits. Industry taster days were favoured by several Hubs as they attracted young people with a genuine interest in working in the area, which was seen to support better engagement than a more generic job fair that drew in employers from different industries. The Hubs which ran these events tended to focus on industries which had relevant, local opportunities for young people, such as construction and hospitality. As well as employers, these events would usually be attended by training providers offering short courses and work placements in these areas.

Other types of services available through Youth Hubs included in this study included **mental health support**. A few of the Hubs provided direct access to these services through on-site counselling and/or alternative forms of therapy such as art or music therapy. The latter was seen to be more suitable for young people who had difficulty opening up and expressing themselves with a counsellor. These alternative forms of therapy were seen to support young people to engage in a shared activity, develop their skills, and form bonds and social connections with others, which could help build their confidence and self-esteem. Where Hubs were not delivering these services on-

site, Hub staff would often be able to signpost young people to local mental health services for a self-referral.

The Hubs included in this research also often provided access to other **types of activities or facilities to support customer wellbeing and help them to form social connections with their peers**. For example, some Hubs delivered healthy cooking classes, outdoor residential trips, group fitness sessions or sports activities. A few Hubs also had sports and fitness facilities on-site that young people could access during their visit. As well as physical activities, some Hubs ran regular arts and gaming clubs to provide opportunities for young people to engage in shared interests and socialise. Hub partners saw all of these activities as helping to increase young people's social contact and their self-confidence.

Finally, a few of the Youth Hubs offered customers direct access to **housing and financial advice services** based within the Hub on set days of the week or signposted to local organisations offering this support. Some of the Hub partners also ran their own **foodbanks** onsite to support customers who were struggling financially and needed help accessing essential items.

## 5.4 Views on Youth Hub environment

The in-depth interviews highlighted that the physical environment in which Youth Hub services were accessed and the approach of staff shaped how young people felt about engaging with the services provided.

The Youth Hubs included in this research were based in a range of venues including existing community venues (e.g. sporting or event spaces), the lead provider's offices or office space provided by a corporate donor. In general, all the Hubs included in this study were seen to be successful in creating a supportive and engaging environment in the view of Hub staff and customers, although some were seen to do this more successfully than others. Often, these spaces were described by customers as feeling relaxed, informal and friendly.

The interviews highlighted that the supportive and engaging environment enabled customers to feel safe and comfortable attending the Youth Hub. This laid the groundwork for developing positive relationships with Hub staff and feeling able to openly discuss their personal circumstances and needs. From the staff perspective, this type of environment resulted in better engagement and higher attendance rates compared to the Jobcentre. This was seen to support customers to access the services delivered by the Hub.

Several factors were seen to contribute towards the creation of a positive Youth Hub environment.

Both Hub staff and customers also spoke of how **staff members would greet young people** as they arrived at the Hub, asking who they were there to see and getting to know their name and personal circumstances over time. In some cases, customers would be offered a drink while they were waiting for their appointment. This made the environment feel more personable to customers, and that they were valued in this space.

*“I don’t feel like a stranger. I don’t just feel like another person coming through the door. The moment you walk through that door you’re welcomed... people say, ‘Hi, how’s your kids?’... They want to know you on a personal level and that’s what a Work Coach should do...”*

Youth Hub Customer

The Hub spaces were seen to be **less corporate** than the Jobcentre. Work Coaches spoke of how they would dress more causally when they were based in the Hub. Young people would tend to sit around a table with their Work Coach/advisor, rather than directly opposite them as they would in the Jobcentre. Both of these practices were intended to set young people at ease during appointments and help the environment to feel more relaxed and collaborative in its approach.

Several of the Hubs provided access to **private meeting spaces** in which Work Coaches and Hub partners held their regular appointments with young people. Both staff and customers felt that this privacy was important in ensuring that customers felt safe discussing their personal circumstances and comfortable disclosing any difficulties they may be experiencing. While a few of the Hubs held their regular appointments in an open plan setting, staff explained that they did have some private meeting spaces available that they could move to if a customer appeared uncomfortable or anxious, or if had something sensitive they wanted to discuss.

Some Work Coaches highlighted the effect that access to a private meeting space had on their own approach and tone with customers. For example, one interviewee spoke of how they adopted a more relaxed tone with customers as their conversations were not being overheard by managers, which they believed helped them to establish better relationships.

*“As a Work Coach when you’re in the Jobcentre you want to have your professional tone and you’re conducting yourself in a certain way because you’ve got managers round and everything else. When you’re in the Youth Hub it’s like you’re able to mellow a bit and speak to them in a way that they can understand you, still professional, so the relationship is able to be built a little bit better”.*

Youth Hub Work Coach

Both Hub staff and customers interviewed also highlighted how **the Youth Hub environment was less busy and noisy** than Jobcentre offices, with fewer people attending. This was felt to be particularly beneficial for neurodiverse young people or those with high levels of anxiety.

The **lack of a visible security presence** was also highlighted by Hub staff and customers as making the Youth Hub environment feel less intimidating for young people. While some staff appreciated the need for security guards in the Jobcentre, they noted that it could be threatening or agitating for vulnerable young people. In contrast, these interviewees explained that the absence of a visible security presence supported them to establish productive relationships with customers in the Hub based on mutual respect and trust which.

*“[The Jobcentre] was awful... I hated it. It were quite daunting for someone who’s never been to a Jobcentre before, quite young... Seeing security on the*

*door... when you're fresh out of school and young, you don't want to see that. Obviously coming in here it's more like a school environment. It's a lot better"*

Youth Hub customer

Finally, many of the Youth Hubs that participated in the research had an agreement with the Jobcentre and DWP staff working within the Hub that they would not issue sanctions within this space. All support offered was voluntary and if customers did not want to engage, they were told they would be referred back to the Jobcentre. In the view of some staff, this created a psychological safe space for young people, where they were not concerned about the nature of the conversations they were going to have.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.5 Nature of customer appointments/staff approaches to working with customers

The additional time that staff working with Youth Hubs had for customer appointments was seen to have important benefits for customers. Thirty-minute appointment times were common across all sites, although appointments could be shorter depending on how much the customer had to discuss and what other support/provision they were engaging with at the time. This appointment length was felt to be valuable in helping customers to feel secure in the Youth Hub environment, comfortable in sharing their experiences and for support to feel tailored to their needs. Hub Work Coaches would often see customers on a weekly basis for the first 13 weeks of their Hub support, but could reduce the frequency of appointments after this point depending on the needs of the customer (e.g. moving to monthly appointments).

The Work Coaches interviewed explained that having regular 30 minute appointments provided enough time to have wider a conversation about different things going on in customers' lives, including topics that were not directly relevant to their job-search (such as their interests and plans for the weekend). Both staff and customers felt that this demonstrated that Work Coaches had a genuine interest in and cared about the young person. This helped them develop a good rapport, supporting the customer to open up about their situation further. This was evident in the observations of appointments completed as part of this research. In cases where

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<sup>11</sup> The DWP staff guidance on the sanctions process for claimants attending a Youth Hub makes clear that claimants could still be subject to a sanction decision if they do not engage in the support, although this will not be applied within the Youth Hub environment. If a customer fails to attend mandatory activity or appointments and provides a good reason, they remain allocated to their Youth Hub Work Coach and continue their Youth Hub journey. If a good reason cannot be applied or the customer has already had three consecutive, locally allowed good reason decisions, they are allocated back to a Jobcentre Work Coach whilst a decision about applying a sanction is made. If a sanction is not applied, the customer is allocated back to a Youth Hub Work Coach to continue on the Youth Hub journey. If a sanction is applied, the customer remains allocated to the Jobcentre Work Coach until the sanction ends. Through this process any sanction is applied consistently for the individual customer regardless of whether they are allocated to the Youth Hub or Jobcentre.

customers had been meeting with their Work Coach for several weeks, they engaged in the conversation in a relaxed way and were able to talk about personal topics, such as their health and well-being, quite openly.

*“Every time I come in [my Work Coach] is like ‘are you alright, how’s your week been’. Not because she needs to, because she cares... she doesn’t like to see people down, depressed. She likes to help people...”*

Youth Hub Customer

The customers interviewed saw the difference that this additional time had on the nature of their interactions with their Work Coach in the Youth Hub compared to the Jobcentre. For example, customers shared that they felt they had a degree of choice in what they talked about during appointments in the Youth Hub, and that their Work Coach appeared to be more patient with them, helping them feel at ease.

Detailed insights into how customers’ support journeys were discussed were gathered through the observations in two Youth Hub sites. While the generalisability of these findings is limited, the information collected shows some of the ways in which Work Coaches working within these settings achieved a greater level of personalisation in the support they offered. This was identified as a key, beneficial feature of the Youth Hub support offer in the qualitative interviews and survey with customers.

In the observations, there was a clear focus from Work Coaches in several appointments on ensuring customers were aware of what their support journey would look like and reassuring them about the pacing of support. For example, customers who were new to the Youth Hub environment could appear anxious during their first appointment. In these meetings, young people were encouraged to see their journey towards employment as an extended process, with many ‘small steps’ along the way. In one Hub, customers were encouraged to make full use of the six months of support available to secure a suitable work outcome. Customers were also reassured about their level of agency in this process, with Work Coaches explaining that they had a choice over what opportunities they took up or turned down. This approach was taken to reassure customers that they would not be rushed into a work opportunity until they felt ready, and that they had control over what types of opportunity they pursued.

These assurances were borne out in the subsequent conversations Work Coaches had with customers in these and other appointments. In several cases, multiple support options were discussed with customers. This could include opportunities for young people to gain qualifications, develop skills and gain work experience (e.g. functional skills programmes, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities, SWAPs). Other support options presented included the opportunity to gain greater confidence in their job-search skills (through job clubs and employability skills sessions) and local support options for health issues (e.g. signposting to in-house or local mental health support services).

By presenting customers with multiple possible support options, Work Coaches tried to encourage customers to engage in some form of support, while ensuring they had a genuine choice over what they pursued.



While customers were given autonomy over their support journey, in one of these Hubs Work Coaches would gently challenge young people to ensure they were continuing to make small steps while pursuing the long-term goal of sustainable employment. Examples included a Work Coach suggesting that a customer consider short-term work experience or part-time employment opportunities while they were taking part in training necessary to pursue a longer-term career goal. In this case, the Work Coach explained that these opportunities could enhance the customer's employment prospects and help them gain more confidence in the workplace.

In another case a Work Coach tried to get a customer to consider apprenticeship training opportunities instead of the zero-hours contract work they had independently acquired, which offered a low number of hours each week. The Work Coach explained to the young person while it was positive that they had found employment independently, their earnings prospects would be better in the long-term if they pursued the apprenticeship.

## 5.6 Customer views and experiences of Youth Hub support

When customers gave their views on the Youth Hub support offer during the in-depth interviews, their experiences appeared to reflect the approaches and messaging used by Work Coaches during the fieldwork observations. For example, several customers commented that they felt less pressure in the Youth Hub compared to the Jobcentre to secure a job outcome as quickly as possible. This was reassuring for customers, particularly for those who had additional support needs (e.g. mental health issues, housing problems), as they knew they would be able to work on addressing these challenges before they began their job-search.

Customers were positive about their level of choice in what opportunities they pursued, reflecting the observation findings. They felt comfortable turning down opportunities presented by their Work Coach which were not aligned to their interests or that they had misgivings about (e.g. concerns about taking on apprenticeship opportunities that offered low rates of pay).

In terms of the support customers accessed through Youth Hubs, young people recalled receiving support with their job-search both individually and in group sessions, attending industry taster days, receiving help to access training opportunities, attending group confidence building sessions, and accessing housing and mental health support. Notable themes in customers' experiences of this support were feeling that it was tailored to their needs, customers feeling validated in their right to seek support for difficult issues (e.g. mental health) and seeing this as part of the process of becoming job-ready, and feeling safe in the Hub environment, which enabled them to build social bonds and positive relationships with Hub staff and other young people.

For example, several customers who received support with their job-search (e.g. help with drafting a CV or being signposted to relevant vacancies) noted how this felt

more tailored to their skills, experiences and interests than the support they had received at the Jobcentre.

*“We went over my CV because the Jobcentre [...] the person who done it just didn't really do a good job they just wrote a very bland generic one and I weren't happy with it. So they helped me go over it and make it better. I was a lot happier with it because it mentioned like I had done bits of youth work and training and stuff like that. It's just more personal to me”.*

Youth Hub Customer

*“[At the Youth Hub] I was working on my CV with this lady and then she would help me send it off to local employers. Whereas the Jobcentre [...] would just send me a message and be like you have to come to this meeting because obviously it is every week but it didn't feel like they had too much to say”.*

Youth Hub Customer

Other customers described feeling that Work Coaches and Hub partners took an active interest in their wellbeing by asking about this directly or picking up on when they were feeling low. This was seen as valuable in encouraging customers to seek support for these needs. In some cases, customers explained that they themselves were initially dismissive about the difficult emotions they had been experiencing and did not believe they were worthy of further support. However, Hub staff encouraged them to seek help and discussed several possible options with them (i.e. seeing their GP and getting a fit note or accessing counselling directly through the Hub).

Many young people also spoke about the positive social experiences they had when attending the Hub. Young people spoke of how social activities embedded in the Hub provided them with opportunities to connect with others in similar circumstances. Some customers commented that the feelings of safety they had in the Hub environment helped them feel able to express themselves more freely in this setting. This enabled customers to gradually build their confidence and develop their interpersonal skills, as well as form friendships.

*“Through [the Youth Hub] I've made more friends in six months than I have in six years. I was learning to project my voice more. I found my self-worth...”*

Youth Hub customer

## 5.7 Effective features and difference made

Based on the interviews and observation data, the effectiveness of the Youth Hub model was linked to:

- Young people feeling welcome and safe in the Youth Hub environment
- The personable and relaxed approach of Work Coaches and wider partners in this space, which was supported through greater flexibility in appointment times and access to private meeting spaces
- Young people feeling that the support they received was tailored to their circumstances and that staff genuinely cared about their situation
- Customers feeling that they had autonomy over what their support journey looked like both in terms of the opportunities they pursued and the pacing of support

With these conditions in place, customers were generally open to the support that was made available to them and felt encouraged to utilise the different services the Youth Hub could offer.

When asked to describe what difference (if any) the Youth Hub support offer had made to them young people at all stages in their journey were very positive about the support they had received. The biggest change that customers identified was a growth in their confidence. This included **feeling more confident in their job-search**. This could stem from believing that their CV was more appealing to potential employers now or that they were better prepared for interview questions after practicing. Some customers also felt more confident in how employable they were in the eyes of potential employers due to the training, qualifications and skills they had gained while attending the Youth Hub.

Several young people spoke about **feeling more confident about the type of job roles they were looking for and what positions were available to them**. For example, some customers explained that the conversations they had with their Work Coach/advisor on their work experience, skills and interests had helped them to better understand what jobs they should apply for and be more focused in their job-search. Other customers needed flexible work opportunities that could fit around their personal commitments (e.g. college courses). Their Work Coach/advisor helped to identify vacancies that met these requirements, which they subsequently applied for.

As noted, **the social activities facilitated by Youth Hubs helped to improve some customer's self-esteem and confidence expressing themselves**. The fieldwork visits to two sites showed that where these activities were embedded throughout the Hub's services, these perceived benefits were more widespread among the customers interviewed. Combined with mental health support, in some cases these experiences had made a significant improvement to customer wellbeing.

A few customers shared that the relationships they had established with Work Coaches and Hub partners had helped to **increase their confidence in their communications skills speaking with working professionals**. Some noted that they brought this confidence into subsequent conversations with employers and training providers, for instance, at job fairs and interviews.

*“I've seen positive changes being in the Youth Hub, dealing with my Work Coach and the staff there has changed a lot. I find it has made me comfortable and confident. When you're around fairly supportive people you don't really have issues”*

Youth Hub Customer

Finally, customers who struggled with mental health conditions such as social anxiety or agoraphobia reflected that the inviting and welcoming nature of the Youth Hub environment had helped them to make progress in these areas. Some customers commented that they now felt more confident engaging with employment services or going out in public than they had done previously.

*“The big difference is I am finding it easier going out by myself in public and stuff like that. That's probably the biggest thing that they have helped me with”.*

Youth Hub Customer

A few of the young people interviewed had moved into part-time or full-time employment opportunities since accessing Youth Hub support. Customers generally attributed these employment outcomes to the support they had received either by helping them to identify areas of work they were interested in, relevant vacancies and/or helping to improve their job-search skills and their employability.

## 5.8 Challenges and improvements

While the Youth Hub model was generally viewed to be working well among Hub staff and customers, several ongoing challenges and possible improvements were identified by interviewees. In some sites, both Work Coaches and Hub partners commented that there could be stronger partnership working between the Youth Hub and local Jobcentres.

For example, some lead Hub partners reflected that did not feel able to encourage the Work Coaches working within their Hub to engage in discussions about how their approach to working with young people in the Hub environment could be improved. They felt that doing so would need the support of Jobcentre managers to encourage and create time for this.

Hub partners and Work Coaches also wanted Youth Hub services to be promoted more in local Jobcentres to encourage more referrals. In these areas, interviewees did not feel they were receiving as many referrals from Jobcentre as they might expect. They speculated that this might be due to pressures within Jobcentre offices to meet referral profiles for DWP-contracted provision. These interviewees felt that the Hub's services could be better promoted by organising an open day for Work Coaches at the Youth Hub to see the facilities and services they offer first-hand. This had taken place in one Youth Hub site included in the research and was seen to be successful in encouraging more referrals.

A further challenge identified by Hub partners was a lack of awareness among local employers about the needs of some of the young people they were working with. Examples included the needs of neurodiverse customers, or those with poor mental health or hidden disabilities. While Hub partners made active efforts to improve the

awareness and understanding of local employers on these issues, some interviewees explained that they were still hesitant to involve employers in the Hub's activities if they could not trust that they would be responsive to these needs and provide young people with a good experience if they were to employ them. This limited the pool of local employers they worked with, which in turn restricted the opportunities available to young people within their Hub.

*“Having employers that are more aware of what’s going on with mental health and what’s going on with disabilities and things, you know the hidden ones, and being more accepting of that. That I think would be really beneficial for our young people and being able to stay in work than rather like I said before, doing a few weeks or months and then not being able to continue because they weren’t understood in the workplace”.*

Hub Partner

From the customer perspective, several interviewees shared that they felt the Youth Hub they attended could have more support for housing needs. While a few of the Hubs included in the research provided direct access to housing advice services, in some areas young people were not clear who they could approach about these concerns and what help they could access.

## 5.9 Employer feedback – motivation and experiences of engaging in the Hubs, outcomes achieved

This section presents the findings from interviews completed with several employers which were engaged with the Youth Hubs included in this research. It presents their motivations for and experiences of engaging with their local Youth Hub.

### 5.9.1 Motivations for engaging

Employers interviewed as part of the research shared a variety of motivations for engaging with Youth Hubs. In some cases, Hubs approached them and suggested they engage to support young people locally. These employers were motivated to support the work of the Hub to give back to the local community by providing young people with workplace exposure, giving them an insight into different industries and enhancing their job-search skills.

Other motivations included raising their organisation's profile and the profile of the work opportunities they have available within the area. In sectors with ageing workforces - such as construction, energy and engineering - employers saw Youth Hubs as a good opportunity to recruit younger entrants and help prevent workforce shortages in the near future.

*“We’re getting into the 70’s club... if they’re retiring then there’s going to be a massive skills shortage... it’s got to be young people that they can mould to work in the industry.”*

Employer

### 5.9.2 Nature of engagement

The activities employers supported as part of their engagement with the Youth Hubs were broad. These ranged from attending jobs fairs and industry days, hosting workplace tours, employability days and mock interviews, and meeting young people one-to-one in the Hubs. Some more unique examples included employers arranging health and wellbeing events for Hub customers (i.e. providing opportunities for product testing and beauty treatments) or partnering with Hubs to gamify an introduction to engineering to promote the industry.

*“We have gone to their premises and got the experts in their field doing training on health and wellbeing... Letting people know, especially young kids who are having a rough time, that it is so good for your mental health just to look after yourself.”*

Employer

In most cases employer engagement was ad-hoc and depended on the recruitment needs of the organisation. For example, employers in construction and engineering shared that they engage with their Hub most often in early summer to recruit school leavers to their apprenticeship opportunities. Engagement for the remainder of the year however was limited. Employers also shared that Hubs would invite employers to jobs fairs and outreach events throughout the year. These requests were also described as being ad-hoc and did not follow a predictable pattern.

Some employers explained that they would also host outreach events at their offices, which Hub staff could attend, to support customers to gain an awareness of how to conduct themselves around employers and develop their confidence and interview skills through mock interview practice.

### 5.9.3 Experience of engaging

Generally, the employers interviewed described the Hubs they engaged with as being well coordinated. Despite this some employers explained that, as they were slightly removed from the Youth Hub support network, it can be confusing to distinguish between different partners involved in Hub activity and understand which organisations supported which customer groups. Understanding these structures would require a time investment, which several felt they could not make, causing some to feel they were not able to fully embed themselves in the support. However, these employers could still see the benefits of their engagement and wished to continue working in partnership with Youth Hubs.

There were conflicting views on young people’s level of engagement with the opportunities offered by employers. Some felt that the young people put forward by the Youth Hubs for job opportunities were noticeably more interested in these roles than customers from the Jobcentre. In contrast, some said they experience fewer no-shows at employability events and interviews organised by Jobcentres. These employers perceived that Work Coaches working within these settings are more likely

to mandate young people to engage in these activities than those working within Hub settings.

*“[Youth Hubs] are dealing with people that are very disengaged... I think with the Jobcentre... they have got a bit more clout.”*

Employer

In rural areas, employers suggested Youth Hubs could do more to support engagement with outreach events in business premises that are less easily accessible by public transport. One suggestion was that Youth Hubs could arrange minibuses to remove these transport barriers. However, employers did recognise the cost implications for the Hub.

Despite the mixed experiences, all employers felt that the Youth Hubs were a valuable resource in allowing them to raise awareness of their job opportunities and attract young people to these roles.

### **5.9.4 Outcomes**

The interviews with employers highlighted some direct outcomes that had been secured through their engagement with their local Youth Hub. For example, several noted an increase in the number of applications they received for job vacancies following their attendance at jobs fairs and industry days.

Employers also highlighted some challenges experienced in securing employment outcomes for Youth Hub customers. For example, one employer shared that a Youth Hub customer had disclosed a criminal conviction late in the application process, which prevented them from securing a position. It was suggested that Youth Hub customers could be better supported to understand when and how a criminal conviction should be disclosed to avoid disappointment. Additionally, employers offering apprenticeship opportunities felt that they had been struggling to attract Hub customers as a result of the rising cost of living and the relatively low wages these positions offered. In contrast, employers shared that the recruitment events they hold at school and college open days were more successful at attracting young people to these roles.

# 6. Youth Employability Coaches: Customer and Work Coach views

This chapter presents findings from qualitative interviews with Youth Employability Coaches (YECs) and YEC customers and outlines their views and experiences of the YEC support offer. First the nature of the YEC role as seen by those delivering the support is outlined, followed by perceptions of staff and customer relationships in the YEC strand. Second, the nature of YEC appointments, including how and when appointments take place, and the support delivered by YECs to customers is explored. Finally, the chapter provides an outline of effective features of YEC support identified by YECs and customers as well as the challenges, gaps and improvements that could be made to the support model.

In interpreting these findings, it should be noted that across the interviews with YEC customers, young people were generally unaware of the term Youth Employability Coach and were not always able to clearly identify when they had received this support. As a result, when exploring customer views in this chapter it is not always possible to identify whether a young person is reflecting on their experiences with a YEC or other Work Coaches within the Jobcentre. In addition, the YECs and YEC customers interviewed as part of this research were not matched pairs. As such, it may be that they are discussing different support environments.

## 6.1 Youth Employability Coach strand description

Youth Offer policy outlined that Youth Employability Coaches (YECs) provided tailored and targeted support to 16-24 year old customers in the Intensive Work Search regime with the most complex support needs and vulnerabilities. YECs were



able to provide and facilitate access to a range of support to help young people develop the skills needed to look for, find and sustain employment.

This intensive support was intended to last up to six months and could be extended to 12 months following a case conference, where appropriate. YECs were typically based in Jobcentres, although the policy allowed YECs to meet customers in public places that customers see as more comfortable for them and in partner support services to facilitate warm handovers. In some areas, YECs could be based in Youth Hubs for part of their working week. Additionally, YECs were able to offer flexibility in appointment length and frequency in order to tailor support intensity to customer circumstances.

Across this time, YECs could provide and facilitate access to CV, application and interview preparation support, identify suitable opportunities to develop customers' employability skills, conduct in-depth conversations with customer about their work search and opportunities available to them, and advocate for customers with employers and providers where appropriate. Additionally, YECs could provide up to six weeks of in work support when a customer starts work or a work-based opportunity.

## 6.2 Views on the nature of the Youth Employability Coach role

The Youth Employability Coaches (YECs) interviewed often had experience of supporting vulnerable customers and those further from the labour market prior to taking on the role. Some explained that they had been asked to take on the YEC position because of this experience. Others had expressed an interest in the role, seeing it as an opportunity to utilise their awareness of the support available locally to customers with complex needs. Some YECs from both groups stated they had previously been the care leaver SPOC for their office. They shared that this experience equipped them with an awareness of the challenges faced by vulnerable customers who would be part of the YEC caseload, and the support available to them.

*“As part of my role I’m the care leaver SPOC for this specific Jobcentre. It works hand in hand with the YEC role because you tend to find that care leavers are those that need that additional support and help and advice.”*

Youth Employability Coach

Despite having this specialist experience and expertise, the YECs interviewed commented that, in their view, the YEC role had gradually become diluted over time. At the time of the research, YECs shared that their caseloads were increasingly mixed and included customers with complex support needs as well as those who were more work ready. This was seen by interviewees to be a result of capacity pressures within Jobcentre offices resulting in YECs having to support other Work Coaches with their caseloads either on an ad-hoc or long-term basis.

For example, some YECs explained that other Work Coaches would book appointments in their diaries for customers not on the YEC caseload if other colleagues did not have availability. This practice was more likely to be experienced by the YECs interviewed based within Jobcentres than Youth Hub settings. Several YECs based in Jobcentres also stated that they would take youth customers with less complex needs into their caseload and work with them long-term to reduce pressures on Youth Work Coaches within their office. As a result of this practice, some YECs shared that their caseload was higher than the policy intention, at nearly 200 young people across all work search regimes. YECs noted how both factors reduced their capacity to have longer appointments with customers with complex needs, which was the intention for the YEC role. To manage these pressures, some YECs explained that if they had particular customers who required more intensive support, they would book back-to-back appointments to ensure time with them was protected.

*“I should have longer appointment times... Some of the YECs nationally... they’ve got 30-minute appointments, but what I tend to do is if I need 30-minutes with somebody, I just block out another 10 minutes...”*

Youth Employability Coach

YECs interviewed who had experience of working in Jobcentre and Youth Hub settings explained that when they were based in the Youth Hub, colleagues were not able to book appointments into their diaries. This protected the flexibility to provide 30-minute appointment slots with customers. The difference in support intensity between these two environments resulted in YECs having to carefully select which of their customers they saw in each location. This was to ensure the customers with the most complex needs were receiving an adequate level of support.

*‘As a Youth Employability Coach I could have at the most 18 appointments a day... definitely more time makes a difference, and there’s not enough time as a Youth Employability Coach in the Jobcentre. I don’t know why they brought us back here [from the Youth Hub].’*

Youth Employability Coach

## 6.3 Staff and customer relationships

### 6.3.1 Staff views

In-depth interviews with YECs highlighted that they felt that building rapport with customers was key to developing a trusting, supportive and productive working relationship. Interviewees felt that ensuring appointments took place in a relaxed environment was important in creating an appropriate space for customers to share their experiences. Where appointments took place in the Jobcentre, YECs facilitated this environment and created a more relaxed and equitably dynamic through their interactions with customers. For example, making conversations feel more friendly

and informal by finding time to discuss customers' personal interests, and sharing relatable elements of their own lives.

*"I'm not talking about UC all the time. It could just be a general chat, just a friendly chat and just getting on a level with them to then move forward with them, and they get more at ease with you."*

Youth Employability Coach

In cases where strong relationships developed between YECs and customers through this approach, YECs shared that they could become confidantes for their customers. Given that the YEC strand is designed for young people with complex needs who are furthest from the labour market, this often extended into discussing customers' mental health. In some cases, shortages of timely mental health support caused YECs to feel they wanted to bridge this gap and offer meaningful emotional support in their interactions with customers. While YECs were aware of the boundaries of their role and their lack of expertise in this area, some wanted to have a better awareness of different mental health conditions that might be presented and be better equipped to have conversations with customers on these topics.

### **6.3.2 Customer views**

YEC customer views on the working relationship with their Work Coaches reflected the YEC interview findings. Several customers stated that they felt comfortable discussing their support needs and personal circumstances with their Work Coach. This finding was more widespread amongst customers who had their appointments in a Youth Hub, reflecting the success of Work Coaches and partners in creating a safe and supportive atmosphere in these settings.

On the other hand, customers whose appointments took place in the Jobcentre felt that the relationship with their YEC could feel transactional. This was attributed to short appointment times, which provided less opportunity to build rapport and explore support options, and customers experiencing the Jobcentre environment as authoritative.

*'It is clear twenty minutes isn't enough time to build some massive sort of acknowledgement of each other, but... we do have time where we can talk you know, this is the commitments, this is the such and such and this is what I can put you on next week'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

## **6.4 Nature of appointments**

### **6.4.1 How and when they meet**

Interviews with YECs found that if a customer was referred to YEC support at the start of their claim the frequency of their appointments would follow the same structure as the Youth Employment Programme (YEP). Customers' appointments would be weekly for the first 13-weeks of the programme and fortnightly after this

point. However, YECs also explained that they had reasonable flexibility within their role and could make discretionary decisions on how frequent each customer's appointments were. This was based on individual customer needs, circumstances and progress. For example, following a referral or signposting to wider support organisations, such as mental health or housing services, YECs could reduce the frequency of their appointments with a customer or temporarily pause them. This was usually done in recognition that these customers had more pressing support needs to address before they could fully engage with the YEC support and to reduce the burden on customers during this time. YECs explained that having this flexibility allowed appointments to remain productive and relevant to a young person's support journey. In doing this, YECs felt young people remained more engaged with their support.

*"I can be like, okay, I know you've got that going on so I'll catch up with you in 2-3 weeks' time... If I see someone weekly it's pointless because it will only be a 10-minute appointment so it seems such a waste of time. I can't have a quality conversation."*

Youth Employability Coach

Similarly, the YECs interviewed shared that they had choice over the mode of their customer's appointments. There was a widespread preference for face-to-face appointments amongst interviewees, feeling that this provided a better opportunity to build rapport with customers. However, the mode could be changed to suit the individual needs of each customer. Groups with a particular need for flexibility included those with disabilities and/or health conditions, and young people experiencing homelessness. Where a customer had recently began engaging with a wider support service or training opportunity, YECs sometimes chose to have shorter, virtual appointments. This reduced the burden on customers while they were engaging with other support services and allowed YECs to stay in touch to check the young person was still engaging in the support or if they were encountering any issues.

While YECs felt that the mode of their appointments was largely based on individual customer needs, the customers interviewed generally felt that they had little influence over how and when their appointments took place. Several stated that the time and mode of the appointment appeared to be prescribed and was not something they felt they could influence or change.

*"It was always, you have to be here in person, and the first 2 months it was always with my Work Coach, and then it would change all the time... it was all just a bit awkward and anxiety inducing"*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

Both YECs and customers shared that the length of their appointments varied. YECs said appointments typically lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. As noted, this length was influenced by the support needs of each young person as well as the time YECs had available in their diaries. Some of the customers interviewed felt that the appointment times were responsive to their needs and were largely based on what

updates they had to share with their Work Coach. Others however, felt that the length of their appointments was quite unpredictable. This was particularly common in instances where customers felt their conversations were largely driven by their Work Coach and they had less autonomy in what was discussed.

*'I'm never really sure about the [varied appointment lengths]. I just found it really strange because you never really know what's going to happen. You just really have no idea how long, what you're going to be talking about, what's going to come up.'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

## 6.4.2 Content

YECs explained that the earliest appointments in a customer's YEC journey were focused on building rapport and an understanding of their support needs. Several YECs shared they prioritised this as, in line with the policy design, YEC customers typically have complex needs and acute challenges they need to address before they can start preparing for employment. Interviewees felt that focussing firstly on building a relationship of trust and ensuring customers felt listened to encouraged better take up of wider support services, for example with mental health or housing needs.

YEC customers interviewed often reported that, in their experience, appointments were mainly focused on work-preparation and job-search activities, such as recent applications and job searches, as well as identifying training and apprenticeship opportunities relevant to their work and personal interests. More focused conversations around additional support needs were often reported by customers whose appointments took place in Youth Hubs. The content of appointments reported by these customers was similar to Youth Hub customer experiences outlined in Chapter 5.

Some customers interviewed mentioned that their Work Coach would check-in on their wellbeing. The perceived usefulness of these conversations varied, with some customers explaining they would receive referrals and signposting to support organisations, and others feeling these topics were moved past quite quickly.

*'Sometimes they were asking me how I'd been, how I had been coping with my mental health... trying to put me in contact with any support for mental health. Other times it would just be they'd ask me how I am.'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

## 6.5 Nature of support

Interviews with YECs identified a range of national and local employment support options available to YEC customers. These included services to develop work-preparation and job-search skills, confidence and motivation, and personal wellbeing.

## 6.5.2 Confidence and motivation

Building confidence and motivation was identified as a key support need amongst YEC customers. For example, interviews with YECs and YEC customers indicated that anxiety around travelling alone or to new places was widespread amongst this customer group. The research identified examples of YECs based in Youth hubs escorting customers to their first few appointments with external support organisations as a way to build their confidence in travelling to this location alone in future. YECs interviewed as part of this research based within Jobcentres did not believe that they had this level of flexibility within their role. This contrasts with the Youth Offer policy guidance, which allowed YECs to meet with customers in public places that were seen by customers as being more comfortable for them.

*'I have had times where they have walked me across [to the Youth Hub], just to have someone to chat to so that I am not looking around panicking and my mind's playing on me, and it does help. It's the little things that you don't necessarily want to say that they know is going to help you.'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

Encouraging young people to leave the house and engage in social activity was another common form of support YECs provided. This was often a necessary first step young people had to make before they felt able to engage in other types of support and making progress towards employment.

## 6.5.1 Work-preparation and job-search skills

Work-preparation and job-searching were also common types of support YECs helped customers to access. Outside of routine appointments, this was delivered through jobs fairs, national employment programmes and referrals to wider support organisations.

Jobs fairs were described as a useful way of introducing young people to employers and allowing them to become familiar with the breadth of opportunities available in local areas. Industry days were noted by YECs and customers to be particularly useful for having more targeted conversations with employers in a customer's specific field of interest.

Some customers interviewed explained that these events provided a good opportunity for their YEC to provide a warm handover to employers and training providers and initiate conversations, after which they were able to learn more about specific opportunities.

*'My Work Coach would have been next to me and would go over and say, hello, this is such and such... and it made me feel a bit more comfortable.'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

National employment programmes were also mentioned by YECs as a way of developing customer confidence in their employability, application, and interview skills. Intensive Personalised Employment Support (IPES) was noted as particularly

useful for those furthest from the labour market. IPES is a voluntary support programme aimed at people with multiple complex needs and provides a holistic, personalised offer. The support prepares individuals for work while also building confidence, managing disability and health conditions, and improving their overall health and wellbeing. IPES support lasts for a minimum of 15 months and is followed by up to 6 months of in-work support and a further 6 months of transitional support. The usefulness of this provision was attributed to its time intensity and multi-faceted nature. For those slightly closer to the labour market, SWAPs were seen to provide customers with a good introduction to different industries, and more broadly the routine of work.

*'She went right through [IPES]... didn't get employment out of it but she had a couple of interviews... She's not a very confident person, but massively more confident than she was prior to going through that.'*

Youth Employability Coach

Wider partners delivering non-DWP funded provision were used to enhance YEC support and develop work-preparation and job-search behaviours. YECs and partner organisations agreed that this support was often able to offer customers more time to identify and engage with opportunities that aligned with their interests. A common example of this was shared by customers who expressed interest in the creative sector. Some of these customers explained that, through support from organisations such as the Prince's Trust, they had been able to access training to develop their skills in different creative sectors, and now felt able to explore how they may be able to earn money through their creative interests or apply for positions on creative job boards.

*'Theres nothing about creativity in the Jobcentre. They're like, no no no, absolutely not... But the Princes Trust, they were like, there's a film making and photography course. One of the ladies gave me a dance group to reach out to which I signed up to. It's about to change my life...'*

Customer, Youth Employability Coach

The YECs interviewed in Youth Hubs explained that YEC customers whose appointments were based in these settings benefitted from the co-location of support services explained in detail throughout Chapter 5 of this report.

### **6.5.3 Views on the duration of the support**

The policy intent was for YECs to support customers for six months. This could be extended to 12 months at the YEC's discretion following a case conference. Some YECs explained they would often extend their support to 12 months for customers. However, others would keep customers on their caseloads and continue to offer YEC support until the young person was at a stage where they felt ready to look for work and did not put a timeframe on their support journey. There were also examples of YECs continuing to support customers until they were no longer in the youth age group. In explaining these decisions, there was a widespread view among interviewees that passing vulnerable customers back to Jobcentre Work Coaches at

a fixed time point was not always appropriate for the customer and could have a negative impact on their progress. Instead, they felt that keeping young people under the YEC caseload until their support needs had been adequately addressed was a better alternative. This helped to ensure that the support was delivered at a pace that did not risk overwhelming customers.

*“I do look after them a little bit longer because I can... I tend to keep them on my caseload unless I felt that actually I can't do any more. If all you're going to do is job search then you'll be better going on somebody who will just be doing job search.”*

Youth Employability Coach

## 6.6 Effective features

YECs interviewed shared a range of effective features of the Youth Employability Coach offer. The characteristics of YECs, including their prior experience and understanding of the complex support needs within their caseloads, and their working practices were seen to be key features of the offer as they supported relationship building and engagement with customers with complex needs and helped to connect them with suitable opportunities. This included YECs' experience of working with vulnerable customers, flexibility within their role to alter appointments in a way that suits each customer, and strong working relationships and networks between YECs.

YECs experience in supporting vulnerable customers, which they gained from previous roles they held within the Jobcentre, was identified as a strength of this Youth Offer strand. This supported their confidence in taking on the YEC role and helped them feel they had the right general level of awareness of the caseload to support them adequately. It also meant that several YECs already had connections with other stakeholders and organisations that support the types of customers they would be working with, such as Personal Advisers, Local Authority Leaving Care teams and probation officers. These YECs explained that having these connections allowed support to be joined-up between organisations, providing a more targeted and personalised intervention.

*“That's why it's brilliant when you can engage with these other guys... we had a four-way conversation between the probation officer, care leaver, personal adviser and myself and the customer... it's really nice to have that conversation all together. That stuff just really works.”*

Youth Employability Coach

Customers also felt that their Work Coach had a good awareness of the different support options available and took the time to explain these and explore the options with them.

In areas where there were multiple YECs, interviewees shared that staff worked closely together to develop an awareness of the support landscape for the YEC caseload. If a YEC felt unable to build a productive working relationship with a customer, there were occasions when they would informally pass them to another



YEC in their office to see if this was a better match. YECs would also engage in this practice if they felt they had exhausted all of the support options within their repertoire or had not made sufficient progress with a customer.

The flexibility within the YEC role to alter appointment frequency and mode was another effective feature of the support widely acknowledged amongst the YECs interviewed as part of this research. Several YECs believed that this encouraged customers to engage in the support offer, whereas insisting on frequent, in-person engagement with customers who might find this difficult could cause them to disengage.

## 6.7 Gaps, challenges and improvements

Several gaps, challenges and improvements that could be made to the YEC support offer were identified by the YECs and customers interviewed as part of this research.

### 6.7.1 Youth Employability Coach feedback

YECs interviewed based within Jobcentres shared that one of the biggest challenges they experienced was lack of sufficient time to spend with customers with complex needs due to pressures on their diary. In addition, while these YECs felt there was a sufficient flexibility in their role to adjust the mode of appointment and the pace of support to meet customer needs, some were unsure how far the flexibility extended. Because of this, some used this flexibility sparingly.

*'I'm always a little bit nervous if someone checks my diary that they're going to tell me off and say, no you've got too many phone appointments in there'*

Youth Employability Coach

YECs interviewed also felt that while they had a general awareness of the support needs of the YEC caseload, their knowledge and understanding of specific mental health conditions or forms of neurodiversity within their caseloads was limited. YECs had a strong understanding of the boundaries of the support they could personally provide for customers who presented these needs, however, a lack of timely support and gaps in local provision led some to want to deliver more meaningful support as they could see the difficulties young people were experiencing. As a result, some YECs suggested that more training and support on the varied needs of some of their caseload and how to navigate conversations on these topics could be beneficial.

*"Officially we are not psychologists, we are not therapists, we are not counsellors, we have no medical knowledge... but the reality is we have to know all that in order to just keep it going."*

Youth Employability Coach

Another common challenge YECs highlighted was the drive from office and regional managers to secure outcomes for customers. Several YECs outlined that the progress made and outcomes secured by customers on their caseload could not be easily recorded through DWP reporting systems and were often not as clear-cut as a

referral, training or employment outcome. Rather, they reflected small, gradual steps towards these outcomes. However, some YECs shared that the pressure to meet profiles for DWP funded provision had caused them to make referrals to programmes such as Restart and SWAPs that they may otherwise not have made.

At the time of the research, the more intensive support needs of the YEC caseload meant that some of the customers YECs were working with would follow the health journey and undergo a Work Capability Assessment. YECs explained that those deemed unfit for work would cease receiving their support. Some YECs interviewed explained that, in their view, a few of these customers still had potential to make progress towards employment at a later stage and could therefore still benefit from access to YECs or DEAs.

*'If that Work Capability Assessment comes through with no work-related requirements... they end up in the black hole. They just disappear for a few years until they surface again. As soon as they go into the black hole that's the support gone.'*

Youth Employability Coach

It was suggested that there could be more formal working arrangements between YECs and DEAs to allow customers on the YEC caseload to access more tailored disability support. The research found that these working relationships already existed in some areas, but typically only because YECs and DEAs had proactively approached one another. Some YECs wanted these practices to be more consistent and for there to be clearer expectations and guidance for how the roles should work together in future to support this.

## **6.7.2 Customer feedback**

Some of the customers interviewed shared that they felt their Work Coach was not always understanding of how their different support needs interact, and the impact these have on ability to complete job-searches and work-preparation. Customers explained that being encouraged to look for work while also addressing other needs had negative implications on their progress and caused them to feel overwhelmed. For example, some customers explained that a commitment to search for work during periods of poor mental health felt unmanageable and was not always taken into consideration by Work Coaches. This, they explained, had further negative effects on their mental health and feelings around their capacity to work.

There were also calls from customers for better support with housing and financial difficulties. Some customers explained that housing services are challenging to navigate and they would benefit from someone walking them through websites and application forms. Similarly, customers experiencing financial hardship commented that the support options available to them through DWP and wider services could be better advertised and explained to help alleviate pressure on personal and household finances. In both instances, customers noted that addressing these support needs more effectively would have a positive impact on their mental health and overall wellbeing.



# 7. Youth Offer Outcomes

This chapter describes the outcomes Youth Offer customers reported in the survey, covering job-related outcomes, direct employment outcomes and softer outcomes, which indicate whether customers are moving closer to the labour market.

## 7.1 Youth Offer outcomes

Changes in circumstance, attitude and employability (skills etc.) that occur during the time a customer is part of a scheme such as the Youth Offer may be attributable to the intervention or they may be coincidental and unrelated. The reality is that everything is interwoven and causation is hard to determine: what look, on the face of things, like coincidental events may have been influenced by a change in attitudes or similar which can be attributed back to the programme.

To make sure incidental changes which may have been indirectly influenced by the programme were measured, survey customers were asked two questions about the outcomes they experienced: firstly, what had happened as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer, and secondly, in addition to those actions, what else had happened since they started the Youth Offer. Overall, most directly attributed the actions they had taken to their participation in the Youth Offer.

Applying for a job was the most common outcome for customers, with over half (54%) having done so. Overall, 44% said this had happened as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer, and 10% listed it as an additional action. Following on from this, 42% of all customers had attended a job interview, 33% as a direct result of the programme and 9% as an additional action. Critically, around one in three (29%) reported that they had actually found a job or were starting one soon, with 21% reporting that this was as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer.

Customers also reported shifts in their confidence and attitudes towards work: 35% said they were more confident looking for work (26% as a direct result of the Youth Offer), 31% were more confident about their ability to work (20% attributed this to the Youth Offer).

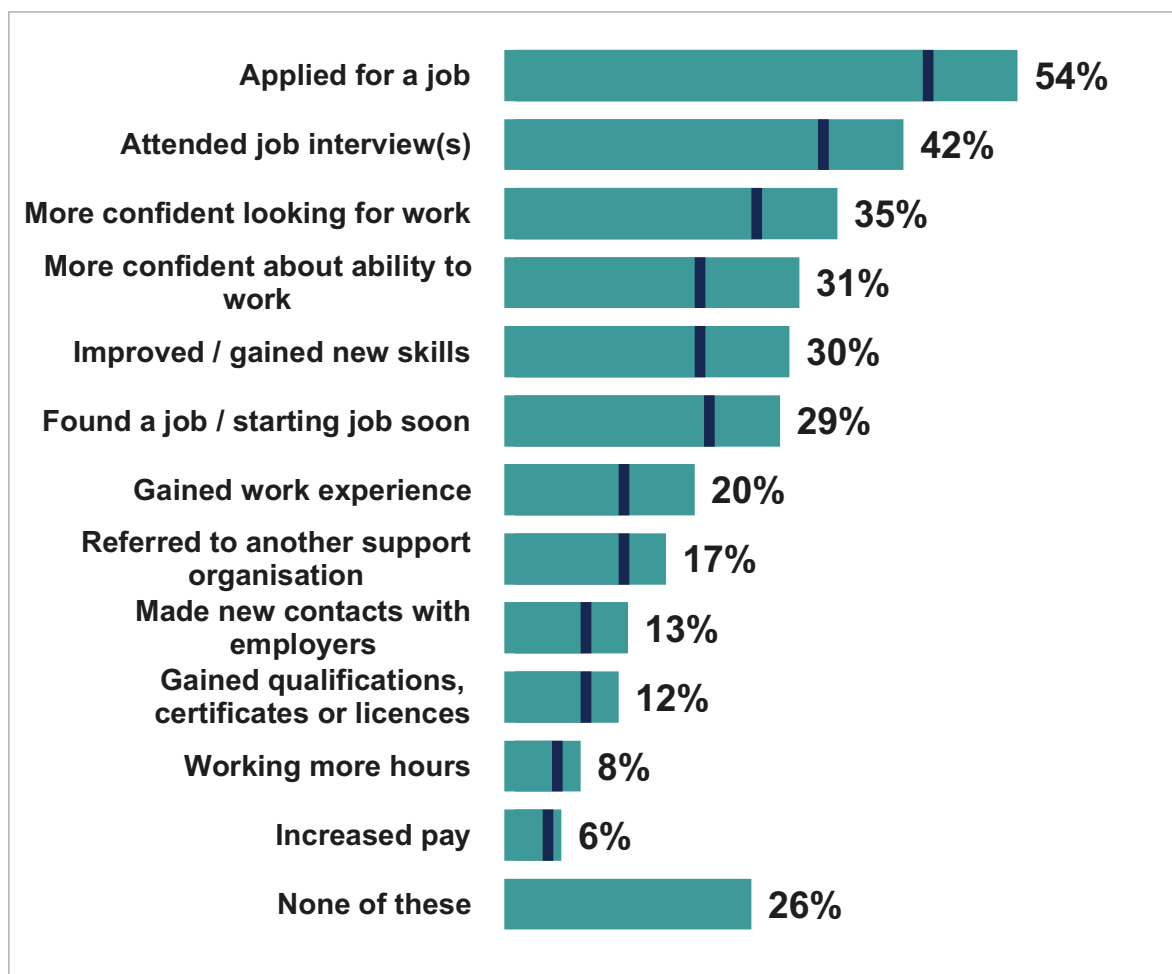
Many reported outcomes that would improve their employability, including gaining new skills (30%, 20% as a direct result of Youth Offer), gaining work experience (20%, 12% as a direct result), making new contacts with employers (13%, 8% due to the Youth Offer) and gaining qualifications, certificates or licences (12%, 8% due to Youth Offer).

A handful reported improvements in their working situation, with 8% saying they were now working more hours (5% as a direct result) and 6% that they were working for increased pay (4% a direct result).

Around one in six (17%) said they had been referred to another, non-DWP, support organisation, 12% said this was a result of taking part in the Youth Offer.

Overall, two-thirds of customers (67%) were able to list outcomes that were directly linked to having taken part in the Youth Offer, and three-quarters (74%) had experienced any positive outcome during that period whether they attributed it to the Youth Offer or not. Conversely, 33% of customers said that nothing had happened as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer, and 26% were not able to list any actions that had occurred during the period since they started. Figure 7.1 illustrates the detail.

**Figure 7.1: Outcomes that have happened as a result of taking part in the Youth Offer, or that have occurred during the period since the customer started on the scheme**



Base: All customers at wave 2 (1377). “None of these” programme outcome (33%). Not shown: “Something else”.

Youth Hub customers were more likely to report several outcomes. They were more likely have applied for a job in the time since they started on the Youth Offer (65%, compared with 55% of YEP and 43% of YEC customers). Youth Hub customers were also more likely to feel more confident both about looking for work (45% compared with 35% YEP and 28% YEC) and about their ability to work (40% compared with 35% YEP and 28% YEC), and to have improved their skills or gained new ones (38%, compared with 29% YEP and 23% YEC). As described in chapters 2 and 4,

YEP customers were those closest to the labour market. In contrast, YEC customers were likely to have more complex needs and be further from the labour market at the outset of the programme, suggesting that whilst a smaller proportion reported these outcomes as a result of the Youth Offer, this is to be expected given the complex barriers they face to employment. Youth Hub customers were those identified as having wider support needs, and findings set out in chapter 2 suggest this was the case. As set out in chapter 3 and 5, Work Coaches and customers saw the quality of interaction with Youth Hub support as high. Youth Hub customers reported receiving more different types of support, perhaps reflecting both the co-located nature of Youth Hubs and the strong relationships between customers and Work Coaches, which both felt led to more productive conversations. Taken together, this helps to explain the higher proportion of customers reporting employment related outcomes, despite their wider support needs.

Customers on multiple strands were more likely to have seen outcomes than those on just one strand of the programme. This was particularly true in relation to having applied for a job (64% on three strands and 57% on two, compared to 46% on a single strand), gaining new skills (40% on three strands, 34% on two compared with 20% on one single strand) and increasing their confidence both in terms of looking for work (48% on three strands and 40% on two, compared to 20% on a single strand) and about their ability to work (43% on three strands, 34% on two, compared to 21% on one single strand).

Male customers were more likely than female customers to have taken action; specifically, they were more likely to have:

- applied for a job (60% compared to 51%)
- increased their confidence both about looking for work (40% compared to 30%) and in their ability to work (35% compared to 28%)
- gained relevant work experience (22% compared to 17%)
- made contacts with employers (15% compared to 10%)
- gained qualifications, certificates or licences (13% compared to 9%)
- have increased their rate of pay (7% compared to 4%).

Customers with a health condition were less likely to report any of the outcomes listed, with 30% saying they'd experienced none of the outcomes since starting on the programme, compared to 18% of those who did not have any health condition. This was particularly true of those who had a long-term mental health condition (30%) or both physical and mental health conditions (37%).

## 7.2 Employment outcomes:

### 7.2.1 Employment status

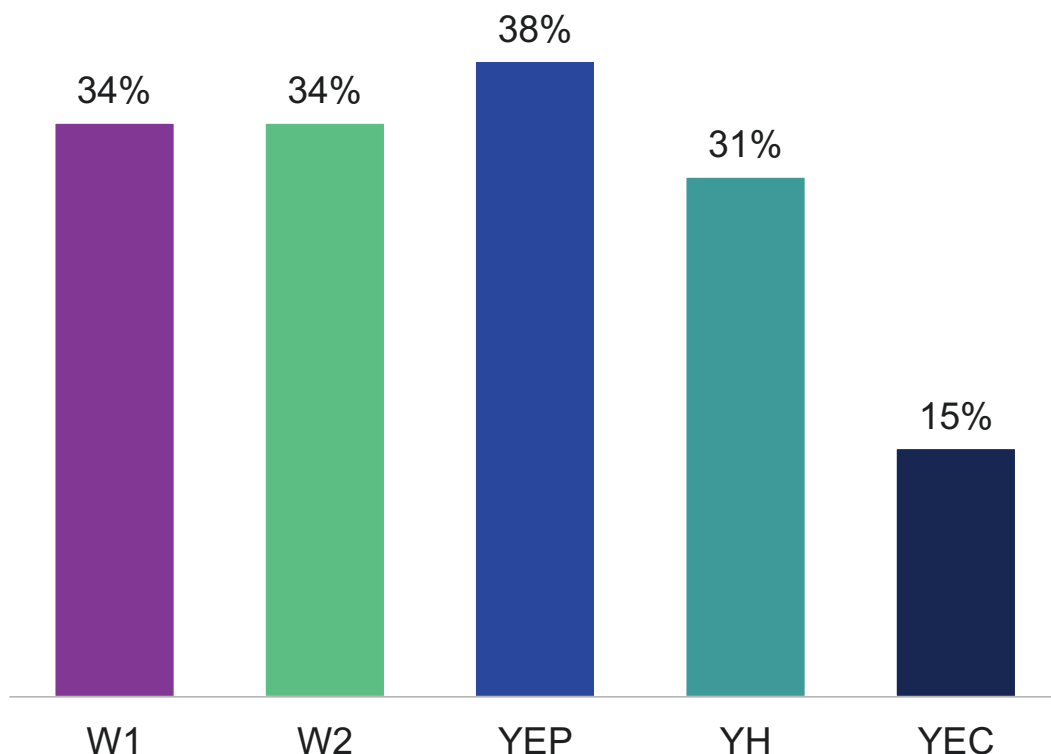
Employment outcomes include any change to the customers' employment status, change of role/employer, or change in any elements of the role such as hours worked and levels of pay. Wave 1 of the survey was asked when customers had been on the

Youth Offer between 4 – 10 months and wave 2 was asked 6 months later. This design was led by the need to have sufficient numbers of Youth Offer customers to survey at wave 1.

The proportion of Youth Offer customers who were in work did not change between wave 1 and wave 2 of the evaluation, with both sitting at 34%. Although some customers gained work during the evaluation period, others moved out of employment. Figure 7.2 shows the employment statuses of longitudinal customers between waves 1 and 2. At wave 2 employment levels were higher for YEP customers (38% in wave 2) and Youth Hub customers (31%) than YEC customers (15%, see Figure 7.2).

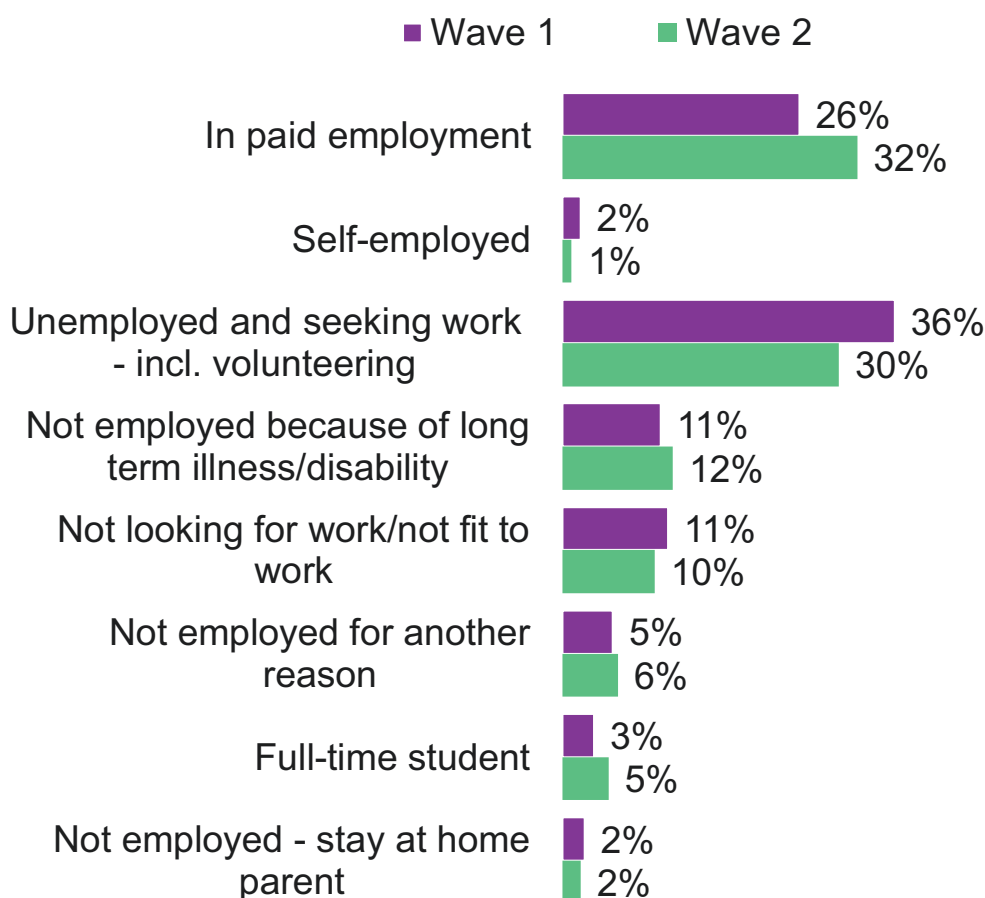
The proportion of customers not in employment remained similar between wave 1 and wave 2; this included people not employed because of a long term illness or disability (10% wave 1, 8% wave 2), those not looking for work or not fit to work (9% and 8%), people not employed for another reason (6% at both waves), full time students (4% and 6%) and stay-at-home parents (2% and 4%). See Figure 7.2.

**Figure 7.2: Employment status among customers at wave 1 and wave 2**



Base: All customers at wave 1 (2976) and wave 2 (1377). Wave 2: YEP (1006), Youth Hub (179), YEC (192)

**Figure 7.3: Detailed employment status among customers at wave 1 and wave 2**



Base: All longitudinal customers (400) Not shown: 'Prefer not to say'.

Levels of employment among customers were similar regardless of the number of strands they were taking part in, and similar by gender.

Customers with a long-term health condition were less likely to be in employment than those who did not have a long-term health condition (27% compared to 42%).

Older customers were more likely to say they were in employment than younger, with employment levels at 19% for those aged 16-18, rising to 27% aged 19-21, then rising again to 48% for customers aged 22-24 and 56% for those aged 25 or older (this group would have been 24 when starting the Youth Offer and since had a birthday).

Low life satisfaction was significantly lower amongst employed customers (20%) compared to those who were unemployed (39%). Customers in work were less likely to report high levels of anxiety (43%) than unemployed customers (55%).

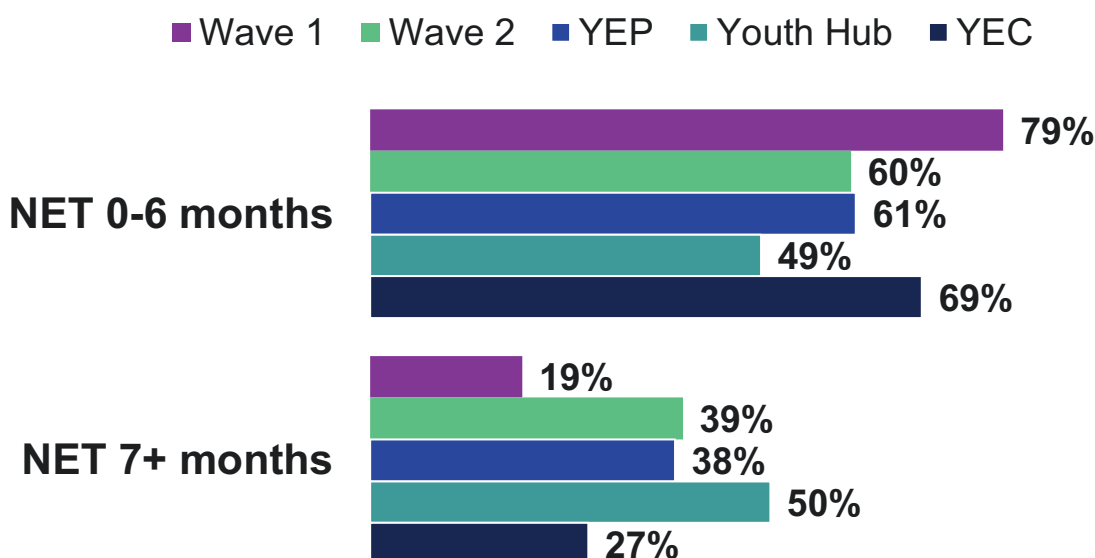


## 7.2.2 Length of time in work

Six in ten (60%) customers who were in paid employment at wave 2 had been in their current job for six months or fewer, indicating they had started their job since joining the Youth Offer. Around one in five (19%) had been in the role less than one month and two in five (41%) had been in their current position for between one and six months. The same proportion (39%) said they had been in the role for seven months or longer (this included 5% of customers who had been in their role for over a year). This indicates that these customers had been in work and in the Intensive Work Search Regime when joining the Youth Offer.

Working YEP (61%) and YEC (69%) customers were most likely to have moved into employment in the past six months compared to 49% of Youth Hub customers in employment (although small base sizes mean this difference does not reach statistical significance, it is mentioned here as it reflects the finding in the previous paragraph). Conversely more Youth Hub customers reported being in their role for seven months or longer (50%), compared to 38% YEP and 27% YEC; see Figure 7.3. This could indicate that the employment found by Youth Hub customers was more likely to be long-term and sustainable, but more evidence is required to say this with any degree of confidence.

**Figure 7.4: Length of time in current employment for employed customers in each strand, wave 2**



Base: All customers at wave 1 (984) and wave 2 (470). Wave 2: YEP (381), Youth Hub (58), YEC (31). Not shown: "Don't know".

There were no differences in length of employment in current role by the number of strands the customer was involved in, nor by whether they had a long-term health condition.

Female customers were more likely than male customers to have been in their role for seven months or longer (45%, compared to 35% of males).

### 7.2.3 Changes to employment since starting a job

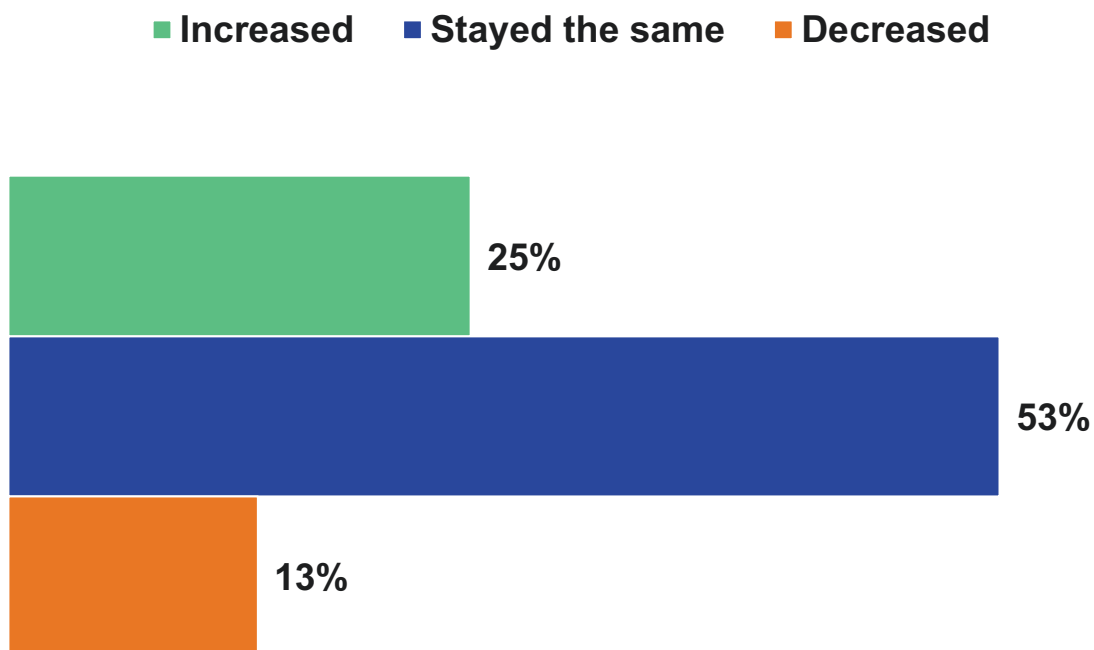
Changes customers reported to their employed role since starting the job were more likely to be positive than negative. However, there were a portion whose hours worked or rate of pay had decreased.

A quarter of customers in paid employment (25%) reported an increase in the number of hours they were working, whereas 13% reported a decrease. Around half (53%) said their hours remained the same as when they started (see Figure 7.4).

More than a third of employed customers (37%) had seen an increase in the amount of pay they received for the work they were doing since they started the job; 12% had seen a decrease and 44% reported no change (Figure 8.4). It should be noted that the time period overlaps with changes to the National Living Wage, so some customers could have received an uplift because of this.

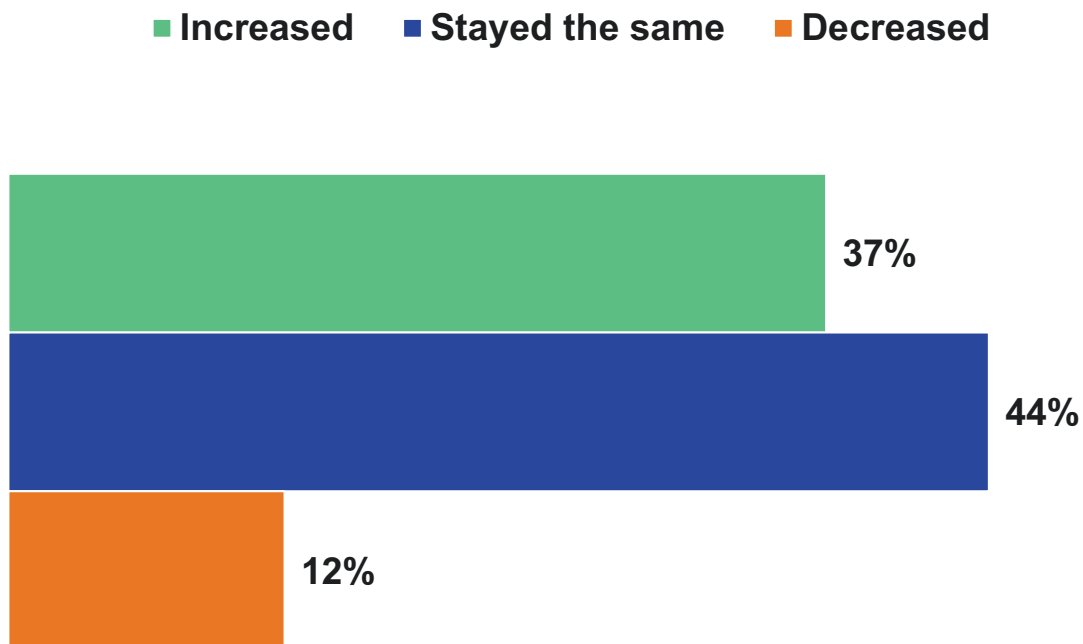
Customers with a long-term health condition were more likely to report a decrease in pay (17% compared to 10% of customers with no long-term health condition); this was particularly the case for those whose condition was related to their mental health (20%).

**Figure 7.5: Changes in hours worked since starting their job.**



Base: All employed customers at wave 2 (470). Not shown: 'Don't know'.

**Figure 7.6: Changes to pay since starting their job or in the past 6 months**



Base: All employed customers at wave 2 (470). Not shown: “Don’t know”.

Customers who were unemployed and those who had been in their jobs for six months or less were asked whether they had had a (different) job in the previous six months. Nearly a third (32%) reported that they had, and 63% that they had not (5% were unsure). Customers in employment were more likely to say they had held another role in the previous six months (39%, compared to 30% who were unemployed at the time of the wave 2 fieldwork). This highlights the often transient nature of employment for these young people. It suggests that continuity of support is likely to be valuable for young people who cycle in and out of work, so that they can build on previous support received through the Jobcentre, rather than starting from the beginning each time.

YEP customers were more likely to have held a (different) job in the six months prior, with 37% reporting this to be the case compared to 20% of Youth Hub and 16% of YEC customers.

### 7.2.4 Support for working customers

One in ten (10%) customers in paid employment had received support from the Flexible Support Fund to help them stay in work since they had started their current job. This was more likely to be the case if they were involved in two or more strands (14%, compared to 6% of those only involved in one).

Customers with long-term health conditions or disabilities were asked if they had received support to discuss reasonable adjustments for their long-term health condition or disability with an employer. One in nine (11%) had, rising to 16% among

YEC customers and 18% of those undertaking all three strands. Customers were equally likely to have received support to discuss reasonable adjustments with employers whether their condition was related to mental health, physical health or both (11% in all cases).

A smaller proportion (8%) reported that they had been told about support from a Disability Employment Advisor. Youth Hub customers were more likely to be aware of this (14%), as were those involved in all three strands (also 14%). Youth Hub customers were no more likely to have a long-term health condition than YEP customers (both 46%) and YEC customers were most likely to report this (65%). This points to the high quality interaction customers received in the Youth Hubs.

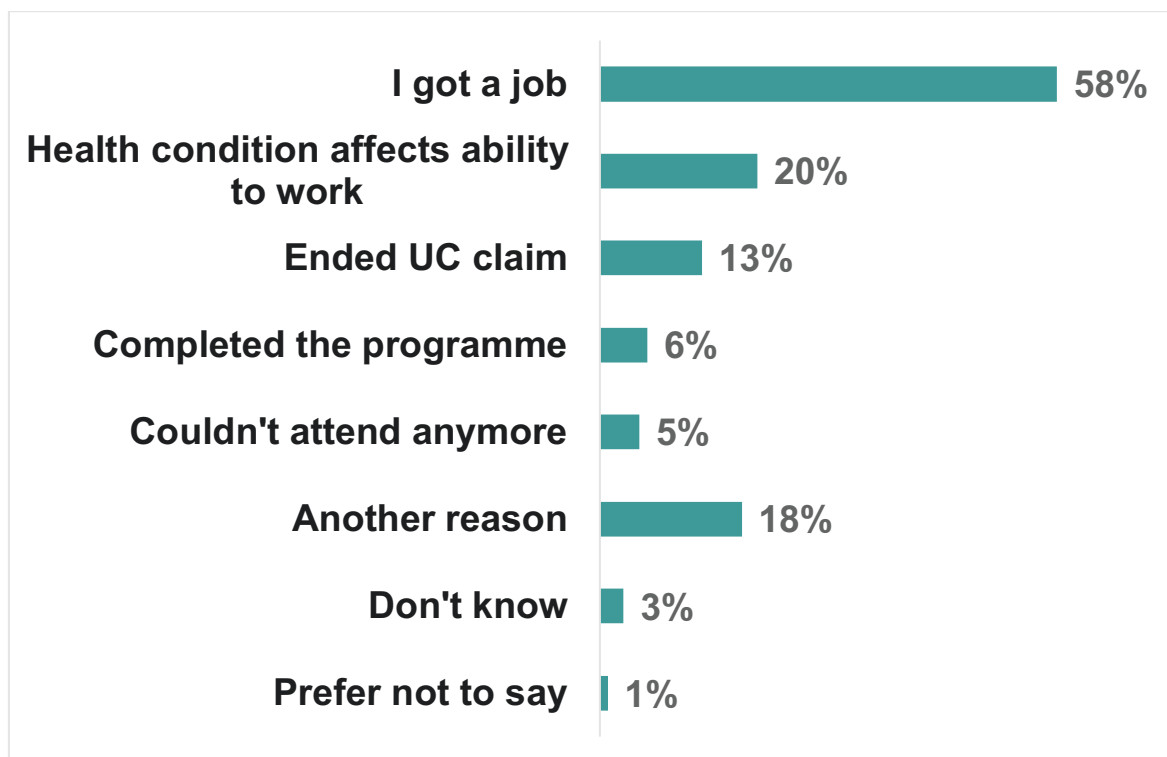
Around one in five (21%) customers with a long-term health condition reported that they did not know if they had received either support to help them discuss reasonable adjustments with employers or been signposted to a Disability Employment Advisor.

### 7.3 Ongoing engagement with the Jobcentre

Overall, 4 in 10 (39%) customers in the evaluation were no longer receiving support from a Work Coach in any capacity at the time of the wave 2 fieldwork. The top reason given by those no longer receiving support was that they had got a job (58% of those no longer receiving support, or 23% overall). This implies the intervention had had the desired effect for this group.

One in five (20%) of those no longer receiving support said it was because they had a health condition that affected their ability to work. 13% that they became ineligible because they ended their UC claim, 6% stated that they completed the programme and 5% said they could no longer attend. 18% said that it was for 'another reason'. These included having a baby, caring responsibilities, and starting college or university. See Figure 7.5. Of those no longer receiving support, just over a fifth (22%), said they had been told they had a limited capability for work or work related requirements a similar proportion who said they were not receiving support because of their health condition. Those who were told they had limited capability for work would have been moved off the Youth Offer.

**Figure 7.7: Reasons for no longer attending Youth Offer (wave 2)**



Base: All who are not currently receiving support from a work coach at wave 2 (562)

YEP and Youth Hub customers were most likely to say the reason for ending their support was that they got a job (61% and 63% respectively, compared with 30% of YEC customers). YEC customers, on the other hand, were most likely to say the reason they ended their support was due to a health condition affecting their ability to work (52%).

Customers involved in all three strands were more likely to attribute the end of their support to getting a job (68%), compared to those involved in just one (57%) or two (51%) strands. This was most likely due to the volume and/or quality of support received rather having been on the programme for longer. Looking at programme start date, there is no difference in “getting a job” as the reason for ending their support between those who started in the earliest cohort (August to September 2022, 60%) and the most recent cohort (December 2022 to January 2023, 61%).

Male customers were more likely than female to say getting a job was the reason for ending their support (67% compared to 50% of females no longer receiving support).

Their health condition was cited as the reason for no longer receiving support by nearly four in ten (38%) customers who had one. Four in ten (39%) of this group stopped their support due to getting a job, compared with nearly eight in ten (78%) of customers who did not have a long-term health condition.

### 7.3.1 Customers with Limited Capability for Work or Work Related Requirements

At wave 2, just over five in ten (22%) customers who were no longer receiving support reported that they had been notified following a Work Capability Assessment that they have limited capability for work or for work-related requirements. This was higher among YEC customers (45%). There were also differences by age (35% among those aged 16-18, compared to 23% aged 19-21 and 17% aged 22-24) and gender (26% of females, compared to 16% of males). Customers who had a long-term health condition were more likely to say this had happened (40%, compared to 3% with no condition; this rose to 65% of those whose long-term health condition had a “lot” of impact on them day to day).

## 7.4 Reducing customers’ distance from the labour market

This section describes outcomes and actions which bring customers closer to the labour market as a step to achieving employment outcomes in the future.

### 7.4.1 Barriers to work

Customers perceived many barriers to getting a job, both in terms of the opportunities available and their own capabilities. Reducing these barriers, both in terms of customers perceptions and in terms of reality, is important in supporting these individuals to achieve employment outcomes.

Figure 8.6 explores how the barriers perceived by customers changed between wave 1 and wave 2 of the evaluation.

The proportion of customers citing any opportunity barriers reduced from 84% in wave 1 to 76% in wave 2. Specifically, the proportion of customers citing the following barriers fell:

- Not enough opportunities in the sector or area interested in fell from 36% in wave 1 to 27% in wave 2. This fell amongst the longitudinal sample too, from 39% at wave 1, to 29% at wave 2. Amongst YEP customers this dropped from 38% at wave 1 to 29% at wave 2 and from 37% at wave 1 to 24% at wave 2 amongst Youth Hub customers.
- Lack of work experience fell from 37% in wave 1 to 27% in wave 2. Similarly this fell in the longitudinal sample too, from 42% at wave 1, to 32% at wave 2. Amongst YEP customers this dropped from 38% at wave 1 to 28% at wave 2; from 39% at wave 1 to 31% at wave 2 amongst Youth Hub customers and from 29% at wave 1 to 19% at wave 2 for YEC customers.
- Lack of opportunities matching their skills and qualifications fell from 31% in wave 1 to 24% in wave 2. Amongst YEP customers this dropped from 33% at wave 1 to 26% at wave 2 and from 32% at wave 1 to 23% at wave 2 amongst Youth Hub customers.

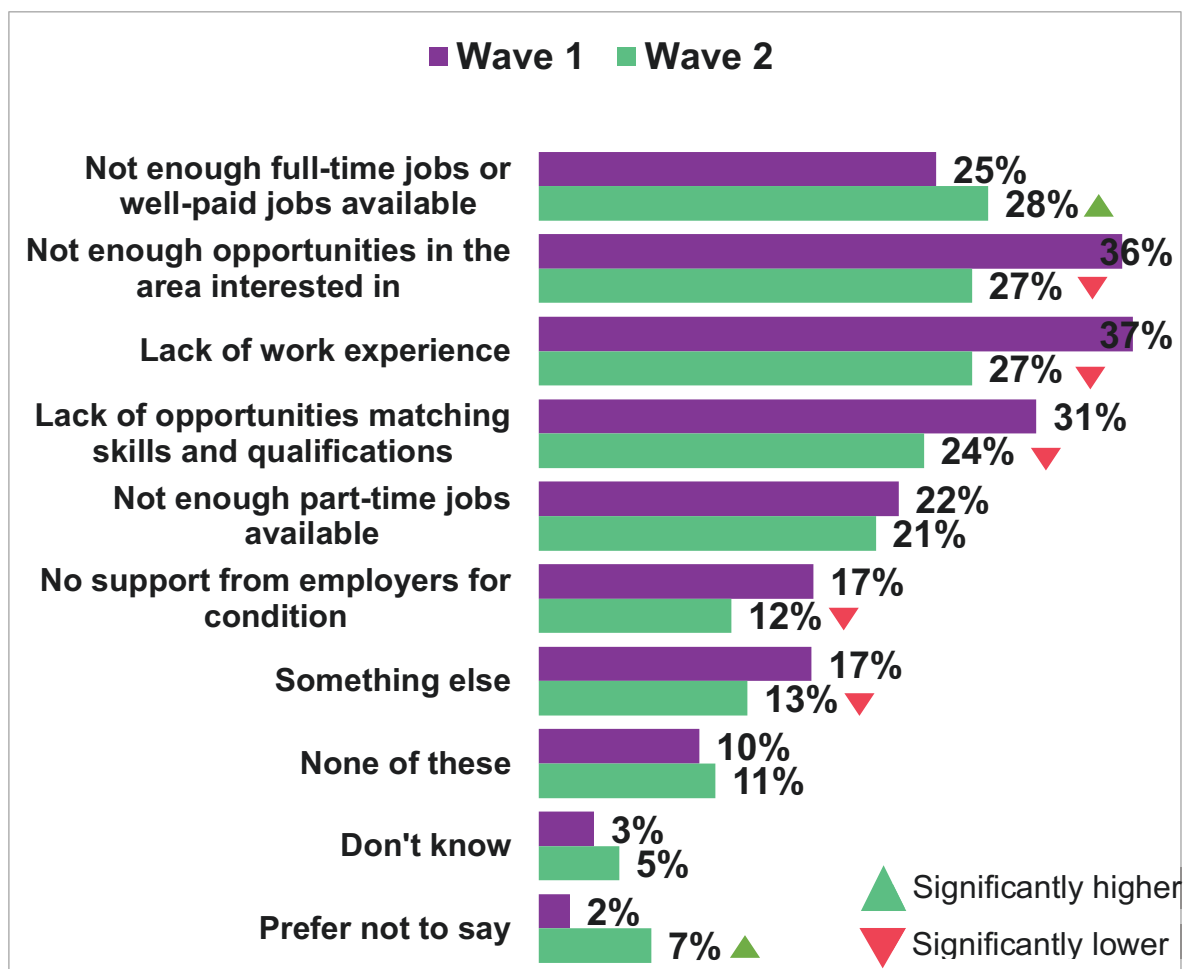
- Employers not offering support for their health condition fell from 17% in wave 1 to 12% in wave 2. Amongst YEP customers this dropped from 16% at wave 1 to 11% at wave 2.

Whilst the proportion of customers who cited lack of work experience as a barrier to work decline in wave 2, the proportion who said they received support with work experience placement remained at one in ten (10%) at both waves.

Perceptions of there being not enough part time jobs available remained stable (22% wave 1, 21% wave 2), as did mentions of any other barriers (17% for both waves) Other barriers included caring responsibilities for children and other family members, mental health issues and disabilities. One in ten said there were no barriers (10% wave 1, 11% wave 2), 3% and 5% respectively said they did not know and 2% and 7% respectively preferred not to say.

ONS data shows that the number of jobs vacancies decreased by 43,000 between April to June 2023 and July to September 2023. This included sectors of relevance to this audience such as accommodation and food, wholesale and retail and administration support. This indicates that a smaller proportion of customers seeing the availability of local job opportunities as a barrier is likely to be due to a shift in perceptions, such as greater awareness of local opportunities or openness to different types of job.

**Figure 7.8: Opportunity barriers to getting a job**



Base: All customers at wave 1 (2976) and wave 2 (1377)

The proportion of customers citing capability and motivational barriers was consistent at 74% in wave 1 and 72% in wave 2. However, there was considerable movement with regards to which barriers were cited.

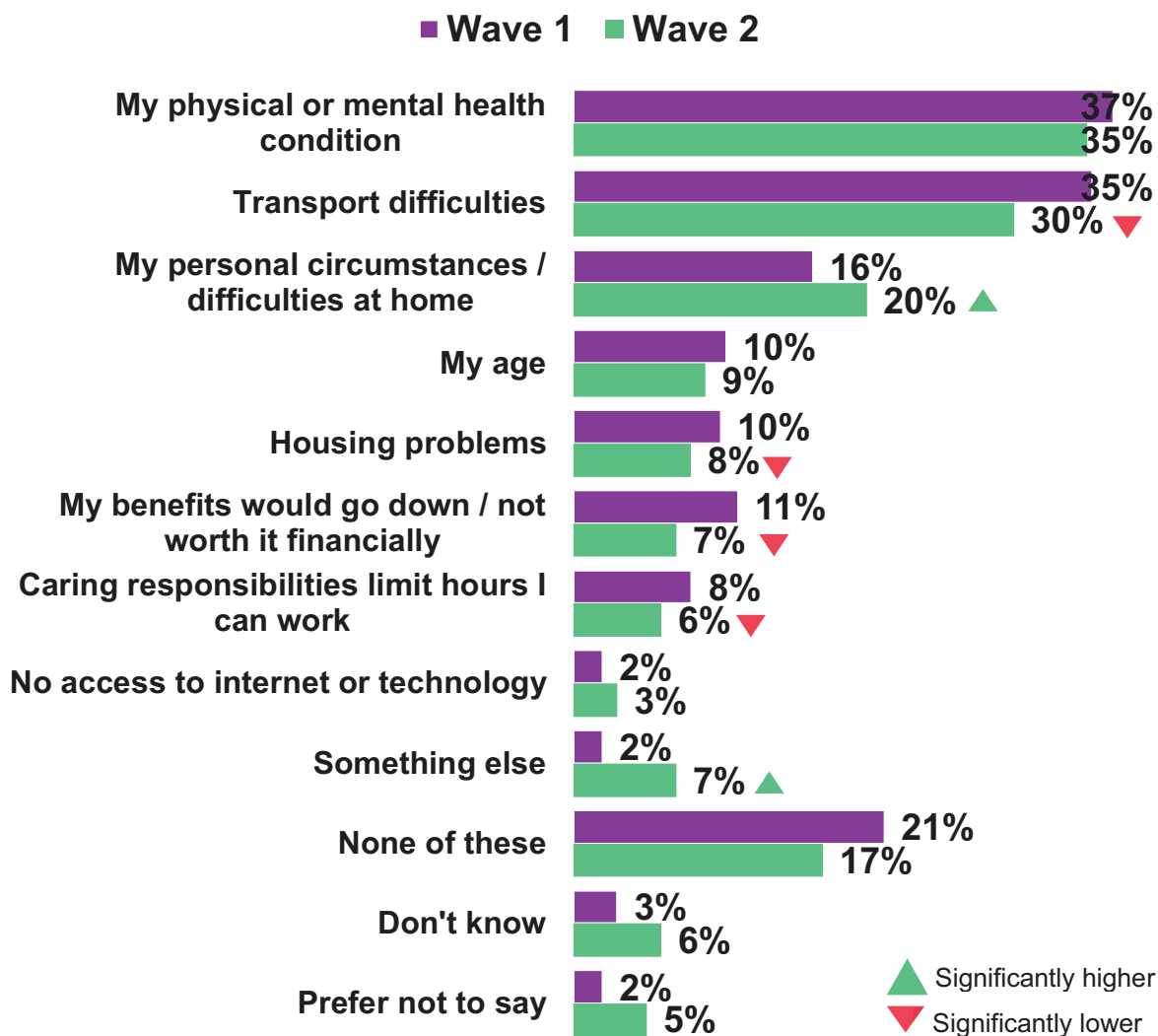
The top barrier for both waves was the customers' physical or mental health condition, cited by 37% and 35% in waves 1 and 2 respectively.

There was a reduction in the proportion of customers naming transport difficulties as a barrier (35% wave 1 to 30% wave 2), housing problems (10% to 8%), fear that their benefits would reduce meaning it was not financially worth working (11% to 7%), and caring responsibilities limiting what they can do (8% to 6%). Conversely, the proportion citing difficulties at home or personal circumstances rose from 16% in wave 1 to 20% in wave 2.

Age as a barrier remained static at 10% in wave 1 and 9% in wave 2, as did access to the internet or technology (2% in wave 1, 3% wave 2). Something else not mentioned on the list was mentioned by 2% in wave 1 and 7% in wave 2, whilst 21% and 17% respectively said there were no barriers, 3% and 6% respectively did not know and 2% and 5% respectively preferred not to say. See Figure 7.8.



### 7.9: Capability and motivational barriers to getting a job



Base: All customers at wave 1 (2976) and wave 2 (1377)

### 7.4.2 Job-search Self-Efficacy

Confidence in looking for jobs was measured using a job-search self-efficacy score (JSSE), calculated using a customer’s self-reported agreement to a set of statements about their confidence with job-searching activities.

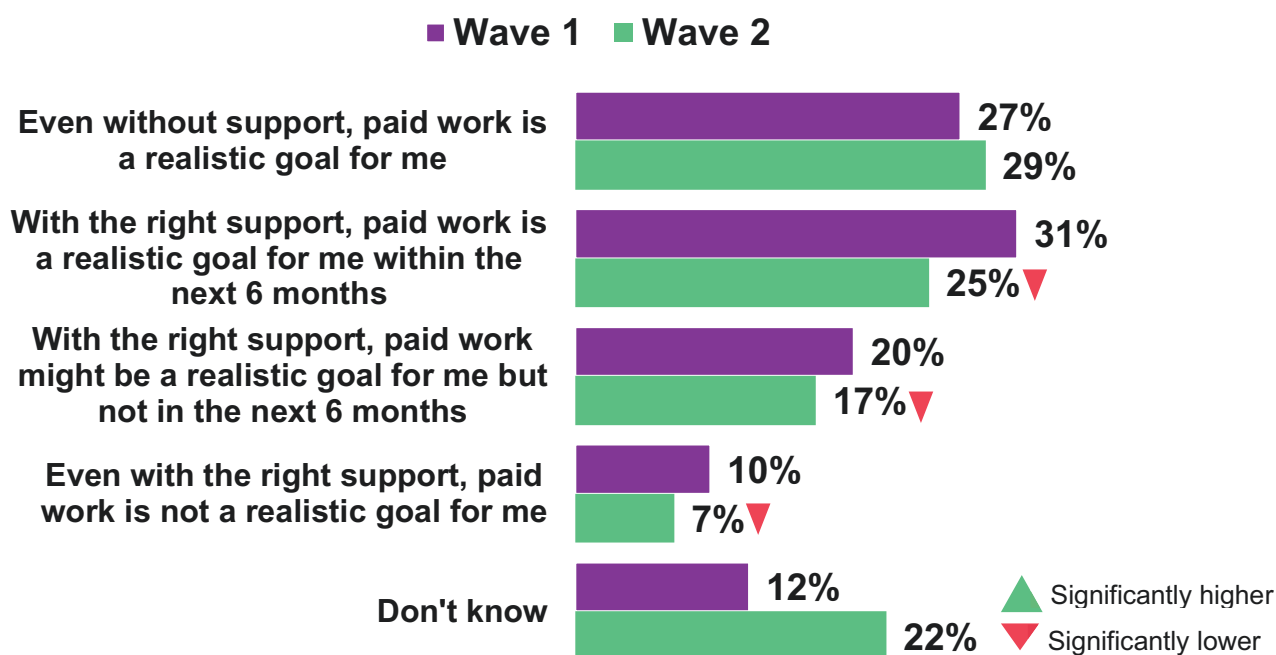
The pattern of confidence followed the complexity of tasks. More customers were confident about completing the most straightforward tasks and least confident about more involved activities. Levels of confidence were highest in searching for (81% at wave 2) or applying for jobs online (80% at wave 2). Fewer were confident about completing a good application and CV (75%), listing the skills they had which could be used to find a job (73%) or asking family and friends about potential employers who needed their skills (71%). The proportions confident about getting help to become familiar with a new job (71%), asking friends or family about suitable job openings (71%) or making the best impression and getting their point across in a job interview (70%) were lower still. Fewest customers were confident about contacting and persuading potential employers to consider them for a job (64%).

Between wave 1 and 2 the proportion expressing confidence in their abilities declined significantly, by between 4 – 6 percentage points, for all measures. This downward shift is at odds with other measures of attitudes towards work broadly showing a positive uplift (such as a reduction in the proportion seeing availability of jobs as a barrier to work, despite there being fewer jobs available). It is possible that the Dunning-Kruger effect is responsible for this decrease, customers’ confidence in their job search abilities decreasing over time as they did not secure a job, and realising this might be more challenging than expected.

### 7.4.3 Beliefs about ability to work

At both waves, unemployed customers were asked their perceived ability to move in to paid work. Between wave 1 and 2 customer beliefs in their personal capability of working shifted as shown in Figure 7.9 below. At both waves, nearly three in ten (27% at wave 1 and 29% at wave 2) agreed that paid work was a realistic goal without support. On other measures, there were significant changes between waves one and two. The proportion agreeing that paid work was a realistic goal in the next six months with the right support dropped from 31% at wave 1 to 25% at wave 2. There was also a drop in the proportion who agreed that with the right support, paid work might be a realistic goal, but not in the next six months, from 20% at wave 1 to 17% at wave 2. The proportion agreeing that with the right support paid work is not a realistic goal dropped from 10% at wave 1 to 7% at wave 2. The proportion saying ‘Don’t know’ in response to this question increased by 10 percentage points between waves one and two, from 12% at wave 1 to 22% at wave 2. Attitudes amongst unemployed customers shifted towards uncertainty.

**Figure 7.10: Beliefs about ability to work amongst unemployed customers at wave 1 and wave 2**



Base: All customers unemployed and out of work: wave 1 (1992), wave 2 (907)

At wave 2, YEP customers were most likely to say that paid work was a realistic goal without support (32%) compared to 23% of Youth Hub and 22% of YEC customers.

It was more common for YEP and Youth Hub customers to feel that with the right support paid work was a realistic goal *in the next six months* (25% of YEP customers, 28% of Youth Hub) than it was for them to feel it would take longer than that (16% of YEP and 21% of Youth Hub customers); among YEC customers the split was fairly even (22% saw it as realistic in the next six months and 19% believed it would take longer).

YEC customers were most likely to feel that paid work was not a realistic goal even with the right support (14%), compared to six percent of YEP customers and three percent of Youth Hub.

This demonstrates that YEP customers remain closest to the labour market whilst YEC customers were most likely to expect to require further, long-term support. This reflects the programme design and suggests that appropriate referrals were made to YEC.

Those without a long-term health condition were more likely to say they did not need support to get into paid work (45% compared to 19% of those with a long-term health condition). Those with a long-term health condition were more likely to say they would need support and it might take over six months to achieve an outcome (23% compared to 10% of those without), that paid work was not a realistic goal (11% compared to 3%) or 'don't know' (24% compared to 16%). This highlights the need for targeted support for those with long-term health conditions, who make up a substantial proportion of the cohort.

Male customers (33%) were more likely than females (26%) to agree that work was a realistic goal without support. Females were more likely to say work was not a realistic goal (9% compared to 5% of males) or 'don't know' (24% compared to 17%).

Customers whose gender identity differed from the sex they were registered at birth were more likely to say that paid work was not a realistic goal (16% compared to 7% overall or 6% of those whose gender identity was the same as registered at birth). Taken together, these findings suggest that there is scope for further tailoring of support based on customers' protected characteristics.

## 7.5 Residual barriers

Out of work customers were asked what further support could help them find a job. At wave 2, three quarters (74%) of customers identified support needs compared to 78% at wave 1. Customers at wave 2 identified 2.3 support needs on average (mean) compared to 2.5 at wave 1.

Most commonly, at wave 2, unemployed customers said they would benefit from help with the cost of travel to work (35%). This was very similar to the proportion seen in wave 1 (34%), however it had only been the third most popular support need at that stage.

The second most commonly cited support need was support with getting a new or different job (for example, interview skills, CV skills etc.) at 33%. This had been the most popular support need in wave 1 (42%), a drop of nine percentage points.

Third most common was support to manage a physical or mental health condition (31%, down from 38% in wave 1).

Housing support, though less common, was still desired by around a fifth (19% at wave 2, consistent with the 17% seen at wave 1) followed by support with work related skills, requested by 14% (down from 22% at wave 1).

Support with particular needs (such as homelessness or alcohol problems) was mentioned by 6%.

Overall 15% said there was not any further support that could help them find a job, and 12% said they did not know (up from 6% at wave 1, reflecting the increase in uncertainty in customers' perceptions of their chances of getting a job).

YEC customers were more likely than those on YEP or Youth Hub to cite support to manage a physical or mental health condition (34%, compared to 25% for YEP and 24% Youth Hub), or housing support (23%, compared to 18% YEP and 12% Youth Hub).

Childcare remains a barrier for some: females were more likely than males to say access to suitable childcare was an area they could use support, at 9% compared to 4% of males.

For customers with long-term physical and/or mental health conditions, support to manage these is the top area where further help would assist them in finding a job or progressing in work; nearly half (45%) said this would be of use.

Taken together, this illustrates that a proportion of the cohort have taken positive steps towards employment, yet some important residual barriers remain. Some of these, such as support with getting a new job, are central to DWP's remit, whilst others present more structural barriers to work, such as transport and healthcare needs.

# 8. Conclusions and recommendations

## 8.1 Customer views and experiences of the Youth Offer

### 8.1.1 Overall findings

Both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews found that the patterns of support reported by customers received broadly followed the policy intent. There was evidence of tailoring in the delivery of the different strands of the Youth Offer. The survey identified that customers on different strands were offered different types of support, and that Youth Hub and YEC customers received more types of support than YEP customers. At wave 1 and 2, whilst similar proportions of customers received support, the types of support shifted over time. This indicates tailoring to customer needs. At least half of customers from each strand agreed that the support was tailored and a similar proportion found the support useful on a number of measures. In both cases, Youth Hub customers were most likely to agree, suggesting that they found the support most impactful.

Nearly half of Youth Offer customers had a long-term health condition or disability, most commonly a mental health condition. Over a third (35%) of customers identified that this was a barrier to work, the most common barrier identified. Patterns in the characteristics of customers who were more likely to recall receiving mental health or wellbeing support suggests that Work Coaches were identifying for additional support needs amongst particular groups and tailoring the support they offered.

There was a clear theme of the Work Coaches interviewed across all strands of the Youth Offer appreciating opportunities for extended meetings with customers. This provided more time for Work Coaches to get to know and show an interest in a customer's circumstances and helped to build relationships which they felt would lead to better outcomes for customers. Customers also appeared to feel more engaged in the support where they could access longer appointments. Those who experienced longer meetings often felt they had a choice in what they brought to the conversation and that their Work Coach was more patient with them, which set them at ease. This extended time was valued across both Jobcentre and Youth Hub settings, although capacity pressures in Jobcentres among Work Coaches made it more difficult to protect.

### 8.1.2 Youth Employment Programme

The YEP strand was intended to support those closest to the labour market with fewer barriers to work and this was reflected in the findings: YEP customers were least likely to agree that the support was tailored to their needs.

The qualitative interviews and observations identified that customers found the YEP light-touch and self-driven. Customers with least experience of job-searching and developing a CV seem to have benefitted most from the support. YEP was most effective when customers had a positive relationship with their Work Coach and valued the encouragement and accountability of regular meetings. They found it frustrating when the Work Coach asked about their interests but sent suggested jobs which were not aligned to these. This risked undermining the relationship. Whilst the volume of customer caseloads mean it may not be practical for Work Coaches to share highly tailored job recommendations with individuals, consideration should be given to how job recommendations are framed, to minimise the risk of generic recommendations undermining the relationship. It also seems useful to set out the terms of engagement between customers and Work Coaches, perhaps in the first commitment meeting held between customers and Work Coach, making clear that the Work Coach role is to support customers to develop and improve their job-searching skills, rather than always sending them specific jobs to apply for. This may help to minimise friction caused by mismatching expectations between Work Coaches and customers.

Work Coaches reported that when they had the opportunity to work consistently with a customer they did not always hold a specific meeting for the Employment and Skills Review (ESR) or Progress Review and implemented these flexibly. This was driven by choice, for those who did not see this as necessary, or necessity for Work Coaches who did not have time to offer the extended meetings. Customer feedback showed that nearly seven in ten customers recalled topics they had discussed as part of their ESR when prompted, suggesting that there is recall of the content being covered. In contrast, recall of the progress review was much weaker, with around three quarters saying they had not had it or did not recall any of the content. If the ESR and Progress Review are seen as being important processes for customers to engage with, rather than a data capture experience for Work Coaches, the importance of holding these as distinct meetings may need reinforcing.

### **8.2.3 Youth Hubs**

Youth Hub customers were more likely to recall having received employment support and to report receiving the most types of support. This suggests that they were taking up the wider support offered through the Hubs, in line with the policy intent.

Customers who had mainly or solely received support in a Youth Hub were more likely to praise the environment in the survey. Customers in the qualitative strand described it as relaxed, informal and friendly and offering a more private space for interaction. Both customers and Work Coaches reported that this helped to engage customers in the support.

Appointment lengths of at least 30 minutes were reported by Youth Hub Work Coaches and customers, meaning that Work Coaches could develop better rapport and personal relationships with customers which made the support feel more personalised. This allowed Work Coaches to challenge customers, and customers to express their true preferences to their Work Coach. Youth Hub customers felt that they had autonomy over the nature and pacing of their support and were reassured that they could make full use of the six months of support to progress. There was

also evidence that Youth Hubs were using a range of creative methods for increasing customer confidence, which, by increasing their social skills, helped to bring them closer to the labour market.

### **8.2.4 Youth Employability Coach**

The YEC strand was aimed at customers with the most complex needs and YEC customers were most likely to receive wider, not directly employment-related support.

There was evidence that YECs brought relevant experience working with vulnerable or potentially vulnerable young people. However, the value of their experience was not always being used to its full potential because their caseloads remained high, at times including customers with less complex needs. This meant they did not always have capacity to give YEC customers the more intensive support or longer appointment times prescribed and which it was felt they needed. Other challenges identified in delivery of YEC included lack of privacy to build rapport when meetings took place in the Jobcentre. However, YECs valued the autonomy offered by the role and ability to shape delivery of YEC to the customer's needs, such as changing appointment frequency and length. They felt that this led to better outcomes for customers and enabled them to manage their time more effectively. By not requesting a meeting with a customer when it would not be productive, they had more time to meet with others. Youth Work Coaches and Work Coaches delivering the YEP would also value this autonomy, enabling them to decide to spend less time with customers closer to the labour market and more time with those who they think would benefit more from the support.

Some YEC customers had appointments with their YEC in Youth Hubs. Both customers and YECs felt that this environment was more conducive to building a trusting relationship and subsequently offering more tailored support than the Jobcentre. This was in part because of the relative ease for Work Coaches to book and hold 30-minute appointments, which YECs reported was not always possible in the Jobcentre. Whilst YECs reported tailoring appointments to the individual's needs, customers at times felt they lacked agency about when or where appointments took place. Similarly, the flexibility of appointment content and length offered by YECs could be interpreted as unpredictability on the part of customers. The current or potential vulnerability of these customers, including a high prevalence of long-term mental health conditions, is likely to shape how they respond to Work Coach suggestions. They may respond better to advance notice about the suggested content and length of appointments, to help them prepare.

Both YEC customers and YECs felt that it was necessary to address their additional needs, such as mental health, housing and financial difficulties before they could directly prepare for work. YECs therefore need both time and capacity to understand how to support customers to navigate these systems, such as housing. YECs who were well networked with colleagues (including other YECs and DEAs) felt that they had a good view of the support available for YEC customers. Given the complexity of the barriers the YEC customer group face to employment, networking opportunities for YECs may be valuable to enhancing the support for customers and improving YEC experiences.

## 8.3 Outcomes

The proportion of customers in work was consistent at wave one and wave two (34%) although some customers moved into employment and others moved out of employment during the evaluation period. YEP customers were most likely to be in work at both waves, reflecting that they were closer to the labour market. Of those in work, a quarter had increased their hours in the past six months/ since starting their job. Customers without a long-term health condition were most likely to be in work.

There was a downward shift in the number of barriers with customers identified at wave one relative to wave two. The number of opportunity barriers identified by customers went down from an average of 2.2 to 1.9 and the mean number of personal barriers went down from 1.9 to 1.7. This suggests that customers had made progress towards entering the labour market, even if they had not yet had opportunity to translate into employment outcomes.

At wave two, YEC customers remained furthest from the labour market suggesting that many in this group needed further, long-term support.

## 8.4 Improving the Youth Offer Policy

Nearly half of Youth Offer customers in this study had a long-term health condition or disability, particularly a mental health condition. However, those with a long-term health condition or disability were less likely to achieve a positive outcome or to feel that the support was tailored to them. This suggests that more tailored support for customers with a mental health condition is required, either from the Youth Offer or from sources. Evidence from Youth Work Coaches suggests they would also welcome more training and support in this area. There was evidence of Youth Offer customers being referred to Intensive Personalised Employment Support. Outcomes should be considered for this group and consideration given to whether this is an effective route, or whether a specific support programme for young people with a long-term health condition or disability may be beneficial or more tailoring within the Youth Offer, to reflect the significant proportion of customers with a long-term mental health condition.

Building on this, customer barriers to attending the Youth Offer reflected their barriers to employment. There was evidence of Work Coaches tailoring their approach to support customers to address these barriers, such as offering remote appointments. Continuing to build on this will help ensure the programme is accessible.

Just over half of Youth Offer customers had not had any employment since leaving education and lack of work experience was identified as a barrier to work. However, only around 1 in ten recalled receiving work experience or a work placement through the scheme. Work Coaches identified that there was a lack of work experience opportunities. This indicates that further work with employers to improve opportunities for work experience placements and improving Work Coach knowledge of existing work experience opportunities, could help lead to better outcomes.

YECs did not always feel that they had capacity to deliver the YEC as intended and that appointments were booked for them with customers who had less complex



needs. Work Coaches felt that protecting this time for those customers would help ensure they have the tailored support they need.

The more intensive and holistic support provided through the Youth Hubs was particularly well received by customers. The informal and relaxed environment of Youth Hubs, coupled with the longer appointment times, were seen by Work Coaches and customers to be very valuable and impactful for customers. Longer appointment times were felt to benefit customers by allowing them to build a strong relationship with the Work Coach, leading them to access more support and allowing for appropriate choice and challenge between the two. The wide range of support on offer through Youth Hubs helped to build customers' confidence and interpersonal skills, essential steps to helping them move closer to the labour market. Youth Hub Work Coaches felt that raising awareness of Youth Hubs amongst Work Coaches in Jobcentres would be beneficial. Strengthening connections between Youth Hubs and Jobcentres was seen as helping to ensure that all customers who would benefit from Youth Hub support were referred to it. One way in which this could be achieved – as suggested by some Hubs themselves - is through Work Coach visits to Youth Hubs, to increase awareness of the provision and better equip Work Coaches to refer to it.

# Appendix A: Technical details

This section sets out the design of the quantitative survey and qualitative research.

## Quantitative surveys

### Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was developed in collaboration with DWP and piloted at each wave to test comprehension, length, and sample eligibility assumptions. The questionnaire was found to work well, and participants were content to answer the questions. Minor routing changes were made where necessary.

### Sample design

The sample frame used for this research was DWP's data of customers who had started on their current strand of the Youth Offer between August 2022 and January 2023.

Once the sample was cleaned individuals were sent an email inviting them to take part in the survey. The email gave details of the research and the recipient the option to opt-out of the research. Customers were sent 3 reminder emails and SMS messages. Interviewing was conducted using an online survey and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. At wave 1 the average CATI survey length was 26 minutes and 17 minutes online. At wave 2 the average CATI survey length was 24 minutes and 17 online.

The first wave of survey research was conducted between 28 April and 3 July 2023 and achieved 2976 completes with Youth Offer customers. Wave two of the survey was conducted about six months later, between 27 October and 17 December 2023 and achieved 1377 interviews. Four hundred longitudinal interviews were conducted with participants who took part in both waves.

### Sample outcomes

Table A1.1: Sample outcomes for the quantitative survey

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Completes	2976	1377
Appointments	463	109
Screened out	898	308
Refusals	1964	142
Quit interview	2460	1430
Incorrect/inactive telephone number	3473	336
No answer by end of fieldwork	19862	29609
<b>Total valid sample</b>	<b>24151</b>	<b>31416</b>
Total eligible sample	31184	33027
Adjusted response rate (as % of eligible sample)	10%	4%
Cooperation rate	34%	41%

The low adjusted response rate is due to challenges reaching and engaging the audience. Measures were taken to address this, including offering the multi-mode survey and an incentive for participating at wave 2.

### Weighting

The survey data was weighted by gender, age and region. The weighted and unweighted profiles are shown below.

Table A1.2: Unweighted profiles for the quantitative survey

	Unweighted wave 2
East Midlands	7%
East of England	8%
London	12%
North East	5%
North West	14%
Scotland	7%
South East	10%
South West	6%
Wales	4%
West Midlands	14%
Yorkshire and the Humber	12%

	Unweighted wave 2
Female	53%
Male	40%

	Unweighted wave 2
20 and younger	49%
21 and older	47%

Table A1.3: Weighted profiles for the quantitative survey

	Weighted wave 2
East Midlands	6%
East of England	7%
London	12%
North East	5%
North West	15%

Scotland	9%
South East	9%
South West	6%
Wales	5%
West Midlands	13%
Yorkshire and the Humber	12%

	Weighted wave 2
Female	40%
Male	52%

	Weighted wave 2
20 and younger	51%
21 and older	45%

## Job-search self-efficacy score statements

Job-search self-efficacy is theorised in job search literature to be linked with gaining employment, so is a useful measure for employment programmes. A job-search self-efficacy score is calculated for participants by averaging their level of reported confidence with a list of work-search skills.<sup>12</sup> These skills are:

- Making a good list of all the skills that you have, and which can be used to find a job
- Talking to friends and other contacts to find out about potential employers who need your skills
- Talking to friends and other contacts to discover promising job openings that are suitable for you
- Completing a good job application and CV
- Contacting and persuading potential employers to consider you for a job
- Making the best impression and getting your points across in a job interview
- Searching for jobs online (using computers, Smart phones, internet, etc.)
- Applying for jobs online (using computers, Smart phones, internet, etc.)
- Getting help in order to become familiar with a new job

<sup>12</sup> Teye-Kwadjo, E. The Job-Search Self-Efficacy (JSSE) Scale: an Item Response Theory Investigation. *Int J Appl Posit Psychol* 6, 301–314 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-021-00050-2>

## Qualitative methodology

This section provides more detail on the qualitative methodology.

### Tool Development

In depth interviews were conducted using topic guides. These were developed in discussion with the Department for Work and Pensions and were designed to reflect the aims and objectives of the study. In total, eight topic guides were developed for depth interviews: one each for use with YEP customers, Youth Hub customers, YEC customers, Youth Work Coaches, Youth Hub Work Coaches, Youth Employability Coaches, Youth Hub partners, and employers.

### Depth interviews

The study comprised a total of 96 depth interviews, 37 with professionals and 60 with customers. After liaising with a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in each case study area, volunteers to be interviewed were sought across the different roles of the Youth Offer in each local area. A sample of partners and employers was snowballed from staff interviewed as appropriate. The Department for Work and Pensions provided a sample of customers known to have used at least one strand of Youth Offer support. Customers completing the quantitative survey were also provided the option to opt-in to further depth interviews.

Fieldwork took place in several locations across England, Wales and Scotland between April and August 2023.

### Observations

The study also included two two-day visits to Youth Hub sites. Here, researchers (with consent from both the Youth Hub Work Coach and customer) observed 12 appointments. Observations enabled the research team to capture data about the interactions between customers and coaches and the Youth Hub environment, and real-time insights rather than recalled in interviews on a self-report basis which may elicit differences between what people say and what they do. Observations were structured using AEIOU, an ethnographic method that provides a framework for recording and classifying data about a subject's Activities, Environments, Interactions, Objects and Users. Observations were followed by short interviews to gather reflections on the session.

While visiting Youth Hub sites, researchers also secured an additional nine in-depth interviews with customers using an opt-in.

Table A1.4: Sample breakdown of characteristics across all depth interviews

<b>Programme</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Youth Employment Programme	22	32%
Youth Hub	28	41%
Youth Employment Coach	19	28%
Total	69	100%

<b>Gender</b>		
Male	38	55%
Female	29	42%
Prefer not to say/other	2	3%
Total	69	100%
<b>Age</b>		
16-17	2	3%
18-24	67	97%
Total	69	100%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	53	77%
Black	1	1%
Mixed	7	10%
Asian	4	6%
Arab	0	0%
Other	4	6%
Total	69	100%
<b>Claimant disability/health conditions</b>		
None	35	51%
Yes (MH)	14	20%
Yes (MSK)	3	4%
Yes (other)	9	13%
Yes (co-morbid)	7	10%
Unknown/ prefer not to say	1	1%
Total	69	100%
<b>Claimant work/benefit status (at interview)</b>		
Economically inactive (not claiming)	7	10%
Claiming benefit	47	68%

Working full-time (30 hours or more/week)	6	9%
Working part-time (1 to 29 hours/week)	7	10%
Self-employed	2	3%
Total	69	100%
<b>Highest qualification level</b>		
No qualifications	5	7%
<Level 2	6	9%
Level 2 or 3	47	68%
Level 4+	10	14%
Unknown/ prefer not to say	1	1%
Total	69	100%
<b>Work history (prior to current employment for those in work)</b>		
Never worked	18	26%
Unemployed <6 months	19	28%
Unemployed 6 months-24 months	24	35%
Unemployed 2 years+	6	9%
Unknown/ prefer not to say	2	3%
Total	69	100%

### Data management and analysis approach

Interviews were recorded (where informed consent was gained from respondents) using encrypted digital recorders in line with data protection. Recordings were either transcribed verbatim or researchers wrote detailed notes, listening back to recordings to ensure no data was lost.

The analysis approach incorporated two interrelated but distinct phases: at the data management stage, the data were coded and synthesised into a thematic framework. Given the variety of data, this process was managed using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS (Atlas.ti) enabled cross-case analysis, giving a consistent structure to facilitate comparison. This approach ensured systematic and consistent treatment of all data units and allowed for the analytical framework to be refined and modified in the early stages of its use. The next stage, interpretation, involved comparing and contrasting views of respondents and identifying patterns within and between cases. The advantages of using software include that source data is retained within the analysis and coding structures and

codes mean that each case, and group of cases, can be explored in depth to understand the drivers and inhibitors of outcomes as well as the role of personal circumstances and contexts.

The approach allowed full within case analysis (looking in detail at each individual case) and cross-case analysis (comparing individual cases and groups of cases such as any differences experience).

It is important to note that qualitative research is used to map the range and diversity of different type of experiences rather than indicate the prevalence of any one particular experience. As such numerical language is not used and findings are not aimed to be statistically representative.