

Levelling Up White Paper and Young Londoners

We are writing to you as the voice of London's youth sector. We form part of a wider alliance which is the Young Londoners Coalition, a network of infrastructure voices in the statutory and voluntary youth sector. Our work involves collaborating at a pan-London level to improve the lives of young people at the heart of the Government's levelling up agenda, particularly to mitigate the legacy of Covid-19.

Our Coalition works across housing, local and regional government, voluntary and community sector and funders to support the workforce to meet the needs of young people. We are keenly aware that many of London's communities share the same challenges as those in other towns and cities across the UK with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. These challenges range from low incomes, insecure work, fewer skill and qualifications and other barriers to employment such as caring responsibilities or health conditions.

We have been cautioning national policy makers not to level-down London in tackling the many regional inequalities present in the UK. The White Paper rightly acknowledges that there are communities in the UK which have not benefitted enough from economic growth or from sufficient government investment over decades. It also states that despite London being an economic powerhouse, it contains significant pockets of high deprivation as we outline below.

Youth Policy

Not levelling up London is a false economy; the focus needs to be on levelling up every young person across the country.

The White Paper rightly recognises the need for all young people to have access to out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer - irrespective of geography. We welcome the move to NCS working with partners to offer year-round activities. We know how critical ongoing, locally accessible sporting, skills development, creative and outdoor learning opportunities are to the physical and mental health of young people, as well as to their prospects. As the Young Londoners Coalition, we will contribute wherever we can to secure and deliver the National Youth Guarantee for London's young people. It is badly needed.

Nearly two-thirds of our capital's youth facilities have closed over the last decade¹. This is a particularly acute loss now we are also coping with the effects of the pandemic on young people's emotional and physical health outlined below.

As London partners we are therefore disheartened to see that other initiatives aimed at levelling up the youth sector exclude some of London's poorest communities.

The visible hallmarks of prosperity in London mask the highest rate of childhood deprivation in the UK. Young people of colour have hugely higher unemployment rates than white young people as outlined below. And most of those young people live in London. Yet only two London Boroughs are currently within scope of the [Youth Investment Fund \(YIF\)](#) initiatives.

Whilst we welcome confirmation that capital spend for new youth clubs will be backed by revenue spend for vital youth worker support, we question where the support is for existing clubs where youth service provision is scant and the need to support vulnerable young people so great. If this need is not reflected in further funding phases, there is a real risk of further deprivation for thousands of young Londoners who already feel forgotten and left behind.

Youth unemployment

We fully recognise that the overreliance on some parts of the country, including London, for economic growth is not good for the rest of the UK. Like other regions, many of London's key sectors have been damaged by the pandemic: our creative industries are an engine of growth but have been badly impacted with significant knock-on effects to London and the UK's visitor economy. The retail and hospitality sectors were particularly badly hit and a large employer of young people. This all gave rise to a full 6% of Londoners going on furlough – twice the national average.

London has not recovered. The most recent [ONS unemployment figures](#) show a widening economic gap for young Londoners.

- There has been a 55% rise in youth unemployment in London since the start of the pandemic (16–24-year-olds).
- 21% of all unemployed young people live in London. This is five times the national jobless rate of 4.3% for all ages.
- A shocking 37.4% of young black Londoners are unemployed and are twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts (17.5%) alongside 20.6% of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young peopleⁱⁱ.
- The Universal Credit increase of 3.1 per cent coming into force in April will still see under-25s, who receive lower benefits rates than older people, receiving £78.34 less than they were before cut in September.ⁱⁱⁱ

Inequalities and deprivation

Health inequalities in London resulted in Covid mortalities that were far starker here than in other UK geographies. Poverty and race were undeniably major contributors to those outcomes. Tackling inequalities post COVID19 is a commitment that we all hold and are working towards. We fully recognise the inequalities across regions and within regions and levelling up must be about tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for all young people and if young Londoners are omitted from this, it looks more like levelling down for many young people in the capital:

- The cumulative death rate of Londoners during the pandemic was 40% higher than the national average.^{iv}
- London has the highest poverty profile in the country, with four in ten children in the capital living in poverty. It also has the highest sub-regional disparities between local authorities: rates of poverty within Tower Hamlets (56%), Newham (50%) and Barking and Dagenham (48%) compared to Richmond upon Thames (17%).^v
- Deprivation is also intrinsically related to the high cost and shortage of affordable housing: 8.3% of housing is overcrowded in London, more than double the rate of the next highest English region^{vi}.
- Young people's mental well-being is now a national crisis: half of 16–25-year-olds are reporting that their mental health has worsened during the pandemic.

- In the capital, 73% of youth workers from the London Youth network say the mental health of their young people has been affected by the pandemic. This is similarly reflected in the Trust for London's [Mapping Young London](#) report commissioned for Partnership for Young London
- Childhood obesity in London is now significantly higher than elsewhere in the UK. Nearly 40% of all London's children are overweight or obese, and severe obesity is three times higher in deprived areas.^{vii}

Cost of Living Crisis

The Anna Freud Centre has flagged that there are additional risks of the pandemic leading to poorer mental health for young people facing socio-economic disadvantage.

Young Londoners will be facing the huge challenges this year with increasing energy prices and cost of living rises. Centrepoint data shows that the increase in energy bills, (after Ofgem raised its cap to £2,000) would see a young person's bills rise by £13.84 per month after the government discount.

Those most affected were already struggling to stay afloat financially: they now face a cost-of-living crisis. All this will exacerbate the economic and mental health stability for thousands of young Londoners and their families in 2022.

London as an engine of growth for all

We are an ally in levelling up all parts of the country, addressing these imbalances benefits everybody. It is right that the White Paper looks to London as an exemplar in addressing how to turbo charge other city-regions in several domains. There is a body of evidence which shows that the economies of the UK's cities, towns and regions and the success of its young people are inextricably linked. Growth in London creates demand for goods and services from other parts of the UK. Increasingly 'London' jobs can be done remotely from other parts of the UK, with wages being spent locally. In short, London's growth helps all regions of the UK and vice versa.

And London's opportunities for further growth remain strong post-pandemic. It is the UK's world city and a key part of the government's 'Global Britain' story. It is a principal location of many of the sectors where we hold a global competitive advantage the benefits of which Britain needs to maximise fin tech, life sciences, creative industries and higher education and financial services. The continued success of these sectors helps London's economy and provides opportunities for companies and organisations across the country.

Intra-regional divides

Young Londoners are geographically at the centre of that engine of growth, but face some of the highest barriers which put these opportunities out of reach. One of the principal reasons for this is that there are such significant divergences within London itself, which already had several of the most deprived local authorities in the UK and now has pronounced demographic shifts into underfunded outer London borough "cold spots".^{viii}

There is a significant job of levelling up to be done within London which spans far wider than the Barking and Dagenham and Tower Hamlets, the only two boroughs to receive support under the Youth Investment Fund.

All tiers of London government are working together to deliver a plan for recovery across these intra-regional economic and social divides, supported by business and community leaders on the London Recovery Board. The pandemic led to more effective partnerships between London's government, business, and community leaders.

London government bodies have set out the importance of building on this by bringing forward investment, helping people to re-skill and get back into work, attracting back visitors to the city and supporting the growth sectors that will be the long-term engine of recovery, such as green industries and the creative sector.

A Partnership Approach

Levelling up will be best achieved through a combination of central and government action. This needs to be informed by the experience of young people in the communities of greatest need and by active partnership with the community sector.

With greater devolution powers, freedom and flexibilities, place-based policy solutions can be more effectively designed to tackle the complex social and economic issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic

Collaboration across London has been vital during the pandemic and will be into recovery. We are working across London's civil society to deliver a better youth offer for London. We are committed to making this happen and to convening all those interested in investing in the next generation of youth people.

Partnership for Young London and London Youth, on behalf of the Coalition, would welcome the opportunity to explore with you how we can work together to advance the policy agenda for young Londoners. They deserve to have their voices heard, and to occupy their rightful place in the levelling up agenda.

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References

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ⁱⁱ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/young-black-londoners-twice-likely-jobless-covid-pandemic-work-b969098.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/almost-a-million-young-people-to-be-hit-by-universal-credit-cut>

^{iv} <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/londons-poverty-profile-2021-covid-19-and-poverty-in-london/covid-19-infections-and-mortality>

^v <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>

^{vi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

^{vii} <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/health/londons-child-obesity-taskforce>

^{viii} London Youth's survey of ONS and other available statistics suggests £361 spent per young person in Inner London compared to £67 in outer London