

Inspiring Futures: a proposal to transform young lives through enterprise and mentorship across the UK.

Executive Summary

- Young Enterprise is the UK's leading business, enterprise, and financial education charity, supporting young people age 5-24.
- The project we propose is **Inspiring Futures** – a targeted programme supporting disadvantaged young people to build confidence, resilience, and employability skills through enterprise-based learning and mentoring.
- **Need:** Young people from deprived communities face high levels of anxiety about the future, lack of access to role models, and lower levels of work readiness.
- **Solution:** Delivering an academic-year-long enterprise journey, mentoring, and skills workshops for young people in the most disadvantaged communities of England, Scotland and Wales.
- **Request:** £3,300 per Inspiring Futures school, enabling up to 25 young people to benefit directly from the year-long programme and 200 young people to gain vital financial capability through our My Money Matters digital programme.
- **Impact:** Young people who face the greatest barriers will gain confidence, essential life skills, aspirations for the future, and better prospects for education, employment, or self-employment.

Introduction

Young Enterprise transforms lives for young people in our country's most underserved communities. Ellie¹ is one of the 53% of young people living in the UK who feels scared about stepping out of the classroom and entering the world of work. When Ellie first started on her Young Enterprise journey, she was anxious and afraid to face the public. Her levels of anxiety were so high she couldn't attend a mainstream school.

Throughout her journey she was put in situations that stretched her outside her comfort zone and encouraged her to challenge herself. Through YE's Team Programme, Ellie was able overcome her crippling anxiety and set up a trading business. She's been able to accomplish tasks that she would never have dreamt of, like being able to speak in public and lead a team. Ellie reflected on the impact from YE's programme:

"It really helps people to get out there, it brings people together as a community so they don't feel like they are different from everybody else. Not everybody here comes from a good background, we come from a PRU², we are kids that got kicked out of school because of behavioural reasons... but here nobody looks at our differences, we're all succeeding."

Now she feels a valued member of her community in Rotherham and is excited to take other students in her school on the same journey that she's been on, to develop their skills and confidence.

¹ Ellie is a fictionalised name to protect the anonymity of this young woman.

² PRU = Pupil Referral Unit

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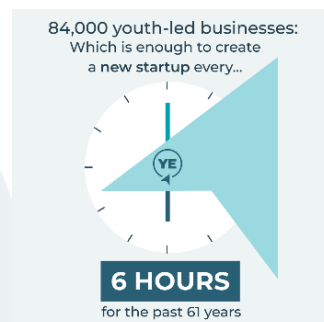
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The Careers Lead at the school Ellie attends, a Pupil Referral Unit in Rotherham added: “Without the Young Enterprise project, our students would not have had the opportunity to build the essential skills that are invaluable for their future. Through this learning journey, the students gain practical knowledge, hands on experience, and an understanding of running a business. Taking part means that they’re prepared for future entrepreneurial ventures but also develop a skill set that enhances their employability and career prospects.”

About Young Enterprise

For over 60 years Young Enterprise (YE) have been working in partnership with schools, colleges, universities, and businesses to enhance and enrich curriculum learning - allowing over **7.2 million** young people to discover, develop and celebrate their skills and potential, helping to prepare them to succeed in the future.

Our learning activities (for 5-24 year olds) range from financial education workshops and one-day employability masterclasses, to our flagship Company Programme, which empowers young people to set up and run a student company across an academic year. By offering these financial and entrepreneurial learning programmes, we now help over **573,000** young people each year, to develop the skills that our education system doesn’t provide for – real life skills, for real life circumstances.



YE’s work since 1961 in
creating youth-led enterprises

The need

Nearly one million (12.8%) of young people across England and Wales are not in education or employment. So many young people leave school without the skills they need to succeed in the real world, but for young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, this is even more common – we want to change this.

The 2024 [Youth Voice Census](#) highlighted that confidence continues to decline for those in education, with young people feeling **far less** confident about their transition into work, their skills, the support they receive and their ability to find quality work compared to last year. Just over a third of young people in education (**36%**) think they understand the skills employers are looking for.

Disadvantaged students in England and Wales are, on average, **19.2 months** behind their more affluent peers in educational attainment by the age of 16, as measured at the end of Key Stage 4 (GCSE level). For persistently disadvantaged students - those eligible for free school meals for 80% or more of their school life - the gap is even wider, reaching nearly **two years (22.9 months)**. These gaps have grown post-pandemic and represent the largest disparities since 2012ⁱ.

Our response - Inspiring Futures

Through Inspiring Futures, we aim to work with schools across the UK, particularly those serving underserved communities, to ensure young people have access to the opportunities, role models, and experiences they need to succeed.



We launched Inspiring Futures (IF) in the Autumn of 2020. Our focus is on bringing opportunity and increased access to real-world practical learning experiences, to young people in the most disadvantaged and deprived areas across England and Wales. This is based on areas ranked as deciles 1-4 of the governments Indices of Multiple Deprivation, IMD. ⁱⁱⁱ

Inspiring Futures is a multi-faceted programme, designed to boost inclusion, over an academic-year-long timeframe. It provides an experiential approach, enabling young people to develop and apply key skills, confidence and an enterprising mindset in a real-world environment. The programme **supports young people in making a successful transition from school into the world of work or further education.**

Inspiring Futures supports young people to set up and run their own **Young Enterprise Company** with the support of volunteer business mentorsⁱⁱ. This opportunity enables them to develop and apply skills in a real-world context and in real time. This includes market research, developing a business idea, assigning job roles and responsibilities, and marketing and selling their products to the public at trade fairs and online through YE’s Trading Station. ^{iv}

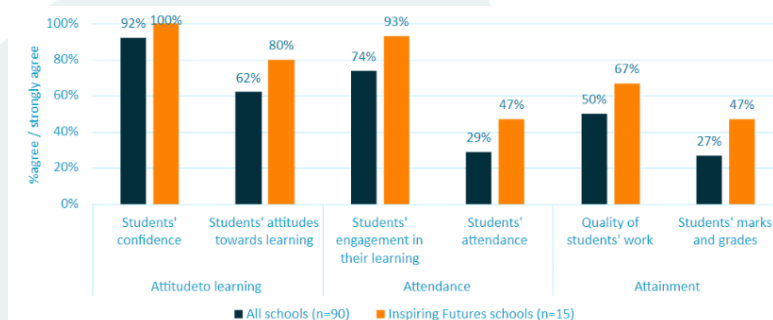


Inspiring Futures is an ongoing programme of work and a key part of our 2024-2030 Transforming Futures strategy.^v Since Inspiring Futures began, we've reached over **8,000** young people and increased the number of schools we've partnered with, year on year.

We are proud to have supported 2,772 young people at **210 state secondary schools in IMD deciles 1-4**^{vi} through the programme in 2024-25 (12% of all state secondaries in IMD 1-4). **In the Northwest, we are supporting learners at 30% of the state secondary schools in the most disadvantaged communities**, with our reach increasing year on year.

Outcomes and Impact

Our impact data highlights that, through their participation in the programme, the young people achieve **strong growth in the development of their work readiness, working responsibly and financial capabilities**. The graphic (right) highlights the proportion of educators who've reported that Inspiring Futures has a positive impact on students' **attendance, attitude to learning and attainment**. The greater degree of impact for young people in Inspiring Futures schools is apparent across all measures.



Through our Inspiring Futures evaluations this year, we're pleased to highlight some key impacts for young people:

- **83%** of young people reported now having a **greater understanding of the world of work**;
- **83%** of young people reported that they have **gained confidence**
- **80%** were able to reflect on what skills they need to develop for the future; and
- **77%** of young people reported **feeling confident when managing money** and in providing examples of their skills to employers.

Long term, we know that alumni of YE's programmes are more likely to be in employment or to be business owners, and that taking part also has a positive influence on their earnings potential.

How you can support

Our work helps to address the structural causes of poverty in the most disadvantaged communities and we would welcome your support in enabling us to reach more young people this year. **To enable 329 teams of young people to benefit from Inspiring Futures requires an investment of £1.89m.**

We have secured some funding towards this total, however we are seeking a contribution towards the shortfall of £1.7m, which will enable 239 teams of young people to take part in 2026/27. As schools are working with more stretched budgets than ever, we want to ensure all barriers to participation are removed. To highlight what a grant could fund for young people this year, I have listed some examples below:

- **A grant of £3,300** would fund an entire school to take part in Inspiring Futures, reaching up to 25-200 young people with our impactful enterprise programme and digital financial education course, My Money Matters.
- **A grant of £10,000** would fund opportunities for around 75 young people at 3 schools in areas of deprivation to take part in Inspiring Futures, also providing sustained impacts for the wider community.

Your funding will make a significant difference to this work and represents a direct investment in the futures of young people across the UK. With your contribution, we can engage schools in the most underserved communities and make a meaningful difference for the young people who need this support more urgently than ever.

Thank you for your consideration

Opportunity changes everything. It replaces despair with determination, impossibility with action, and limitation with limitless possibility. This is why it's a key part of our long-term strategy to invest in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – by doing so, we can ignite a fire that can illuminate even the darkest corners of society and create a better future for us all. But we can't do it alone – with your support we can change the lives of hundreds of young people – we can change the lives of a generation.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider our proposal.

For more information about Young Enterprise or Inspiring Futures, please contact philanthropy@y-e.org.uk

Appendix

Inspiring Futures Budget Breakdown	Per school (up to 25 young people)*
Staffing costs - Area and Regional Manager, school recruitment & support, volunteer recruitment, training and support, including DBS checks for Volunteer Mentors. Materials ordering & event logistics	£1,780
Programme materials, resources and programme development including contribution to online hosting for digital programmes	£924
Evaluation, impact monitoring and reporting	£216
Marketing & promotion of activities including events, competitions & awards, including Trade Fairs, Pitch to the Panel, Showcases and Finals	£80
Contribution to operational overheads (@ 15% of direct costs) including IT support, finance, fundraising	£300
Total:	£3,300

*Typically teams of 10-25 young people will take part in Company or Team Programme, through Inspiring Futures. However we can reach up to 200 young people per Inspiring Futures school through our digital financial education programme, My Money Matters.

Company Programme Learning Outcomes

Through taking part in YE's Company Programme young people achieve the following learning outcomes.

- ✓ Develop confidence, an enterprising mindset and employability skills
- ✓ Gain self-awareness of personal strengths and areas for development
- ✓ Develop a professional network
- ✓ Gain first-hand experience of work, job roles and working as a team
- ✓ Develop relevant content for applications to education/training providers and future employers
- ✓ Set SMART goals and plan next steps to achieve successful futures

^{vi}Schools outside IMD1-4 locations

Schools outside IMD1-4 locations are (since 24/25) now eligible to take part in Inspiring Futures free of charge, subject to certain criteria. This means that, for students who are at risk of exclusion or disengagement; Care Experienced; eligible for Free School Meals or Pupil Premium, we do not require the school to make a financial contribution for their participation in Inspiring Futures.

We adjusted the eligibility criteria to better reflect the diverse needs of the communities we serve, recognising that many students from disadvantaged backgrounds may travel some distance to attend a school in another location.

ⁱ <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/disadvantaged-pupils-in-england-and-wales-are-significantly-behind-other-pupils-by-the-time-they-take-their-gcses>

ⁱⁱ We have over **2,200** volunteers from the world of business, who play a crucial role in our work. Engagement with young people is critical, as we know that young people who recall four or more encounters with employers while in education are significantly less likely to be NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and go on to earn on average **16%** more than peers with no engagement.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/loD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.ye-tradingstation.org.uk/>

^v <https://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/sites/default/files/202603/Young%20Enterprise%20Transforming%20Futures%20Strategy.pdf>