

Meeting the needs of young women and girls in the implementation and delivery of Young Futures Hubs

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This briefing was developed by Centre for Young Lives and Agenda Alliance. It is designed to be used as a guiding document for government officials and local delivery partners in the roll out of Young Futures Hubs.

At a critical time for the government's delivery of Young Futures Hubs, this briefing sets out how these new hubs can transform outcomes for young women and girls. With the first Prevention Partnership Panels and eight early adopters established and a further 42 Hubs being created before the end of this parliament, this briefing draws on Agenda Alliance's workshops with service and delivery partners; the predecessor to the Centre for Young Lives, the Commission on Young Lives; the Centre for Young Lives' and a wide framework for Young Futures Hubs range of literature. Together this evidence is used to set out tangible insights for national and local policy makers to ensure that the Young Future's hubs are a success for all young people, including young women and girls.

Funding for the Hubs is part of a wider £70 million commitment to improve local youth service offers by March 2029, a welcome commitment to inject funding and a new way of working into local communities with the highest need. The hubs will require specialist expertise, training and knowledge to understand how to reach and engage vulnerable young people who need them most. The hubs will be a real opportunity to bring a new focus on integrated early support for teenagers – they build on the “Sure Start for teenagers” model recommended by the Commission on Young Lives, which was intended to bring together the best of Sure Start and youth provision - but it is key that they acknowledge the unique experiences of girls. Despite work now underway to deliver the first pilot of these hubs, the government has yet to outline how they will ensure these hubs will meet the needs of young women and girls.

Led by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and reporting into the Safer Streets Mission, Young Futures hubs have a key role to play in meeting the government's ambition to halve knife crime in ten years. Throughout this briefing, we aim to highlight the unique challenges young women and girls face with their mental health and wellbeing, experiences of violence and abuse, and unique risks in relation to involvement in youth violence, which Young Futures Hubs will need to adapt to, including the need for specialist support to address girls and young women's unique experiences of youth violence and abuse. By considering the needs of girls, Young Futures Hubs also have the potential to strengthen wider work across government such as their pledge to halve violence against women and girls in a decade and make the lives of young people and society safer and happier.

A note on language

For the purposes of this briefing, we may use this term 'perpetrator' and 'victim' when referring to violence. We recognise that these terms, while useful in understanding youth violence, can cause stigma and be polarising which can be counterproductive when aiming to design services which aim to prevent and respond to harm. While we have chosen to use these terms, we recognise that they are not mutually exclusive and all young people regardless of what they may have done, are deserving of the support and rehabilitative care that Young Futures can offer.

The term 'gang' is widely used shorthand for activity encompassing youth violence and criminal and sexual exploitation. The term attracts attention, collaboration and funding and can facilitate

access to pathways to support. However, research and engagement with girls and young women has highlighted a range of concerns associated with the use of the term 'gang' which is also highly racialised, classed and gendered and can be reductive - used as an umbrella term for multiple experiences without acknowledging structural inequalities and coercion. For further reflections on use of the term 'gangs', please see [Abianda's reflections on the term 'gangs'](#).

About the Young Futures programme

The Young Futures programme aims to better support children and young people, helping to reduce crime, improve mental health and create opportunities in their communities. The Young Futures programme is formed of two parts:

1. Prevention Partnerships, led by the Home Office, which will identify children and young people vulnerable to being drawn into crime and ensure access to appropriate support
2. Young Futures Hubs, led by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which will bring together services to improve how children and young people access opportunities and support at community level, supporting them to thrive and promoting positive outcomes.

About the authors

The Centre for Young Lives, founded by Baroness Anne Longfield CBE in early 2024, is an independent think tank and delivery unit working to improve the lives of children, young people, and families across the UK - with a particular focus on those facing the greatest challenges. Our team combines decades of experience in Westminster, Whitehall and beyond with a relentless commitment and drive to breaking down the barriers that hold back some children, and to ensuring that every child and young person can thrive. We use high quality research and evidence to advocate and campaign for innovative solutions and new models that improve the lives of children, young people and their families.

Agenda Alliance is a charity and coalition of over 130 member organisations working to make a difference to the lives of women and girls at the sharpest end of inequality. We advocate and campaign for women and girls who have multiple, interconnected needs that are not being met by public services – and sometimes by voluntary sector organisations. We convene our Alliance, conduct research, campaign and platform the voices of women and girls, in order to end cycles of trauma and harm.

The current context

It's no secret that there has been a decline in youth provision over the past 15 years, leaving young people across the country with little to no spaces or places to develop relationships and access support and mentorship. Youth clubs were a particularly preventative measure for mitigating harm and violence experienced and perpetrated by young people. Where youth clubs are available, children directly affected by violence are likely to regularly attend – with 60% of victims of violence and 65% of perpetrators reporting attending regularly, compared to 31% of children who are not involved in or have not experienced violence in any capacity (Youth Endowment Fund 2024)¹.

In 2021, the Commission on Young Lives was launched by Baroness Anne Longfield, which was launched in to put forward a national plan to transform the outcomes of the most marginalised teenagers. In November 2022, the Commission published its final report² highlighting the paucity of support for vulnerable teenagers and the urgent need to develop new national and local plans to protect young people from violence and crime and support them to thrive. The same month, the National Audit Office (NAO) published its assessment of the Government's support for vulnerable adolescents. It found that "there is no overall strategic approach, so government does not know whether there are gaps or overlaps in the support for vulnerable adolescents" (NAO 2022)³. The absence of priority and any purposeful or strategic approach to support for vulnerable young people over the last decade, has resulted in a piecemeal approach in a long list of disjointed, uncoordinated, and underfunded responses to real-life tragedies taking place in communities across the country.

The Commission held dedicated sessions on the needs of young women and girls where it heard how young women and girls who are affected by violence and 'gang'-related activity often go unseen. These young women experience multiple vulnerabilities, trauma, and unmet need, and often face violence, intimidation, sexual abuse, and criminal and/or sexual exploitation. The Commission highlighted how organisations supporting girls and young women at risk need far more support from national and local government, and that more widely the issues facing girls and young women at risk of exploitation and 'gang' activity and that much more needs to be understood about their experiences and effective methods of supporting them

The Commission's flagship recommendation was a 'Sure Start for Teenagers', a network of intervention and support hubs that reduce the risks vulnerable young people face and encourages and supports them to thrive. The proposal was subsequently adopted by Labour in its manifesto and called 'Young Futures'. Evidence from the Sure Start programme in the 2000s also shows that early integrated support for families boosts resilience and enables children to thrive, with significant reductions in illness and youth crime, and higher GCSE results for children who grew up near a Sure Start children's centre (Carneiro et al, 2025)⁴. Yet there is a gap in this type of provision for young people, many of whom are falling through the cracks in a fragmented system which does not see older children as a priority. We recommend that Young Futures Hubs build on the lessons learned from Sure Start, addressing this gap and bringing a new integrated approach of opportunities, mental health support, and youth provision to communities where young people need them most. As the Commission highlighted, if the needs of girls are not properly taken into consideration during the development of this programme, there is a risk that

these Hubs will contribute to a widening gender imbalance in access to services, putting girls at an even higher risk of harm, exploitation, and violence.

Girls are uniquely affected by a lack of youth provision. Specialist gender-based services are often unavailable or inadequate due to a lack of resources, resulting in many girls being left without support.⁵ Girls have expressed a lack of time, expertise, and presence from professionals working across youth programmes and children's social care leaving them unable to fully participate on what is offered (*ibid*). Short-term, generic youth services are often ineffective and can even retraumatise girls (Local Government Association 2024)⁶. Furthermore, youth services designed to support and protect vulnerable young people have been typically skewed towards the needs of boys and consequently girl's needs become harder to identify and address. For example, research conducted in Crewe and Trowbridge found that parks, skateparks, multi-unit game areas and youth facilities catered overwhelmingly to boys - leaving girls with limited options for recreation or socialising (King & Theocharides-Feldman, 2022).⁷

Violence against young women and girls

Gender significantly affects how violence is experienced. While boys on average have a greater likelihood of being both a victim and a perpetrator of youth violence, girls are at much greater risk of certain forms of violence, including sexual violence and intimate partner violence (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024)⁸:

- Girls and young women aged 16 to 24 report the highest rates of domestic abuse experienced by any age group.⁹
- Growing concern about misogynistic attitudes among some young boys was raised by several girls in one of IPPR North's focus groups (IPPR North 2025).¹⁰
- Before the age of 16, 15-20% of girls are estimated to have experienced childhood sexual abuse, compared to 7-8% of boys.¹¹
- In one study, one in three girls, aged 13 to 17, reported some form of sexual violence by their partner, compared to one in six boys.¹²
- Girls are also more likely to be at greater risk of child sexual exploitation, with this identified as a bigger risk for girls than boys.¹³

Case Study - Getaway Girls, Leeds

Getaway Girls is a project that seeks to empower girls and young women aged 11-25 in Leeds, supporting them to build confidence, resilience, raise aspirations, develop new skills and take positive risks in a safe environment. The project is delivered via a 'strength-based' approach, recognising young women's strengths, abilities, talents alongside their lived experience. They proactively target young women from specific groups, including young mothers, young women from racially minoritised backgrounds, care-experienced girls and young women, girls and young women living in poverty or girls and young women at risk of sexual exploitation.

Getaway Girls provides individual support, group work and outreach through school-based programmes, residential opportunities, creative arts, sports, training and personal development and peer support.

Getaway Girls run two mental-health specific groups, providing girls and young women with a safe space to discuss their experiences and utilise creative resources as an outlet. 'She Writes' is a weekly poetry and creative writing group for young women aged 18-25, where they can share their experiences with mental health. Young women attending the group shared positive feedback about the opportunity to meet like-minded young women in a safe space. 'Side By Side' is another group for women with lived experience of mental health, offering peer support and a safe space to discuss issues openly. Since its inception 35 years ago, Getaway Girls has supported over 20,000 women and hosted 27,300 workshops / group work sessions.

This epidemic of violence is clearly not unique to young people but reflective of the social norms within our culture and society. 33% of teenagers report having encountered content that encourages violence against women and girls specifically, and half of children in relationships report experiencing violence (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).¹⁴ Additionally, 85% of girls aged 11-21 experience sexism daily with nearly half now reporting feeling less safe due to sexism – more than double the proportion from a decade ago (GirlGuiding 2024).¹⁵ This is most prevalent for girls from LGBTQ+ communities, or with disabilities, or from the most deprived areas (ibid). This has also affected the way girls feel they can behave, affecting which extracurriculars they can do or what they can say, with this expectation felt more heavily by girls of colour (ibid). In educational settings which may be male dominated such as Pupil Referral Units, girls have expressed that they feel unsafe, there is a high prevalence of gendered violence, and there is a lack of specialist care (Agenda Alliance 2022).¹⁶ While there may be mutually beneficial aspects of mixed-gendered settings among young people, it's key that the needs of girls are considered in these settings to protect them from harm and ensure their safety. These issues may be more acute among some hubs than others, however, all hubs will need to take these issues into consideration.

'Gang' violence

Young women and girls experience so-called 'gang' violence differently to boys. They tend to not be officially affiliated with 'gangs' and therefore can fall through the cracks: research has

highlighted a range of risk factors for girls becoming involved in ‘gangs’, including school disengagement, poor mental health and behavioural problems. 78% of the girls involved in the ‘Getting Out for Good’ project in Greater Manchester were found to present with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ difficulties or need, compared to 10% of a national sample – indicating that girls with unmet needs have a higher likelihood of interactions with people and groups looking to exploit them (Jump & Horan 2021).¹⁷ As the Commission on Young Lives found, girls and young women are often recruited as they are believed to be less likely to attract the attention of police and they can be made to fulfil several roles in the group, from administrator and organiser to girlfriend or sexual partner. Like boys, they are controlled and punished, often through extreme sexual threat and violence.

The Commission highlighted that girls subject to criminal or sexual exploitation often go unrecognised, with not enough professional understanding of the issues relating to young women involved in ‘gang’ activity or the impact this activity and exploitation can have on them personally. This has included labelling girls as victims of Child Sexual Exploitation, without recognising wider Child Criminal Exploitation they may also be experiencing.

The Commission heard about the ongoing struggle to encourage girls to disclose what is happening to them when they are being abused or exploited, combined with a lack of understanding from some statutory services about how to spot problems that are occurring, or how to help young women. Referrals are low compared to referrals for boys, which, in the experience of many of those the Commission heard from, does not reflect how many young women are involved in county lines and other exploitation. Others have told the Commission how too often exploitation of care-experienced girls is being missed or overlooked. Some girls in care are subjected to damaging surveillance and unnecessary criminalisation, and some of their behaviour in a care setting triggers police action that would never take place if they weren’t in care. Sometimes the perception of girls in care is negative by default and some of these young women can end up with a thick case load files and a ‘difficult’ official history, which can reduce their opportunities in early adulthood.

While new work is emerging, there are relatively few support services in place, and most children supported by youth justice services are boys. There are some systems of culturally appropriate and community-based support available in some places in England, like the excellent Comic Relief-funded Positive Steps project in Oldham, and Abianda in London, which were set up specifically to support girls and young women who are exploited, but not as part of any national system or programme. The Commission also heard how some vulnerable girls are not using services because there is no assertive outreach, particularly from people who look like them and who they trust. Where interventions are successful, youth workers and outreach workers are providing services that are not judgmental, that don’t assume ‘something is wrong with you’, and that feel safe. We heard again the frustrations of those running successful interventions at the short-term funding they usually receive to provide what is long-term work.

Despite making up a significant proportion of vulnerable youth (approximately 60,000 girls), girls are often invisible in ‘gang’ and exploitation-related interventions, which are still largely designed with boys in mind. This leads to missed safeguarding opportunities and poor data collection which then informs available services and interventions (Jump et al 2023).¹⁸

Case study London's Violence Reduction Unit – Girls and Young Women's Prevention Plan

London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has set out a pioneering approach working across communities and sectors to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls and support them to thrive. Its Girls and Young Women's Prevention Plan focuses on four key strategic aims:

- Supporting all young Londoners to develop healthy relationships and tackle misogyny
- Creating and supporting girls and young women into positive opportunities
- Increasing awareness and targeting support for girls and young women at risk of exploitation
- Co-ordinating an approach to support young people and communities in response to online harms

Race and ethnicity

"How black girls are perceived becomes a moral panic, they are hyper visible... When we enter the news, people become aware of the hyper-phenomenon. They are aware and then quickly become a statistic. This phenomena is exacerbated by the hyper fixation on the study of Black boys. A fixation that can be seen in the sector and presented by white researchers with a fixation on researching Black boys and therefore actively treating Black girls as if they don't exist. Because Black girls are more likely to achieve higher they are ignored. In turn, Black girls don't have as much access to support."

[Ebinehita Iyere, Milk Honey Bees]

- Practitioners frequently underestimate or misread girls' risk, interpreting behaviours driven by trauma (such as aggression and disengagement) as troublemaking or criminality.
- Black and minoritised girls are most frequently the subject of this, being adultified¹⁹ rather than protected, highlighting an urgent need for culturally-sensitive, gender-specialist training across services.
- Dual heritage girls (e.g., White and Black Caribbean girls) were excluded at three times the rate of white British girls, with adultification resulting in non-white girls being labelled as more culpable, leading to harsher discipline and less support (Agenda Alliance 2022).²⁰

Mental health and Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- While boys and young men experience a higher rate of suicide (ONS, 2025)²¹, evidence shows that low wellbeing and poor mental health among girls and young women is higher and has been rising at a faster rate in recent years (Stapley et al. 2022).²² Girls and young women experience higher rates of self-harm, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

- Girls are more likely than boys to suffer from a mental health condition or to self-harm. Over a quarter of young women aged 16 to 24 have symptoms of depression or anxiety, experiencing this at three times the rate of their male counterparts and at higher rates than older women (NHS 2023).²³
- A survey from 2024 revealed that since 2009, girls and young women's happiness has been steadily declining, and is now at an all-time low (Girls Attitude Survey, 2024).²⁴
- Research has found an 'epidemic' of mental health problems among girls in their late teens and early twenties, which services often fail to respond to due to stigma, lack of resources, or capability (Agenda Alliance, 2022).
- Barriers to accessing support can compound – leading to the inaccessibility of statutory services for girls and young women experiencing multiple overlapping unmet needs. This is particularly the case for Black and minoritised girls and young women, who face discrimination in services as a result of their race and faith, as well as their gender. (ibid).
- For teenagers who perpetrate violence, most don't receive support – only 10% received support to improve their behaviour (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024)²⁵

Girls and young women who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

- The number of young women 'NEETs' – not in education, employment, or training – has reached its highest level since 2016.
- The latest increase in NEETs was driven primarily by young women, with female NEETs rising by 25,000, while the number of young men NEETs fell slightly by 1,000. Overall, 497,000 young men and 450,000 young women are currently categorised as NEET.²⁶
- NEET rates among young women have risen, and the recent datasets show young women NEETs increasing faster than rates for young men, mirroring trends in school attendance. Agenda Alliance analysis of Department for Education data shows that the gap between boys' and girls' severe absenteeism has narrowed significantly – in some cases, to near parity.
 - Since 2017/18, the gap between boys' and girls' severe absenteeism has narrowed significantly from 21% to 0.2% showing this is a growing issue for girls (Agenda Alliance, 2025).²⁷
 - Historically, lower numbers of girls have been persistently absent from school compared to boys. This has led to limited research into the drivers of girls' absence from school being undertaken, creating an environment which has allowed the numbers of girls missing school to increase at shocking rates. (Agenda Alliance, 2025).²⁸

What do stakeholders and service delivery partners need at the local level?

In Autumn 2025, Agenda Alliance convened a working group to address the rise in girls disengaging from education and the worrying increase in exclusions and severe absences. The group brought together a cross-section of alliance members and youth sector professionals with expertise in supporting girls and young women, including girls' centre service managers, education PGCE professionals, and youth advocates working alongside public education

services. Each sector expert contributed insight into the key drivers harming girls with multiple unmet needs – such as housing insecurity, low income, lack of access to SEND support, racism and discrimination in education and youth services including the adultification of Black girls (Jahnine Davis, 2022), and trauma from violence and abuse.

Young Futures Hubs present an opportunity to prevent the rising number of girls missing education, experiencing severe absence, and facing exclusion (Agenda Alliance 2022)²⁹ – all of which increase their exposure to exploitative and vulnerable situations. The working group discussed how Young Futures Hubs could provide early intervention and open-access support to address girls’ multiple unmet needs.

Case study - Good for Girls, London Youth

The Good for Girls programme works to support young women and girls to access relevant, holistic early intervention mental health support in community spaces. The intention of Good for Girls is that girls get support earlier, and therefore are less likely to require referral to specialist services. The programme provides support and guidance from trained youth professionals and opportunities to develop relationships, skills and tools to retain positive mental health.

The programme focuses on supporting racially minoritised girls aged between 10 and 14. Through the programme, girls take part in weekly sporting or creative activities to promote positive mental health and challenge stigma through discussion of emotional wellbeing and other issues. They also take leadership roles to promote wellbeing in the community through social action projects.

Evaluation of the project revealed the impact of the programme on the mental health, wellbeing and overall confidence of the 620 girls supported by the programme in 2022. The biggest impact overall was on girls’ confidence levels in talking about their mental health (63%), followed by their ability to ask for help with their mental health if they need it (59%).

Gender informed spaces

The harms young people experience, such as violence, abuse, exploitation, and issues at home are uniquely shaped by gender. Their distinct gendered needs and ways of engaging is something that must be actively included in building services that are safe and responsive to the needs of both girls and boys.

“We do things that the girls are interested in which can include content creation, creating spaces for creativity and expression. The curriculum needs to get up to speed with what girls are interested in.”

[Ebinehita Iyere, Milk Honey Bees]

Creating gender-informed spaces that are safe and provide holistic activities for girls and young women requires trauma-informed delivery models, as well as staff training that values approaches that are responsive to the unique needs of girls. Understanding what girls and young women want in their spaces should be prioritised – following the examples of specialist,

community-based organisations that already hold expertise in working with them, and by learning from how these organisations and the spaces they create are experienced by the communities and girls they serve.

“What we do really well is making spaces very homely... Very sort of nurturing and I don't know whether some young women would attend, you know, mixed gender settings.”

[Julie Stott, Young Women's Outreach Project]

While some services are dedicated to supporting girls, they are few. The needs of girls cannot be fully met when funding for this essential work is limited. The constant framing of resources as a choice between girls or boys overlooks the fact that reducing harm experienced by both requires creating safe, supportive spaces tailored to their distinct gendered needs. A gender-responsive youth service that addresses the unique drivers of harm affecting girls and boys is far more effective than a one-size-fits-all approach.

“There is an obvious focus on boys' needs, which I agree with completely, but I don't want that to take away focus for young women, because we still need that support and that funding for young women's work, not just to focus on boys.”

[Girls and young women's service provider]

Delivery Models

Safe spaces should reflect the communities they serve and enable girls to participate comfortably. This requires a range of opportunities for engagement that go beyond one location or a single support model. Open access should offer multiple pathways through which girls and young women can connect and be supported.

“I can't imagine what it's going to look like and who's going to be attending, but from the young women who I've seen over the years, who have severe absence and at risk of (school) exclusions, they're quite difficult to reach and you know you've got to do home visits and then gently get them included so that they want to be part of a service.”

[Julie Stott, Young Women's Outreach Project]

The youth service experts we spoke to agree that a model for reducing harms that supports wider meaningful engagement which girls can access usually includes a service that has a variety of approaches that address the unique needs of girls and young women.

“It can't be a one-size fits all because it [development of the hubs] needs to be involved with the local communities where the youth hubs will be, and they need to speak with grassroots organisations. They need to understand the lay of the land, who's going to be involved, what kind of services will be provided in there, based on the area otherwise it's not going to work.”

[Deborah Stillman, Advance]

Cultural competence

A delivery model that considers the unique gendered needs of girls and boys can still risk becoming a service that doesn't feel safe or accessible if the space doesn't reflect the

community it sits within. Cultural competence can't just be a training requirement, but a value held and existing in its daily delivery and building of a service.

Education and youth spaces not only overlook the unmet needs of girls but can also perpetuate discrimination and contribute to wider societal harms that disproportionately affect them based on class, race, gender, culture, and beliefs. When girls are harmed or mistreated in these settings, the conversation often moves on quickly, without addressing the unique drivers of discrimination girls experience.

Safe youth spaces which are responsive to gendered needs can mean representing girls through protected staffing characteristics. However, protected characteristics need to be extended beyond gender alone and consider the cultural context of the community where a service is based and who is delivering the services. Many spaces that should work in practice fail due to a lack of representation and cultural competence.

"You can't be going into spaces where the majority of the community is predominantly Muslim, and then everybody in the hub is going to be white and British. You need staff and people working in spaces who reflect and understand the communities that these hubs are in, but also people that are trained and have got the skills, experience and knowledge to be able to engage with the young people in ways that are actually meaningful."

[Alison Wiggins, Lecturer in Education: PGCE Social Science, UC]

Guiding principles and themes for implementation and delivery of Young Futures

The Centre for Young Lives has established core principles that Young Futures should integrate to support the most vulnerable young people and their families. The core principles of the framework established by Centre for Young Lives will ensure that the programme has the flexibility to respond to local need and bring together existing support services, while also establishing a recognised and national brand for the hubs so that they are recognised as safe, supportive spaces, which also provide appealing and open-access activities. Building on this, we have established what the implications of these principles are for thinking about support for girls and young women.

Guiding principles and themes for implementation and delivery of Young Futures			
Key principle	In practice	What this requires	Implications for work with girls and young women
Single front door with integrated local system	Young Futures Hubs are visible, trusted, and embedded in communities, offering consistent support and opportunities through a coordinated local system.	Clear understanding of Hub purpose across all partners, referral pathways, strong leadership, coordinated local plans, and involvement of schools, health, police, youth services, and voluntary sector. National brand and public awareness campaigns; cross-department guidance; long-term investment and innovative funding approaches.	Health: With high rates of mental ill health among girls and young women, it is particularly important to ensure a smooth pathway between CAMHS and Young Futures Hubs. Hubs should also work with local Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) to ensure young survivors of sexual assault can access safe and appropriate support. Education: Hubs should also work together with schools to tackle persistent absence among girls, which has risen by 250% since 2017 (Agenda Alliance, 2025). Policing and criminal justice: Hubs should work together with youth justice and girls' services on gender-specific crime prevention. There should also be strong links with domestic abuse and sexual violence agencies to support girls and young women at risk of VAWG.
Voices of young people and families are heard	Hubs co-produce services with young people and families, responding to their needs rather than imposing services.	Guidance for local authorities on co-production. Sharing best practice, embedding engagement from design to delivery.	Youth providers which have an overrepresentation of boys and young men should hold specific engagement opportunities with girls and young women.
Embedded in communities	Hubs actively reach underserved communities, understanding and responding	Local outreach plans using schools, youth centres, community spaces, and voluntary sector networks; guidance on data	Proactive outreach plans should target services which girls and young women are most likely to engage with, including marginalised girls and young women.

and reach those most in need	to local needs, including girls and minoritised groups.	collection, monitoring and culturally competent engagement.	
High-quality services	Hubs provide meaningful, impactful, and inclusive opportunities that prevent harm, support wellbeing, and transform life chances.	Frequent, accessible open-access activities; skilled and culturally competent workforce; integration with specialist services; national outcomes framework; evidence-based programme delivery; workforce and leadership development; cross-department coordination and a core offer of services.	Hubs should partner with specialist girls and young women's and VAWG services to ensure support for girls and young women is high quality, culturally competent, intersectional, and tailored to their needs. This may include commissioning specialist training for hub staff and creating opportunities for joint delivery.

Recommendations

In ensuring that young women and girls can equally access and benefit from Young Futures Hubs, we have outlined three overarching themes which all hubs should ensure they are following. These themes, alongside the principles, can guide how hubs are resourced, how delivery partners are supported, and support identification of the skills and expertise required to guarantee that young women's and girls' needs are a central part of the success of Young Futures Hubs, rather than an afterthought. Our recommendations fall under each theme, which are:

1. **Preventing harm** – Utilising partnership and collaboration, Young Futures could be part of a wider eco-system to mitigate and prevent harm to young women and girls. Definitions of harm facing young people should always include the forms of violence which girls and young women are most likely to be subject to but which are often overlooked, including sexual and intimate partner violence and abuse.
2. **Responding to harm** – Trauma informed specialists have a unique role to play in supporting young women and girls during and in the aftermath of gender-based harm. Youth services should have specific protocols in place for supporting girls and young women, and for responding to circumstances where a girl or young woman has been harmed by a peer who also uses the hub.
3. **Creating safe spaces** – Young Futures Hubs could unlock the potential of young women and girls across the country by providing protected time and space for gender specific services and support. This may include girls and young women-only mental health support sessions which are designed to respond to the high levels of need; as well as ensuring a good ratio of male to female youth practitioners who are able to create a safe environment for girls and young women within mixed-gender settings.

1. Preventing harm

Knife crime and violence against women and girls are closely intertwined. There has been a surge in police-recorded knife crime against women in recent years (Independent, 2024)³⁰, with recent high-profile incidents revealing the risks of intimate partner knife crime in youth relationships. The government has set ambitions to halve both violence against women and girls and knife crime in a decade – but understanding where these crime categories overlap is important in ensuring the right targeted responses. Rates of violence against women and girls are significantly higher than those reported to the police or known to services and violence against women and girls is too often overlooked or misunderstood by crime prevention agencies.

Young Futures Prevention Partnerships have an important role to play in preventing harm, identifying children and young people vulnerable to being drawn into crime and ensuring they are able to access appropriate support, including via the Young Futures Hubs. Prevention Partnerships are designed to focus on young people at risk of involvement in crime and establish safe pathways to support and opportunities that reduce and prevent harm. With girls and young women less likely to be identified by the police, it is vital that prevention partners take tailored approaches to ensuring girls and young women at risk of involvement in violence can access support – as well as ensuring that perpetrators of violence against women and girls identified

through the Prevention Partnerships pathways receive appropriate tailored interventions such as those accredited by Respect.

The Home Office and Department for Culture, Media and Sport should outline how the Young Futures programme will tackle violence against women and girls, including by:

- Developing a cross-departmental action plan for preventing and responding to peer on peer youth violence against women and girls;
- Ensuring violence against women and girls is specifically referenced in Young Futures guidance – from partnerships to hubs – and monitoring and evaluating the types of violence addressed by the programme.

Government should ensure seamless alignment between the National Youth Strategy and Young Futures to ensure that every young person should have access to a trusted adult via Young Futures Hubs.

A trusted adult is ideally not a parent, family member, or teacher. Young Minds’ definition of a trusted adult is someone who is “non-judgmental, has no expectations, is honest, reliable and a good listener” (Young Minds, 2022).³¹ Strong trusted adult relationships provided by qualified practitioners in a variety of settings can improve wellbeing, self-esteem and future employment prospects. This is partly through the support they can offer a young person in the transition from education to employment. However, 800,000 secondary school-aged children in the UK are currently without a trusted adult relationship or mentor (Pro Bono Economics, 2024).³² Bringing this figure down could transform the lives of all young people, especially young women and girls.

Young Futures Hubs could be a key collaborator for contextual safeguarding programmes.

Contextual safeguarding goes beyond traditional safeguarding environments (e.g. the school or the home), and aims to work in the community to identify vulnerable children and those at risk of violence and exploitation. Children affected by violence are just as likely (approximately 85% to have a trusted adult, but it is more likely for them to find this figure outside of school (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).

Young Futures Hubs will be a key contact point for children who may struggle with school, be absent or experience difficulties that school and local services have yet to identify. For example, children and young people who perpetrate violence against other children are often vulnerable and minoritised, with 32% of children who are persistently absent found to, at times, perpetrate violence (this figure is at 74% for young people who are permanently excluded, compared to 9% who have never been suspended or excluded) (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).³³ Young Futures could identify the young people who have fallen through the cracks of traditional services and prevent further harm.

2. Responding to harm

Government must ensure sufficient funding for trauma-informed, gender- and culturally responsive specialists who can support girls and young women both in and outside school in order to address the underlying causes of challenges they face, delivered in partnership with specialist women and girls’ and “by and for” services.

While Young Futures Hubs cannot serve as a replacement for frontline domestic and sexual violence services that still require additional funding, they can be effective places to identify and respond to harm either separate to or with support with public services (e.g. health services and the police). Survivors of adolescent domestic abuse have been found to benefit significantly from trauma-informed support, to improve outcomes i.e. mental health for those experienced adverse childhood experiences (Weir et al 2025).³⁴ The case studies outlined in the previous section of this briefing show that these services exist in pockets across the UK, and this could be scaled up as Young Futures Hubs open up. We have listed examples of how specialists could be trained and utilised for young women and girls:

- **Cultural sensitivity:** – engaging with how the problems girls face manifest across different cultural and ethnic communities will be integral to efficient services that can respond to gender-based harm. This could be implemented via culturally sensitive trainings, translation services and undertaking outreach with communities who may not be engaged. Findings from the ‘Getting Out for Good’ programme shows that gender-specific, trauma-informed models (e.g. mentoring and providing safe spaces) can successfully reach and support high-risk girls (Jump et al, 2024).
- **Contextual safeguarding:** through identification of vulnerability and risk of sexual exploitation and flagging to services where appropriate, hubs could be part of “wraparound” provision services that can share data and coordinate support which has been evidenced to prevent harm and improve girls’ future outcomes (Jump et al 2024).

3. Creating safe spaces

Ensuring the voices of young women, girls and families are heard by:

- Commissioning and issuing guidance to local authorities on effective ways to embed co-production with young women and girls into service design, supported by the sharing of best practice and practice guides. This should include involving young people in local design teams as hubs are established. The views and voices of young women and girls should be present throughout every aspect of service design and delivery.
- Providing protected time for girls and young women (e.g. ‘girls only’ days, evenings and events) It’s integral that support for girls goes above and beyond girls’ experiences of violence and harm to also address girls’ needs in other areas (e.g. mental health, careers and relationship support). The government must ensure Young Futures Hubs are properly resourced so that delivery partners can have girls only evenings and events, and dedicated time to understand what young women and girls need from their local hub.

Partnership working

To ensure the hubs are meeting the needs of girls, there must be incentives for hubs to work in collaboration with local organisations who provide specialist support for young women and girls. Specialist services for girls and young women hold strong local relationships and years of specialism, yet too often these services are underfunded and struggling to cope with demand. Local authorities should encourage consortia applications for hubs provision which may include partnership with specialist girls and young women’s services to deliver engagement and

outreach with girls. Hubs may also consider commissioning specialist training for their staff from girls and young women's services, providing co-location and partnership delivery opportunities to girls and young women's services, and establishing clear plans for outreach and referral pathways with local girls and young women's services.

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