

Launch of the National Youth Strategy: Youth Matters

"The current generation are the most connected, yet the most isolated."



The publication of Youth Matters, the first National Youth Strategy in more than two decades, marks a significant moment for young people across England. After years of fragmented provision, declining youth infrastructure and siloed policymaking, the Strategy signals an overdue recognition that young people must be placed at the centre of national priorities.

The Muslim Youth Alliance (MYA) was privileged to attend the launch event of the Youth Strategy on 9th December 2025. The decision to unveil the Strategy in a room full of young people, rather than behind closed policy doors, felt symbolically important. A strategy about young people, launched with young people present, suggests a shift towards a more participatory and grounded approach.

As the Minister reflected, young people were clear in what they asked for:

"People they trust, places to go and things to do."

These words, drawn from more than 14,000 young voices, speak directly to the foundations of healthy adolescence: trusted relationships, safe spaces, and meaningful opportunity.

What We Welcome

Across the youth sector there is relief that long-standing challenges are finally being acknowledged and supported by tangible investment. MYA strongly welcomes the following commitments:

 <p>£350 million for youth facilities Providing much-needed capital investment to rebuild youth centres, community hubs, sports facilities and safe places that have been steadily eroded over the past decade.</p>	 <p>Richer Young Lives Fund Aimed at expanding access to enrichment, culture, creativity, sport, outdoor learning, and social action, recognising that opportunity should not be dictated by postcode or household income.</p>	 <p>500,000 more trusted adults Acknowledging the central role played by youth workers, mentors and community leaders in safeguarding, belonging and wellbeing.</p>
Strengthened pathways into work Including an enhanced Youth Guarantee to support 16–24-year-olds into learning or employment.	Mental Health Support Teams In all schools and colleges by 2029, an important step towards earlier intervention, though one that will require careful implementation and sustained local capacity.	Youth participation structures Including commitments to embed youth voice in decision-making and to lower the voting age to 16.

Taken together, these commitments form a stronger foundation than has existed for many years.

Where the Strategy Falls Short

Optimism must be matched with honesty. If Youth Matters is to deliver equitably, there are significant omissions that must be addressed.

1 Racialised Communities Remain Largely Invisible

While deprivation is acknowledged, the Strategy does not meaningfully confront racial inequality. Young people from Black, Brown and Muslim communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, overcrowded housing, exclusion from enrichment opportunities and reduced access to trusted adults. Failing to explicitly name racialised disadvantage risks universal solutions that do not reach those facing the greatest structural barriers.

2 Faith Is Entirely Absent

Faith is a central source of identity, belonging and support for millions of young people. Yet it is not referenced once in the Strategy. This omission overlooks the vital role of mosques, madrassahs, churches and temples, many of which are among the largest and most trusted providers of youth engagement in their communities.

3 Marginalised Groups Are Overlooked

Muslim girls are one example of young people who face some of the highest participation barriers across sport, outdoor learning, residential, STEM pathways and leadership opportunities. These barriers are well-evidenced, yet the Strategy does not address gendered or culturally specific exclusion. Without targeted approaches, participation gaps will persist.

4 No Strategy for Cross-Sector Alignment

Education, safeguarding, youth work, policing, mental health, and employment continue to be treated as separate policy domains. Yet young people do not experience their lives in silos.

The widely cited "engagement crisis" in schools, rising mental health needs, increasing safeguarding concerns and the long-term erosion of youth provision are interconnected symptoms of a fragmented system that has lost its relational foundations.

While the Strategy acknowledges these pressures, it does not set out how cross-sector alignment will work in practice. There is no framework for shared outcomes, joint accountability or coordinated delivery across statutory services, community provision and the youth sector.

5 Community-Led Provision Is Not Recognised or Resourced

Despite the emphasis on local delivery, the Strategy does not meaningfully recognise the role of community-led, grassroots and faith-rooted organisations, particularly those serving racialised and marginalised communities.

These organisations are often closest to young people, hold deep trust, and are best placed to engage those furthest from mainstream provision. Yet funding systems continue to favour scale, compliance and short-term outputs over relational depth and cultural competence.

Without a shift in how funding is designed and distributed, many community organisations will be expected to deliver outcomes they are not resourced to sustain.

6 Funding Is Framed Around Proof, Not Enablement

Current funding approaches often require organisations to prove impact before they are sufficiently resourced, rather than enabling them to build the capacity, workforce and infrastructure needed to deliver effectively.

For communities facing the greatest disadvantage, this creates a cycle where those with the least capacity are least able to access funding — reinforcing inequality rather than reducing it.

A truly equitable youth strategy must rethink funding to support purchase, participation and provision, not just performance measurement.

7 Data Blindness to Inequality

The absence of disaggregated data by race, ethnicity and faith represents a serious limitation.

Without it, structural inequalities remain obscured, patterns of exclusion go unchallenged, and those facing the greatest barriers are rendered statistically invisible.

"What we cannot see, we cannot address. What we cannot measure, we cannot meaningfully change."

Looking Ahead

Youth Matters provides coherence, but not yet transformation. The next phase, implementation, will determine whether this Strategy reaches all young people, or primarily those already closest to opportunity.

To realise its full potential, MYA calls on government, funders and system leaders to:

Design equity in from the outset, ensuring race, faith, gender and socioeconomic realities shape delivery, measurement and accountability.

Work with community experts who hold trust, particularly minority-led and faith-led organisations rooted in the communities experiencing the greatest barriers.

Rethink funding models, moving from short-term, proof-heavy approaches to long-term investment that enables organisations to build sustainable provision.

Address the barriers facing Muslim girls and other overlooked groups through targeted, culturally competent approaches.

Rebuild the relational infrastructure young people rely on, investing in trusted adults and community-rooted spaces alongside physical buildings.

Break down silos across education, youth work, safeguarding and health, recognising that young people experience these systems as one interconnected reality.

- At MYA, we work at this intersection every day. Through a national network of more than 130 organisations supporting over 14,000 young people each week, we see what becomes possible when identity, belonging and opportunity are taken seriously.

Young people have spoken with clarity. The responsibility now lies with all of us to ensure the system listens, and acts, for every young person.

How MYA Can Help Support The Youth Strategy

The Muslim Youth Alliance is uniquely positioned to support the delivery of Youth Matters in practice. As a national infrastructure body working across more than 130 grassroots, faith-led and global majority-led youth organisations, MYA sits at the intersection of youth work, education, safeguarding, community leadership and opportunity pathways.

We bring together hyperlocal insight, lived experience and national coordination, enabling policy to translate into delivery that reaches young people furthest from opportunity. Through our data, place-based networks and cross-sector partnerships, MYA can support inclusive implementation, inform equitable funding models, amplify underrepresented youth voice and help align statutory services with community-rooted provision. In doing so, we can help ensure this Strategy delivers not only at scale, but with equity, trust and lasting impact.

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