

E4P insights review and consultation: Fact sheet

Inclusive or intrusive? An exploration of young peoples' and practitioners' experiences of demographic data collection and equity in the youth sector

Background

The College, funded by Youth Futures Foundation, has started to:

- A) Explore knowledge, practice, and views on the collection and use of demographic data in the youth sector in England; and
- B) Co-create recommendations for any changes that would result in better practices - with the definition of 'better' to be first and foremost shaped by young people and practitioners.

This project is called E4P ("Embedding Equitable Evaluation in Employability Provision"). We believe the insights to be widely applicable to everyone working with and for young people in the youth sector.

The work began in December 2022 and will close at the end of October 2024. It is, however, only the start of an important conversation, and our hope is that funders, researchers, and practitioners can move forward with key insights and recommendations from the project.

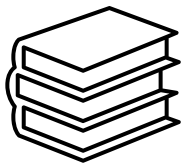


What did we want to find out?

We wanted to learn more about the following questions:

1. Why do organisations collect demographic data?
2. Does it matter which demographic data organisations collect, or what they do with it?
3. What messages would young people and practitioners like to give organisations who collect demographic data? If they were to redesign the process, what would they suggest?

We undertook several activities to help with this, between April 2023 and July 2024

What did we do?

What		
		
Literature review	Focus groups with young people (online and in-person)	Interviews with practitioners (online)
We reviewed 45 items of literature.	We spoke to 63 young people aged 14-24 in 10 focus groups. These young people were involved with youth organisations in Northampton, Birmingham, Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Canterbury, and London.	We spoke individually with 15 youth practitioners from the same geographical areas as the young people's focus groups, as well as the Southwest and East Anglia.
Why		
To understand what current literature exists on the topics of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic data collection with young people in England; Guidance or any standardised tools available for the youth sector in England; and The topic of “deficit narratives” within demographic data practice. 	To learn more about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people’s understanding of why organisations collect demographic data; The words they feel describe their identities; How it feels to be asked these questions; and What they would like to see organisations do next. 	To learn more about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners’ experience of collecting demographic data; The phrasing and delivery of questions about demographic data; How and why demographic information is used within their organisations; and Next steps and developments in which they would be particularly interested.

What did we hear?

Detailed insights are provided in the full Insights Report and associated outputs. Below, we share a summary of behaviours, practices, and actions for *those of us involved in demographic data practice in the youth sector* to either stop or start, and that we believe will help to improve demographic data practices based on what we have heard so far.

Behaviours, practices, and actions that we need to stop

- Creating and contributing to ambiguity or confusion around the purpose of demographic data collection
- Using approaches (including categories and methods) that exacerbate stereotypes and reinforce deficit narratives ⁵
- Using approaches that reinforce a checklist or tokenistic approach to demographic data collection
- Collecting demographic data in a way that invokes negative feelings and emotions in young people, such as apathy, irrelevance, boredom, fear, stress, or exasperation
- Prioritising the needs of funders or marketing/advertising above the needs of young people; and
- Creating multiple barriers to engagement and access (including collection tools, language, and age appropriateness).

Behaviours, practices, and actions that we need to start

- Build in and protect sufficient time for the process of demographic data collection, e.g. to enable reflection, for trust and relationships to be built, and for conversations about identity
- Co-create approaches (including categories and methods) with young people that truly represent (as much as possible) how young people identify, which may include ‘fluid’ and/or be complex in other ways
- Build our understanding of what constitutes data ‘accuracy’ from the perspective of different stakeholders and/or different uses for demographic data
- Develop and improve support, training, and resources for practitioners
- Develop nuanced, tailored approaches for specific data categories (e.g. sexuality, ethnicity)
- Develop and use consistent language across the sector; and
- Develop clear, brief, and specific guidance on why data is being collected and how it will be used.

As we do this, we need to prioritise:

- Ongoing conversations and co-creation so that young people can influence change on issues that affect them (being mindful of the extent to which young people might want to be involved, given that some have expressed a sense of apathy or disconnect)
- Approaches that support underrepresented communities

- Supporting improvements to practice and provision (over simply 'proving' that something is happening)
- An awareness of the multiple impacts that demographic data collection can have on young people's identity and wellbeing; and
- Addressing tensions between the requests of funders and the interests and needs of young people.

It is also worth noting that, from the literature review, we were unable to identify any substantial guidance that was specific to England **and** to the context of working with young people.¹ This further underscores the need for better understanding and guidance **specifically** for youth sector organisations in England and – to inform this – the need to have open conversations with those impacted by the process, so that guidance is informed by young people and youth work practitioners.

Where are we now?

We have written up what we heard into an Insights Report. This is quite long, as the topic is complex, young people and practitioners generously shared a lot about their experiences, and we wanted to share their quotes word-for-word as much as possible. To break these insights down, we have created shorter, more bite-sized documents and resources. You can find all this content on our website here: <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/embedding-equitable-evaluation-employability-provision-e4p>

We are now taking these outputs out for discussion. This review will inform a series of final recommendations for how this work could be moved forward within the youth sector, in future.

What is the purpose of this review?

We want to sense check our interpretation of the findings and ask you:

- Do any of the key findings resonate with you/your experiences?
- Is there anything that does not resonate with you/your experiences?
- What would make the biggest difference to your experience/practice right now?
- Is there anything else you would like to add to the conversation?

We understand that the insights above might not feel immediately actionable, and that our collective ability to improve practice will require a sustained, systemic approach – as well as time, effort, and resources. We will be doing our best to make this explicit in the final recommendations, and to

¹ NB. This does not include discussions on a 'demographic data standard' being developed by the College with Back Youth Alliance (BYA) Members, which aims to agree a common approach to describing the young people we work with. At the time of writing this report, this document is not yet publicly available.

identify different types of actions and stakeholders. Your input through the consultation will help to shape this.

We also acknowledge that this project has not yet engaged with youth sector funders, who are a key stakeholder and influencer within demographic data practice. **We are particularly keen to speak to interested funders as part of the consultation phase.**

If you are holding a meeting, forum, or similar event over the consultation period and would like us to come and facilitate a discussion, we might be able to arrange this – please get in touch with Catherine to arrange (catherine.mitchell@ymcageorgewilliams.uk).

How can I contribute my thoughts and ideas?

There are two options, depending on your capacity and preferences. These will be open from **Monday 16 September – Friday 11 October** and are detailed below:

Online survey	1:1 online call
<p>We are inviting anyone (including young people, practitioners, researchers, and funders) to head to our online survey and share responses to the consultation questions there.</p> <p><u>Please complete this form to give your consent and share your responses</u></p> <p>Young people and adults can personally receive a £10 high street voucher as thanks for responding to the survey.</p>	<p>We are inviting practitioners and funders to book an online conversation with one of our project team members. This will be a relaxed space in which we will explore the insights and questions above with you.</p> <p><u>Please complete this form to give your consent and book a call with us</u></p> <p>We can offer £50 per organisation as thanks for your practitioners taking the time to have a call with us.</p>

If neither of these options work for you but you would like to contribute, please get in touch with Catherine so that we can explore the options (catherine.mitchell@ymcageorgewilliams.uk)

What will happen after this?

The project timeline and resources will end in October 2024. Before this, we will be writing up a clear set of recommendations, informed by the consultation and tailored for different audiences such youth organisations and practitioners, researchers and evaluators, and funders. We will also be advocating for additional funding to continue or support this work in the future, drawing on what we have heard and learnt so far.