



## Youth social action is a critical lever in boosting social mobility

*Young people’s character is transformed*

In 2016 the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) conducted RCTs of several social action programmes that embed the 6 quality principles and the results showed that young people who participated has robust improvement in character qualities like **empathy, cooperation, resilience, problem-solving and sense of community**<sup>i</sup>.  
The impact of youth social action on essential life skills was also corroborated in RCTs led by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) of the youth social action programmes Children’s University<sup>ii</sup> and Youth United<sup>iii</sup>.

*They develop the skills employers want*

85% of employers surveyed by the CBI said they prioritise character & attitude over academic results<sup>iv</sup>.  
A CIPD survey reported that 67% of **employers say candidates with social action experience demonstrate better employability skills**<sup>v</sup>.  
81% of young people participating in meaningful social action believe it will help them get a job in the future<sup>vi</sup>.

*They experience greater well-being*

The National Youth Social Action Survey has been running annually since 2014, carrying out face-to-face interviews with young people across the UK aged 10-20. It has consistently shown that social action is associated with **improved levels of well-being**<sup>v</sup>. The same survey revealed that young people participating in social action have **stronger personal networks and higher life satisfaction**<sup>vii</sup>.  
In one of the BIT-tested youth social action programmes, young people reported **reduced anxiety** by over a fifth<sup>i</sup>.

*Youth social action can improve attainment*

The EEF RCT with Children’s University shows social action activities have a positive impact on **maths and reading in KS2**, as well as **non-cognitive outcomes**<sup>ii</sup>.  
The EEF’s RCTs focussing on in-school social action, **peer tutoring** has shown a positive impact on learning, equivalent to approximately **5 additional months’ progress**<sup>viii</sup>.  
A meta-analysis of 62 RCTs completed in the United States reveals that when social action was integrated into the curriculum there was a significant improvement in academic performance<sup>ix</sup>.

*Communities become better integrated and socially mobile*

The Social Integration Commission recommends youth social action as a way to address the lack of social integration that costs our economy an estimated £6bn each year<sup>x</sup>.  
Engaging young people with vulnerable groups in health & social care settings increases understanding and tolerance of these groups, leading to enhanced community integration and understanding, increased community networks and capacity<sup>xi</sup>.

*There is a socio-economic divide in participation*

The National Youth Social Action Survey shows the gap in participation between those from the most and least affluent backgrounds to be significant (51% vs. 32% in 2017 - similar to the baseline of 51% vs 31% in 2014)<sup>v</sup>.

*Schools and colleges are crucial in helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds participate*

In 2017, 65% of young people doing social action got involved through school or college; moreover teachers are the biggest motivator for young people from the least affluent families<sup>v</sup>.  
The appetite for social action remains strong: the majority of young people (58%) have taken part in some form of social action over the last 12 months and 68% say they are likely to take part in the future<sup>xii</sup>.  
81% of secondary school pupils in England want their school to do more to support them to participate in social action<sup>xiii</sup>.



*Teachers increasingly see social action as part of their school culture*

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) have polled teachers for the past 3 years to find out if their perceptions of social action in their school have changed over time. Primary and Secondary school teachers increasingly see social action as part of their school’s culture and practice (34% in 2016 vs. 59% in 2018), but fewer than 25% say over half of their students participate regularly<sup>xiv</sup>.

There is a significant gap in teachers’ perceptions of their school’s social action culture with just 27% of Primary teachers in high%FSM schools saying social action is embedded, compared with 57% of Primary teachers in low%FSM<sup>xiii</sup>.

*There are significant benefits of starting early*

Those who first get involved in service to others under the age of 10 were found to be more than two times more likely to have formed a habit of social action than if they started aged 16-18<sup>xv</sup>

*The DfE has a unique role to play in supporting school leaders in areas of high deprivation to embed social action*

One of the key barriers to schools with the highest %FSM making social action part of their culture & practice was lack of recognition from DfE or Ofsted, however, in 2018 fewer teachers report this<sup>xiii</sup>.

Under Nicky Morgan’s leadership, social action was embedded in the **DfE’s Character agenda**, with character grants and awards recognising youth social action in schools & organisations who work alongside them.

Since then, the DfE have embedded the 6 quality principles of youth social action into their guidance on **work experience** in Study Programmes<sup>xvi</sup>.

The DfE have more recently been working to ensure youth social action is a key element of their social mobility strategy, specifically in **Opportunity Areas**.

Ofsted carried out a small-scale thematic survey into high%FSM schools and colleges who had used social action to achieve significant improvements to their academic or Ofsted results<sup>xvii</sup>.

*Schools who embed social action use it to achieve their broader outcomes*

Headteachers from schools and colleges who have a culture of social action identified four key principles to their practice<sup>xviii</sup>:

- 1) Embed social action in the school mission, values & calendar
- 2) Inspire & empower young people to lead their own social action
- 3) Recognise and reward youth social action in and out of school
- 4) Build strong partnerships with local and national organisations to help young people make a difference

*The #iwill campaign is a cross-sector movement across the UK, coordinated by Step Up To Serve*

As a campaign that has grown from 50 founding partners in 2013 to over 875 today, its ambition is to give young people the opportunity to take part in quality social action from a young age, especially those from the least affluent communities, building a habit for life and further empowering them to be active citizens today and in the future.

Step Up To Serve is the charity that coordinates the collective effort of the #iwill campaign by connecting partners, communicating the stories and impact of quality social action and challenging partners to do more.

*#iwill campaign has secured significant seed funding to achieve its goals*

The #iwill Fund brings together a coalition of funders that all contribute to embed meaningful social action into the lives of young people. It is made possible thanks to £40 million joint investment from the Big Lottery Fund and DCMS to support young people to access high-quality social action opportunities, enabling them to participate sustainably, many of whom would not have had the chance to before.

<sup>i</sup> [Behavioural Insights Team \(2016\) Evaluating Youth Social Action](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Education Endowment Foundation \(2017\) Children’s University](#)

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- iii [Education Endowment Foundation \(2016\) Youth Social Action Trials: Youth United](#)
  - iv [CBI & Pearson \(2015\) Education and Skills Survey](#)
  - v [CIPD & YouGov \(2015\) Learning to Work Survey](#)
  - vi [Ipsos MORI \(2016\) The National Youth Social Action Survey](#)
  - vii Ipsos MORI (2014, [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#)) The National Youth Social Action Survey
  - viii [Education Endowment Foundation \(2018\) Peer tutoring summary](#)
  - ix Celio, C.I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011) A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students; Journal of Experiential Education, 34(2), 164-181
  - x [Social Integration Commission \(2015\). Kingdom United? Thirteen steps to tackle social segregation](#)
  - xi [Volunteering Matters \(2015\) Toolkit: Youth Social Action in Health and Social Care](#)
  - xii Ipsos MORI (2017) The National Youth Social Action Survey
  - xiii Ipsos MORI (2015) Schools Omnibus Survey
  - xiv National Foundation for Educational Research (2016-2018) Teacher Voice Omnibus
  - xv [The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues \(2017\) A Habit of Service](#)
  - xvi [Department for Education \(2017\) 16 to 19 study programmes. Planning and delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes.](#)
  - xvii [Ofsted \(2016\) Social action: good examples from schools and colleges](#)
  - xviii [The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues with Step Up To Serve \(2015\) Transforming Young People and Communities](#)