



CordisPulse

March 2026

Welcome to March's edition of the CordisPulse – a monthly digest of key research and policy developments across the sectors in which Cordis Bright provides research and consultancy services, i.e. adult social care and health, children and young people's services, and criminal justice.

Across adult social care, the debate about reform and what this might actually mean is increasingly shifting—from whether we can afford to act, to whether we can afford not to. Both options carry risks for the whole of society but slowly we are building an evidence base which can be used for impartial and informed guidance in this debate.

Recent work led by Cordis Bright for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights the scale of what has too often been overlooked: low pay is not simply a workforce issue, but a systemic inefficiency that carries significant hidden costs. With around 40% of care workers paid below the Real Living Wage and persistently high turnover, the sector absorbs substantial financial and operational pressures through recruitment, training, and service instability.

This evidence aligns closely with the tone and urgency of Baroness Louise Casey's recent address to the Nuffield Trust Summit. Her call for a “moment of reckoning” underscores a system that has evolved without a clear political settlement. Fragmented across institutions, reliant on low-paid labour, and lacking coherent accountability. The consequences are felt not only by the workforce, but by individuals and families navigating a system that is too often complex, fragile and under strain.

From a Cordis Bright perspective, these two strands—evidence on hidden costs and a renewed national discussion on reform—point to the same conclusion: investment in the social care workforce is not a marginal policy choice, nor should it be a point of political difference, but fundamental to the systems sustainability. As debate accelerates, the sector has an opportunity to reframe low pay not as a cost pressure, but as a critical lever for stability, quality and long-term value.



If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this month's Pulse, please do contact us on 020 7330 9170 or email stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk.

Best wishes,

Dr Stephen Boxford
Director & Head of Research

If you would prefer not to receive future editions of the CordisPulse, please click 'unsubscribe' at the very end of this email. If you would like to discuss anything that arises from the Pulse (or if there are others who you think would like to receive copies) then please contact Dr Stephen Boxford on stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk or 020 7330 9170.

Cordis Bright Ltd, 23/24 Smithfield Street, London, EC1A 9LF.

Telephone: 020 7330 9170

Email: info@cordisbright.co.uk  [@CordisBright](https://twitter.com/CordisBright)

Website: www.cordisbright.co.uk  [Cordis Bright](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cordis-bright)



Cordis Bright News

Youth Endowment Fund published Cordis Bright's evaluation of the STEER mentoring programme

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) has published Cordis Bright's evaluation of the STEER mentoring programme, delivered by Salford Foundation. The study represents one of the largest and most rigorous UK evaluations of a mentoring programme aimed at preventing youth violence.

Our work combined a randomised controlled trial (RCT), implementation and process evaluation, and cost assessment. Across six Greater Manchester boroughs, 689 children were randomly allocated either to receive STEER or to a signposting control group.

The findings provide important insights for organisations delivering mentoring programmes. In particular, the evaluation highlights the importance of strong mentor–mentee relationships, the challenges of delivering programmes at the intended intensity, and the realities of engaging families and young people facing complex circumstances.

Alongside the trial findings, the study adds valuable evidence on how mentoring programmes are implemented in practice and how they can be strengthened in the future

Read more about the evaluation [here](#).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation published Cordis Bright's report on the hidden cost of low pay in the social care sector

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has published Cordis Bright's report examining the hidden costs of low pay in adult social care, particularly, how low wages drive turnover and reduce sector productivity. It also models the potential benefits of raising pay for care workers to at least the Real Living Wage.

Research for this study involved primary and secondary evidence, including academic literature, qualitative interviews with care providers, provider financial data, and Skills for Care sector-level analysis. We quantified recruitment, training, agency and lost-output costs linked to vacancies and turnover.

The findings are especially useful for government, local authorities and commissioners, care providers, and policymakers working on pay and retention in adult social care, because they show that low pay is not just a workforce issue but a system performance issue affecting recruitment, retention and service stability.

Read more from the study [here](#).

Adult Social Care and Health

Reports

Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Cordis Bright. The hidden cost of low pay in the social care sector

This report examines the hidden costs of low pay in social care, particularly the inefficiencies and lost output associated with staff shortages and high turnover. Cordis Bright was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to carry out the study, which combined an evidence review, interviews with social care leaders, and financial and workforce data from 11 independent-sector providers.

Key findings include:

- Low pay is a major driver of turnover, with 9 in 10 care workers who moved jobs within the sector receiving a pay rise.
- Turnover is also influenced by wider factors, including management quality, working conditions, career progression and competition from other sectors.
- Staff turnover creates substantial costs, with median recruitment costs of £800 per worker and median training costs of £884.
- Turnover also reduces sector capacity, with median lost output during recruitment estimated at £4,625.
- Raising pay could partly offset these costs, while improving retention and creating a more stable, productive and secure care sector.

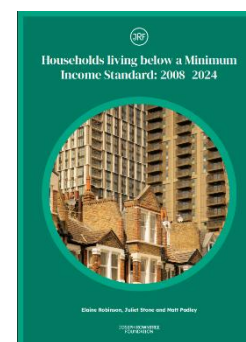
The report suggests that higher pay would be partly offset by savings across the NHS, social care and the wider system, while also creating a more stable, productive and secure care sector for workers and people who draw on care. In this context, the Government's proposed Fair Pay Agreement offers an opportunity for a properly funded pay settlement for social care workers.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Households living below a Minimum Income Standard: 2008-2024

This report gives an estimate of the proportion of people living below the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) and below 75% of MIS, a level associated with greater risk of material deprivation. Covering the period from 2008/09 to 2023/24, it shows that income inadequacy increased in 2023/24 and is now higher than at the start of the series.

Key findings include:

- 37.5% of people were living below MIS in 2023/24, the highest level since the series began in 2008/09.
- For the first time, most children (52.6%) were living below MIS.



- Children in lone-parent families were far more likely to be below MIS than those in couple-parent families (84.2% versus 42.7%).
- Nearly half of 16–24-year-olds remained below MIS, although the risk for this age group has fallen; pensioners remained less at risk, and the proportion of single pensioners below MIS also fell.
- Income inadequacy is increasingly affecting working households, with most households below MIS now containing at least one working adult; lone parents are especially affected, with 59.5% below MIS even when working full-time.

The King's Fund. 'Not my priority' How the public sees social care (and what can be done about it)

This report examines public attitudes towards adult social care in England and their implications for reform.

Key findings include:

- Many people do not understand the basics of social care, who provides it, how it is funded and what it does.
- Social care is far down the list of policy priorities for the public. The proportion of people saying it is a top issue has never exceeded 20% and is typically between 1 and 10%.
- Public satisfaction with social care is very low (13%) and expectation of improvement is limited. People who say they have had contact with social care are more dissatisfied than those who have not.
- People want the state to cover most of the cost of social care but there is less agreement on the details. People say they support national taxation as a way of paying for social care, though the strength of that support is unclear.



These findings suggest that reform is challenging because public understanding of adult social care is limited, the Care Act's focus on choice and control has not strongly shaped expectations, public views are heavily influenced by media and personal networks, and political attention tends to focus mainly on the contentious issue of funding.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Ethnicity, poverty, and in-work inequalities in the UK

This report draws on a range of studies to examine how labour market structures and institutions contribute to higher poverty rates among Bangladeshi, Black African and Pakistani communities. Focusing on in-work inequalities, it explores job quality, barriers to better-paid work, visa-related disadvantage, and the policy levers that could improve work and living standards.

Key findings include:

- **Low pay and poor job quality:** Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black workers are more likely to be in low-paid work, with some ethnic minority groups also reporting lower job control than White workers.
- **Insecure work:** Ethnic minority workers are more likely to be in precarious jobs, including zero-hours, underemployed part-time and some gig work. Pakistani men are also more likely to be self-employed, though ethnic minority self-employed workers often earn less than White peers.
- **Barriers to progression:** Educational gains do not translate equally into better jobs or pay, with barriers including discrimination, non-recognition of overseas qualifications, limited networks and restrictive workplace cultures.
- **Persistent and intersectional inequality:** Racial discrimination, harassment and bullying remain common, especially where ethnicity intersects with gender and religion.
- **Visa-related disadvantage:** For some migrants, immigration controls and visa conditions increase insecurity and vulnerability to exploitation.
- **Policy implications:** Measures such as the National Living Wage, ethnicity pay gap reporting and stronger employment protections could help, if properly enforced and designed to address intersectional discrimination.

Work Foundation. Breaking down barriers: How remote and hybrid work can support disabled workers

This Nuffield Foundation-funded report examines how remote and hybrid working can better support disabled people's entry into, retention in, and progression at work. Using mixed methods, it explores disabled workers' experiences, stakeholder views on Access to Work, and employers' implementation of remote and hybrid working.

Key findings include:

- Remote and hybrid work was widely seen as beneficial, improving disabled workers' health, wellbeing, work-life balance, productivity and ability to manage health conditions, caring responsibilities and work tasks.
- Preferences for flexibility were strong, with most participants wanting to continue remote or hybrid working and many saying remote options were important when looking for a new job or staying in work.
- Experiences were uneven, with women and younger workers often reporting stronger benefits, while Black and ethnic minority workers and lower-income workers were less likely to report positive outcomes.
- Remote and hybrid work only worked well with proper support, including adequate equipment, reasonable adjustments, autonomy, and strong support from managers and colleagues.

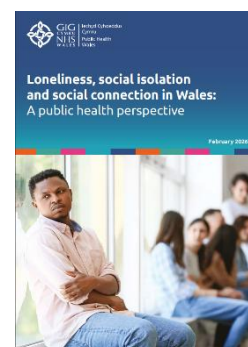


- Employers also saw clear benefits, especially for recruitment, retention, wellbeing and sickness absence, but noted gaps between policy and practice and the need for more inclusive implementation.
- Key barriers remained, including isolation, pressure to return onsite, incomplete reasonable adjustments, and delays or shortfalls in Access to Work support.

Public Health Wales. Loneliness, social isolation and social connection in Wales: A public health perspective

This report takes a public health perspective on loneliness, social isolation and social connection in Wales, summarising evidence on prevalence, risk factors, health and wellbeing impacts, responses, examples of practice, and priorities for action.

It found that 13% of people aged 16+ in Wales feel lonely, 13% are socially isolated, and 71% feel fairly or very connected to others, with experiences varying by age, deprivation, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. While a range of interventions exist across Wales, stronger evaluation is needed to understand what works, for whom, and in what contexts.



Key recommendations across 4 key areas include:

- **Data collection** should prioritise routine measurement of social isolation in Wales, more detailed age-based analysis, mapping existing social connection data sources, and creating a central data hub for loneliness, isolation and social connection.
- **Research** should build the evidence on social isolation in Wales, including who is most affected, the health impacts, cross-sector implications, and the role of digital technology in supporting connection safely.
- **Interventions** should target higher-risk groups, strengthen evaluation of what works and for whom, recognise the value of indirect approaches, align with wider public health action, and be co-produced with communities.
- **Partnerships and networks** should increase cross-sector awareness of the health, social and economic impacts of social disconnection, create regular opportunities to share evidence, learning and practice, and strengthen links with international networks and initiatives.

Briefings

The Health Foundation. Fixing the front doors? Public perceptions of the NHS and general practice

This briefing offers insights from a series of surveys by The Health Foundation with Ipsos to understand public attitudes towards the NHS. Findings from the survey undertaken in 2025 via Ipsos' Knowledge Panel suggest that public views of the NHS remain negative overall. Compared to 6 months ago, more think the general standard of NHS care worsened over the past 12 months and will fall further in the year ahead – though people are still less pessimistic than before the 2024 General Election. Nearly half of people who had a health



concern in the past 12 months avoided or delayed contacting their GP, raising concerns about unmet need. Making it easier to get appointments at GP practices and improving A&E waiting times are now tied as the public's top priorities for the NHS. Persistent public concerns about problems in general practice and A&E – the 'front doors' of the NHS – mean policymakers may need to reassess their priorities.

Children and Young People's Services

Reports

Youth Endowment Fund. Evaluation of the Salford Foundation's STEER Programme in Manchester: An efficacy randomised controlled trial

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) commissioned Cordis Bright to evaluate the STEER mentoring programme delivered by the Salford Foundation and funded by YEF. The programme is a mentoring intervention that aims to reduce children's involvement in violence. It is delivered by youth workers (mentors), over a period of 4 weeks, providing wraparound support.

Through a randomised controlled trial, implementation and process evaluation and cost assessment, the study offers insights on the impact of the mentoring programme and how they can be strengthened.

Key findings include:

- The trial found a small negative effect on self-reported offending, with children in STEER slightly more likely to report offending than those who did not receive STEER, though this estimate is uncertain and should be treated cautiously.

STEER showed a moderate impact on reducing emotional symptoms and a small impact on reducing peer difficulties and on improving pro-social behaviour. It demonstrated a small negative impact on conduct problems. These are secondary outcomes and should be treated with more caution. The evaluation highlighted several lessons for mentoring programmes:

- **Relationships matter:** Children consistently described trusted relationships with mentors as the most valuable part of the programme.
- **Intensity and engagement are critical:** Sustained mentoring contact may be necessary to achieve behavioural change, but maintaining this intensity can be challenging when working with children facing complex life circumstances.
- **Family engagement can be difficult:** Mentoring programmes often operate alongside multiple other services. This can make it harder for families to engage consistently with additional support.
- **Implementation matters:** Understanding how programmes are delivered in practice, including dosage, engagement and local system factors, is essential for interpreting trial results and improving interventions.





Department for Education. RISE targeted intervention: interim process evaluation report

This report by the Department for Education (DfE) evaluates the bespoke Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) targeted intervention for ‘stuck’ schools as part of the government’s Opportunity Mission. The Opportunity Mission focuses on breaking down the barriers to opportunity and ending the link between background and success. RISE aims to raise standards for all children and young people, especially the most disadvantaged, by helping schools improve and tackling barriers to opportunity.



RISE targeted intervention: interim process evaluation report

February 2026

Philip Wilson, Georgina Cowen and Rose Suddaby (York Consulting LLP); Kathryn Crowther and Louise Starks (KMC Research); Dr David Greatbatch and Sue Tate



This formative process evaluation focuses on the targeted intervention offer and draws on interviews with stakeholders involved in delivering or receiving it. It began in April 2025 and will run until November 2027.

Emerging findings suggest that early implementation was broadly positive. Stakeholders were generally supportive, adviser-school matching usually worked well, and school improvement plans were developed collaboratively. Main challenges highlighted include tight timescales, rushed or unclear communication, slow approval processes, uneven matching of supporting organisations, and uncertainty about the adviser’s ongoing role.

Department for Education. Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group Report: Recommendations for mainstream education

In November 2024, the DfE commissioned an independent Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group (NDFTG) to report on how best to support neurodivergent children and young people in mainstream education settings.

The Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group: report

Recommendations for mainstream education

February 2026

The report draws on research, existing evidence, and extensive consultation with parents and carers, neurodivergent children, young people and adults, education staff, charities and networks, academics, sector leaders, government stakeholders, and local and national organisations.

The report sets out recommendations for government action across four priority areas:

1. **Identification and support:** Equip education professionals with evidence-based tools to identify strengths and needs, improve information-sharing across services, and involve parents and neurodivergent young people in planning.
2. **Workforce development:** Provide high-quality training on neurodivergence for teachers, leaders and support staff.
3. **Inclusive practice:** Increase flexibility in curriculum and assessment and adapt learning environments and behaviour policies to support inclusion.
4. **Funding and commissioning:** Strengthen cross-sector planning and commissioning, increase funding for schools’ core offer, and create clear local routes for resolving issues.

Department for Education. Improving the kinship local offer and approach to kinship care

This report by the National Kinship Care Ambassador summarises learnings generated from September 2024 onwards to inform the development of kinship local offers, support partner agencies involved in supporting children and families and national policy teams overseeing kinship care reform

Findings were gathered through engagement with children and young people, kinship carers, parents, 12 local authorities, 10 voluntary and community sector organisations, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the National Association of Virtual School Heads.

The report outlines key themes and considerations that stakeholders identified as relevant when designing a kinship local offer that is clear, accessible, and aligned with existing local systems. Engagement activity highlighted several recurring themes across local areas:

- **Awareness and accessibility:** Many families do not realise they are kinship families or know what support is available. Digital-only communication can miss some carers, so printed materials may also be needed.
- **Inconsistent eligibility:** In some areas, support depends on legal status rather than need, meaning children in the same household can receive different levels of help.
- **Limited visibility of informal care:** Informal kinship arrangements are often not identified by local authorities, reducing opportunities for early help and proportionate support.
- **Clarity of responsibility across agencies:** Kinship support may be perceived as the responsibility of children's social care alone, despite the need for involvement across education, health, housing and wider partnership structures.
- **Safeguarding expectations:** There is variation in how safeguarding roles and responsibilities are communicated to families, particularly where legal permanence orders are granted.

Department for Education. Short breaks innovation fund: lessons learned

This report draws on interviews with local authorities involved in the Short breaks for disabled children innovation fund and their annual impact reports, to help local authorities review and improve their short breaks offer.

Short breaks, sometimes called respite care, are a statutory duty under the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011. Local authorities must provide a range of breaks for disabled children and young people, and for their parents or carers. In 2021, the DfE secured £30 million from HM Treasury to help local authorities expand provision, improve access for under-represented groups, and test new delivery models.

The report brings together lessons from the programme to help local authorities improve the effectiveness and efficiency of short breaks.

Key findings and recommendations include:

- **Innovation is needed in commissioning as well as delivery.** The programme showed that improving short breaks is not just about new services, but also about how local authorities commission, coordinate and deliver them. Local authorities should set a clear vision for impact and identify what structural changes are needed to achieve it.
- **Short breaks can support rising Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) need.** Many authorities used the funding to respond to growing demand from children and young people with SEMH or EBSA, groups not traditionally included in short breaks. Local authorities should review who is accessing provision and consider whether a broader approach could better meet local need.
- **The move to a more child centred approach must not be to the detriment of a whole family support.** Short breaks are vital for parent-carers, and any move away from respite for families risks undermining their value.
- **Co-production and multi-agency join up drive positive impact.** Local authorities should bring together stakeholders to discuss the existing offer and develop a vision for the future short breaks in the local area.
- **Accountability and impact assessment drive success.** Designing services from scratch, with built-in monitoring and local and national impact assessment, was linked to stronger outcomes. Local authorities should use tools such as KPIs, accountability boards and risk logs to assess the impact of their short breaks approach.

Barnardo's. Communication, Trauma, and Weight: Making sure “sickness to prevention” works for all young people

This report was produced by the NHS Young Researchers, a group of 25 young people aged 16 to 24 within the wider NHS Youth Forum, working with Barnardo's and NHS England to amplify young people's voices in healthcare. It examines whether young people feel listened to by NHS services in relation to their physical and emotional needs, and how this could be improved.

Focusing on the “Sickness to Prevention” strand of the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, the study uses a mixed-methods approach and draws on the lived experiences of diverse young people to identify perceived gaps in the plan.

Key findings include:

- 72% of young people feel that how they are negatively impacted how NHS staff listen to them.
- 65% of young people feel that their previous experience of healthcare has made them less confident accessing them again in the future.



The group recommended the following:

- Collaborate with young people on a ‘communication protocol’ to ensure every young voice gets heard.
- Use the LEMUR protocol as a starting point for engaging with young people: speak directly to them, explain care clearly, make space for questions, understand the wider impact of their health issue, and seek consent, report concerns and refer to support where needed.
- Expand current waiting well provisions for children and young people.
- Strengthen training, resources and targeted support to tackle discrimination and support young carers and young people ‘on the move’.

Barnardo’s. Shifting Care to the Community: What does this mean for young people?

This report, produced by the NHS Young Researchers with Barnardo’s and NHS England, examines how the shift to community care can better support young people’s health and wellbeing. Drawing on mixed-methods evidence from young people, parents, carers and NHS staff, it highlights poor care experiences, access barriers, limited involvement in decisions, tokenistic participation, and the need for more joined-up support across services.

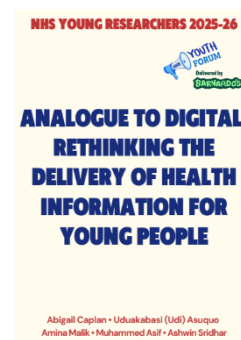


The report found and recommended the following:

- **Greater improvements to communication, accessibility, visibility of services, and cultural competency are needed.** The data highlighted concerns/negative experiences that young people have had over communication, barriers to accessibility, visibility of services, and a lack of cultural competency within community care services. This was further reinforced by responses from the parent and carer survey.
- **More focus on engaging a broader range of people with diverse lived experiences is needed,** in particular, including the voices of carers, refugees, asylum seekers and looked after children/care leavers. This can be done through increasing funding and availability of peer support workers or lived experience workers who can understand an individual’s experience from a lived experience lens - an area missing from the Government’s National Youth Strategy.
- **Improving existing services must come before creating new services.** The quality of existing services needs to improve before creating new services, to ensure they remain fit and accessible for young people, parents, and carers who use them, as well as staff. It is vital that, during this shift, that the voices of those already excluded from health and social care services are not further marginalised or disadvantaged. NHS England and social care services need to collaborate to ensure the shift from hospital to community care is truly fit for purpose and meets the needs of young people.

Barnardo’s. Analogue to Digital: Rethinking the delivery of health information for young people

This report, produced by the NHS Young Researchers with Barnardo's and NHS England, focuses on the shift from analogue to digital within the NHS's *Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England*. Drawing on survey data from 13- to 25-year-olds across England, it examines the health information sources and formats young people use, their trust in those sources, whether they act on the advice they receive, and the factors influencing their engagement with health influencers.



Key findings include:

- 75% of young people use the NHS website and app for their health information.
- Over 30% of young people use short videos and image posts for health information and trust it more when it comes from the NHS, government or qualified professionals.
- Most young people had acted on health information found online, including researching symptoms and conditions, seeking medical advice, changing diet or exercise, and buying supplements.

Recommendations include:

- NHS public health campaigns should prioritise a strong, consistent and timely social media presence, using platforms young people already engage with, such as Instagram and TikTok, including for urgent public health messaging.
- NHS social media content should be authentic, evidence-based, and delivered by qualified or experienced individuals to build trust.
- Schools should keep online safety education up to date and strengthen young people's critical thinking, including how to identify misinformation, AI-generated content, political bias, and reliable health information sources.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. National Citizen Service Evaluation 2023 to 2025

The 'National Citizen Service Evaluation' was undertaken by an external consortium (Verian, The Social Agency and London Economics) and outlines combined findings across both years of the new National Citizen Service (NCS) programme delivered by National Citizen Service Trust (NCST).

The National Citizen Service (NCS) was a major DCMS-funded youth programme for 16- to 17-year-olds in England for over a decade. Before COVID-19, it mainly offered intensive part-residential programmes lasting 2 to 4 weeks, twice a year. Between 2023 and 2025, the model was redesigned from a single residential offer to a year-round programme with three service lines: shorter themed residential experiences focused on confidence, social action or work-readiness; community activities, including both open-access and targeted provision; and digital experiences ranging from self-guided content to live sessions and immersive games.

A process and impact evaluation were carried out in both years of the evaluation, and an economic evaluation was conducted in the first year due to data limitations.

Key findings include:

- **The redesigned NCS model was broadly welcomed and seen as more inclusive.** Delivery partners supported the shift to a more flexible year-round model with residential, community and digital offers.
- **Young people’s experiences were generally positive, especially in residential provision, which also appeared stronger for some outcomes.** Participants valued meeting new people, trying new activities and support from staff, and residential delivery seemed particularly effective at promoting social mixing.
- **Impacts were mixed.** Residential participants showed some gains in life skills, volunteering and attitudes to social mixing, but many other intended outcomes showed no significant effect.
- **Implementation and evaluation limitations reduced the programme’s potential.** Contracting delays, recruitment and financial pressures, weak links between service lines, and funding uncertainty made delivery harder, while the evaluation was better suited to residential than community or digital offers, meaning wider impacts may not have been fully captured.
- **The main implication is to retain the flexibility of the new model but strengthen delivery and evaluation.** The report points to the need for better timelines, stronger integration, more stable funding and more proportionate monitoring.

Local Government Association. Achieving the best start in life: Research to support a plan for partners

The Local Government Association commissioned Interface Enterprises to examine how 60 English local authorities are working to improve children’s good level of development (GLD). Set against the government’s *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy, published in July 2025, the study explored how local areas are working towards the target of 75% of five-year-olds reaching GLD by 2028.



Drawing on a rapid literature review, case studies, workshops and interviews with 117 workforce stakeholders and 20 parents, the study identified barriers including poverty, limited access to quality early years provision, English as an additional language, workforce shortages, poor data sharing and gaps in support.



Key local approaches included:

- Joined-up leadership across health, education and family support.
- Early identification and intervention for attachment, speech, language and SEND.
- Workforce recruitment, retention and development, including “grow your own” approaches.



- Better use of data and stronger engagement with parents, communities and the voluntary sector.

Parents and professionals highlighted policy priorities including a whole 0–5 approach, stronger workforce capacity to meet rising and more complex SEND needs, enhanced early support pathways before school entry, and greater recognition of and long-term investment in the early years workforce.

National Foundation for Education Research. The Early Years Workforce in England Annual Report 2026

This report funded by the Nuffield foundation is a part of an expanded series of annual labour market reports. The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the early years workforce in England and identify risks and challenges for recruitment and retention. The report summarises the key trends in recruitment, retention, pay, working conditions and wellbeing within the early years workforce, and points towards actions that are likely to have the greatest impact on addressing the workforce challenges identified.

Key findings include:

- Early years staff numbers may have plateaued after years of strong growth and appear to be considerably below the Government’s estimated requirement for delivering the expanded childcare entitlement
- Regions such as the South West, West Midlands and North East may be worst affected by potential staffing shortfalls
- A higher qualified workforce is likely to deliver better quality early years education and care, but qualification levels remain low
- Early years pay is low compared to otherwise similar workers, especially for those early years staff who are more highly qualified
- Early years workers with higher qualification levels report more limited opportunities for career progression compared to similar workers
- Early years work offers higher levels of workplace representation and staff report higher levels of wellbeing compared to similar workers.

The report recommends increasing funding so providers can offer more competitive pay and clearer-progression linked reward, implement the Government’s professional development and career pathway reforms quickly to upskill and retain staff, and strengthen recruitment by promoting the fulfilment, worthwhileness and positive working environments associated with early years work.

Tools and Guidance

Department for Education. Every child achieving and thriving and SEND consultation supporting information



The DfE has put forth a series of documents setting out the key information and proposed reforms in the schools white paper and SEND consultation document for parents and those working in the sector. These documents are focused on the following:

- What parents of children and young people with SEND need to know, what to expect from their child's journey through education, and what every parent carer can expect from the reforms.
- Information on SEND reform for those working in early year settings, leading and working in mainstream schools, for leaders of special schools, AP and specialist post-16 institutions, those working in post-16 settings.
- Information on SEND reforms for parents and carers who have children with EHCP, of young people in special schools and of those receiving SEND support in mainstream schools and colleges.

Home Office. Understanding the National Referral Mechanism: primary school children and secondary school children

This Home Office has published two guides to explain the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The guides for primary school children (between the ages of 4-11 years) and secondary school children (between the ages of 11-16 years) offers information to children on why they have been referred to the NRM and next steps in supporting them.

The guide explains in accessible language what exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery are, what the NRM is, why a child might be referred, how the process works, what decisions can be made, what support may be available, and where else a young person can get help. Its aim is to help children understand the NRM and feel safer and better informed if they have been referred or might be affected and show them where to get help.

The relevant guide can be accessed by clicking the appropriate school phase in the header above.

Criminal Justice

Reports

Ministry of Justice. Turnaround Programme independent process and implementation evaluation: final report

The Ministry of Justice commissioned the National Centre for Social Research to evaluate Turnaround, a youth early intervention programme launched in December 2022 and delivered by Youth Offending Teams to address the root causes of offending among children at risk of entering the justice system through a whole-family approach.

Ministry of Justice
Turnaround Programme –
Independent process and
implementation evaluation
Final Report

The process and implementation evaluation, conducted between April 2024 and May 2025, used a mixed-methods design including a document review, YOT survey, programme data, and interviews with children and parents.

Rosie Turner, Thina Scheel, Lame Maschobane, Nandita Upadhyay,
Tulika Chakrabarty, Charlotte Clutter, Patrick Ogilvie,
Noomi R. Ojienkole, Nathan Hudson and Terry Ng-Knight
National Centre for Social Research
Ministry of Justice Analytical Series
2024

Key findings include:

- Only 7% of children who completed Turnaround had been cautioned or received a judicial outcome by December 2024.
- Children reported improvements in behaviour, education, wellbeing and future outlook.
- Parents and carers reported better family relationships and wellbeing.
- Stakeholders said the programme fills a gap in pre-court diversion, particularly for children outside statutory YOT caseloads.
- Its main strengths were its voluntary, flexible, child-centred and tailored approach, alongside strong relationship-building.
- YOTs reported better service delivery and stronger multi-agency working.
- Challenges included recruitment delays, time pressures and overlap with existing diversion services.

Ministry of Justice. Youth Justice Board Review: Independent report

Sir Nic Dakin, then Minister for Youth Justice, commissioned an independent Public Bodies Review of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) on 18 December 2024. The review was led by Steve Crocker, a former Director of Children's Services, and conducted as part of the Ministry of Justice's final year of the Cabinet Office Public Bodies Review Programme. It concluded in June 2025.

Ministry of Justice
The Youth Justice Board
Public bodies review
Summary and findings

The report calls for retaining but reforming the YJB. Key findings include:

January 2025

- Most stakeholders still support an independent body like the YJB and do not want it abolished.
- The YJB's role should be updated to better reflect the current system and improve performance and governance.
- There is scope for structural and operational reform, including leadership, data, IT, policymaking and efficiency.
- The YJB should provide stronger leadership on what works, advocacy for children, and accountability of partners.
- Recent system performance has improved, with fewer children in custody, police stations and courts, and most services rated good or outstanding.
- Youth justice is inherently multi-agency, spanning justice, policing, education, health, youth work and family support.

Ministry of Justice. Independent Review of the Criminal Courts: Part 2

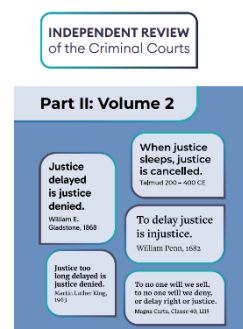
The Independent Review of the Criminal Courts, chaired by Sir Brian Leveson, has published Part 2 of the Review. The review focused on how criminal courts could be reformed and operate as efficiently as possible. It calls for recovery across three levers: resource, structural reform, and efficiency.

Key findings include:

- Long-term underfunding created system-wide pressure, leading to backlogs and long waits across police, CPS, defence, courts, prisons and probation.
- Cases are now more complex and take longer. Digital evidence, disclosure demands, and a higher share of sexual and violent offences have lengthened trials and made the system less resilient.

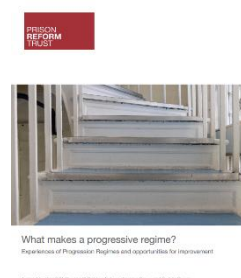
The review recommends the following:

- **Court reform:** more cases should be diverted from the Crown Court by expanding out-of-court resolutions, abolishing release under investigation, keeping more lower-level cases in the magistrates' court, and creating a new Crown Court Bench Division for cases expected to attract sentences of three years or less.
- **Trial reform:** judge-only trials should be expanded in limited circumstances, allowing defendants, with judicial consent, to choose judge-alone trial
- **System recovery:** technology should be used more effectively. The report backs AI-assisted transcription, better digital interoperability, data dashboards, and AI-supported listing and case management to reduce delay.



Prison Reform Trust. What makes a progressive regime? Experiences of Progression Regimes and opportunities for improvement

This report examines what makes a prison regime ‘progressive’, how progression regimes are experienced, and how they could be improved. In the men’s estate, these regimes are intended to support prisoners, particularly those serving indeterminate sentences, who face barriers to progression or are nearing tariff expiry or parole eligibility. Drawing on surveys and focus groups with prisoners serving sentences of 10 years or more at HMP Warren Hill, alongside staff surveys, the report highlights both the potential and limits of progression regimes in practice.



Key findings include:

- There was a gap between the idea of progression and how it worked in practice, with the regime often experienced as restrictive and inconsistent.
- Prisoners reported few meaningful opportunities to demonstrate progress, especially through work, qualifications and Release on Temporary License (ROTL).
- Staff practice strongly shaped the regime, with concerns about limited support, inconsistent delivery and weak mutual respect.
- The regime was not seen as sufficiently flexible or tailored, particularly for older prisoners, those without visits, and those with additional or neurodiverse needs.

Recommendations include:

- Tailor progression to individual needs and realistic release plans and clarify the purpose, expectations and decision-making of progression regimes.
- Expand opportunities to demonstrate progress, including work, qualifications and ROTL.
- Improve preparation for release through better financial and digital support.
- Strengthen staff training and culture around progression, respect and diverse needs.
- Rebuild trust through better staff-prisoner communication and relationships.

Briefings

Ministry of Justice. A modern youth justice system: Foundations fit for the future

This policy paper sets out the government’s plans to modernise the governance and funding of youth justice services, strengthen early intervention, and ensure custody is only used as a last resort. The paper identifies the following key reform priorities:

- Prioritise stable youth justice funding, including multi-year grants to support planning, retention and longer-term commissioning.
- Shift core grant responsibility from the YJB to the MoJ from 2026/27, with a stronger central role for the MoJ.

- Modernise case management through updated systems and greater use of AI and analytics to support early intervention.
- Reduce the use of custody through remand reform, incentive funding and greater investment in community-based alternatives.
- Align youth justice reform with wider social harms, including knife crime, racial disproportionality, violence against women and girls, and online harms.

Ministry of Justice and HM Courts & Tribunals Service. Courts and Tribunals Bill

The government introduced the Courts and Tribunals bill in the Parliament on 25 February 2026. The government commissioned Sir Brian Leveson to undertake an independent review of criminal courts and the review serves as the blueprint for the structural reforms that this Bill introduces.

The bill will reform criminal procedure, appeals, sentencing powers, and court structures; expand judge-only hearings in some cases; strengthen evidence and special measures rules; remove the presumption of parental involvement in family law; and make targeted changes to tribunal leadership, court titles, and magistrates' expenses. Alongside this the Bill introduces measures that ensure fairer trials for victims, protect children, modernise operational arrangements, and support consistent practice across the courts and tribunals.

Prison Reform Trust. Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile: February 2026

This briefing highlights the sustained strain on the prison system. It highlights worsening overcrowding, poor prison performance, high levels of self-harm, rising recalls, and ongoing concerns about indeterminate and extended sentences, while also stressing the vulnerability of children in custody and the continued overuse of short custodial sentences.

Although the Sentencing Act 2026 may ease pressure somewhat, the report argues that it will not resolve the deeper structural problems driving population growth and deteriorating conditions

The briefing points towards a more community-based approach: greater use of effective alternatives to custody, especially instead of short prison sentences; sustained investment and reform in probation so it can manage more people safely in the community; action to address excluded groups such as people serving extended or unreleased IPP sentences; and broader reforms to improve prison conditions, safety, and outcomes across the system.



These 'Bromley Briefings' are produced in memory of Keith Bromley, a valued friend of the Prison Reform Trust and whose personal commitment with prisons and human rights. His support for refugees from oppression, victims of torture and the safety of children made a difference to many people's lives. The Prison Reform Trust is grateful to the Bromley Trust for supporting the production of this briefing.