

Connected Futures  
Phase 1 - Interim Report  
September 2024

**Enabling  
Burnley's next  
generation to**

**Thrive**

**NO LIMITS**

## Contents

Why Burnley? .....	4
The challenge .....	6
Who is involved in the research? .....	8
What we did in phase one .....	10
What have we learned...? .....	12
... from young people .....	12
... from the education sector .....	14
... from employers.....	14
What does a solution look like? .....	16
Our proposal for Thrive .....	17
Three pilot projects .....	17
Thrive in Education.....	18
Thrive in Employment.....	20
Thrive in the Community.....	22
So, what happens next? .....	24

---



The Connected Futures project has been funded by the Youth Futures Foundation - the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people.

Calico Enterprise is one of eight partners in the UK delivering the Connected Futures project.

Across the UK, 900,000 – 1 in 8 – of our young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The situation is especially acute in the North and the Midlands, and for marginalised young people who experience significant systemic barriers.

The Youth Future Foundation’s vision is a society where all young people have equitable access to good jobs.

Their mission is to narrow the employment gap by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change.

## **Burnley is facing an employment crisis among 16–24-year-olds.**

Youth unemployment in Burnley is double the national average and many are looking to migrate out of the area because they do not believe there are opportunities for them in the town.

Over the past 18 months, the Connected Futures project has spoken to young people, community groups, local businesses, schools and colleges to understand what can be done.

Hearing directly from 700 local young people who come from a range of backgrounds has been invaluable to this process. Their honesty provides us with a significant teachable moment as a community.

We also appreciate the feedback from local businesses and schools who have helped us put these lessons into perspective so we can hear all sides of the story.

The first phase of this innovative research project, which aims to help young people in Burnley out of unemployment, has now been completed. The learning and the next steps are set out in this report.

We recognise that the solutions presented here are complex. No single organisation or sector has all the answers, and success can only be achieved when educators, employers and the community work together.

As members of the Thrive partnership, we all have a role to play.

## Why Burnley?

Burnley is a market town in Lancashire which boasts a diverse community and a proud industrial heritage.

The ethnic makeup of the town is 82.5% white and 14.7% Asian, with the other ethnic minorities, and people of mixed heritage making up the remainder.\*

In 2024, the largest employment sectors are wholesale and retail (23%), with health and social work at 18%, and manufacturing at 15% (which is double the percentage for England).

Together these three sectors alone make up 41% of all jobs in Burnley whereas nationally, these sectors account for just 27%.\*\*

The result is that Burnley has fewer jobs in administration, professional and technical services, financial services, and information and communication relative to the nation as a whole.

Youth unemployment in Burnley is double the national average (10% compared to 5%), and while economic activity levels are higher in Burnley than in other areas of Lancashire, nearly a quarter of young people are in 'elementary' roles, typically entry-level jobs requiring minimal qualifications or experience.

A lack of local opportunities and 'tailored culturally responsive support' affects all young people, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting barriers. Generational unemployment is a challenge in some areas.

\* ONS 2021 Census

\*\* Business Register and Employment Survey (Nomis)

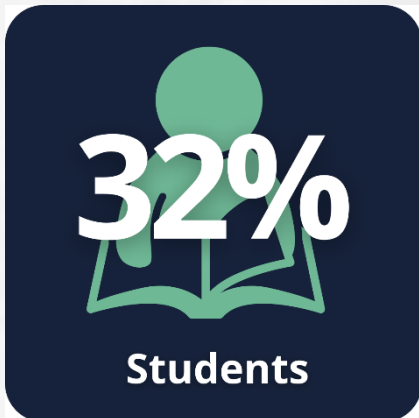




Burnley has around 9400 young people aged 16-24 living in the town



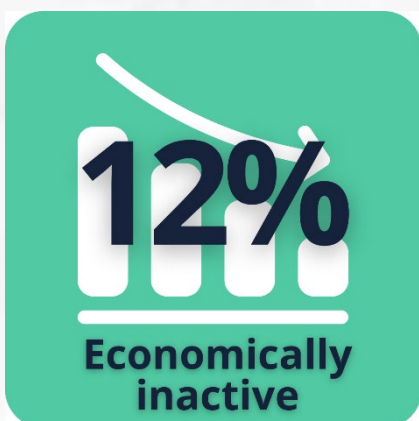
46% are in employment



32% are economically inactive but are full time students



22.5% of those are already in receipt of some element of welfare benefit



12% are long term or temporary sick, discouraged, or looking after family and others



10% are unemployed and seeking work



## The challenge

The current ecosystem around youth employment in Burnley is disjointed and difficult to navigate, characterised by ad-hoc youth support driven by short-term funding opportunities and limiting eligibility criteria.

The system is not designed with young people in mind and is therefore difficult for a them to understand and navigate - particularly at moments of transition.

Young people do not necessarily know what support is available, where it is, or how to access it.

### **Our challenge, as we see it, is:**

**to co-create a youth-led, data-focused, impactful, eco-system in Burnley...**

**one which enables a highly personalised employment and training offer for young people...**

**built on a network of organisations who truly value collaboration...**

**focused on making the biggest difference for each individual, rather than contractual outcomes.**

# Young People's Employment Journey in Burnley



## Who is involved in the research?

We have attempted to involve as many young people as we can in this project.

However, we are aware of the challenges our communities face and recognise that that we needed to focus on the following three groups who are at greater risk of being marginalised by the existing system:

- **Young people with care experience**
- **Young people with Bangladeshi & Pakistani heritage**
- **Young people that are long-term unemployed.**

To do this, and to ensure that we heard directly from young people themselves, we supported young people to create a group called 'Rise Up'.

We are grateful for the involvement of Participation Works North West, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), Base-X, and Sajda Majeed, a community consultant who have led on this community engagement.

Through Rise Up, and with the support of schools and partner community organisations, we engaged nearly 700 young people. 60% of these were from a BAME background, and the gender split was 60% male and 40% female.

The project has also been supported by the Thrive Youth Hub and Burnley Bondholders (a local employer network).

The systems leaders that we have engaged on the project include Burnley Borough Council, Burnley Bondholders, Burnley Together - Integrated Care Board, East Lancashire Healthcare Trust, Social Housing, the Lancashire LEP, Department of Work and Pensions, Burnley Schools partnership and Lancashire County Council.

---



We would like to thank the following young people in particular for their contributions to this project:

**Habiba Akhtar**

**Mohammed Shah Ahmed Ali**

**Zoey Ashe**

**Maxine Ashworth**

**Mohammed Bilal**

**Sophie Denton**

**Ben Green**

**Mohammed Haydar**

**Lara Metcalfe**

**Naimah Miah**



## What we did in phase one

During the first phase, our research and consultation projects included:

- Youth consultation of 700 young people (including Base-X consultations of BAME young people)
- Consultations with over 100 Burnley employers
- UCLan literature review and participatory workshops
- Engagement and consultation with Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities
- Systems mapping, including a workshop, conducted by Renaisi
- 3 co-design sessions with key stakeholders
- Local labour market analysis
- Post-16 funding flows analysis drawing from Phase 1 research and consultations.



The project has engaged with employers in the town to gain a better understanding of their experiences when recruiting young people.

Discussions started with Burnley Bondholders, to raise awareness of the project objectives and to support them with their employer requirements in the future.

The Calico Group have signed up to the 'Good Youth Employment Charter' and are supporting other employers across the town to do the same.

We have received detailed data sets from Ipsos and Renaisi who are two learning partners commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation. This provides statistics around youth unemployment in Burnley.

The project has been focusing on 3 key areas:

Employer  
engagement

Local  
research

National  
research

## What have we learned...?

### ... from young people

Feedback from young people has highlighted a lack of places to go and meaningful activities in Burnley, as well as the need to better engage young people and families within the Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage communities.

Young people told us that:

- There is a perceived lack of employment opportunities in Burnley.
- Many young people want to leave the town, in most cases for the following reasons:
  - Poverty and high levels of crime in the town.
  - They believe Burnley to be 'scruffy' and 'dirty'.
  - Lack of youth friendly places for them to go and no real dedicated youth spaces, along with nothing for young people to do after 5pm.
  - Poor media coverage of the town, along with a perceived poor reputation.
- Mental health is a significant contributing factor to employment barriers.
- Young people lack support and career confidence and don't feel that they have the skills that employers want.
- Those without qualifications feel as though they didn't receive the support that they needed in school.
- Families and teachers have the biggest impact on a young person, and particularly when it comes to influence and decision making in periods of transition.
- There is a lack of free transport and limited bus routes in the town.
- Young people feel 'lost in a maze' and not listened to.

BASE-X research also identified that young South Asian people do not see people of colour represented or role models described as a lack of 'Apna' organisations in the town.

'Apna' loosely translates to 'one of our own'. They also believe there to be a disconnection with the areas where these communities live.

## Young people's perceptions of Burnley



### Positive

- Learning opportunities
- Student nurse courses
- Best GCSE results in Lancashire
- Football club
- Pubs
- Famous people from Burnley
- Countryside
- Close to motorway
- Good schools
- Lovely walks
- Takeaways
- Cool place to live
- Close to school / college
- Friendly
- You can get away with most things (driving underage)
- Don't get ID'd (15 years old)



### Negative

- Not a lot of support out there to find work
- Boring - nothing to do for teenagers
- No nice restaurants
- Questioned by the police when out in town
- Group of friends can't go in McDonalds
- Shops - not much variety in town
- Some areas are rough
- Needs improving
- Too small
- Scruffy
- Lack of outdoor provision
- Rough areas
- Leaving to move to Manchester
- Leaving Burnley due to 99% of men oversexualising girls
- Leave to move back to Ireland
- Leave to go travelling
- Bad memories
- Litter everywhere
- Scruffy and dirty
- High levels of drugs and crime
- Poverty
- Too much construction and green space is reducing
- No friends
- No culture
- No work opportunities
- Scruffy
- Unfriendly
- No youth provision
- Venues restrict access for young people e.g. McDonalds
- Bad wifi
- No nightlife after 5pm
- No tourist attractions or experiences
- Burnley has a bad reputation
- Poverty

## ... from the education sector

School leaders and Lancashire County Council have also advised that there has been an increase in Elective Home Education.

The reasons cited were parental choice and the fear of receiving fines and avoiding court proceedings relating to their child's attendance levels.

Staff at Lancashire County Council supporting 16 to 17-year-old NEETs share that mainstream education is not meeting the needs of many young people.

Both young people and school leaders have suggested that there is an issue with when young people leave secondary school.

School leaders believe that this is due to the level of support provided in schools not being there when moving into college. There is also a disconnect between school and college pathways that further increases the risk of becoming NEET.

---

## ... from employers

Employers have shared the following through surveys, groups and one-to-one consultations:

- Employers have limited connection to education providers.
- Education providers are not aware of the employment opportunities to promote to young people.
- Young people require skills for employment.
- They would like to see pathways put in place to support young people into employment.
- They would like to access in-work support for young people.
- They have concerns over an ageing workforce.
- They want to recruit locally.

When pulled together, the key themes of consultation feedback led to the following suggested solutions:

### **Infrastructure**

- FAQ website for young people
- Services more accessible
- Social areas for young people
- Safe places to go
- Improve town centre
- Green space
- Upgrade buildings

### **Health**

- Better NHS accessible services
- More Mental Health support and stop the stigma
- Someone you can trust to talk to
- Counselling
- Confidence building

### **Education**

- Maths and English free for young people aged 16+
- Start preparing children from year 8 upwards on careers
- Life skills including budgeting, bank accounts, ID and cooking
- Less academic focus and more practical

### **Employment**

- More voluntary opportunities
- Job experience for under-experienced 16 year olds
- Life / job coaches
- CV help, mock interviews
- Job trials

### **Transport**

- Increased accessible and safer transport
- Cheaper ways to learn to drive & insurance
- Modernise and improve transport links with more routes
- Faster trains with less stops
- Travel grants

### **Financial**

- More support for cost of living including food banks
- Vouchers for young people to do things in Burnley
- Financial help at college
- Tuck shops for struggling kids including uniform / stationary / books

## What does a solution look like?

The findings from Phase One of the Connected Futures project are clear.

No one organisation or group has all the answers, but collectively each has the potential to reduce the barriers that the others experience.

Our intention as we move into the next phase is to take a systems-based approach to tackling the issues raised.

**We have seen that there is a passion and commitment from everyone to do this.**

For Phase Two we will be working through the Thrive hub to facilitate connections between employers, education providers, the wider community, and to directly engage the young people themselves.

We know that we have two fantastic infrastructures within the town in Thrive and Burnley Bondholders. However, they are not connected, and could engage education providers in the system more effectively.

Working collaboratively, our intention is to shift power towards young people to ensure that the Burnley ecosystem is co-led, personalised, supportive, and accessible.

- Creating **long lasting** change
- Tackling **root causes**, not just symptoms of the problem
- Identifying which partners in Burnley can take it forward



## Our proposal for Thrive

Our proposal is to expand on the town's 'Thrive' hub and network to improve and create pathways for young people, and ultimately a more coherent youth employment ecosystem built around the following three strands:

Thrive in  
education

Thrive in  
employment

Thrive in  
community

The Thrive partnership has been operating since 2021 and consists of 24 members. We already have a strong operational commitment to our young people and members are wholly committed to the Thrive brand being developed around this model.

As part of this, we will shift the power balance more towards young people to ensure that the system is co-led, personalised, supportive and accessible. We will have a paid role for a young person working within the system and change the way that we work together.

---

## Three pilot projects

The three pilot initiatives identified above will seek to create new pathways that bridge the gaps between aspirations, experience and opportunities.

Each of these will be carefully monitored to identify areas of success, opportunities for further learning, and then build upon those.

The role of the Thrive hub is therefore critical in ensuring that all partners and stakeholders are effectively engaged in the process and supported at every stage to play their part.

## Thrive in Education

We think that a plan should be developed around how schools and students are supported to prevent NEET and improve career pathways. We will test this by further developing the emerging partnership with education leaders and by building a Bondholder & Business Education Partnership (BEP).

The focus will be to improve careers provision within schools. This will build on the work that Burnley Borough Council have already started with the Bondholders and those other partners already working to support careers activity in schools.

A number of employers have already signed up to the Good Youth Employer Charter, an outward commitment of their support to the project. These are the organisations that we will test the development of the partnership with.

We will also explore whether training school staff on things like understanding complexities in some groups of young people, trauma informed approaches and the health and wellbeing of young people have a positive impact on students and start to seek solutions for their 'how might we' questions in this area.

Three of the secondary schools have indicated that they would like our support to test a work-experience-based curriculum for students in year 10 and 11, who are struggling in school. We want to test whether this is successful for young people, helps avoid poor outcomes for those involved and, in the most challenging cases, prevents permanent exclusion.

We want to know if careers support in schools can be improved and developed to link better with the specific employment opportunities in Burnley. We want to see improved connections to Bondholders, supported transitions to college, and work with families, especially in our south Asian communities.

### **Basically, we will...**

- Improve careers provision within schools
- Explore training school staff in student complexities
- Develop to link better with the employment opportunities in Burnley
- Test a work experience-based curriculum for students in year 10 and 11

### **Our ask of the education sector is...**

- ✓ **Sign up for local Teacher Insight days to get into businesses and see what opportunities are available. Tailor your support for students to what's on offer.**
- ✓ **Implement extended work experience – especially for students at risk of being NEET.**
- ✓ **Create referral pathways the THRIVE now, especially for any students who are less likely to access further education, training or work.**



## Thrive in Employment

We think we can develop pathways that are available to young people ready for work, who are supported to gain and sustain employment.

We will test it by supporting Bondholders in the town to:

- raise awareness of their vacancies through the Thrive youth hub, which reaches young people that job centres might not reach,
- operate good youth employment practices which include targeted recruitment campaigns,
- design pre-employment and into-employment pathways with the Thrive partnership, which include creating work experience and volunteering opportunities.

We will also improve connections into employment support from the DWP and utilise the adult education budget to prepare young people for the vacancies that employers have.

We will test in-work support for employers and young people, providing practical support, budgeting, supervision, and mentoring. We will also test and promote role-modelling to increase the connections between young people and the career pathways available to them.

We will do this by recruiting a partnership co-ordinator that works between 2-3 key Bondholders, the existing Thrive delivery partners including DWP, and support organisations.

Participation Works will also support young people when they secure employment. They will help with practical support in setting up bank accounts, and understanding tax, National Insurance, pensions, budgeting, and through one to one support.

## **Basically, we will...**

- Prepare young people for the vacancies that employers have
- Improve connections into employment support from the DWP
- Support young people when they secure employment
- Test in-work support for employers and young people
- Recruit a partnership co-ordinator that works with key Bondholders

## **Our ask of employers is...**

- ✓ **Create entry level job roles for young people where you can and send details of these to THRIVE.**
- ✓ **Redesign your recruitment approach so that it's more appropriate for younger people:**
  - **consider the language you use;**
  - **focus on skills rather than qualifications;**
  - **and move away from daunting application forms – try dynamic approaches like videos, insight days, work trials and volunteering pathways instead.**
- ✓ **Reach out to local schools to offer work experience and other activities – don't assume they can come to you.**



## Thrive in the Community

We think that young people need safe spaces to go in the community where they can access inclusive support and undertake meaningful activities.

We will test this by delivering a range of outreach services at community venues including the town centre and market. These will be scheduled sessions delivered by both professionals and young people, providing a variety of activities to support young people and their families.

We will also use Participation Work's Youth and Community Van for one day per week, taking it to locations where there are no community facilities and known hang-out points such as Asda and the college car park.

It will operate on a 4-week rota to build consistency and to develop relationships with the young people in those areas. We will pilot this in the south Asian areas and ensure that it is inclusive through engaging.

### **Basically, we will...**

- Deliver a range of outreach services at community venues
- Take a community van to areas with no community facilities
- Operate on a 4-week rota to build relationships, consistency and familiarity

### **Our ask of the community is...**

- ✓ **Find out about what opportunities and activities are on offer by following THRIVE on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn.**
- ✓ **Look out for local community resources where THRIVE can be accessed – such as the Participation Works van.**
- ✓ **Create a safe space to talk about mental health and other worries they may have.**

## So, what happens next?

This work is starting now, with steps to change the way we recruit. We're directly involving young people in the process, with a view to make it less oppressive and more accessible for all.

The established youth leadership group of Rise Up is being supported to gain more members, become more diverse, and be a more accurate representation of Burnley and its young people – particularly for those who are traditionally more marginalised.

We also require our partners' support in raising awareness of the project. This will help us in our aim to influence change across the town because of what is learnt, and to work in true partnership with young people, support organisations and employers.

There are a considerable number of job vacancies in Burnley and finding ways to connect those who are looking for work with the opportunities that are available is key to our long-term success.



# youth futures FOUNDATION

