Supporting youth transitions in Buckinghamshire

Interim report

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This report was written by The Centre for Education and Youth. CfEY is a 'think and action-tank'. We believe society should ensure all children and young people receive the support they need to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We provide the evidence and support policy makers and practitioners need to support young people. We use our timely and rigorous research to get under the skin of issues affecting young people in order to shape the public debate, advise the sector and campaign on topical issues. We have a particular interest in issues affecting marginalised young people.

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Foreword

We started working on our new strategy during the coronavirus pandemic and in a time of great uncertainty. We wanted to better understand the implications of the crisis for young people in our community, particularly those with limited access to resources and opportunity. We needed to be more aware of how young people would transition through education, into work and life as an adult so that we could make effective investments that would help them on their way. We are pleased to have partnered with The Centre for Education and Youth to bring together data, learning and evidence for that purpose.

The Rothschild Foundation has made a commitment to support the needs of young people through our Buckinghamshire focused grant-making programme. Alongside this work supporting youth transitions we will prioritise core funding for youth organisations which offer direct guidance and activities for young people, as well as provide support for good mental health. In these complex areas, we anticipate making longer-term grants and funding county-wide initiatives which will have a beneficial impact to the resilience of local third-sector organisations. These grants will sit alongside our existing strategic interests in sustainable food systems and the development of the local cultural sector.

We value our continued collaboration with The Centre for Education and Youth, and look forward hearing direct insights from young people and those who work with them in the next stage of this project.

Leona Forsyth
Grants Manager
Rothschild Foundation

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Executive summary

This report presents findings from the first two stages of an ongoing research project conducted by The Centre for Education and Youth for The Rothschild Foundation. In the wake of a pandemic which has caused significant disruption to young people's educational pathways and employment prospects, the research sets out to explore the following four questions:

1. What is it like for young people to grow up in Buckinghamshire?
2. What stands in the way of them making a fulfilling transition to adulthood?
3. What services are these young people accessing?
4. What existing local services would benefit from being supported and expanded?

This as an opportune moment to conduct research on how youth transitions in Buckinghamshire can best be supported, given the prominence of the social mobility and levelling up agendas, and the increased attention being given to geographical inequalities, deprived contexts beyond the inner city, and the place-based processes that shape young people's lives.

When the project concludes in late 2021, we aim to have brought together a range of local stakeholders around a set of shared aims and funding priorities to support young people in the county. Young people will play a key role in this process.

The report is structured around four priority themes, which emerged from a review of the Foundation's existing grant-making and its current priorities. Each theme offers a different perspective on what it means for a young person in Buckinghamshire to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood, and the barriers they can face along the way.

First we focus on young people's **transitions** into higher education and fulfilling, stable employment. Second we focus on **accessibility**, through the lens of local housing affordability, digital access and rural links to opportunities. Third we focus on **disability** – specifically the transitions of young people with SEND and those with poor mental health. Finally we focus on **diversity**: the importance of amplifying the perspectives of all young people, particularly those from minority ethnic groups and those living in less affluent areas of the county.

The report sets out the evidence for why these themes are important, examines the current Buckinghamshire context, and identifies existing interventions which could inform future grant-funded activity in the county.

Transitions

Across the country, the pandemic has disrupted young people's ambitions for higher level study and stable, fulfilling employment. A significant proportion of 16–17-year-olds' transitions into education, employment or training in Buckinghamshire are not known by the local authority. Although HE participation rates are, on average, higher in Buckinghamshire than nationally, the picture varies widely across the county. 22 neighbourhoods in the county fall within the lowest fifth nationally for HE participation, with significant concentrations to the west of Aylesbury and the east of High Wycombe. There is a mixed evidence base for interventions supporting young people into higher education and employment. Educational attainment at the end of secondary school is critical; there is an attainment gap of almost two years at the end of secondary school between disadvantaged pupils in Buckinghamshire and their more affluent peers. Access

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to consistent, high quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) is also crucial in supporting young people to achieve their ambitions for higher level study and stable, fulfilling employment.

Accessibility

Housing affordability is a critical factor influencing young people's transitions to adulthood. Young adults are particularly reliant on the private rented sector, which is often expensive and insecure. Housing in South Bucks and Chiltern is some of the least affordable in the South East. The most effective levers to tackle housing affordability sit at the national policy level, which limits the scope for local interventions. However, there are increasingly common economic models for local action, such as Community Land Trusts.

Covid-19 has exposed a 'digital divide'. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to rely on mobile phones to access the internet, and less likely to have access to their own device and a broadband connection. This has led to unequal home learning experiences while schools were closed during the pandemic, and is also a barrier to IAG relating to further and higher education, employment and training opportunities. Our mapping suggests there may be particular digital exclusion coldspots west of Aylesbury, east of High Wycombe and north of Chesham.

Outside densely populated metropolitan areas, young people often face long journey times to access education institutions, large employment centres and other amenities. Disadvantaged young people are heavily reliant on public transport – in particular bus services. Within Bucks, further education and employment cold spots tend to be in more rural parts of the county. The western edge of the county, at the midpoint between Aylesbury and Oxford, appears to be particularly inaccessible to further education and employment opportunities.

Disability

Young people with SEND face a range of challenges including social exclusion, a lack of specialist support, and difficulties accessing stable and fulfilling employment. SEND prevalence in Buckinghamshire, along with Key Stage 5 attainment and employment rates for young people with SEND, are broadly in line with the national average. Buckinghamshire Council have sought to tackle social stigma around disability through student-led conferences and practice-sharing between schools. Other valuable interventions identified in the literature include tailored careers education and personalised, sustained support when transitioning to adulthood.

Poor mental health can affect young people's experiences of education, employment and personal relationships. Although youth mental health indicators in Buckinghamshire compare favourably with the wider national context, many young people in the county will be struggling with their mental health as they emerge from the pandemic. Young people should be able to access support with their mental health regardless of their education, training or employment pathway. Their access to high quality support should be uninterrupted by the transition from youth to adult mental health services.

Diversity

Nationally, young people from different ethnic groups achieve significantly different educational and labour market outcomes. Outside larger metropolitan centres, young

people from minority ethnic groups tend to make up a smaller proportion of the local population. This can create barriers to finding role models, accessing information and guidance, and influencing local decision-making. Although Buckinghamshire residents are predominantly from White British backgrounds, there are sizeable groups from other backgrounds, particularly in Wycombe.

While Buckinghamshire as a whole is defined in official statistics as an 'affluent' county, 1 in 14 neighbourhoods within the county are defined as 'hard pressed'. As our mapping reveals, these neighbourhoods are spread throughout Buckinghamshire, often away from urban centres. We know from existing research that young people growing up in these more peripheral, hard pressed neighbourhoods have some of the poorest outcomes. Some neighbourhoods in the county are among the most limited nationally for social infrastructure, although they are not particularly deprived. This means they have relatively limited civic assets, are less well connected, and have a less active and engaged community.

This interim report lays the foundations for the next stage of the project: a local consultation, involving detailed fieldwork with young people to explore their perspectives, experiences, and the changes to opportunities and support they would like to see, alongside engagement with key partners from local government, statutory services, business, and the community and voluntary sectors to hear their perspective and identify consensus for action. The findings of this interim report will guide the questions we explore in the consultation, the organisations and individuals we speak to, and the areas of the county we target when recruiting participants.

The project will conclude in late 2021 with a review of the Rothschild Foundation's youth-focused grant making, drawing on the shared priorities that emerge from the consultation work, and based on our analysis of gaps in provision, well-evidenced interventions that could be piloted in Buckinghamshire, and existing local provision that could be supported or scaled up.

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1   Introduction

1.1   About the project

In March 2021, the Rothschild Foundation began working with CfEY on a piece of research focusing on young people in Buckinghamshire as they transition through, and out of, their final years of education. Through the research, the Foundation is keen to explore how marginalised 16-to-25-year-olds in the county perceive and evaluate the opportunities around them, and how they can best be supported into adulthood. In the UK at present, there is very limited research into the lives of young people growing up in areas of rural isolation, non-urban deprivation, and pockets of low social mobility hidden within affluent shire counties. This research project has the potential to make a significant contribution to knowledge about young people's lives and transitions out of education in these contexts, as well as informing future action to support young people in the county.

When the project concludes in late 2021, we aim to have had a tangible impact on the prospects of young people in Buckinghamshire, by:
- shedding light on aspects of young people's lives in the county that have previously been underexplored
- bringing together local stakeholders around shared priorities and a common sense of 'place'
- fostering collaboration and partnership working
- guiding the Foundation's deployment of funding to expand and support existing services
- supporting the Foundation's use of seed funding to trial promising approaches to filling gaps in provision, based on the latest research evidence and existing provision

1.2   Methodology

The project is being guided by four broad research questions:
1. What is it like for young people to grow up in Buckinghamshire?
2. What stands in the way of them making a fulfilling transition to adulthood?
3. What services are these young people accessing?
4. What existing local services would benefit from being supported and expanded?

The project is proceeding in four stages, and this interim report focuses on the outcomes from stages 1 and 2.

1. Priority setting → 2. Establishing the Bucks context → 3. Consultation → 4. Funding opportunity review
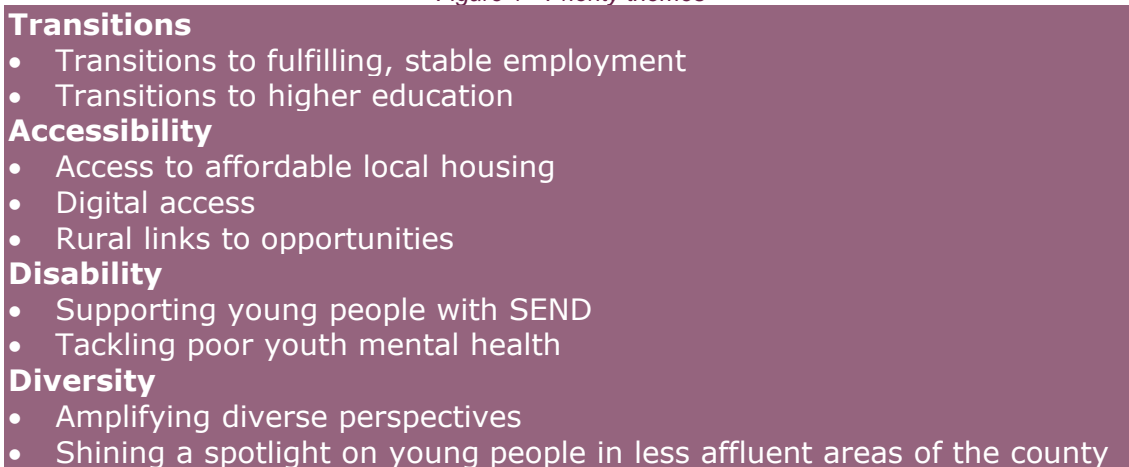
1.2.1 Priority setting

In stage 1, we established the themes that will guide the project and provide a strategic focus for the Foundation's youth-oriented grant-making. This stage of the project was based on discussions with the Foundation team and an extensive review of the

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Foundation's existing grant-making activities and priorities. We arrived at four overarching themes that will guide the rest of the project, set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Priority themes

Transitions
- Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment
- Transitions to higher education

Accessibility
- Access to affordable local housing
- Digital access
- Rural links to opportunities

Disability
- Supporting young people with SEND
- Tackling poor youth mental health

Diversity
- Amplifying diverse perspectives
- Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county

We also began initial conversations with key stakeholders, to discuss the aims of the project, gather feedback on our plans for the consultation in stage 3, and identify further contacts to engage with our fieldwork. These initial stakeholder conversations provided on-the-ground insights into the work being done to support marginalised young people in Bucks to make fulfilling transitions to adulthood. We have included a list of the stakeholders we contacted in this initial stage of the project in Appendix 1.

1.2.2 Establishing the Bucks context

In stage 2, we set out to describe and understand the youth context in Buckinghamshire in relation to our four priority themes, by compiling a data snapshot and reviewing existing literature.

Data snapshot

We established key statistical indicators for each priority theme (see Figure 1) and sourced the most recent, localised data available for each indicator. Some of our chosen indicators have data available at a small-area or 'neighbourhood' level (OA, LSOA or MSOA[1]) allowing for a high degree of granularity in our assessment of geographical 'hot' and 'cold' spots for youth opportunities and outcomes. Other indicators draw on data at a less granular ward or district level (based on the four second-tier districts in Buckinghamshire before the unitary authority was established). Meanwhile, some indicators rely on data at a county level. Likewise, while some indicators draw on recent data, some rely on data from the 2011 Census and are therefore less likely to provide an accurate picture of the current youth context in the county. Our data sources our outlined in Figure 2.

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[1] OAs (Output Areas) are the smallest of the Census geographies, with an average population of 310 residents. OAs sit within LSOAs (Lower Layer Super Output Areas) which have an average population of 1500 residents. In turn, LSOAs sit within MSOAs (Middle Layer Super Output Areas) which have an average of 7500 residents.

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Figure 2 – Overview of indicators and data sources used for the data snapshot

Theme	Sub-theme	Indicator	Source	Geography	Date
Transitions	Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment	18-24 claimant count	Nomis	District	March 2021
		16-17 NEET rate	DfE	County	2020
	Transitions to higher education	HE participation rate of 18–19-year-olds from state funded mainstream schools	OfS (TUNDRA)	LSOA	2014/15 to 2019/20
Accessibility	Access to affordable local housing	Ratio of average house prices to average local earnings	ONS	District	2018
	Digital access	Broadband speed, device ownership and internet usage	British Red Cross/CACI (Digital Vulnerability Index), ONS (IUC)	MSOA, LSOA	2018
	Rural links to opportunities	Journey times by public transport to FE colleges and large employment centres	DfT (JTS)	LSOA	2017
Disability	Supporting young people with SEND	SEN prevalence rate (pupils)	DfE	County	2019/20
		KS5 cohort with SEND in sustained EET	DfE	County	2018/19
	Tackling poor youth mental health	Average self-reported wellbeing score at age 15	PHE (WEMWBS)	County	2014/15
Diversity	Amplifying diverse perspectives	% of population from main ethnic groups (all ages)	ONS	District	2016
	Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county	Left Behind Neighbourhoods	British Red Cross/OCSI (Community Needs Index)	Ward	2020
		Hard-pressed neighbourhoods	ONS/CDRC (Output Area Classification)	OA	2011

Guide to the scale of geographies used:

OA > LSOA > MSOA > Ward > District > County

More granular   Less granular

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Alongside the headline trends from the data snapshot discussed in this interim report, we have produced an interactive map showing key youth indicators available at the most granular geographies, in order to make it easier to visualise the distribution of cold spots at a small neighbourhood level across the county.

Figure 3 - Interactive map of key indicators available at small-level geographies
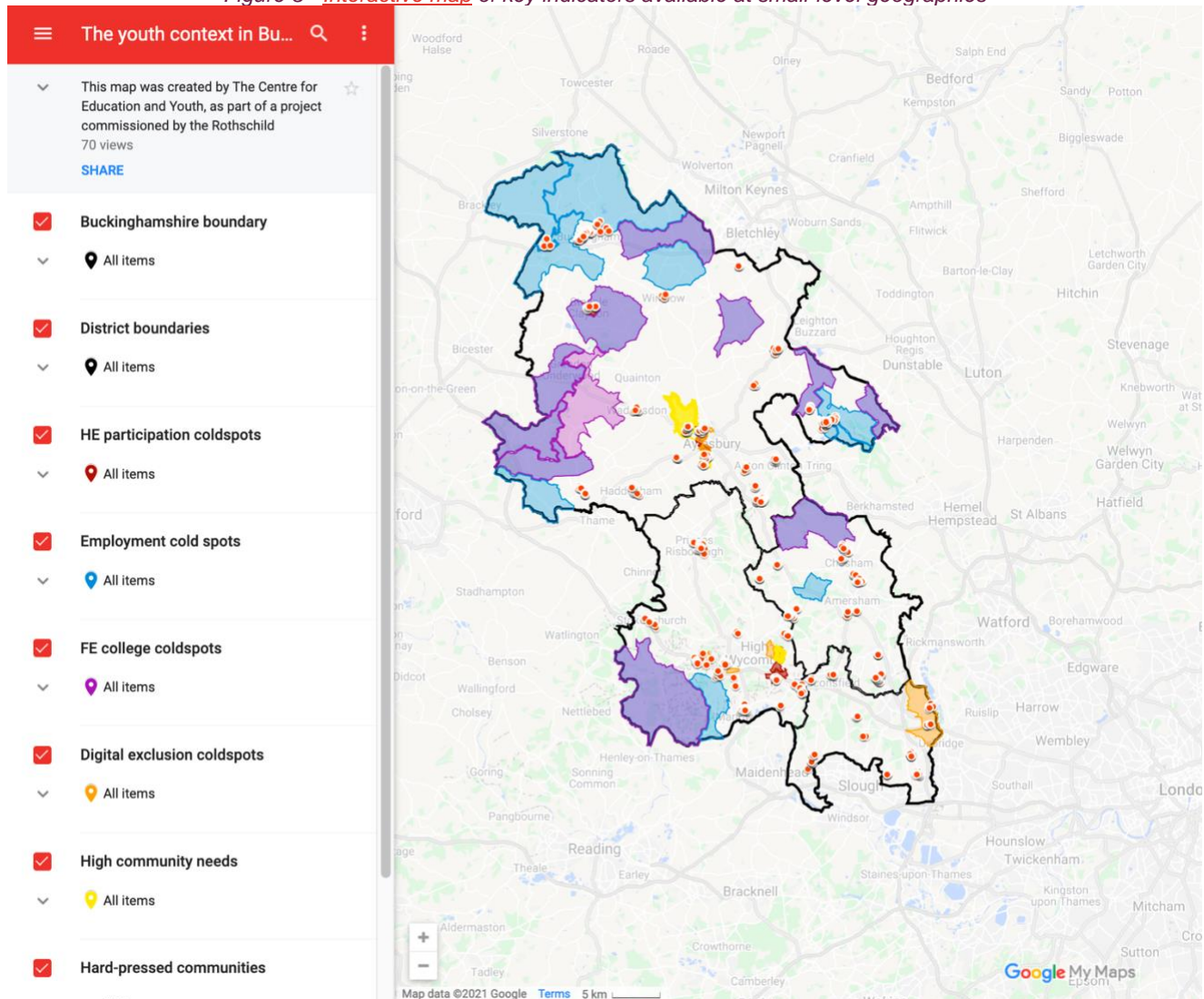
Literature review

Alongside the data snapshot, we conducted a rapid literature review, focusing on each priority theme in turn, in order to draw together existing evidence relating to key causes and barriers, promising interventions and Bucks-specific context where available.

We sourced literature by:
- Drawing on CfEY's database of recent, robust reports and research papers, particularly those providing an overview of existing literature
- Conducting keyword searches to fill gaps in our database
- Pursuing expert recommendations, from our own networks and from our initial stakeholder conversations
- Reviewing 'grey' literature focused on Bucks, such as research reports from Buckinghamshire Council, local universities and think tanks, and evaluation reports from local third sector organisations

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Our priority themes are rarely discussed in isolation in the literature. For example, research on poor digital access (theme 2) often focuses on education and employment outcomes (theme 1). Although the interim report discusses the evidence underpinning each of our priority themes in turn, we have flagged connections and intersections between themes where they occur in the literature.

This interim report is based on the findings from our data snapshot and literature review. Our aim is to bring together the most up-to-date, robust evidence relating to each of the priority themes guiding the project. This includes evidence relating specifically to the Buckinghamshire context, and broader evidence that helps us to understand key challenges and potential solutions in each priority area.

1.2.3 Consultation

The third stage of the research will be a local consultation, involving detailed fieldwork with young people to explore their perspectives, experiences, and the changes they would like to see, alongside engagement with key partners from local government, statutory services, business, and the community and voluntary sectors to hear their perspective and identify consensus for action. The findings of this interim report will guide the questions we explore in the consultation, the organisations and individuals we speak to, and the areas of the county we target when recruiting participants.

1.2.4 Funding opportunity review

The project will conclude in late 2021 with a review of the Rothschild Foundation's youth-focused grant making, drawing on the shared priorities that emerge from the consultation work, and based on our analysis of gaps in provision, well-evidenced interventions that could be piloted in Bucks, and existing local provision that could be supported or scaled up.

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2   Summary of findings

This section of the report presents a summary of our findings from the data snapshot and literature review. These findings are explored in more detail in Section 0.

2.1   Transitions

2.1.1 Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment

- A significant proportion of 16–17-year-olds' transitions into education, employment or training in Buckinghamshire are not known by the local authority
- Nationally, young people's educational pathways and employment prospects have been significantly disrupted by the pandemic
- There is a mixed evidence base for interventions supporting young people into employment, although the literature identifies some promising programme features. In Bucks, interventions like Tool Shed may help support young people into employment, particularly those with SEND

2.1.2 Transitions to higher education

- Although HE participation rates are, on average, higher in Buckinghamshire than nationally, the picture varies widely across the county. 22 neighbourhoods in the county fall within the lowest fifth nationally for HE participation, with significant concentrations to the west of Aylesbury and the east of High Wycombe
- Nationally, there are pronounced gaps in higher education participation based on disadvantage and ethnicity
- The pandemic has disrupted young people's access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) which is crucial in supporting them to achieve their ambitions for higher level study
- Educational attainment at the end of secondary school is a strong determinant of higher education prospects. There is an attainment gap of almost two years at the end of secondary school between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in Bucks
- Other than improving primary and secondary educational outcomes, efforts to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks and to draw on ties with local universities and businesses may help to boost HE participation

2.2   Accessibility

2.2.1 Access to affordable local housing

- The affordability of local housing compared to local earnings is broadly in line with the regional average in Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe. However, housing in South Bucks and Chiltern is some of the least affordable in the South East: South Bucks is ranked the least affordable of 67 districts in the region; Chiltern is ranked third
- Across the country, young adults are particularly reliant on the private rented sector which is often expensive and insecure
- The most effective levers to tackle housing affordability sit at the national policy level, which limits the scope for local interventions.

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However, there are increasingly common economic models for local action, such as Community Land Trusts

2.2.2 Digital access

- Covid-19 has exposed a 'digital divide'. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to rely on mobile phones to access the internet, and less likely to have access to their own device and a broadband connection
- Our mapping suggests there may be particular digital exclusion coldspots west of Aylesbury, east of High Wycombe and north of Chesham
- Nationally, the digital divide led to unequal home learning experiences while schools were closed during the pandemic. Beyond covid-specific impacts, poor digital access also acts as a barrier to IAG relating to further and higher education, employment and training opportunities
- Action is being taken at a local level to tackle digital access issues in Bucks. Buckinghamshire County Council's 'Smarter Buckinghamshire' strategy (2018-2022) is completing rollout of broadband to rural communities

2.2.3 Rural links to opportunities

- Outside densely populated metropolitan areas, young people often face long journey times to access education institutions, large employment centres and other amenities
- Disadvantaged young people are heavily reliant on public transport – in particular bus services
- Within Bucks, further education and employment cold spots tend to be in more rural parts of the county, particularly in Aylesbury Vale. The western edge of the county, at the midpoint between Aylesbury and Oxford, appears to be particularly inaccessible to further education and employment opportunities

2.3   Disability

2.3.1 Supporting young people with SEND

- There is significant variation in SEND identification across the country. SEND rates in Buckinghamshire are broadly in line with the national average
- Key Stage 5 attainment and employment rates for young people with SEND in Buckinghamshire are also similar to national and regional rates
- Young people with SEND often face a range of challenges, including social ostracization, a lack of specialist support, and difficulties accessing stable and fulfilling employment
- Bucks Council have sought to tackle social stigma around disability through student-led conferences and practice-sharing between schools. Other valuable interventions identified in the literature include tailored careers education and personalised, sustained support when transitioning to adulthood

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2.3.2 Tackling poor youth mental health

- Poor mental health can affect young people's experiences of education, employment and personal relationships
- Overall, youth mental health indicators in Buckinghamshire compare favourably with the wider national context. However, many young people in Bucks will be struggling with their mental health as they emerge from the pandemic
- Across the country, local CAMHS are often insufficiently funded and unable to respond to demand
- Young people should be able to access support with their mental health regardless of their education, training or employment pathway
- More needs to be done to ensure young people continue to get access to high quality support as they transition from youth to adult mental health services

2.4 Diversity

2.4.1 Amplifying diverse perspectives

- Nationally, young people from different ethnic groups achieve significantly different educational and labour market outcomes. They also experience significant differences in relation to wider outcomes, such as their mental health
- Outside larger metropolitan centres, young people from non-White ethnic groups tend to make up a smaller proportion of the local population. This can create barriers to finding role models, accessing information and guidance, and influencing local decision-making
- Although Buckinghamshire residents are predominantly from White British backgrounds, there are sizeable groups from other backgrounds, particularly in Wycombe

2.4.2 Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county

- While Buckinghamshire as a whole is defined in official statistics as an 'affluent' county, 1 in 14 neighbourhoods within the county are defined as 'hard pressed'. As our mapping reveals, these neighbourhoods are spread throughout Buckinghamshire, often away from urban centres
- Three neighbourhoods in Aylesbury and High Wycombe are ranked among the most limited nationally for social infrastructure, although they are not particularly deprived. This means they have relatively limited civic assets, are less well connected, and have a less active and engaged community

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3   Detailed findings

This section of the report presents the findings from our data snapshot and literature review in detail. We establish the youth context in Buckinghamshire in relation to each of the priority themes in Figure 1, set this local picture within the national context, and draw on existing evidence to identify key causes and barriers, and potential solutions that may be worth exploring in the next stages of the project.

3.1   Transitions

3.1.1 Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment

The importance of fulfilling employment

For many young people, the period between 16 and 25 is characterised by a movement from education to employment. At 16, young people make pivotal decisions about their educational journey, such as A-Levels, supported internships and traineeships. Then, at 18, they decide whether to pursue further study through universities or apprenticeships, or to make a transition directly into the world of work. For most young people, the period of 16-25 will see them move into the labour market, albeit at different stages and through different avenues.

Too often young people find themselves unable to access fulfilling employment, with many having to navigate complex barriers to access the labour market, such as economic disadvantage or caring responsibilities (Newton et al., 2020). Youth unemployment matters greatly at the individual, household and community level. As well as the immediate material costs of reduced income, unemployment is associated with a range of negative health outcomes, including anxiety and depression (The Health Foundation, 2021). Moreover, unemployment may cause stress on personal and household finances, which could reduce young people's ability to keep up on housing payments and to access the support they need.

Youth unemployment and Covid-19

The pandemic has had devastating consequences for many young people in the labour market. Whilst youth unemployment is consistently higher than the general unemployment rate, "young people at 'transition' points in their late teens and early twenties" have experienced a particular fall in employment (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021, p. 5) as a consequence of the pandemic. This can partly be attributed to working in vulnerable sectors, such as hospitality and retail. Alongside immediate concerns about lost income, there are dangers of 'pay scarring', where those who have lost out on work may be less attractive to employers in the long-run, producing a downward pressure on wages. Young people are particularly prone to pay scarring: a period of unemployment "disadvantages individuals above and beyond the direct cost" (Gregg & Tominey, 2005 p.487). Further, the significant number of young people placed on furlough (Henehan, 2021) may themselves be subject to pay-scarring effects (Cominetti et al., 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, "younger people had experienced lower rates of pay growth and higher rates of working in the country's lowest-paid sectors (retail, hospitality, and arts and leisure), compared to their predecessors while the same age" (Henehan, 2021, p. 3). Following the pandemic, young people have faced even greater challenges in the labour market:

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- Over the course of one year, the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds rose from 11.3% to 14.4% in October-December 2020 (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021)
- An April-May 2020 survey found over a quarter of young people felt their future career prospects had been damaged by the pandemic, with just under half saying it will be harder than ever to find work (The Prince's Trust & YouGov, 2020). Elsewhere, Fancourt et al. (2020) note that worries about future plans were consistently higher amongst young adults between 21st March-6th June 2020
- 16-24 year olds now account for almost two-thirds of the total fall in payrolled employment in the year to February (Henehan, 2021)
- There are dangers of long-term unemployment and pay scarring, as with previous recessions (Cominetti et al., 2021)
- In more recent polling from Public First (2021), nearly a third of 18-24 year olds agreed with the statement: "I have lost all hope for the future as a result of Covid"

The figures surrounding youth unemployment are concerning and young people seem alive to what the possible long-term consequences could be if they do not receive adequate support to reengage with the labour market.

Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment: the Bucks context

Compared to a national average of 9.2% and a regional average of 7.8%, Buckinghamshire's 18-24 claimant count compares favourably at 7.4%. Within the county, the claimant count ranges from 6.4% in Aylesbury Vale to 8.4% in Wycombe – still below the national average.

There are considerable variations at local authority level in how well 16/17 year-olds' transitions into education, employment and training are tracked, despite local authorities having a legal duty to track these outcomes. While the proportion of young people known to be NEET in Buckinghamshire is relatively low (0.8%, compared to a national average of 2.7% and regional average of 2.4%), the rate of young people who are NEET or whose status is unknown is the 7th highest in the country, at 10.2%.

Buckinghamshire Skills Hub (2021) have identified several skills strengths in Bucks, including:
- Significant anticipated job growth in a range of sectors
- Employer involvement in the local skills agenda
- Collaboration between employers and educators, with Further and Higher Education Institutions emphasising "applied learning and employability" (*ibid.,* p. 8), and a high-performing Careers Hub
- High performing schools, with residents holding high levels of qualifications
- Cross-sector skills that may breed innovation

These sit alongside a range of challenges, including:
- Retention of talent, with a larger local skills gap
- Low take-up of apprenticeships
- Sector-specific challenges: lack of engineering provision, low interest in construction and health and social care
- Labour market shifts (particularly post-Covid)
- Slow productivity growth
- Inaccessibility of growth sector opportunities

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Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (2021) report a number of ways in which Covid-19 has affected the Bucks economy, some of which are likely to have a particular impact on young people. As of early 2021, approximately 300 registered businesses were at severe risk of insolvency, whilst 4,400 were at moderate risk, which could place downward pressure on youth employment. The LEP also identify a range of sector-specific impacts:

- Aviation: Heathrow and Luton airports provide employment for many Bucks residents, with many Bucks firms working within their supply chains. A significant fall in passenger numbers has put many people's work at risk
- Hospitality and tourism: 1 in 12 jobs are in this sector, which has suffered a marked downturn during the pandemic
- Events: Covid-19 has affected the events industry and those within its supply chain, such as caterers, printers and marketing agencies
- Health and care sector: there has been an increase in job opportunities within the sector but these are accompanied by concerns surrounding burn-out and infection risk, with many choosing to leave the sector
- Construction: despite some significant challenges, particularly among those working in the events industry, Bucks is faring better than other areas, with planning permission applications in Q2 up 6% on 2019

Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment: interventions

In a report commissioned by the Youth Futures Foundation, the Institute for Employment Studies sought to identify 'what works' when it comes to supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful work (Newton et al., 2020). Overall, the report finds a lack of compelling evidence on 'what works', but identifies positive signs in the following areas (*ibid., see p. 11*):

- Accurate identification: identifying risk early, potentially with the use of tracking systems
- Effective engagement: using cultural (music, sports, arts) and financial (e.g. cash vouchers) 'magnets' to encourage take-up of provision
- Effective assessment and profiling: understanding needs and personalising support, including employability skills, capabilities (e.g. agency, self-efficacy), vocational skills, and addressing barriers (e.g. health, housing)
- Trusted, consistent advisors: one-to-one support to help young people overcome access barriers and maintain momentum
- Employer-focused strategies: targeted wage subsidies and intermediate labour markets (e.g. temporary paid jobs with additional support)
- In-work support, CPD and training

3.1.2 Transitions to higher education

Post-18 destinations and widening participation

As young people reach the end of compulsory education, they must make important choices about their post-18 options. Higher education is a popular route, with full-time intake growing rapidly in recent years. As the Augar review of post-18 education notes, the "proportion of English young people entering HE has risen from below 20 per cent in 1990 to almost 50 per cent today" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 20). Further, there has been a significant growth in the number of disadvantaged 18-year-olds entering higher education (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, significant gaps in access remain for different groups of young people. According to the Augar review:

- Disadvantaged 18-year-olds are less than half as likely to enter full-time higher education than their more advantaged counterparts
- Approximately 4% of disadvantaged 18-year-olds attend the highest tariff universities
- The premium for attending higher education appears to be lower for disadvantaged students. Even after controlling for degree subject, institution attended and other characteristics, 29-year-old graduates in the top socio-economic quintile earned between 8-9% more than those from the lowest quintiles (*ibid.*).

Moreover, Crawford & Greaves' (2015, p. 94) analysis of higher education participation amongst the 2008 GCSE cohort found "substantial differences in participation overall and at the most selective institutions by socio-economic status and particularly by ethnicity" (p. 94). Increasing and widening higher education participation has been an explicit aim of successive governments, and all universities now have a duty to broaden their intakes by ensuring young people receive the support they need to make informed choices about their post-18 options.

Academic attainment, HE progression and Covid-19

Given that grades continue to be the key determinant of future higher education participation (Chowdry et al., 2013), improving students' access to a quality education is key to efforts to widen university participation. It is therefore important to attend to any educational fallout from Covid-19 and consider the consequences for higher education participation, particularly amongst underrepresented groups.

During the pandemic, young people have faced significant disruption to their education, which has been felt differently amongst different groups of young people:
- A 'digital divide' has emerged, with TeacherTapp polling for The Sutton Trust (2021) revealing substantial differences in device access between state and private school pupils, as well as substantial differences between the most and least deprived schools
- The Education Endowment Foundation (2021a) has documented an emerging evidence base that suggests that "pupils have made less progress compared with previous year groups" and that the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils appears to have grown
- Young people have had very different experiences of education during lockdown, with variation "in time spent learning, activities undertaken during this time and availability of resources to support learning" and that "this heterogeneity is strongly associated with family income and in some instances more so than before lockdown" (Andrew et al., 2020)
- Other reports suggest 'learning loss' has been highest in high-FSM primary and secondary schools (Renaissance Learning & Education Policy Institute, 2021)

These factors may have implications for those that are yet to transition to post-16 education, the pre-cursor to post-18 destinations. Even after controlling for prior attainment, ability of peers and qualification type, "disadvantaged students still have lower 16-19 attainment than other students" (Tuckett et al., 2021, p. 8). The educational fallout from the pandemic may exacerbate these pre-existing inequalities, which could, in turn, impact on higher education participation. Young people have voiced such concerns in the literature, reporting feeling fearful about their futures in the wake of the pandemic (Public First, 2021; Larcher et al., 2020; Day et al., 2020).

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Other factors affecting higher education access

Whilst grades are a key determinant of higher education access, the causal mechanism at play here may be complex. For example, if a disadvantaged student believes that higher education is "not for people like them" (Chowdry et al., 2013, p. 5, cited by Robinson & Salvestrini, 2020), this could affect their engagement with school. This could, in turn, influence their grades, which are the key means for participation in higher education. Likewise, there is still a gap in HE participation between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students after controlling for prior attainment (Robinson & Salvestrini, 2020). Efforts to raise attainment at school therefore need to be supplemented by interventions focused on other factors, including:

- **Parental influence and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)**: there is strong evidence for a link between parental expectations and children's own expectations and outcomes (Gorard et al., 2012), whilst other research has noted the mediating role that adults can play in young people's decision making about their futures (Harrison & Waller, 2018). Parents with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees felt more confident in supporting their children with their studies during lockdown (The Sutton Trust, 2021), and those parents are also in a better position to provide IAG related to HE study. Respondents to one survey, following the first lockdown, noted that higher education IAG "is reliant on parental knowledge to support students. Therefore, people whose parents don't have this knowledge, or who are estranged from them, are disadvantaged at this time" (Mountford-Zimdars & Moore, 2020, p. 2).
- **School-based IAG, often part of careers guidance:** In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the role that schools can play in shaping post-16, post-18 and careers-related decision-making. Schools are now encouraged to work towards The Gatsby Benchmarks, including 'Linking curriculum learning to careers', 'Encounters with further and higher education' along with six other benchmarks. In addition, colleges have received their own tailored guidance. It is hoped that a renewed emphasis on in-school IAG will give young people the support they need to make informed choices about their futures, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, in their interviews with 16-18 old further education college students, Jones et al., (2021, p.10) felt that "schools-based careers advice was an inadequate surrogate for the kind of social and cultural capitals upon which more advantaged peers are able to draw".
- **University outreach work and IAG:** Universities also conduct outreach work themselves, often partnering with schools. The Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland has reported that Covid-19 has made small group, face-to-face encounters "very difficult, if not completely impossible" (Scott, 2020, p. 7). He argues that in-person sessions have historically helped "demystify higher education" (*ibid.* p. 7), particularly surrounding universities. The Commissioner has acknowledged that a move to online outreach has presented opportunities but these will be hard to access for those living in 'digital poverty'.
- **Availability of part-time work:** Amongst 16-24 year-olds, "120 thousand fewer young people are now combining work and study" (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021, p. 9). This could affect the ability of low-income pupils to fund their studies.
- **Differing priorities and the difference between 'aspirations' and 'expectations':** Whilst it is important to ensure that young people can make informed decisions about higher education participation, we must also acknowledge young people's agency in decisions surrounding higher education. The language of 'aspirations' can create a 'deficit' model towards young people

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(Harrison & Waller, 2018), that implies certain groups have lower aspirations than others. Blaming 'low aspirations' can be unhelpful. Instead, our conversations with young people about their futures should always cover three key bases (Baars, 2019):

- Focus on the steps that need to be taken, as well as the desired destination. Potential aspirations can be suppressed when young people feel unsure about how to realise them
- Distinguish between young people's aspirations (what they want to happen in future) and their expectations (what they think is likely to happen in future). If young people hold high aspirations but do not expect them to be attainable, those aspirations are likely to fade
- Gauge whether young people feel they have influence over their future. This can be considered in relation to specific goals (their 'self-efficacy') and also their overall belief that what they do as an individual has a bearing on how their story will unfold more widely (their 'locus of control')

Transitions to higher education: the Bucks context

Across all neighbourhoods (LSOAs) in Buckinghamshire, an average of 52% of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who completed their GCSEs in the summer of 2012 to 2016 were enrolled on a higher education course when they were 18 or 19 (between 2014-15 and 2019-20). This compares favourably to the national average of 41%. However, HE participation rates vary widely within the county, and 22 LSOAs in Buckinghamshire fall into the lowest quintile (fifth) nationally for their HE participation rate, with participation rates between 15% and 27%. Our interactive map shows the distribution of these HE participation 'cold spots' within the county, with significant concentrations to the west of Aylesbury and the east of High Wycombe.

According to analysis by the Education Policy Institute, (Andrews et al., 2017), there is a gap of almost two years (22.6 months) between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Buckinghamshire and the national average for non-disadvantaged pupils at the end of secondary school. This is a relatively large gap, and is likely to be driving lower HE participation rates among disadvantaged young people in the county.

Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (2021) report a number of ways in which Covid-19 has affected the post-16 education sector in Bucks, both positive and negative. These include:
- A 50% fall in apprenticeship vacancies between 2019 and 2020
- More applications for first degree and postgraduate study within Buck's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- More flexibility among Bucks HEIs and colleges, with some courses starting in January 2021, and condensed first year courses
- Greater interest in courses for careers in health and social care, and teaching

Transition to higher education: interventions

Bucks New University has a range of interventions in place, including:
- pre-sessional campus activities to support young people as they move into higher education (Knight & Rochon, 2012), including online pre-sessional social networking activities
- a targeted National Scholarship Programme (NSP) which has had a positive impact on student retention (Bryne & Cushing, 2015)

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Other areas for intervention could include:
- Supporting schools to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks, with a strong place-based focus on a range of sectors and higher education institutions
- Drawing on ties with higher education providers to support quality outreach work, including early intervention in primary
- Support for IAG outside mainstream school, such as youth clubs and alternative provision, to access a wider range of young people

3.2   Accessibility

3.2.1 Access to affordable local housing

Generational trends in housing

Affordable housing describes "housing of any tenure that is judged to be affordable to a particular household or group by analysis of housing costs, income levels and other factors" (W. Wilson & Barton, 2021, p. 5). Measures of affordability include housing cost to income ratios, and 'residual income' approaches which consider whether people can meet their needs after housing costs are taken into account.

Even prior to the pandemic, young adults were experiencing a significant fall in home ownership (Affordable Housing Commission, 2020), with many having to rely instead on the often expensive and insecure private rented sector (PRS) (Wood & Clarke, 2018). For young buyers that cannot draw on financial support from friends and family, it can be difficult to amass enough money for a housing deposit. The share of families with children in the PRS has nearly tripled since the 1990s, whilst a typical young family would now take 22 years to save for a deposit (Judge & Pacitti, 2021).

Young people's ability to get onto the property ladder is greatly shaped by their parents' personal wealth. In a 2018 study, the Resolution Foundation found that "at the age of 30 those without parental property wealth are approximately 60 per cent less likely to be homeowners" (Wood & Clarke (2018, p. 3).

The wider policy context

Given the number of young people struggling to access stable, secure, quality housing, more needs to be done to help those looking to secure a place to call home. Current key policies include:
- **Increasing the affordable housing stock:** Currently, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019) states that in any major development including housing provision, a minimum of 10% of housing should be for affordable home ownership (with some exceptions) (W. Wilson & Barton, 2021). As part of gaining planning permission for a development, local planning authorities may require developers to provide affordable housing. However, this condition can be lifted if a developer makes provisions off-site or a financial contribution instead. Moreover, the NPPF makes no provisions for affordable rented housing (*ibid.*), which would have the potential to transform young people's experiences of the PRS.
- **Affordable home ownership schemes:** the government have introduced various schemes to support affordable home ownership, including Help to Buy ISAs, Help to Buy Equity Loans[2] and shared ownership, along with schemes to

[2] Help to Buy ISAs closed on 30th November 2019.

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buy council or housing association property. Most recently, the government launched a scheme that would allow those with 5% deposits to get on the housing ladder (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Governmen, 2021)
- **Changes to Housing Benefit:** A series of policy changes since 2010, such as changes in how Housing Benefit in the PRS is determined, have made it more likely that the housing element of Universal Credit may not fully cover rent due, with particular consequences for low-income households (W. Wilson & Barton, 2021)

Impacts of housing affordability

As the Affordable Housing Commission, (2020, p. 13) note, housing unaffordability is often at the root of "poverty, homelessness, debt, family breakdown, mental and physical poor health", and can adversely affect individuals, local communities and the economy at large. With rent costs taking up a large proportion of income, it can be difficult to save enough money for a deposit (*ibid.*). Further, increasing numbers of young adults are reluctantly living with their parents as they are priced out of the PRS, despite the PRS more than doubling in size in the past two decades, whilst social housing has shrunk. The report notes that whilst the PRS may be suitable for some young people, including students, it is not suited to lower-income households, or families who need long-term affordability and security.

The implications of a lack of affordable housing are wide-reaching, with particularly stark impacts for those who:
- are living in low-income and/or financially insecure households, where problems associated with housing issues (such as poverty and family breakdown) can have a damaging effect on young people
- are paying high rent in the PRS during their university studies and are unable to find part-time work to support maintenance costs
- reluctantly stay at home after graduating and must commute long distances to work as a consequence
- may be looking to get on the property ladder and start a family but are unable to as they are not able to draw on family and friends to cover a deposit

A lack of affordable local housing has clear implications for young people's ability to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

Access to affordable local housing: the Bucks context

Housing affordability (the ratio of average local house prices to average earnings of local residents) varies across the county, based on 2018 data which are the most recent figures available at district level before Buckinghamshire became a unitary authority. According to these figures, Aylesbury Value and Wycombe are the most affordable districts in the county, with house prices between 10 and 11 times average earnings. Chiltern and South Bucks are significantly less affordable, with house prices of 15 and 17 times average earnings, respectively. This makes South Bucks the least affordable of 67 districts in the South East, with Chiltern ranked third.

Access to affordable local housing: interventions

Many of the key levers to achieve more affordable housing – such as local authorities' ability to fund new social housing, planning law, and regulation of Buy To Let mortgages, sit at the level of national policy, which limits the scope for local

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intervention. However, economic models for local action such as Community Land Trusts are becoming more common. These exist alongside provision which operates within the private sector. For instance, Hull-based charity Giroscope secure loans and grants to buy and renovate unoccupied properties (Affordable Housing Commission, 2020) which are then furnished and let at affordable rates. In addition, they work alongside the council to aid community self-build housing on vacant public land (*ibid.*).

3.2.2 Digital access

Covid-19 and the digital divide

Many young people have struggled to access remote learning during the periods of school closure since March 2020, and the pandemic has emphasised longstanding issues surrounding access to suitable devices and a stable internet connection, particularly for those attending schools in deprived areas (The Sutton Trust, 2021).

The consequences of poor digital access on young people's transitions are wide-ranging, including:
- **Remote learning:** Many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have struggled to access remote learning, often due to lack of an appropriate device and/or a stable internet connection (The Sutton Trust, 2021). Whilst schools have now re-opened, these issues may still affect students' ability to complete homework and access educational resources
- **Outreach work:** As the Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland has reported, the pandemic has diminished opportunities for small group, face-to-face encounters (Scott, 2020), which have previously helped "demystify higher education' (*ibid.* p. 7). Although some schemes have offered 'blended' approaches, combining online and print resources (Office for Students, 2020), issues with digital access may limit young people's ability to make use of online-only outreach initiatives
- **Work experience, internships and job opportunities:** Young people with poor digital access may encounter difficulties when looking and applying for work experience, internships and jobs. Moreover, this could see them miss out on signposting to interventions such as consistent, one-to-one advisory support, which can be an important way of helping young people furthest from the labour market find meaningful employment (Newton et al., 2020).

Digital access: the Bucks context

Out of 8,481 neighbourhoods (MSOAs) in England, the most digitally excluded MSOAs in Bucks all fare slightly better than average. Areas of relative digital exclusion within the county, based on broadband speeds, device ownership and internet usage, appear to be to the west of Aylesbury, north of Chesham and east of High Wycombe, as shown on our interactive map.

Digital access: interventions

A range of local interventions are underway, including:
- ConnectMK (a PLC owned by Milton Keynes council) partnered with Microsoft to provide refurbished computers to loan at £1.50, targeted at local people on means-tested benefits. They partnered with local schools to support disadvantaged students through computer and broadband provision

- The 'Smarter Buckinghamshire' strategy (2018-2022), which sets out a plan for various interventions, including:
  - Completing rollout of broadband to rural communities
  - Adopting the European Commission's action plan for smart villages
  - Investing in young people's digital skills, and creating opportunities for them to use them

3.2.3 Rural links to opportunities

Transport in rural contexts

Outside densely populated metropolitan areas, young people often face long journey times to access education institutions, large employment centres and other amenities. Although some young people gain access to their own private transport when they reach the age of 17, their less advantaged peers remain heavily reliant on public transport – in particular bus services. Young people growing up in poorer households, outside urban areas, therefore face a double disadvantage when it comes to accessing opportunities. Spielhofer et al. (2011) illustrate how young people's aspirations in rural areas can be significantly shaped by the availability and cost of local transport – with young people sometimes opting for local, less desirable education and employment pathways if their preferred pathways are difficult or expensive to travel to.

Existing literature demonstrates the psychological barriers that can prevent young people from accessing opportunities, even when they are notionally connected to them by public transport networks. For instance, Green and White (2008) document how young people in their Midlands-based fieldwork were unwilling to put up with the 'hassle' of a journey beyond their local area if it involved a change of buses, or multiple modes of transport.

In a recent report, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods document how the density of bus routes, and their usage, has been declining over time (OCSI, 2021). It is harder to maintain commercially viable routes outside densely-populated urban areas, leaving local authorities to maintain routes deemed 'socially necessary', although there is no statutory duty to do so, and no clear definition of a 'socially necessary' service.

Rural links to opportunities: the Bucks context

At a district level, the average travel time to the nearest FE college by public transport or walking is uniform across the county, at just over 20 minutes. However, there are 11 'cold spots' in the county, primarily in the more rural parts of Aylesbury Vale, where this journey takes 45 minutes or more. We have included these FE cold spots in our interactive map.

Across the county as a whole, 78% of residents are within 45 minutes of a large employment centre (defined as supporting at least 5,000 jobs) by public transport and walking. This ranges from 44% in Chiltern to 95% in South Bucks and Wycombe. In 19 neighbourhoods it takes an hour or longer, on average, to access a large employment centre. We have identified these employment cold spots on our interactive map, and as with FE cold spots they are concentrated in the more rural parts of Aylesbury Vale.

Access to large employment centres appears to be most limited in the westernmost region of the county, at the midpoint between Aylesbury and Oxford. While this area of

25

the county is relatively distant from the primary employment and education centres within Buckinghamshire, it sits within the wider economic geography of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021). The Arc contains a number of higher education institutions and has been identified by the government as a hub for innovation and growth. The development of the Arc, and the East West Rail scheme, which will re-establish a rail link between Cambridge and Oxford, create the potential to link the more peripheral northern and western regions of Buckinghamshire to wider education and employment opportunities.

Rural links to opportunities: interventions

The Department for Transport (2020) presents an overview of the potential levers that could improve young people's access to opportunities in more rural parts of Buckinghamshire. These include:
- Supporting employers to facilitate remote working arrangements, including remote job interviews, to allow young people to access labour market opportunities that are not commutable on a daily basis
- Improving the integration between different transport modes, such as bus and train schedules
- Promote the use of cycling through financial incentives, upgrades to infrastructure such as cycle lanes, and supporting cultural change through schemes such as Bikeability

The development of the East West Rail scheme and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc have the potential to link the county's education and employment cold spots with wider regional opportunities.

3.3   Disability

3.3.1 Supporting young people with SEND

Defining SEND

Just as there is "no single definition of disability in the UK" (Hubble & Bolton, 2019, p. 4), the category of SEND can be elusive, covering a wide range of needs and disabilities. The Children and Families Act 2014 defines young people with SEND as those who have:

"significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or ... a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions" (cited by Shaw, 2021)

Shaw (2021) notes the degree of interpretation required in this definition and explains that this lack of clarity can lead to issues of under- and over-identification of SEND. The former may deprive young people of the support they need, while the latter may divert resources away from children whose needs are greater, contribute to the young person experiencing social stigma, and lead to schools missing other factors or practices that may be contributing to the young person's educational difficulties.

As of 2020, 12.1% of students are receiving SEN support, without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), whilst 3.3% of all pupils have an EHCP (Department for Education, 2020). Only about a fifth of those with SEND have EHCPs (Long et al., 2021). The most common type of need for those with a plan is autistic spectrum disorders,

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whilst the most common for those with SEND is speech, communication and language needs (Department for Education, 2020).

Outcomes for young people with SEND

Pupils with SEND tend to have lower educational attainment than their peers. Indeed, the SEND/non-SEND attainment gap is double the size of that between FSM and non-FSM pupils (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). SEND pupils are also five times more likely to be excluded than their peers and to leave the school system prematurely (Hunter, 2019). There is a strong association between SEND and FSM eligibility (Department for Education, 2020). According to the Education Endowment Foundation (2021b), 27% of pupils with SEND are eligible for FSM (the figure is 12% for non-SEND pupils) and those who are both FSM and SEND have significantly lower achievement than other students (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). In addition to lower attainment, Shaw (2021) highlights a range of issues concerning the experience of young people with SEND, such as:

- **Social ostracization**, with one large scale survey finding that students with SEND were much less likely to report themselves having friends and being happy at school, and more likely to be worried about bullying
- **Lack of inclusion in school**, with young people often marginalised from high-quality support, due to a focus on hours of support rather than its effectiveness
- **Exclusion** rates are significantly higher for students with SEND, with many young people also facing barriers during school applications when their parents are informed that schools do not have the facilities to support them
- **Special schools** are often left under-resourced and on the margins of the education system, with not enough collaboration between special and mainstream schools

Variation in identification and support

In a recent report, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) describe a 'postcode lottery' when it comes to SEND identification (Hutchinson, 2021), with the likelihood of being identified with SEND varying according to:

- Whether the judgment is made by a school or a local authority
- The type and phase of school a young person attends
- Neighbourhood-level deprivation

The quality of SEND support also varies widely between educational settings and local authorities. In 'Plans That Work', IPPR note "considerable variation in the quality of support provided between local areas, especially for those not eligible for an EHC plan" (Hunter, 2019, p. 9). This is consistent with Ofsted's (2018, p. 8) 2017/2018 Annual Report, which found that "the gap in performance and outcomes for children with SEND is widening between the best and the worst local areas". Shaw (2021) also notes that post-16 further education colleges are often not set up to support young people with SEND, particularly those who may need assistance in adjusting to a less-structured timetable, with greater demands for independent study. Accessing high quality SEND support can be particularly challenging for young people who have experienced periods of change or instability, such as moving schools or neighbourhoods in early primary school, being frequently absent from school, or having a child protection plan.

Post-18 support and transitions to employment

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For young people with SEND, the movement out of school or college can mean losing access to the support mechanisms that they have built up through their schooling. In their 2017/2018 annual report, Ofsted (2018, p. 12) note that during local area SEND inspections they saw "a continuing lack of coordinated 0–25 strategies and poor post-19 provision, which means some young people just doing the same things for six years more after age 19 and not moving into employment". Whilst EHCPs do have coverage up until the age of 25, young people with SEND do not automatically maintain EHCPs after turning 19, if they have met the aims of their EHCP or it is deemed to be no longer necessary (Hubble & Bolton, 2019). Currently, those aged 16-19 make up about a fifth of EHCPs, whilst those aged between 20-25 make up just 6% (Long et al., 2021).

The IPPR identify a number of risk factors when it comes to supporting young people with SEND as they approach 18 (Hunter, 2019):
- Issues with EHCP quality and relevance, particularly for those of 18, related to reductions in available funding
- A "lack of coordinated planning as young people moved into adult services" (*ibid.* p. 10), leading to young people not accessing support and resources at 19
- Poor integration of services and low employer engagement, with not enough suitable opportunities for disabled young people
- Ineffective engagement between colleges and employers to provide young people with work experience opportunities
- Low uptake of supported internships and apprenticeships, which have been tied to sustained employment for those with SEND (CooperGibson Research & Disability Rights UK, 2013, cited by Hunter 2019)

Supporting young people with SEND: the Bucks context

13.5% of pupils in Buckinghamshire have a statement of special educational needs (SEN), an education, health and care (EHC) plan, or are receiving SEN support. This is below the national and regional average (15.3% and 15.2% respectively). The proportion of the Key Stage 5 (16-18) cohort with SEND in education, employment or training is in line with the national and regional average of 86%.

Supporting young people with SEND: interventions

Bucks Council have long been aware of the social stigma associated with disability. In 2013, the LA organised a student-led conference on bullying, with over 100 students taking part (Soyei et al., 2014). Following this, Bucks County Council organised a conference for primary school teachers on addressing bullying, with a strong focus on disability. The authors suggest that "sharing best practice between schools is very useful for helping teachers engage young people positively with this work" (*ibid.* p. 53) and that high-quality resources can support this.

Other interventions might include:
- Supporting SEND coordinators to make evidence-informed decisions
- Supporting stronger local ties between schools and external services
- Improving education-employer connections for those with SEND, to increase the accessibility of careers education and work experience opportunities
- Personalised, sustained support when transitioning to adulthood
- Supporting uptake of supported internships and apprenticeships

3.3.2 Tackling poor youth mental health

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Youth mental health and parity of esteem

The consequences of mental ill-health can be far reaching, affecting young people's experience of school, employment, relationships and other areas of life that are key to a fulfilling transition to adulthood (Menzies et al., 2018). With around half of 18-24 year-olds saying that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health (Public First, 2021), high-quality, accessible support for young people has never been more important.

In recent years, youth mental health has received renewed attention, with an ambition towards 'parity of esteem', where mental health issues are addressed with the same intent and urgency as physical health issues (McShane, 2014). As with SEND, mental health can be an elusive concept. Popular definitions often tie mental health to issues of wellbeing, which can be shaped by "health, education, work, social relationships, built and natural environments, security, civic engagement and governance, housing and work-life balance" (Robertson, 2021, p. 53). Robertson (2021) notes that it is developmentally appropriate for young people to have some emotional difficulties and conduct some risky behaviour but there is a distinction between these routine experiences and cases of mental ill-health, which form the focus of this section of the report.

Recent trends and causal factors

The most recent reporting from NHS Digital (2018) shows a slight increase in overall rates of mental disorder in young people, with a rise in emotional disorders and other disorders holding stable. In particular, they note that about one in six 17–19-year-olds have a mental disorder, with anxiety disorders and depression amongst the most common in this age group.

Robertson's (2021) synthesis of the evidence suggests certain groups of young people are particularly vulnerable to poor mental health, including:
- **Teenage girls**, particularly those between 17-19
- **Young people from low-income families**, who have a greater propensity to encounter issues with mental health but are less likely to access specialist services
- **Young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds**[3], who are under-represented in CAMHS but over-represented in adult mental health services, which may be partly influenced by disparities in the availability of local services or by a range of complex social and cultural factors
- **Young people with SEND**, partly due to some mental health conditions also being classed as a form of SEND
- **Young people who identify as LGBT+**, who are more at risk of depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour and self-harm than their peers

According to the Education and Health and Social Care Committees (2018) other vulnerable groups include:
- **Looked-after children,** with many not regularly attending school and thus unable to take full advantage of in-school mental health support
- **Children in contact with the criminal justice system**
- **Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs)**

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[3] We acknowledge the limitations of 'BAME' as a descriptive category. There are inevitably inter-group differences within this category.

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Robertson (2021) goes on to detail a complex picture, with a range of 'new stressors' that may be posing challenges to young people's mental health, including:

- **The issue of 'digital natives'**, where young people may feel they cannot talk to adults about the issues they encounter online
- **Social media and screen time**, with access to sites that are not age-appropriate and could facilitate bullying
- **Body image and unrealistic expectations**, which may lead to feelings of insecurity
- **Examination pressures**, with international data suggesting UK students are more likely to feel anxious for tests or tense while studying
- **Home life**, particularly for young people who have experienced parental separation or financial crisis at home. Children living with parents with poor mental health or who receive disability related income are more likely to experience a mental disorder themselves.

The role of schools

Given that they are the only public service that has regular contact with young people, it is logical for schools to play some role in supporting young people's mental health. While teachers are not mental health professionals, they can play an important role in signposting young people to specialist services, where required (Parkin & Long, 2020a). The government have committed to taking forward the recommendations set out in the Green Paper on *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision* (Department of Health & Social Care & Department for Education, 2018), including:

- Mental health leads in all areas by 2025 (Parkin & Long, 2020a)
- Furthering the place of mental health and well-being in Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) (*ibid.*)
- Further development of mental health awareness training for all primary and secondary school staff in England (*ibid.*)

The Education and Health and Social Care Committees (2018) noted that that too often young people do not experience satisfactory transitions to adult services, with many falling out of mental health services entirely. They also argue that there should be greater acknowledgement of the different challenges faced by young people attending FE and sixth form colleges, and those completing apprenticeships, and that young people should be to access support services through all of these routes.

Tackling poor youth mental health: the Bucks context

The most recent data available (2014/15) indicates that the self-reported mental wellbeing of 15 year-olds in Buckinghamshire is significantly better than the regional and national average. However, in 2017 Buckinghamshire Mind evaluated mental health peer support groups across the county, finding gaps in community service provision for younger people, especially for those between 18-35 years-old (Healthwatch Bucks & Buckinghamshire Mind, 2017).

Tackling poor youth mental health: interventions

Several interventions could be considered in this area, including:

- Supporting the sharing of best practice between mental health leads in schools
- Supporting the coordination of mental health support received outside of school

- Interventions aimed at young people at the end of compulsory schooling, which could help bridge the gap between CAMHS and adult mental health services
- Targeted support for groups known to be at greater risk of poor mental health

3.4   Diversity

3.4.1 Amplifying diverse perspectives

Understanding differences and disparities between ethnic groups

Young people from different ethnic backgrounds encounter different challenges during their transition to adulthood, and the barriers they face depend on how their ethnicity intersects with their gender, age and material circumstances (Barnard & Turner, 2011). Our understanding of how young people's ethnicity impacts on their transitions to adulthood is often held back by datasets based on broad ethnic categories, which tend to mask meaningful distinctions between groups and important variation in their outcomes.

Variation in outcomes for young people from different ethnic groups

A range of youth outcomes appear to vary by ethnicity, including educational attainment and exclusion rates, higher education participation, labour market engagement and mental health.

Outcomes in compulsory education

The relationship between ethnicity and educational attainment is complex. Black pupils have the lowest pass rate for GCSE English and maths combined, whilst white pupils make the least amount of progress at secondary school (Roberts & Bolton, 2020). However, among disadvantaged (FSM) pupils, White British pupils have lower secondary school achievement than all other ethnic groups (Strand, 2015). Certain ethnic groups are excluded at far higher rates than others, including Black Caribbean and Irish Traveller/Roma pupils.

Higher education outcomes

Although White young people are least likely to proceed from secondary education to higher education (Richardson et al., 2020), Black Caribbean and Other Black pupils are "significantly less likely to attend a selective institution than their white counterparts" (Crawford & Graves, 2015, p. 11) and tend to have lower retention rates and poorer degree outcomes on average (Roberts & Bolton, 2020).

Labour market outcomes

Even prior to the pandemic, labour market outcomes differed significantly between different ethnic groups, with certain groups experiencing higher unemployment rates than others after the 2008 financial crisis (Francis-Devine, 2021a). Prior to the pandemic, a lower proportion of Black and Asian young people were in work (46%), compared to white young people (68%). As with the 2008 financial crisis (Francis-Devine, 2021a), the effects of the pandemic have been felt differently amongst those from different ethnic groups. The fall in employment rates has been four times greater for young Black people than for young white people, while the fall for young Asian people has been nearly three times greater (Wilson & Papoutsaki, 2021, p. 4).

The Centre for Education & Youth

Mental health

Young people from non-White ethnic backgrounds tend to be over-represented in adult mental health services but underrepresented in CAMHs (Robertson, 2021). This could suggest issues around access, compounded by funding shortfalls and often fragmented mental health support for young people. Robertson (2021) also notes other potential reasons for this difference, including institutional, cultural and socioeconomic factors, as well as stigma surrounding mental health within some ethnic groups.

Amplifying diverse perspectives: the Bucks context

The most recent 2016 population estimates from the ONS indicate that 81% of the county's population are White British; slightly higher than the national average. Of the other main ethnic groups present in the county, the largest are Asian/Asian British (7.7%), Other White (5.4%), Mixed (3%) and Black/Black British (1.9%).

The ethnic compositions of the county's four districts vary around this average. Aylesbury Vale has a relatively large White British population, while Wycombe has relatively high proportions of residents from the other main ethnic groups.

	White British	All Other White	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	Asian / Asian British	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Other ethnic group
Aylesbury Vale	88.0%	2.6%	3.1%	4.2%	1.6%	0.5%
Chiltern	82.1%	7.4%	2.1%	7.4%	1.1%	
South Bucks	79.4%	5.9%	1.5%	10.3%		2.9%
Wycombe	74.9%	7.4%	3.4%	10.3%	2.9%	1.1%

Amplifying diverse perspectives: interventions

Drawing on our work with the Greater London Authority (Millard et al., 2018) and the Social Mobility Commission (Shaw et al., 2016), there are a range of ways in which young people from all ethnic backgrounds can be supported to make fulfilling transitions to adulthood:

- Build strong, constructive relationships with parents and families. Parents can feel disengaged from their children's education if they themselves had negative experiences of school, or feel alienated from settings whose behavioural norms and expectations differ from their own. This support may be particularly crucial for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Black Caribbean families
- Support efforts to increase teachers' and school and college leaders' awareness of unconscious bias, and ways of reducing the impact of biases, where they impact upon areas such as setting and streaming, teacher assessment outcomes, and disciplinary measures such as exclusions
- Support efforts to increase the diversity of the workforce in key youth-facing services such as schools and youth services, and public decision-making bodies
- Ensure all young people have access to peer support, particularly during the primary and secondary school transition
- Support groups with high educational attainment but poorer labour market outcomes, such as young Bangladeshi and Pakistani women, to achieve their career ambitions and progress in the workplace

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3.4.2 Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county

Defining the types of neighbourhoods where youth outcomes are poorest

In general, young people living in deprived areas experience worse outcomes than those in less deprived areas. For this reason, youth-focused research and policymaking has tended to focus on areas of greatest deprivation, based on the widely-used Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). This approach has shortcomings in relatively more affluent shire counties, in which deprivation tends not to be particularly concentrated or extreme. There are relatively deprived areas within such counties, but they are rarely amongst the most deprived in the country. As a result, young people in relatively deprived areas of otherwise affluent counties can be overlooked.

Deprivation-based measures have other disadvantages. First, while household- and area-level deprivation is a significant determinant of young people's outcomes, the IMD fails to distinguish between different 'types' of neighbourhood: two areas might have a similar rank on the IMD, but differ significantly in terms of their ethnic composition, rurality, age structure, and employment profile – such as Blackpool and Hackney. Second, the majority of the most deprived parts of the country are in inner-urban areas, where educational outcomes often compare favourably to the national average (such as in London) and where young people have access to a wide range of opportunities and amenities.

For these reasons, area typologies can be a more powerful tool to describe youth contexts in counties such as Buckinghamshire. Area typologies are based on similar raw data to the IMD – measures of the material environment, local labour market, and demographics of local residents – but rather than distilling this data into a single score and rank for an area, typologies classify areas into 'sets' of places with similar clusters of characteristics. They allow us to make qualitative distinctions in the way we label different neighbourhoods, rather than placing them all on the same sliding scale.

Existing research shows that area typologies are a more powerful predictor of various youth outcomes than the IMD. Pupils attending schools in 'cosmopolitan' inner city areas outperform those in 'hard pressed' outer urban areas by almost a grade and a half in every GCSE they sit – even though both contexts are similarly deprived. Likewise, young people from deprived outer urban areas are five times less likely to aspire to higher skilled professional jobs than their peers in inner urban, equally deprived neighbourhoods (Baars, 2021).

The Census-based Output Area Classification and Area Classification for Local Authorities allow us to create a meaningful picture of the types of neighbourhood in which young people live, and to identify small, isolated areas within a large county that share a similar predicament in terms of their ability to support fulfilling youth transitions.

Research on area-based inequalities has recently begun to place more emphasis on non-economic indicators of local need, and these measures can also prove to be more insightful in shire counties such as Bucks. The Community Needs Index measures the 'social infrastructure' within neighbourhoods including civic assets (such as the presence of libraries and community centres), connectedness (such as the quality of public transport, job opportunities and digital infrastructure), and community engagement (such as level of third sector activity).

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Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county: the Bucks context

All four former districts within Buckinghamshire are designated as 'Affluent England' according to the 2011 Area Classification for Local Authorities. However, within this overall context of affluence, between 6% and 8% of the neighbourhoods within each district are classified as 'hard pressed' – the area type that is associated with the poorest youth outcomes in existing research. We have identified these areas on our interactive map. As is the case across the country, hard-pressed communities are spread throughout Buckinghamshire – not just in more urban and deprived parts of the county. They are often located on the outskirts of conurbations rather than in their centres, and are present in a number of smaller towns and villages in Buckinghamshire.

While there are no neighbourhoods in Buckinghamshire that rank among the most deprived nationally (based on the IMD), 3 wards in the county fall into the highest needs decile on the Community Needs Index: Micklefield in High Wycombe, Walton Court & Hawkslade, and Riverside (both in Aylesbury). We have highlighted these areas in our interactive map.

Shining a spotlight on young people in less affluent areas of the county: interventions

Our mapping suggests there is a small set of neighbourhoods within the county – hard pressed, and with relatively high levels of community needs – from which young people's perspectives should be actively sought. These types of neighbourhoods are generally under-researched, and we have much to learn from the young people who live in them. Beyond the youth voice work contained within this project, other potential actions could include:

- Working with schools to draw on students' understandings of 'place' (for example through student councils) to shape an effective careers education offer, by ensuring employer engagement is more responsive to students' concerns or misconceptions about the local labour market
- Working with local academics to create opportunities for teachers in Bucks to engage in research that deepens their knowledge of the local context in which they work, and how their efforts to raise attainment for 'disadvantaged' pupils can be honed to their specific neighbourhood context

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4   Next steps

This interim report lays the foundations for the next two stages of the project:
- A **local consultation** involving detailed fieldwork with young people to explore their perspectives and experiences of life in the county, and the changes they would like to see to local provision and opportunities, alongside engagement with key partners from local government, statutory services, business, and the community and voluntary sectors to hear their perspectives and identify a consensus for action
- A **funding opportunity review** drawing on the shared priorities that emerge from the consultation, alongside the needs and intervention mapping contained in this interim report, to signpost interventions that could be piloted in Buckinghamshire, and existing local provision that could be supported or scaled up by the Rothschild Foundation

Local consultation

Our local consultation will have two simultaneous strands. The first will involve a consultation with young people, targeting the groups and issues identified in this interim report. Through interviews and focus groups, as well as participatory methods such as walking interviews and mapping, we aim to build a rich and nuanced picture of young people's sense of place, their hopes, expectations and frustrations, their sense of the opportunity structures around them, the key barriers to their life chances, and the things they would like to see change in Buckinghamshire in order to support their transitions to adulthood.

We will triangulate young people's perspectives with the local knowledge held by expert organisations and practitioners, and other stakeholders such as local employers and community organisations, through interviews and surveys. This will allow us to assess key areas of tension and overlap between the perspectives and priorities of local young people and those who shape and inform decision making. These stakeholders will be able to provide a long-term view and a macro-level perspective of the commonly recurring issues they have noticed over the course of their work with young people in the county, and the types of intervention that show promise locally.

The findings of this interim report will guide the questions we explore in the consultation, and the areas of the county we target when recruiting participants. For instance, we may focus on the issue of access to further education and training with young people in the west of the county, and the issue of social infrastructure with young people living north west of Aylesbury.

Appendix 1 lists the stakeholders we have already approached in the initial phase of the project, and provides an indication of the types of stakeholder we aim to engage through the consultation.

Funding opportunity review

The project will conclude in late 2021 with a review of the Rothschild Foundation's youth-focused grant making. This final phase of the work will draw on the priorities for action identified by young people and other local stakeholders during the consultation, alongside the findings of this interim report in relation to areas of need, gaps in provision, and promising forms of intervention. This will lead to a set of suggested programmes or services that the Foundation could support or expand, or trials they

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could seed fund. We are keen to develop a participatory approach to developing these funding recommendations, closely involving young people in the process.

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Appendix 1

Initial set of stakeholders identified or approached

Action4Youth
Age UK
Aspire
Aylesbury Youth Action
Buckinghamshire College Group
Buckinghamshire Disability Services (BuDS)
Bucks BAME Network
Bucks Business First
Bucks Carers
Bucks College Group
Bucks Council – Children's Service
Bucks Council – Service Director for Education
Bucks Council – Virtual School
Bucks Council – Youth VCS
Bucks Disability Advice Service
Bucks Funders Group
Bucks MIND
Bucks New Uni
Bucks Skills Hub
CAB
Challenge Board
Charity Excellence Framework
Chiltern Rangers
Clare Foundation
Community Youth Ventures
Furze Down School, Winslow
Heart of Bucks - Buckinghamshire Community Foundation
High Sherriff of Buckinghamshire
Leap
MamaBee
NHS Charities Together
Oasis Partnership
One Can Trust
One-Eighty
St Francis' Children's Society
The Fitness Garden
ToolShed
Wycombe Homeless Connection
Wycombe Wanderers
Wycombe Youth Action
Youth Concern
Youth Information Service
Youth Offending Team

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