

Supporting marginalised 16- to 25-year-olds in Buckinghamshire

Analysis and recommendations

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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

In 2021, we started working together with The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) to explore how the Rothschild Foundation could better support marginalised 16 to 25 year olds in Buckinghamshire. This work was set against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has challenged all age groups in our community, but none more so than the younger generation. An [interim report](#) set out the youth context in the wake of coronavirus. It compiled a snapshot of data and a literature review, which has both supported our efforts to be a more evidence-led funder and provided valued insight for our collaborators.

In this final report, we have learned even more from The Centre for Education and Youth's team, who over many months met and listened to young people and the adults who work with them. We value the grassroots connections they have made across our community and their efforts to ensure diverse voices have been included. This consultation has resulted in eleven key recommendations set out clearly in this report. They will influence how the Rothschild Foundation will tackle challenges faced by young people and where our investment is prioritised in future. We also believe these recommendations will inform our own grant-making practise: not just what we fund, but how we work with others. Our Strategic Fund, currently focused on the resilience of the youth sector, will have renewed focus on opportunities for young people, particularly those facing barriers to transitions to adulthood in the coming months.

We are delighted to share The Centre for Education and Youth's analysis and recommendations, and hope they will be useful for current and future partners, as well as for other funders considering their role to support young people. Finally, we'd like to thank Billy Huband-Thompson, Sam Baars, Will Millard and The Centre for Education and Youth team for their thoughtful and expert guidance in this work.

List of contributing organisations

This work has been made possible by the generosity of school staff, voluntary and community sector organisations, and young people themselves, who have generously given up their time to speak with us at various stages of this project. We would like to thank all of the organisations and individuals who have contributed to CfEY's work in Buckinghamshire, whether it be during the [interim report](#) stage or in this consultation.

The following organisations have made a particular contribution to CfEY's work during the consultation. A fuller list of the organisations whose work shaped our work in Buckinghamshire can be found [here](#) (many of the organisations identified in the interim report also contributed to the consultation). Please note that the below list is therefore not exhaustive.

Action4Youth

Aspire AP

Aylesbury Homeless Action Group

Bucks College Group

Bucks Council (virtual school, youth services and various others)

Cloudy IT

Connection Support

Leap

New Meaning

One-Eighty

P3

Pebble Brook School

Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School

Youth Concern

YC2

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 makes a significant contribution to knowledge about young people's lives and transitions out of education in these contexts. In addition, it should help inform the support available to young people in the county.

Through this project, we aim to have 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.

This is 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.

In this research project, CfEY have brought together insights from quantitative and qualitative studies, grey literature, local stakeholders and young people themselves. The [interim report](#) drew on a literature review and data scan to outline the challenges facing 16-25 year-olds in Bucks and how young people's experiences vary across the county. Building on the interim report, this second report provides rich place-based insights concerning the challenges young people in Bucks face, the support available to them, and gaps in provision. Drawing on the analysis presented in this report, CfEY have provided a set of recommendations that should inform the Rothschild Foundation's grant-making. In addition, the report should prove useful to schools, non-mainstream educational settings, local businesses, VCS organisations and others working to ensure that all young people in Bucks can make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

1.2 Methodology

The project was 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 was split into four stages. The [interim report](#) covered stages 1 and 2, whilst this analysis and recommendations report presents the outcomes from stages 3 and 4.



Stage 3 - Consultation: The third stage of the research was 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 the [interim report](#) guided the questions we explored, the organisations and individuals we spoke to, and the areas of the county we targeted when recruiting participants. Interviews and focus groups were held over Zoom or face-to-face in Bucks.

Stage 4 - Funding opportunity review: The project concluded with a review of the Rothschild Foundation’s youth-focused grant making, drawing on the shared priorities that emerged 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. CfEY invited young people and youth-facing professionals to comment on some of the findings generated as part of the consultation, which were then refined before being presented in this report.

1.3 Report structure

This analysis and recommendations report presents findings from the final two stages of a research project conducted by The Centre for Education and Youth for The Rothschild Foundation. **Chapter 2** outlines a set of general recommendations that should inform Rothschild’s grant-making, drawing on CfEY’s consultation with young people and youth-facing professionals, and recommendations workshops conducted as part of stage 4 (see above). **Chapter 3** is based 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.

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 county¹

¹ This theme is addressed through the place-based insights provided throughout the report and so is not addressed as a stand-alone section.

2. General recommendations

List of general recommendations

1. Improve understanding of the Bucks context and the particular issues facing 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks

- Widely disseminate the findings of the [interim report](#) to different layers of government, grant-making organisations and others, to improve understanding of the needs of young people in Bucks.
- Produce thematic documents that integrate the findings of the interim report and consultation, which can then be used by grant-seeking organisations to support their applications.
- Commission further work to explore the challenges/barriers facing young people in Bucks.

2. Address the drop-off in support at key points of transition

- Consider how grantees would manage support at key transitions (e.g. 16, 18 and 25), to ensure that gains made through provision are not lost and relationships with young people are maintained.
- Ask grantees to give a clear rationale for the match between their chosen age range and the support they are providing.
- Consider how grantees would make necessary adaptations to their services to ensure that those in the 16–25 age bracket are receiving age-appropriate support.

3. Map needs and interventions across Bucks, including provision in bordering counties

- Ask grant applicants to share information on the geographical reach of their work. This could be geographical data on previous beneficiaries or a projection.
- Invest in the geographical mapping of needs and support in Bucks, to help ensure effective targeting of support.
- Ask grant applicants to justify the geographical targeting of their work, drawing on external evidence (such as the interim report or local authority data) or on internal evidence (evidence they have gathered through their work).
- Ensure that when mapping provision available to young people in Bucks, this includes provision in neighbouring counties, such as Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

4. Understand and address travel-related barriers to support

- Ask grant applicants to outline any anticipated travel challenges to access and how these might be overcome (e.g. budgeting for free/subsidised taxis, providing private transportation or travelling to meet young people in their households/communities).
- Ask grantees to consider any anticipated travel challenges with reference to particular groups of young people and how these might be overcome (e.g. providing detailed travel plans and information for young people with particular SENDs).

5. Improve targeting of pupils, including those on the margins of support

- Ask grant applicants to give a clear rationale for their chosen target group(s) of young people (e.g. a group under-represented in HE, where current outreach provision is insufficient).

- Ask grant applicants how they plan to overcome barriers to access that their chosen target group(s) may face when seeking support.
- Ask grantees to outline efforts to include those who may otherwise be on the margins of support (e.g. those with SEND who do not have EHCPs or those who have recently left care and so may have experienced a drop-off in support available to them).

6. Minimise unnecessary duplication and improve signposting to existing support

- Use the mapping of provision to consider whether there is unnecessary, inefficient duplication of services and for this to shape grant-making decisions.
- Ask grant applicants to consider the other support that their target group(s) of young people are receiving and whether these will be complementary or counter-productive in terms of their outcomes.
- Ask grant applicants to explain how they intend to signpost their provision to improve access, particularly in relation to groups that may be hard to reach.

7. Seek a balance between holistic support and specialist provision

- Ask grant applicants who position themselves as specialists to outline their relevant qualifications and expertise, and draw on appropriate professional guidance to inform decision-making.
- Ask grant applicants to be clear about what they provide, while acknowledging the importance of 'black box' interventions that consist of many simultaneous components.

8. Foster productive relationships between organisations of different sizes

- Consider how grant applicants' scale may affect their provision for young people in Bucks when making grant-making decisions.
- Act as a broker between grantees and grant applicants, facilitating meetings, training events and other forms of targeted, proportionate collaboration where there is demand.
- Ask grantees to draw on evidence to inform their practice and proposals. This might be internal evidence that shows that there is a need for their provision, or that their programmes are working (or that a new programme is likely to work), and/or their plans to evaluate their programmes in the future (while acknowledging capacity issues and other limitations).
- Include an evaluation partner as part of its grant-making offer.

9. Consider the length of interventions and support

- Ask grant applicants to justify their length of intervention/support and outline steps that will ensure that any benefits realised from their provision will be sustainable.
- Acknowledge that interventions aimed at the under-16 age group may play a vital long-term role in preparing young people in Bucks for adulthood. These early interventions can be part of an effective long-term grant-making strategy to support future 16- to 25-year-olds.

10. Consider a range of gatekeepers, going beyond the school gates

- Ask grant applicants to outline how they will engage young people in non-mainstream settings (e.g. special schools, APs and PRUs).

- Ask grant applicants to give a clear rationale for when their programmes are taking place. The Rothschild Foundation may also wish to encourage certain organisations to consider running programmes through the school holidays, where appropriate.
- Ask grant applicants how they will engage non-traditional gatekeepers, going beyond educational settings, and how this might help them give support to groups that may otherwise be hard to reach.
- Facilitate contact between grant applicants and non-traditional gatekeepers, where relevant and useful to their work.
- Ask grant applicants how they intend to engage parents/carers with their provision, whether this be through direct contact or through a third party (such as a housing association).

11. Involve young people at every stage

- Involve a diverse range of young people in the Rothschild Foundation's grant-making process/decisions in some capacity.
- Ask grant applicants whether/how they have consulted the young people they are targeting in their provision.

1. Improve understanding of the Bucks context and the particular issues facing 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks

"We've got some amazing services out there, doing amazing work" (Professional from a housing charity)

"I don't think there's that many young people who feel like they have places to go in town really" (Young person from a support group for young carers)

Addressing misconceptions and generalisations

Across our consultation for this report, adults and young people expressed frustration at external perceptions of Bucks, which often overlook the challenges facing the county. One professional explained that Bucks is a difficult place to live for many young people, contrary to its 'leafy' and 'academic' image. These misconceptions and generalisations appear to have several consequences for the support young people are able to access in Bucks:

i) Social stigma affecting access to support: One professional from a youth-facing charity explained that Bucks is often stereotyped as being affluent, despite the significant pockets of socioeconomic deprivation outlined in our interim report. She explained that this perception creates a social stigma surrounding being from a low-income household or facing other challenges, meaning some young people do not seek out services that they could benefit from.

ii) Less access to funding: A member of staff at a youth sports charity explained that the false perception that there is no youth need in Bucks means that it can be difficult for voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and others to access funding. This was echoed by others during our consultation, who felt Bucks is often overlooked in government schemes and by grant-making organisations.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Widely disseminate the findings of the interim report to different layers of government, grant-making organisations and others, to improve understanding of the needs of young people in Bucks.
- Produce thematic documents that integrate the findings of the interim report and consultation, which can then be used by grant-seeking organisations to support their applications.
- Commission further work to explore the challenges/barriers facing young people in Bucks.

2. Address the drop-off in support at key points of transition

"When you finish school it's like 'Boom, go away. You're an adult, figure it out'" (Young person at a youth forum focus group)

"It can be quite a shock to lose that voice when they [students] leave school" (Professional at a vocational skills training organisation)

Another consistent theme across the consultation was a feeling of despair at the decline in support services available to 16- 25-year-olds in Bucks. In particular, young people, and the adults who support them, were concerned at significant drop-offs in support at

key points of transition, particularly at ages 16 and 18 (the end of compulsory education). In addition, there was a sense that some post-16/18 support is not age appropriate and/or appealing to young people.

With this in mind, the Rothschild Foundation should consider how grantees would manage support at key transitions (e.g. at ages 16, 18 and 25), to ensure that gains made through provision are not lost and relationships with young people are maintained. It should also ask grantees to give a clear rationale for the match between their chosen age range and the support they are providing. Finally, the Rothschild Foundation should consider how grantees would make necessary adaptations to their services to ensure that those in the 16–25 age bracket are receiving age-appropriate support.

Decline of youth clubs/centres and other youth services: Across schools, alternative provisions (APs), pupil referral units (PRUs) and VCS organisations, adults and young people noted a decline in the number of youth clubs. Professionals at multiple organisations explained that the Covid-19 pandemic may well have contributed to youth club closures, but this process was well on its way prior to the pandemic, due to systematic funding cuts. Those who were still attending youth clubs reported finding them useful. For instance, one young person had attended a youth club and now volunteers at sessions for 11- to 16-year-olds, providing a safe place for them to meet to play games or sports.

One professional who worked for the council explained that following a recent consultation, the youth service had been hampered due to a lack of funding, leaving youth workers with unsustainable caseloads, with many young people missing out on vital support. Professionals across schools, APs, PRUs and VCS organisations felt that the loss of Connexions services had left a large gap in the youth service. There was a sense that while other organisations had worked hard to provide pastoral, careers and other forms of support, young people had missed out on the 'one-stop shop' offered by Connexions. However, a leader of one charitable foundation felt that the new 'hubs' approach is more dynamic and efficient.

Drop-off at the post-16 transition: Many young people change school/provider at age 16, moving to sixth-forms, colleges and other destinations. Adults and young people raised concerns about what these transitions would mean for young people's access to out-of-school support. A professional who worked for a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions explained that young people feel a greater sense of agency at 16 and may be more resistant to support as a result. They argued that it is vital that organisations understand why young people may refuse support and to ensure that onboarding is a key part of their post-16 transition. Moreover, having consistent out-of-school support during the transition may act as a bridge between their pre- and post-16 destinations.

Drop-off at the post-18 transition: There was a broad consensus that young people's access to support is often disrupted at key points of transition. At a youth forum focus group we conducted for this report, one pupil explained that school gives young people a natural tie with people who are responsible for them but this ends at age 18. One youth-facing professional noted that social workers and other provision are often changed at 18 and while some support continues until 25, this is not the same as youth support. In particular, she felt that looked-after young people struggle at transition, as they have so many different forms of support, many of which change on their 18th

birthday. Others observed that a lack of funding and capacity mean that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other services are beginning to focus on those under 16/18. Indeed, parents and young people worried that at 18 they would lose their CAMHS support. One young person found it so difficult to access CAMHS that they were considering waiting until they turned 18 to seek mental health support. Moreover, another youth-facing professional noted that, in terms of safeguarding, some organisations treat 16-year-olds as adults, meaning there is a drop-off in support available to them. Another professional, who worked for the council, noted that ideally those with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) would be supported at the point of post-18 transition but this often does not happen as staff are stretched.

Lack of accessible post-16/18 support: Many adults and young people felt that youth-targeted provision becomes less attractive to young people as they reach transition points at 16 and 18. One professional at a housing charity explained that some young people feel a sense of disassociation with statutory-based services, so do not attend, with many finding there are too many restrictions and rules. Similarly, another said that when young people reach 16, youth clubs and centres become less relevant, given that they may have left school.

Staff at a virtual school in Bucks explained that previously they were not invited to pathway planning meetings for young people, with one arguing that if they could support young people beyond the age of 18, that would allow them to provide consistent support at the point of transition.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Consider how grantees would manage support at key transitions (e.g. 16, 18 and 25), to ensure that gains made through provision are not lost and relationships with young people are maintained.
- Ask grantees to give a clear rationale for the match between their chosen age range and the support they are providing.
- Consider how grantees would make necessary adaptations to their services to ensure that those in the 16–25 age bracket are receiving age-appropriate support.

3. Map needs and interventions across Bucks, including provision in bordering counties

Geographical variation in terms of support available to young people

"I just want to get out of Buckingham ... it's just very samey, it's very boring, you feel very trapped" (Young person from a support group for young carers)

Our data scan, published as part of the interim report, revealed significant geographical variation in terms of the opportunities available to 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks. These intra-county differences were apparent to the adults and young people we spoke to. Some felt that larger towns are better resourced than smaller towns, while others pointed to urban–rural differences. Others gave more granular area-specific insights.

One professional, who worked with young people all across Bucks, felt that Wycombe is extremely active in terms of communities supporting each other, with lots of services available that exist outside of the council, many of which are accessible to young people. In her view, Wycombe is quite connected in terms of community resources.

Contrastingly, she felt that Aylesbury is quite fractured, with weak ties in terms of community support, and that South Bucks does not have very strong youth support. On the other hand, another professional felt that Aylesbury Value tends to have more specialised support for young people, though felt it is mostly aimed at either high or low achievers, rather than those in the middle. Several comments were made about certain areas, such as Wendover, Chesham and Princes Risborough, having an older population, with limited opportunities for young people. Other areas, such as Beaconsfield, were described as having not much for young people to do.

Two students at a post-16 college in Aylesbury felt that opportunities in Aylesbury are limited and that young people have to work hard to seek out opportunities. Other areas were seen as facing particular challenges. One professional who worked in higher education (HE) access noted that they have four target wards in Aylesbury and none in High Wycombe, which had been a problem cited in conversations with the Local Economic Partnership. He explained that in certain wards, like Quarrendon, young people are getting good grades and then not transitioning into university. His organisation worked with these schools to help with transitions. To capture this information from grantees, the Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to share information on the geographical reach of their work. This could be geographical data on previous beneficiaries or a projection.

There were conflicting perspectives among adults working in different parts of Bucks, perhaps reflecting the different areas – education, employment, special educational needs and disability (SEND), housing etc. – in which they support young people. These diverse perspectives underscore the importance of understanding the support available in Bucks, breaking it down granularly by area. It is important that supply is matched with demand. For instance, one professional who specialised in work with vulnerable young people suggested that there is a lot of demand for mental health services in Aylesbury but not as much in the Chilterns and South Bucks. We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation invests in the geographical mapping of needs and support in Bucks, to help ensure effective targeting of support.

This mapping work has already begun in some VCS organisations, with one outreach professional explaining the importance of finding gaps in provision. One charity had mapped 30 priority areas to focus on, with a top 10 that should receive the most attention. Elsewhere, one professional at another large youth charity observed that the closure of council-run youth opportunities in High Wycombe had led them to set up a centre there, offering drop-ins, counselling and other support. The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to justify geographical targeting of their work, drawing on external evidence (such as the interim report or local authority data) or on internal evidence (evidence they have gathered through their work).

Provision across borders

While this work focuses principally on Bucks, our consultation found that much support for young people passes over county borders. Some young people in Bucks may receive vital support from the VCS in Northamptonshire (and vice versa), for instance. This should be taken into account when mapping services available to young people.

There were several examples of this, including:

- A vocational skills training organisation, where young people came from as far as Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Chesham and Amersham to access support.

- A charity specialising in psychology-based interventions to support young people to live meaningful lives. This is based in Oxfordshire, but works closely with a virtual school in Bucks. It observed that in Bucks there are more rural areas than in Oxfordshire, therefore there seems to be less for young people to do, especially the older ones. In addition, it noted that there is more substantial SEND support and AP in Oxfordshire than in Bucks.
- A 'Uni Connect' partnership between Buckinghamshire New University, the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and the University of Reading, with coverage across a range of counties.

Therefore, the Rothschild Foundation should ensure that when mapping provision available to young people in Bucks, this includes provision in neighbouring counties, such as Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grant applicants to share information on the geographical reach of their work. This could be geographical data on previous beneficiaries or a projection.
- Invest in the geographical mapping of needs and support in Bucks, to help ensure effective targeting of support.
- Ask grant applicants to justify the geographical targeting of their work, drawing on external evidence (such as the interim report or local authority data) or on internal evidence (evidence they have gathered through their work).
- Ensure that when mapping provision available to young people in Bucks, this includes provision in neighbouring counties, such as Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

4. Understand and address travel-related barriers to support

Issues with public transport

"Most people I've known complain about the transport if I'm going be honest ... how are you going to get to places? I mean I know we live in the absolute middle of nowhere so ... you're not going to get transport regularly, but they did used to have a regular bus there when I first moved and then they stopped, I don't know why" (Young person from a support group for young carers)

With some areas reportedly offering fewer opportunities for young people, many needed to travel to access services and/or meet with friends. For many young people, particularly those who could not drive or did not have a parent/carer to drive them, this meant relying on public transport. Unfortunately, in many cases, public transport (most notably buses) was said to be slow, expensive and difficult to navigate. This meant that some young people struggled to access support outside of their local communities. In a focus group with young carers, young people noted that they would try to travel to Milton Keynes or Aylesbury to meet with friends but their bus cost £11 for a student return, ran once an hour and did not run at all on Sundays. This meant they travelled less than they would otherwise. One young person explained that her mother often receives emailed about activities that her brother may benefit from but they were always happening further south, in High Wycombe or Aylesbury, meaning it was hard to get there when her parents were working. Given these travel issues, we recommend that the Rothschild Foundation should require grant applicants to outline any anticipated travel challenges in terms of access and how these might be overcome. This could

include budgeting for free/subsidised taxis, providing private transportation or travelling to meet young people in their households/communities, for instance.

Transport issues for particular groups of young people

Poor public transport posed particular challenges to different groups of young people in our research. One of these groups was young people with SENDs. One young person at a life skills programme explained that he is being taught how to use public transport as part of his course, but at the moment he is not confident enough to access the old town near him, which would allow him to go outside and access social opportunities. These concerns were echoed by young people at a special school, who found that public transport is complex and very poorly signposted. One teacher at the school explained that for many young people, a delayed bus or a change of route may be enough to throw them off and mean they do not travel at all. Several young people at the school also noted that their bus passes are not valid before 9am, which makes getting into school financially challenging. The Rothschild Foundation should therefore ask grantees to consider any anticipated travel challenges with reference to particular groups of young people and how these might be overcome. This could include providing detailed travel plans and information for young people with particular SENDs.

The Rothschild Foundation should:

- Ask grant applicants to outline any anticipated travel challenges to access and how these might be overcome (e.g. budgeting for free/subsidised taxis, providing private transportation or travelling to meet young people in their households/communities).
- Ask grantees to consider any anticipated travel challenges with reference to particular groups of young people and how these might be overcome (e.g. providing detailed travel plans and information for young people with particular SENDs).

5. Improve targeting of pupils, including those on the margins of support

Targeting pupils

"What we sing home all the time is that we want anybody that wants to do it to be able to do it" (Professional at a large youth charity)

When planning any youth-based provision, it is important to consider who will be entitled to the programme or support. There may be strong arguments for targeting certain groups of young people, such as those at risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those with an identified SEND, particularly where resources are scarce. Young people may also appreciate opportunities to meet those who share similar experiences to them. For instance, members of a group for young carers liked having a judgement-free space to talk with others with similar experiences and raise issues they felt unable to talk about at school. This shared experience also made it easier for them to receive bespoke information, advice and guidance (IAG) surrounding their post-16/18 options. In addition, some of those who participated in a local group for young carers when they were younger stayed on to support the group as volunteers. One of those who stayed on explained what they felt this meant for younger group members:

"I really enjoy it, I relate to quite a lot of the children here. And I think it's nice for them to see an older young carer as opposed to a volunteer; because they know that you're going through the same things that they've been through, and you've made it out. You're older than them and if you've done it they think that they can do it." (Young person from a support group for young carers)

A professional at a large youth charity explained that they have bursary places on one of their flagship programmes and are proactive about seeking a wide range of schools and young people to sign up. Part of the programme involves one-to-one support for those who are at risk of becoming NEET, providing them with a range of future options, rather than taking a slant towards a particular destination (e.g. university, an apprenticeship or work).

Elsewhere, professionals at a youth sports charity explained that their focus is on young people who would not otherwise get involved in sports activities, not necessarily out of a lack of motivation but due to limited opportunities. They noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted inequalities and helped them prioritise where funding is directed. In particular, they cited a scheme to help communities set up local clubs, which saw them work more with harder-to-reach groups. They also noted a particular focus on young carers, given that this group is reportedly particularly large in Bucks. They explained that young carers often find it hard to commit to traditional sports clubs, so it is important to provide something more informal and relaxed.

Overall, the consultation showed that it is important for youth-facing organisations to have a clear rationale for their chosen target group(s) of young people, targeted support and efficient allocation of resources. The Rothschild Foundation should therefore ask grantees to give a clear rationale for their chosen target group(s) of young people. For instance, this could be a group under-represented in HE, where current outreach provision is insufficient. In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants how they plan to overcome barriers to access that their chosen target group(s) may face when seeking support.

Those on the margins of support

"They only really get help if they're at the front of the line" (Youth-facing professional who worked at Buckinghamshire Council)

While targeted provision can be an important way of providing for those in greatest need of support, target categories are often difficult to demarcate, leaving some young people on the margins of support. As one professional noted, young people who are unable to get EHCPs, for instance, may miss out on vital interventions that could benefit them. Similarly, a member of staff at an AP provider felt that those with EHCPs and/or an identified SEND are more likely to access support in specialist settings than those who are undiagnosed (even if there is an undersupply of specialist support in Bucks).

One professional at a housing charity noted that CAMHS have thresholds and long waiting lists, meaning that some young people who have combinations of need, such as mental health issues and substance abuse, may fall through the gaps between services. Elsewhere, professionals at a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions noted that young people may not have a diagnosis but struggle with the way they are being moved about in the system. To access certain programmes, like the

aforementioned life skills programme, young people need to have EHCPs and be within the 16–25 age range, as 25 is the limit for EHCPs.

To ensure that all young people can get the support they need, the Rothschild Foundation should ask grantees to outline efforts to include those who may otherwise be on the margins of support. This might include those with SEND who do not have EHCPs or those who have recently left care and so may have experienced a drop-off in the support available to them, for example.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grant applicants to give a clear rationale for their chosen target group(s) of young people (e.g. a group under-represented in HE, where current outreach provision is insufficient).
- Ask grant applicants how they plan to overcome barriers to access that their chosen target group(s) may face when seeking support.
- Ask grantees to outline efforts to include those who may otherwise be on the margins of support (e.g. those with SEND who do not have EHCPs or those who have recently left care and so may have experienced a drop-off in support available to them).

6. Minimise unnecessary duplication and improve signposting to existing support

Number of programmes and duplication

"There are more young people needing support than we are able to provide for"
(Professional from a housing charity)

As covered in the interim report, the needs of young people, and the amount of support available to them, vary across Bucks. In the consultation, young people and professionals felt that the number of programmes available to 16- to 25-year-olds varies by area. Overall, there was a sense that much of the youth sector is competing for local pots of money or fighting for referrals to under-pressure professional services. With core services like CAMHS oversubscribed, many smaller VCS organisations are picking up referrals, and some felt this contributes to a lack of coordination when it comes to support for young people in Bucks. While acknowledging that youth provision in Bucks is distinctly lacking in some areas, some professionals we spoke with felt that there are too many organisations duplicating work and that better mapping of need would improve resource allocation. We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation uses the mapping of provision to consider whether there is unnecessary, inefficient duplication of services and for this to shape grant-making decisions.

It was widely acknowledged that many young people would access multiple provisions and services at the same time. For instance, a young person may be in a support group for young carers, be receiving counselling and also attending a group that aims to support under-represented groups to access work experience. However, there were concerns that young people's access to two simultaneous interventions may be counter-productive. For instance, one professional at a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions recalled giving support to one young person who was involved in in-depth trauma therapy at the same time, which meant their intervention was less likely to succeed. The Rothschild Foundation should therefore ask grant applicants to consider the other support that their target group(s) of young people are receiving and whether these will be complementary or counter-productive in terms of their outcomes.

Signposting

There are opportunities out there, but "if the information isn't supplied, unless you've got the tools to look for it, you won't find it" (Professional at a vocational skills training organisation)

Participants felt that there was also a need for better signposting of existing resources. One participant in a youth focus group explained that a law firm in Aylesbury gives out money to college and university students to help them purchase studying resources. However, this was reportedly not well advertised and they only found out about it by chance through a family friend. There was a sense that advertising such opportunities in youth community groups, local VCS organisations other outlets could improve signposting to support.

A professional at a large charity explained that young people are often overwhelmed by the number of programmes they have available to them, so there is a need for clarity about what they are trying to achieve. For one professional at a housing support service, this concern is particularly pronounced for certain groups of young people, such as care leavers, who may need more help to work out where to access support at points of transition. This support is provided at a group for young carers, where they discuss post-18 options, including funding available to young carers.

It is vital that young people know where to go for support. Therefore, we recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants to explain how they intend to signpost their provision to improve access, particularly in relation to groups that may be hard to reach.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Use the mapping of provision to consider whether there is unnecessary, inefficient duplication of services and for this to shape grant-making decisions.
- Ask grant applicants to consider the other support that their target group(s) of young people are receiving and whether these will be complementary or counter-productive in terms of their outcomes.
- Ask grant applicants to explain how they intend to signpost their provision to improve access, particularly in relation to groups that may be hard to reach.

7. Seek a balance between holistic support and specialist provision

Holistic support and specialism

Through the consultation, we spoke with a range of organisations, some of which provided specialised services (e.g. interventions from qualified mental health professionals) and others that act as a 'one-stop shop' for young people. The former are vital services for young people and often greatly under-resourced, particularly in the case of CAMHS. The latter can also be invaluable in giving young people a place to go, a community to participate in, and a means of accessing more specialised services.

Loss of specialist support: Alongside large-scale youth club closures, one professional spoke of how there used to be a range of council-led services available to young people but now everything sits under the 'family workers' bracket, which has meant a loss of specialist support. In addition, several youth-facing professionals spoke about the loss

of Connexions services, which helped young people with their careers but also supported them with drug problems, counselling and other issues. Addressing this lack of specialist support is an urgent task but one that must be handled with great care. The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants that position themselves as specialists to outline their relevant qualifications and expertise, and draw on appropriate professional guidance to inform decision-making.

Importance of holistic support: One of the organisations we spoke to is looking to tackle youth homelessness but also provide more holistic support at a central hub. It acknowledged that this could not be a substitute for other professional services (such as CAMHS) but could be helpful in giving young people somewhere to socialise and get help with referrals. As one professional put it, young people need access to both specialised services and general opportunities to chill out and socialise. The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to be clear about what they provide, while acknowledging the importance of multi-stranded interventions that consist of many simultaneous components.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grant applicants who position themselves as specialists to outline their relevant qualifications and expertise, and draw on appropriate professional guidance to inform decision-making.
- Ask grant applicants to be clear about what they provide, while acknowledging the importance of multi-stranded interventions that consist of many simultaneous components.

8. Foster productive relationships between organisations of different sizes

Scale of organisations

Another key consideration concerns the scale of organisations being funded. During the consultation, youth-facing professionals articulated a range of viewpoints surrounding the relative advantages and disadvantages of smaller and larger organisations.

Smaller organisations: Many of the smaller organisations we spoke to felt that they are well-placed to respond sensitively to local need. A professional at a small charity seeking to tackle youth homelessness noted that her staff come from the local community and are very invested in their work as a consequence, with an awareness of need in Aylesbury Vale. She, along with others in smaller VCS organisations, felt that their smaller scale means they can create a more welcoming, hospitable environment for the young people they are supporting. However, there were concerns that smaller organisations can find it difficult to benefit from economies of scale and might be less efficient as a consequence. It may also be more difficult for smaller organisations to evidence their impact (as discussed later in this section) and to gain funding. One professional at a vocational skills training organisation explained that although they have received support from the Rothschild Foundation, they have found it hard to get government funding.

Larger organisations: Larger organisations we spoke to are able to benefit from economies of scale and spread themselves across Bucks (and often beyond). One member of staff at a large housing support service noted that their scale means that they can have dedicated development and fundraising teams, who can seek out and apply for grants. She also explained that they have tried to create a similar, consistent

sense of homeliness across all of their centres. Larger organisations also felt well-placed to share insights across their team and to generate evidence of impact. Monitoring and evaluation capacity was higher in these larger organisations, which may have benefits when looking to improve practice and during grant applications.

Both smaller and larger organisations may have relative advantages and disadvantages when it comes to their support for 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks. We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation considers how grant applicants' scale may affect their provision for young people in Bucks when making grant-making decisions.

Collaboration and partnerships between organisations

There were mixed feelings about the extent to which youth-facing organisations would benefit from collaboration. There was appetite for organisations, large and small, to share practice with one another, but professionals also cautioned against viewing collaboration as an end in itself. If organisations were to work together, they felt this should be limited and proportionate, with clear objectives and outcomes outlined prior to collaboration.

In some cases, collaboration was felt to be an essential part of ensuring coordination between all of the different forms of support that young people may be accessing at any one time. One charity that specialised in psychology-based interventions explained that they previously wrote weekly reports summarising young people's progress to share with their professional network, such as SEND officers and social workers. This was then changed to mid-point and closure reports, with emails and calls in between. They also attended meetings with others in the young person's support network to get them onside and aim to redirect support if they felt that the support was not targeted properly. In addition, collaboration was tied to the particular circumstances of the individual young person. For instance, they might have more frequent contact with school if they are a student at risk of exclusion.

"Without a doubt I think the number one challenge is trying to get that partnership working cohesively" (Professional at a youth sports charity)

A professional at a large charity explained that they had gone to great lengths to collaborate with smaller organisations but that this had not gathered any significant momentum. However, there did seem to be some success stories when it came to collaboration, albeit with some challenges.

One youth sports charity had worked with a church youth group in Chalfont to support a group of boys who had been causing trouble and whose youth club felt they could benefit from physical activity. It was increasingly trying to work with community organisations to get more young people into sport and to signpost them to those who may be able to provide more tailored support. Here, it was important for organisations like the youth sports charity to have good knowledge of the expertise represented in the wider Bucks VCS and to offer their own expertise out when it came to physical activity. One member of a youth sports charity sat on a wellbeing board and the organisation has worked with CAMHS and a large, county-wide mental health organisation. While the charity has gone to great lengths to foster collaboration, it explained that partnership working can be competitive, especially if organisations are seeking funding from the same places. While others can be territorial, it tries to act as an "honest broker". Rather than viewing other organisations as competition, it pursues common agendas with

them. This ethos of positive collaboration was also adopted by one smaller charitable foundation, which partnered with the University of Buckingham, which has a similar interest in enterprise. Through the university, it also began working with a larger charitable foundation (which presented prizes at a schools event) and also received support from an international technology company.

It is clear that collaboration should be viewed as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. There is little point in asking organisations to collaborate with one another without clear objectives in mind. If anything, this could lead to a waste of resources. However, there may be useful opportunities for grantees to learn from one another and work together in appropriate ways. With this in mind, the Rothschild Foundation should act as a broker between grantees and grant applicants, facilitating meetings, training events and other forms of targeted, proportionate collaboration where there is demand.

Evaluation/evidence expectations of smaller organisations: It is important that all organisations working to support young people are able to evidence their impact or anticipated impact. A youth sports charity, for instance, felt that there is already some good available evidence on how physical activity can improve mental health. Larger organisations may have capacity to support evaluation through an in-house research team or external evaluator. Smaller organisations are likely to find it more difficult to evidence their work through impact evaluations compared with larger organisations. In addition, one professional at a youth homelessness charity explained that smaller organisations like hers often have to apply for smaller, more prescriptive grants, which means they have little autonomy or flexibility in terms of how the money is spent, which slows their work down. In such instances, it may be appropriate to relax some spending and reporting conditions, provided grantees can evidence their impact or anticipated impact in some meaningful way.

We recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grantees to draw on evidence to inform their practice and proposals. This might be internal evidence that shows that there is a need for their provision or that their programmes are working (or that a new programme is likely to work), and/or their plans to evaluate their programmes in the future (while acknowledging capacity issues and other limitations). To facilitate this, the Rothschild Foundation could go further and include an evaluation partner as part of its grant-making offer. This could involve introductory workshops, training and/or continuous support for grantees. This would have three key benefits:

- ensuring that the Rothschild Foundation's grant-making is evidence-informed
- improving the working practice of grantees
- raising the standard of evidence in youth-oriented support in Bucks.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Consider how grant applicants' scale may affect their provision for young people in Bucks when making grant-making decisions.
- Act as a broker between grantees and grant applicants, facilitating meetings, training events and other forms of targeted, proportionate collaboration where there is demand.
- Ask grantees to draw on evidence to inform their practice and proposals. This might be internal evidence that shows that there is a need for their provision, or that their programmes are working (or that a new programme is likely to work), and/or their plans to evaluate their programmes in the future (while acknowledging capacity issues and other limitations).

- Include an evaluation partner as part of its grant-making offer.

9. Consider the length of interventions and support

Length of intervention and support

A key issue raised in the consultation concerned the length of interventions. In many instances, schools, APs, VCS organisations and other youth-facing organisations reported having to place limits on the provision length due to funding and capacity issues. Organisations were very conscious of not being like a “fair that comes to town” and then just leaves (as one professional put it), with a strong focus on sustainability.

One youth-facing professional who worked for the council explained that those coming to the family support service at Level 2 would only get six weeks of support. While she acknowledged that there needed to be a time limit on interventions, she felt it is hard to build a strong, productive relationship with young people over this time. She contrasted this with a previous programme that used to run over the course of a year, every week, including during the summer, which allowed them to build strong relationships with young people. A professional at a housing charity raised a similar issue with another mental health programme, in which young people reportedly begin to open up just as the sessions end.

“I used to love my social worker. I was really sad when we got off social.” (Young person from an AP focus group)

Length of intervention was seen as an issue that particularly affects those outside of mainstream educational settings. One member of staff at an AP explained that over a quarter of their students have EHCPs and that many would otherwise be in a PRU, which often have a transient population, potentially presenting a challenge to those with social and emotional needs. Moreover, a professional at a housing support service explained that provision is often too short term and underlined the need for longer-term support as young people leave children’s services, as they are too often left to their own devices. She explained that short-term interventions like temporary financial support will not help to address underlying issues.

However, there did seem to be a place for short-term interventions in particular contexts. For instance, in a discussion with staff at a charity that provides shorter-term psychology-based support for young people, we heard about potential attachment issues that may occur if an intervention lasts for too long. Elsewhere, one professional said that it is important for there to be a cut-off in support at some point or otherwise their organisation would become an unhealthy crutch for young people. Here, it may be instructive for grantees to think about how much can be achieved in a short period of time and whether/how this support might be followed up later down the line.

We recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants to justify their length of intervention/support and outline steps that will ensure that any benefits realised from their provision will be sustainable.

Early intervention

Although this work focuses on the 16–25 age bracket, young people and youth-facing professionals emphasised the importance of early intervention as a means of

preventative support. For instance, if a young person aged 13 is suffering from anxiety and depression, this can then affect their relationships, studies and other aspects of their life. Here, access to CAMHS and other specialist support could help the young person before these issues become more severe. In many senses, the specialist 16–25 organisations we spoke to felt that they were having to compensate for a lack of earlier support, which presented challenges to their work. A professional at a virtual school, for instance, felt that young people arrive to them at 16 with poor academic performance but also a range of other challenges, such as mental health problems. This issue is particularly pronounced for young people who enter care late and have not previously accessed support as they were not 'in care'. She explained that they do not have the resources to address all of these issues, particularly at the post-16 level, where funding is particularly tight. Another professional, who worked for a housing charity, said she would like to see more preventative mediation for families, which could help stop breakdowns happening in the first place. She felt that this would help to lessen the impact on services and keep young people in their family home.

The Rothschild Foundation should acknowledge that interventions aimed at the under-16 age group may play a vital long-term role in preparing young people in Bucks for adulthood. These early interventions can be part of an effective long-term grant-making strategy to support future 16- to 25-year-olds.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grant applicants to justify their length of intervention/support and outline steps that will ensure that any benefits realised from their provision will be sustainable.
- Acknowledge that interventions aimed at the under-16 age group may play a vital long-term role in preparing young people in Bucks for adulthood. These early interventions can be part of an effective long-term grant-making strategy to support future 16- 25-year-olds.

10. Consider a range of gatekeepers, going beyond the school gates

Support in schools, APs, PRUs and other educational settings

Much support for young people is provided in school, whether that be careers provision, IAG concerning post-16/18 options or pastoral support. For young people, particularly those who may require additional support, strong relationships with schools and colleges can be vital. In addition, schools play a vital role in making referrals to other support services provided by the council, the VCS and other organisations. A professional at a large youth charity explained that they have strong relationships with local schools, particularly in Aylesbury Vale, where they have been running projects for a long time.

These relationships with schools help them to engage with more young people. However, for many young people who are not in mainstream school, it can be more difficult to access the opportunities that may be available to them. One teacher at a PRU explained that many outreach schemes are targeted solely at mainstream schools, rather than APs and PRUs. Elsewhere, one of the tutors on a life skills programme for young people with SEND found it very difficult to make contact with employers to help her students secure work experience. She felt that a lot of this is down to employers' pre-conceptions about the capabilities of young people accessing the life skills programme, all of whom have an identified SEND and EHCP.

Some provision had been set up explicitly to engage with those who may be in non-mainstream educational settings. A member of staff at a virtual school explained that they worked with many of those who have poor prior academic attainment and that their substantial post-16 offer helps young people re-engage with education. Other organisations, like one vocational skills training organisation, worked with schools and agencies on referral but also engaged young people who might be excluded, attending a PRU, being home-schooled or who have been in contact with youth offending services. The participant at the vocational skills training organisation felt that their programme allowed students to reconnect with education and see a future for themselves.

We recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants to outline how they will engage young people in non-mainstream settings (e.g. special schools, APs and PRUs).

Outside of term-time

There was a concern that much support for young people in Bucks is limited to term-time, which means that progress, whether socially, academically or in terms of mental health, may drop off during the summer.

Some youth-facing professionals felt there is little structured provision available to young people during the holidays. That said, one large charity runs several active citizenship programmes, alongside other programmes for those with SEND, which tend to be more specialised. One professional explained that while the government has put a lot of emphasis on 'recovery', it is important that this is wide-ranging, with holidays presenting a key window of such opportunities. She continued that year 11 is a key time for young people, as they have opportunities to recreate themselves, make new friends and look forward at their post-16/18 options.

We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants to give a clear rationale for when their programmes are taking place. It may also wish to encourage certain organisations to consider running programmes through the school holidays, where appropriate.

Beyond the school gates

"There's loads of different ways to engage children and young people. It doesn't have to be through the traditional avenues or establishments such as schools. There are other groups – community organisations, faith groups, there are so many groups out there that we can tap into and engage children and young people." (Professional at a youth sports charity)

While acknowledging the importance of schools, APs and PRUs, some organisations had sought out other services and gatekeepers to widen access and improve support for the young people they were targeting. One youth sports organisation explained that it had recently begun focusing more on outside of education and looking at communities and families, which are the areas where the county needs more support. It felt that the Covid-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to do things differently and start working with partners and stakeholders it had not previously worked with.

Across the consultation, young people and youth-facing professionals were worried that once young people leave school, they may struggle to access information, particularly

for those moving from small schools to large colleges. Professionals argued that it is important to have places outside of the education system for young people to access support and be referred to specialist services, but that there is a shortage of these in Bucks.

We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grantees how they will engage non-traditional gatekeepers, going beyond educational settings, and how this might help them give support to groups that may otherwise be hard to reach. In addition, the Rothschild Foundation could facilitate contact between grant applicants and non-traditional gatekeepers, where relevant and useful to its work (as discussed under recommendation 8).

Engaging parents/carers

Across the consultation, youth-facing professionals and young people emphasised the importance of parents and carers as a key part of young people's support network. One young person at a post-16 college in Amersham explained that his mother had been very proactive and arranged meetings with his school about how to accommodate his identified SEND, but other young people may not have as strong support in their family. This underlines the importance of having systems in place that allow schools, VCS organisations, families and other parts of young people's support mechanisms to work together productively.

Professionals from a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions explained that a key part of their multi-agency work is empowering parents and carers to carry on the work with the young person after their intervention ends. Here, they were very conscious of issues surrounding attachment, and always had two or three members of staff responding to each young person to mitigate this risk.

Another professional whose organisation is seeking to improve digital access and competency, felt that while schools are key gatekeepers for young people, they can be quite detached from parents and carers. He found ties with housing associations a useful way of addressing this issue. During his organisation's education-focused digital donation project, after saturating schools, they started donating digital devices to housing associations. They also found charities useful to work with, given their sector knowledge and attention to impact.

We therefore recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants how they intend to engage parents/carers with their provision, whether this be through direct contact or through a third party (such as a housing association).

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grant applicants to outline how they will engage young people in non-mainstream settings (e.g. special schools, APs and PRUs).
- Ask grant applicants to give a clear rationale for when their programmes are taking place. The Rothschild Foundation may also wish to encourage certain organisations to consider running programmes through the school holidays, where appropriate.
- Ask grant applicants how they will engage non-traditional gatekeepers, going beyond educational settings, and how this might help them give support to groups that may otherwise be hard to reach.

- Facilitate contact between grant applicants and non-traditional gatekeepers, where relevant and useful to their work.
- Ask grant applicants how they intend to engage parents/carers with their provision, whether this be through direct contact or through a third party (such as a housing association).

11. Involve young people at every stage

During the consultation, we spoke to young people at different stages in their transition to adulthood, at schools, APs, PRUs, VCS organisations and other settings. While young people had a range of experiences to share, they were united in feeling that they wanted to have more of a say in matters that affected them. Young people appreciated initiatives like the youth forum and wanted further opportunities for a diverse range of their age group to share experiences and opinions. They felt it important to know that they were not simply being paid lip-service, but that their contributions could effect tangible change. The Rothschild Foundation should consult with the young people who are the intended beneficiaries of certain forms of support (e.g. hearing from young carers about a proposed HE outreach scheme aimed at them).

The Rothschild Foundation should:

- Involve a diverse range of young people in the Rothschild Foundation's grant-making process/decisions in some capacity.
- Ask grant applicants whether/how they have consulted the young people they are targeting in their provision.

3. Thematic analysis

3.1. List of thematic recommendations

Transitions

Transitions to higher education

- Consider grant applications from organisations looking to help young people with their decision-making prior to key points of transition, as well as those that support them at the point of transition itself.
- Ensure that grantees/applicants with an IAG focus are presenting young people with the full range of the post-16/18 options available to them, for instance emphasising that higher education is one of a range of options, all with potential advantages and drawbacks.
- Support grantees providing IAG regarding post-16 options, as post-16 destinations shape post-18 decision-making.
- Consider how issues raised at post-16 transition (e.g. limited college opportunities for those with SEND) may affect young people's post-18 decision-making, and how other forms of support (e.g. subsidised supported accommodation near suitable colleges) may widen access to post-18 destinations.
- Strengthen ties with the University of Buckingham, Buckinghamshire New University and other post-18 providers to help grantees with their outreach work.
- Support university outreach that:
 - o Emphasises local options.
 - o Covers a wide range of universities, at a range of tariffs, for young people at different levels of academic attainment.
 - o Discusses the financial implications of university, with attention paid to certain groups of young people (those living in socioeconomic disadvantage, young carers etc.).
 - o Considers the different travel implications for young people in Bucks.
 - o Builds on schools' knowledge of their cohorts (e.g. through supplying labour market information, facilitating guest speakers etc.).
 - o Targets particular groups of young people outside of mainstream educational settings.
 - o Actively addresses some of the issues raised in the 'Other concerns and considerations' section above (or at least display an awareness of these issues, which then informs its work).

Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment

- Support organisations offering 16- to 25-year-olds support with getting into employment, from work experience right through to gaining stable, full-time employment.
- Include a 'tick box' on its grant application forms that asks organisations whether they would consider hosting young people for work experience.
- Take labour market context into account when judging grantee evaluations and other evidence concerning employability provision.
- Work with organisations like Bucks Business First to feed granular, Bucks-specific labour market information to organisations looking to support young people into work.
- Prioritise getting all 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks some meaningful, appropriate form of work experience. The Foundation's grant-making should seek to address some of the issues identified in this section, including the employment 'Catch 22',

a lack of access to non-academic opportunities and poor signposting. Possible grant-making opportunities might include:

- An organisation set up to support work experience for 16- to 25-year-olds with SEND at workplaces, with in-work support provided to reduce employer workload and boost the retention of participant young people.
- An organisation set up to provide young people with work in a sector in particular need of employees in Bucks, simultaneously providing useful experience for young people and addressing a need in the county's economy.
- Support grants for organisations aiming to help young people into part-time work. This might include:
 - Assistance with CV writing, catering for those who might not have much work experience to reference.
 - Facilitating/subsidising travel to part-time work opportunities for young people in rural areas.
 - An organisation acting as a convener between employers and schools/colleges.
- Draw on organisations like Bucks Business First to support a network of organisations who may consider offering apprenticeships for young people in Bucks.
- Support grantees that give the support that young people need to start their working life in Bucks. This might include:
 - IAG surrounding the cost of living in Bucks, including how to apply for affordable housing, taxation information, and guidance surrounding grants and other support they may be eligible for in Bucks.
 - Signposting to larger firms in Bucks and the post-16/18 steps that may be required to work for them.
 - IAG surrounding remote working opportunities, which may open up the labour market to those in rural and/or poorly connected areas.

Accessibility

Access to affordable local housing

- Support grants for organisations that are focused on:
 - Improving young people's access to affordable housing. This might include:
 - Giving IAG to young people on how to access affordable housing and signposting them to other 'cost of living' support that is available to them.
 - Working as mediators with PRS landlords to ensure young people are paying manageable rent.
 - Addressing barriers that certain groups might face when looking to access affordable housing. This might include:
 - Supporting young people with SEND to find appropriate accommodation
 - Providing support with relevant life skills (e.g. giving clear directions/support over how to use household appliances and how to set up standing orders).
 - Helping young people at key points of transition. This might include:
 - Support at the point of transition between supported accommodation and regular accommodation (e.g. one-to-one/group visits).
 - Life skills top-ups for young people with SEND who have recently moved into the PRS.

- Addressing youth homelessness. This might include:
 - Building contained flats/units for young people.
 - 'One-stop shop' services that provide multi-stranded interventions (e.g. helping young people gain employment, teaching them about rent etc.) that reduce future risk of homelessness.
 - An online service that centralises all spare beds/shelters available in Bucks through government, VCS and other organisations.

Digital access

- Use the interim report's digital mapping to help VCS organisations to audit digital access for their target groups of young people.
- Support grants for organisations that are focused on tackling the 'digital divide'. This could take a number of forms, including:
 - Direct resource provision, such as laptops, with a focus on those outside of mainstream schooling.
 - Developing apps that facilitate online IAG outreach for those with poor connectivity.
- Encourage grant applicants (where relevant) to use online analytics to track who is using their online offer and whether this differs by geography, device used and other variables.
- Ask grant applicants to explain steps that they have taken to ensure their content is of a high quality and accessible to a range of young people (e.g. those with SEND).
- Ask grant applicants to consider whether online or in-person provision in their programme is more effective/accessible, and whether providing some combination of both may improve effectiveness/accessibility.

Rural links to opportunities

- Encourage grantees to use the interim report to map the opportunities available to young people, along with barriers to access, and for this to inform the targeting of their provision.
- Ask grantees to record access to their provision, in particular focusing on figures for those in rural/remote contexts.
- Ask organisations how they will ensure access for young people from rural/remote areas. This might include:
 - Support with travel directions, including a contact to call if they get stuck.
 - Subsidised taxi travel.
 - Travelling to meet young people.
- Consider grant applications from small community groups, where there is a clear benefit to localised support (e.g. a group of young carers who share a local area and may not be able to travel far to access support, due to their caring responsibilities).

Disability

Supporting young people with SEND

- Ask grantees about the steps they will take to include young people with SEND.
- Produce and disseminate anti-discrimination guidance/principles that would form part of the condition of grants awarded.
- Support grant applicants from organisations focused on supporting young people with SEND, working with schools, APs, PRUs and others where appropriate/useful.

- Ask grant applicants to make support applications/onboarding as straightforward as possible, to support those who may be short of time/resources to seek out provision for themselves or others (e.g. young carers).
- Ask that grant applicants give a clear rationale for their target age group and offer their provisions to a specific age range where appropriate and feasible.
- Support grant applicants that support young people with SEND to access work experience, part- and full-time work and other labour market opportunities. This may be done in several ways, including:
 - o Helping young people with SEND to develop desirable knowledge and skills.
 - o Working/mediating with employers.
 - o Setting up opportunities from scratch.
 - o Improving ties between specialist and mainstream settings.
- Work with existing grantees to explore possibilities for young people with SEND to gain work experience with them.
- Ask grant applicants what support they will put in place to ensure any benefits to young people with SEND will be sustainable (e.g. handovers to other forms of support and phasing out check-ins over time).
- Support grant applications from organisations that explicitly seek to bridge the gap between young people's SEND/EHCP support and adulthood.

Tackling poor youth mental health

- Seek a greater understanding of the geographical distribution of demand for and supply of youth mental health support in Bucks.
- Support grant applications from organisations looking to improve young people's mental health. This might include:
 - o Expert, evidence-informed mental health interventions.
 - o 'One-stop shops' that provide counselling support and are able to make referrals to CAMHS.
 - o Intermediate support, for those waiting for CAMHS or who are in the transition between CAMHS and adult mental health services.
- Ask grant applicants to detail how they plan to overcome access and delivery challenges concerning certain groups of young people (e.g. those with SEND who may be uncomfortable communicating with CAMHS).
- Support organisations that support young people with SEND who may be on the margins of support (e.g. those who are waiting for an EHCP referral).
- Encourage grant applicants to work closely with schools and non-mainstream settings (e.g. APs and PRUs) to aid their capacity in terms of mental health support and to share practice.
- Encourage grant applicants to work closely with schools and non-mainstream settings (e.g. APs and PRUs) to aid their capacity in terms of mental health support and to share practice.
- Ask grant applicants to consider how they will support young people in making a transition out of their services. This might be through:
 - o Transferring young people to a suitable adult mental health service, alongside other support from VCS and other organisations.
 - o Slowly phasing out regular check-ins with young people to avoid a sudden drop-off in support.
- Ask grant applicants to justify the length of their mental health intervention and its suitability for what they are trying to achieve.

Diversity

Amplifying diverse perspectives

- Ask grant applicants whether/how they have consulted the young people they are targeting in their provision.
- Involve a diverse range of young people in its grant-making process/decisions in some capacity.
- Support grant applicants who will facilitate productive contact between groups of young people from different backgrounds (e.g. socioeconomic background, ethnicity and area of Bucks).
- Ask grantees to consider appropriate adjustments to their services to better support young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. This should be done in a manner that responds to the young person, avoiding blunt assumptions.

3.2. Transitions

The 16- to 25-year-old age range is characterised by transition. Many young people change education institution at 16, while 18 marks the end of compulsory education, with young people deciding on pathways such as university, apprenticeships, training and employment. As young people transition out of the institutions that have formed such a key part of their childhood, they may have to deal with a loss of support and/or a challenging transition into adult services. Moreover, as young people move towards their mid-twenties, they are likely to experience a further drop-off in the support they are eligible for. For instance, as young people with SEND who need a higher level of support reach 25, their EHCPs will end.

Young people need support at these key points of transition. Indeed, many schools, APs, PRUs, council staff and VCS organisations we spoke to as part of our consultation in Bucks are working tirelessly to help young people with post-16/18 decisions, work experience, part-time working, housing, access to specialist services (such as CAMHS), and much more. However, many of those we spoke to during the consultation felt that young people are too often left on their own during these crucial moments.

In addition, there were concerns about the rigidity of young people's pathways, where there is little capacity to change one's mind when it comes to study, work and other decisions. One youth-facing professional felt that young people are categorised and locked into particular trajectories early, making it hard to change route. She also believed that more generalised support, such as job centres, are not personalised enough in their approach. Elsewhere, some of the young people we spoke with explained the pressure they feel to continue in sixth-form, which will ultimately lead them towards university, rather than alternative options they may have considered. Overall, professionals and young people themselves felt they needed more sustained, targeted support to help them through significant points of transition.

3.2.1 Transitions to higher education

Preparation for key transitions

"There's not a lot of support in understanding some of the stuff that you get asked to do when looking at post-18 decisions" (Student at a post-16 college in Wycombe)

To ensure that all young people can make informed decisions about their post-16/18 futures, it is vital that they have information about how to access different pathways and that they know the options available to them, the potential advantages and

drawbacks of the different options, and the longer-term consequences that their decisions may have. The importance of early IAG is well-documented in outreach and widening participation literature. As early as secondary school, young people begin to make decisions about which subjects to study, which then has implications for the options available to them at the post-16/18 transition. When it comes to HE participation, sustained, early support may be particularly important for young people whose parents did not attend university or who come from an underrepresented group (such as being from a socioeconomically disadvantaged household).

In Bucks, many young people across the 16–25 age range felt that they had not received the support they needed to make informed decisions about their futures. Young people often felt that post-16/18 decisions were not on their radar until the point at which they had to make key decisions. In other instances, young people regretted making post-16/18 decisions without knowing the relative advantages and drawbacks of their options.

We recommend that the Rothschild Foundation should consider grant applications from organisations looking to help young people with their decision-making prior to key points of transition, as well as those that support them at the point of transition itself.

The Eleven-Plus and the narrowing of pathways

"When you're 11, your future is designed for you" (Secondary school student on an active citizenship programme)

"There is this big thing about grammar schools in our area, where almost like, if you don't end up in one of those grammar schools, you know about it" (Student at post-16 college in Wycombe)

Among both adults and young people, the grammar school system was a key talking point. There was a sense of unfairness around the Eleven-Plus, with some richer pupils being able to afford tutoring in advance of the entrance exam. Some young people felt that those who do not attend grammar schools get looked down upon even though "it isn't their fault". Similarly, one youth charity professional we spoke to described a 'stigma' around those who do not attend grammar schools, with the implication being that they cannot attend university. Meanwhile, one young person described how a school near them is known as the 'drinking/smoking' school for pupils who have few opportunities.

Advertised post-16/18 pathways reportedly vary a lot by school, with grammar school pupils seeing university as a natural choice, at the expense of apprenticeships and other more vocational routes. Meanwhile, one youth charity professional felt that APs and PRUs have a slant towards apprenticeships and employment. She felt this could be a peer-pressure phenomenon or due to school practice. One pupil at a reportedly low-achieving school felt that their cohort are being encouraged to attend Buckinghamshire New University but there is little consideration of other universities.

The narrowing of post-18 options is particularly concerning given many pupils stay at the same school for sixth-form, so may not access wider IAG at another institution. However, even for those who do change institution at 16, there is no guarantee that this will result in a broadening of horizons when it comes to post-18 options. Pupils from a range of post-16 college campuses reported careers days and talks that were university-

focused and not targeted towards those who had different post-18 aspirations. Elsewhere, several young people felt that gap years are frowned upon and that they also need more information about apprenticeships.

Young people were also aware that attainment is significantly higher in grammar schools (more a reflection of academic intake than 'value-added') and that this may open up more opportunities to those pupils at post-18 level, particularly concerning university. Indeed, grades are a key determinant of HE admissions. However, young people's decision-making is complex. A professional working in HE outreach noted that there are certain wards in Bucks, such as Quarrendon, where young people are getting good grades but then not progressing to university, suggesting that social, cultural, economic and other factors may be affecting young people's decision-making. Their organisation has established target wards for this reason, to ensure that support is going to young people who need most help with their post-16/18 transitions.

We recommend that the Rothschild Foundation should ensure that grantees/applicants with an IAG focus are presenting young people with the full range of the post-16/18 options available to them, for instance emphasising that higher education is one of a range of options, all with potential advantages and drawbacks.

Post-16 transitions

Prior to the end of compulsory education at 18, 16 is a key point of transition for many young people, many of whom move to colleges and other post-16 destinations. Pupils sensed the significance of this transition. Some, such as those in an alternative provision youth focus group, were worried about the idea of moving to a larger college, where they felt there may be less access to more personalised support. Indeed, one member of staff working in a non-mainstream school felt that a large college group has a monopoly in Bucks and that the large campuses do not suit all young people. However, one post-16 student felt that their Wycombe campus is small enough to feel personal. Others felt that transferring to another school for sixth-form is not a well-signposted option, with some pupils missing out on the opportunity.

As part of our consultation we spoke to young people who had taken a range of post-16 options for a range of reasons, including interest in a given subject, travel arrangements, career aspirations and future earnings. At secondary school, one student grew interested in pursuing either teaching or midwifery as a future carer. She felt that her school careers advisors had pushed her towards sixth-form, but she ultimately decided to go to college, which allowed her to pursue her interests more closely.

"There are very few options out there for vulnerable children who don't fit the mainstream profile ... we're lacking post-16 provision to meet these children's needs"
(Member of staff at a virtual school)

For those outside of mainstream school, professionals were worried about the options available at the post-16 level. Staff at a virtual school explained that many vulnerable young people want to leave Bucks because there is no suitable provision for them. These challenges at post-16 then pass through to challenges with post-18 decisions and transitions.

With these findings in mind, the Rothschild Foundation should support grantees providing IAG regarding post-16 options, as post-16 destinations shape post-18

decision-making. In addition, the Foundation should consider how issues raised at the post-16 transition (e.g. limited college opportunities for those with SEND) may affect young people's post-18 decision-making, and how other forms of support (e.g. subsidised supported accommodation near suitable colleges) may widen access to post-18 destinations.

Access to a range of university options

There are over 100 universities in England, with great variation in terms of tariff requirements, subject specialisms and diversity of intake. From our consultation, it seemed that many young people in Bucks are unaware of the full range of university options available to them. However, they did voice certain key considerations that had shaped their university application decisions.

Many young people spoke of a desire to attend university out of Bucks, often in London. This was often motivated by a desire to move to somewhere perceived to be more exciting for young people. Other reasons included perceptions of facilities and reputation, with several young people explaining that local universities are not very well publicised and they do not know people who go to them. Young people in a youth forum group similarly felt that local universities are not really on the radar of young people in Bucks and that Buckinghamshire New University does not have a good reputation. They did, however, feel that local options might be good for those who do not have the means to move away from home, suggesting there may be a missed recruitment opportunity here. Elsewhere, some of the young carers felt that a private university near them was not financially accessible and that they would not fit in there socially.

Attending a local university may be an attractive, viable option, particularly for young people who may, for a range of reasons (finances, family ties etc.), wish to stay in Bucks. The Rothschild Foundation should therefore support university outreach that emphasises local options. It should strengthen ties with the University of Buckingham, Buckinghamshire New University and other post-18 providers to help grantees with their outreach work.

"If you weren't going to go to Oxford or Cambridge, they would be pretty disappointed, they wanted you to aim for that" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

Many pupils in mainstream schools felt there is a strong emphasis on Oxbridge entry, often to the expense of other support. One secondary school pupil noted that their school has an Oxbridge group from year 10 but little other support. Others at a grammar school reported a strong emphasis on Oxbridge entry, which was reportedly good for school publicity. Overall, young people felt schools needed to give wider support to young people, not just those applying to well-known universities.

The Rothschild Foundation should support university outreach programmes that cover a wide range of universities, for young people at different levels of academic attainment and with different course preferences.

Finance

Young people were mindful of the financial implications of their post-18 options. This manifested in a range of different ways.

- **Socioeconomic disadvantage:** One secondary school student explained that those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may steer themselves away from university as they are worried that they are not going to be eligible for sufficient student loans. A member of virtual school staff explained that a lot of young people are keen to get out and start earning money, which affects their willingness to engage in education.
- **Opportunities for part-time work:** Young people mentioned that it can be difficult for them to find part-time work in Bucks, which will make it harder to finance university.
- **Caring responsibilities:** A student at one post-16 college noted that many young people have a responsibility to support their family, which may make university financially unfeasible.

The Rothschild Foundation should support outreach programmes that discuss the financial implications of university, with attention paid to certain groups of young people who may be less likely to progress to higher education, such as young carers and those living with socioeconomic disadvantage.

Travel

Across the youth focus groups we conducted, it was clear that transport connections shape young people's post-16/18 decision-making and experiences. Some better-connected young people are able to catch regular public transport, whereas others, particularly those in rural areas, felt either that they are priced out of making journeys or that the infrastructure simply is not there. One student at an Aylesbury college chose a local college for further study as there was little lead-in time for their decision and making travel arrangements would have been complicated. Another student at the same campus was pleased to find her local college was running her course so she could walk there. Elsewhere, a student at another campus was planning on attending Winchester University, which was far enough away that she would feel some independence, while also being able to visit home occasionally.

Other young people said they are unable to travel due to their home circumstances. One young person had a post-16 choice between colleges in Milton Keynes and Amersham. One of their parents did not want them to attend Amersham as they would have to take the train. This then affected their decision-making, narrowing down their options.

The Rothschild Foundation should support university outreach programmes that consider the different travel implications for young people in Bucks.

School and college-based support

"We had our tutors helping us with our personal statements, they talked to us about what we want to do, we discussed our options and stuff, and like they were there to help if we wanted. Whereas a lot of my friends [in sixth-form rather than college] didn't really have that kind of experience. It was kind of like 'here's everything - go'" (Student at a post-16 college in Wycombe)

Schools and colleges are a key source of IAG about post-16/18 options, particularly in light of careers requirements set out under the Gatsby Benchmarks. While some young people reported having school-based support with post-16/18 decision-making, many of

those we spoke to felt that they had been left in the dark about their options or had been given a narrow picture of the available steps to realise them. Staff at a grammar school reported efforts to engage students with different pathways but there was still a sense among pupils that university is the primary option. Sometimes this support is in-house, while in other instances, schools buy into services like UniFrog, which supports students with personal statement applications, while letting tutors oversee the progress of their pupils.

The Rothschild Foundation should support university outreach programmes that work with schools on their outreach, building on schools' knowledge of their cohorts (e.g. through supplying labour market information and facilitating guest speakers).

Out-of-school support

There are several outreach organisations working in Bucks to widen HE participation among students from underrepresented groups. One outreach professional explained that their work encompasses Buckinghamshire New University, the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and the University of Reading, with coverage of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Swindon. The organisation's funding covers pupils in year 9 through to colleges and sixth-forms. The organisation's remit is broad, including efforts to raise aspirations, informing pupils about potential careers, university application support and helping schools to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks.

While schools are clearly a vital resource when it comes to post-16/18 decision-making, efforts are also being made to engage with young people outside of the school environment. One programme administered by a large youth charity includes interview preparation, CV assistance and one-to-one programmes of support for those who are at risk of becoming NEET. Beyond mainstream schools, they work closely with social services and give talks to social workers on how to support young people with their transitions. They also target young people in care and home-schooled pupils, as well as having strong relationships with SEND and PRU schools, adjusting practice where appropriate.

A young carer we spoke with is attending a course at the University of Reading aimed at supporting those less likely to go to university with their post-18 transitions. She finds it useful and said it has helped other members of the group to think about going to university away from home. A member of a young carers group recalled going to an 'inspiration day' at Oxford Brookes University, while others felt that discussions about post-18 options with other young carers provide them with the information and perspective they need to make post-18 decisions with greater confidence.

The Rothschild Foundation should support university outreach programmes that target particular groups of young people outside of mainstream educational settings.

Other concerns and considerations

Several other concerns were raised in relation to higher education and other post-18 transitions, including:

- **Application window and support:** There were concerns about there not being enough of a lead-in when it comes to applications to university, apprenticeships and other pathways. One sixth-form student felt it can be a shock when at the

start of year 12 you have to suddenly do applications and are meant to have had work experience. They felt that earlier IAG and other support could counter this.

- **Lack of personalised support:** In some instances, young people felt that the support they received did not take their personal interests, preferences and circumstances into account. For instance, a young carer explained that an external careers advisor was not well positioned to advise her on how to pursue a career in food and hospitality, instead suggesting a move to another sector entirely. Another said she had not spoken to any careers advisor at all.
- **Challenges for particular groups of young people:**
 - o *Young carers:* Some young carers believed that other young carers may feel that they would be unable to attend university and that they have limited options compared to others. They felt that it is important to tackle this assumption to show younger carers what they can achieve.
 - o *Young people from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds:* At one of the grammar schools, a member of staff felt that some English as an Additional Language (EAL) students have aspirations (due to cultural factors) for medicine but do not have the grades to pursue this. The school is providing such students with guidance on alternative routes.
 - o *Socioeconomically disadvantaged students:* At the same grammar school, some disadvantaged students had made weak university applications the previous year, with some putting down insurance offers that had higher tariffs than their firm choices. The school has reportedly worked hard to make improvements in this area.
 - o *First-generation students:* One youth-facing professional explained that those whose parents have not been to higher education may be less likely to have acquired key information surrounding UCAS applications, student loans and debt repayments.
- **Covid disruption:** Young people across schools, APs and PRUs reported Covid disrupting their post-18 decision-making. For instance, a student at a post-16 college in Aylesbury said they were unable to meet with a placement officer due to Covid, while another said that Covid had disrupted her future planning. Elsewhere, an outreach professional noted that it had been harder to conduct outreach work during the pandemic, given travel and contact restrictions. Nevertheless, some young people reported having direct contact with certain universities. One noted that they had been advised that universities and employers would be more lenient due to Covid.
- **Peer influence:** Peers are a key influence on young people's decision-making and one member of staff at a youth charity explained that it can be hard to display the confidence needed to pursue a different route from your friends. Indeed, the vast majority of young people we spoke to reported taking similar post-16/18 routes to their peers.
- **Negative coverage of university:** While young people felt it important to understand the potential challenges associated with university attendance, others felt that excessive messaging about the expense of university and limited graduate jobs is off-putting.
- **Funding constraints of outreach work:** One outreach professional explained that budget cuts have made it harder to deliver in-person visits, meaning they have had to be more selective about where they focus their work.
- **Other options:** Interest in university is also affected by the relative attractiveness and availability of apprenticeships, training, work and other opportunities.

The Rothschild Foundation should support university outreach programmes that actively address some of the issues raised above (or at least display an awareness of these issues, which then informs its work).

Rothschild Foundation should...

- Consider grant applications from organisations looking to help young people with their decision-making prior to key points of transition, as well as those that support them at the point of transition itself.
- Ensure that grantees/applicants with an IAG focus are presenting young people with the full range of the post-16/18 options available to them, for instance emphasising that higher education is one of a range of options, all with potential advantages and drawbacks.
- Support grantees providing IAG regarding post-16 options, as post-16 destinations shape post-18 decision-making.
- Consider how issues raised at post-16 transition (e.g. limited college opportunities for those with SEND) may affect young people’s post-18 decision-making, and how other forms of support (e.g. subsidised supported accommodation near suitable colleges) may widen access to post-18 destinations.
- Strengthen ties with the University of Buckingham, Buckinghamshire New University and other post-18 providers to help grantees with their outreach work.
- Support university outreach that:
 - o Emphasises local options.
 - o Covers a wide range of universities, at a range of tariffs, for young people at different levels of academic attainment.
 - o Discusses the financial implications of university, with attention paid to certain groups of young people (those living in socioeconomic disadvantage, young carers etc.).
 - o Considers the different travel implications for young people in Bucks.
 - o Builds on schools’ knowledge of their cohorts (e.g. through supplying labour market information, facilitating guest speakers etc.).
 - o Targets particular groups of young people outside of mainstream educational settings.
 - o Actively addresses some of the issues raised in the ‘Other concerns and considerations’ section above (or at least display an awareness of these issues, which then informs its work).

3.2.2 Transitions to fulfilling, stable employment

Young people will likely start their working lives sometime between the ages of 16 and 25. This might be part-time work to support their studies, summer jobs or internships. Later down the line, they may also take on apprenticeships or full-time work. The young people we spoke to saw employment not only as a source of income, but also as a means of gaining experience that would allow them to develop and improve their employability in the future. The schools, APs, PRUs, VCS organisations and others we spoke to are working hard to help young people get a good start to working life, with a range of support available to young people in Bucks.

One teacher at a PRU explained that they aim to ensure that all year 11–13s have secured a place at college, an apprenticeship or an alternative (such as a work and study programme). They give young people a range of support with employability, including CV writing, careers sessions and additional small-group support for those with EHCPs that covers life skills, such as catering.

One professional working for a digital/IT company gives opportunities for young people to gain knowledge and skills in coding through his organisation's charity work. He works with Skills Hubs and Careers Hubs, which he described as the conduit for employers to work with schools. Through these Hubs, he has developed strong relationships, allowing him to build working partnerships with schools and reach more young people directly. His organisation has also worked with other organisations interested in widening participation and outreach, as well as being an enterprise advisor at a local school.

Other bespoke support has come from:

- A virtual school that seeks to improve careers outcomes for young people in care and care leavers, removing barriers – financial, educational and otherwise – to certain post-16/18 careers pathways.
- A life skills support programme for young people with EHCPs, concerning issues such as hygiene, budgeting etc., to help them be in a position to work and live independently. One young person who is autistic and has several other identified SENDs, explained that he had been able to progress with his English and maths, while developing life skills, which he had found interesting and rewarding.
- A vocational skills training organisation that provides a mixture of practical and desk-based learning, concerning vehicle motors, safe driving etc.

Throughout the consultation, we heard from a range of young people in the 16–25 age group, who described their childhoods and journeys through education, which had helped to shape their aspirations and chosen pathways. We heard from a student at an Amersham post-16 college campus, who is studying Level 3 Art, and wants to join a related industry, following in the footsteps of their close friend. Another post-16 student in Aylesbury explained that various TV shows have inspired her to pursue a career as a nurse. Others noted how parents, teachers, youth workers and others have helped them arrive at their chosen study and career paths.

The fieldwork underscored the networks that shape young people's post-16/18 decision-making. However, too often young people felt they were unable to access high-quality work opportunities in their area and were uncertain where to go for help.

Insufficient in-school careers support: While some felt that in-school careers support had been useful, others felt that they had lacked consistent careers support. For instance, some had struggled to find work and work experience during sixth-form and others wanted more support with CV writing. Several young people felt Personal, Social, Health and Education (PSHE) could be better used for careers provision.

Lack of sustained support: Where young people did report receiving careers-related IAG, this was often through one-off meetings rather than sustained support. For instance, one young person in care met with an advisor and found they had nothing to add, but may have benefited from their support later down the line.

Out-of-school support: Numerous youth-facing professionals felt there has been a decline in government-funded careers IAG. In particular, they spoke about the loss of Connexions, which provided advice concerning HE, apprenticeships and work, alongside pastoral and other forms of support.

Targeting of pupils: Young people often felt that careers fairs, advice sessions and other provision are aimed at a select group of academically high-achieving students, the

majority of whom are destined for university. This means that those considering apprenticeships, other vocational options or transitioning to work are not receiving sufficient support. One youth-facing professional explained that Bucks does not have sufficient programmes to bridge the gap for young people who may not have had a good experience of school.

Range of careers: There were also concerns that careers support given to young people is too narrowly focused on 'elite' careers, such as medicine, with little information concerning non-traditional pathways. In addition to wider careers IAG, young people were keen to hear from those who have had more varied careers and/or were career-changers.

The Rothschild Foundation should support organisations offering 16- to 25-year-olds support with getting into employment, from work experience right the way through to gaining stable, full-time employment. In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should include a 'tick box' on their grant application forms that asks organisations whether they would consider hosting young people for work experience.

Employability is subject to the labour market

Many young people felt that they would have better experience of the labour market outside of Bucks. Here, it is important to acknowledge that regardless of the strength of IAG and support for moving into work, young people's ability to find work experience placements, apprenticeships, part-time work and full-time work will depend on the state of the economy. Respondents to the consultation were aware of Covid's devastating impact on the labour market. With young people disproportionately affected in terms of both furlough and unemployment, this seemed to be feeding into their decision-making. Some jobs, like teaching, had become relatively more attractive during the pandemic-induced economic downturn, with one young person explaining that teachers are always in demand. That said, they worried about living in Bucks on a teacher's salary and so they were considering moving somewhere else. Accounts like these exemplify the complexity of young people's careers decision-making.

The Rothschild Foundation should take labour market context into account when judging grantee evaluations and other evidence concerning employability provision. In addition, it should work with organisations like Bucks Business First to feed granular, Bucks-specific labour market information to organisations looking to support young people into work.

Work experience

"I want to be a teacher and I don't really see working in a café is going to help with that so much" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

"I've never heard of a work experience being paid" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

"Even if you do work experience, it doesn't necessarily help you" (Student at a grammar school)

Prior to paid employment, work experience can be a useful way of young people gaining transferrable knowledge and skills, receiving sector-specific insights and making them

more employable in the future. Workplace experience features as one of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks and schools, APs, colleges and other educational institutions are a key broker of such opportunities. Young people may also gain work experience through youth clubs, VCS organisations and others. One student explained that qualifications are not enough to get into a career in finance, for instance, with experience being key to career progression. However, too often in Bucks, young people are unable to access this vital step on the employment ladder. One young carer explained that she had applied to 45 jobs before getting her summer job in Aylesbury. Unfortunately, stories like these were commonplace, highlighting the need to give young people more support as they navigate a challenging labour market.

- **Covid disruption and online work experience:** Many youth-facing professionals and young people noted that the pandemic had resulted in fewer work experience opportunities. Many businesses had to drop face-to-face encounters as they tried to respond to the pandemic. Of those who had been able to access work experience in Bucks, many participated online, which was generally satisfactory but not a perfect substitute for face-to-face experience. As one charity professional working in digital access explained, it can be hard for people to learn on the job from home and Covid had also led young people to miss opportunities to informally learn with one another, such as during coding workshops. Elsewhere, a post-16 student in Aylesbury stressed the need for more employers to be more understanding and flexible when assessing young people's applications after Covid, given they may have been unable to secure work experience. Another student at the same campus was unsure what would happen about her planned work placements, which had already been disrupted by Covid.
- **Few opportunities before 16:** In one youth focus group, some young people explained that 'work experience' post-16/18 is 'work' and they had struggled to access earlier opportunities through their school. One post-16 college student explained that they did not know where to access careers support at school but had received help with their CV and future planning at college.
- **The employment 'Catch 22':** Young people we spoke with described a 'Catch 22' where they could not gain employment or work experience as they did not have sufficient experience. However, they could not gain this experience as they were not being given such opportunities. Some young people explained that their peers are working for free to gain experience so they can then apply for jobs. One group spoke of a friend who worked two different jobs unpaid over the summer just to get experience in two different fields. This is likely to further labour market inequalities, as those from wealthier households are more likely to be able to access such unpaid opportunities.
- **Sector-specific experience:** Young people reported that it is difficult to gain sector-specific experience in Bucks, particularly if you do not have personal contact with those working in a particular field. One grammar school student, for instance, found themselves doing work experience at a dentist's surgery, rather than going through school or another gatekeeper. There was concern here that while generic work experience may be useful for university applications, it will not be helpful when applying for jobs later. In one focus group, a young person felt that those taking non-academic pathways have less support with their options. They explained that they wanted to become an actor but had been encouraged into work experience in an unrelated sector.

- **Widening access to non-academic opportunities:** One youth focus group participant explained that pupils who are enthused by a particular academic discipline are able to benefit from work experience, whereas those who are not have fewer opportunities.
- **Reluctance from employers:** Pupils, teachers and other youth-facing professionals felt that employers are often reluctant to give opportunities to young people, particularly those attending special schools, APs and other non-mainstream settings. One teacher at a grammar school felt their school could do more to establish links with local businesses. Meanwhile, AP, PRU and SEND professionals felt that employers need greater knowledge and awareness of the abilities of their pupils and that this understanding would make them more likely to take young people on.

"If you don't get along with people, it's going to be hard [to maintain a job]" (Student in alternative provision)

- **In-work support:** Young people were concerned that they would not receive support during work experience placements and/or jobs, raising concerns about job retention. Indeed, one teacher at a PRU felt that employers often do not have the time or capacity to support young people in work.
- **Poor signposting:** There appeared to be poor signposting of available opportunities. Young people felt that work experience often goes to those who are more confident putting themselves out there and/or those with useful contacts or who happen to be in the right place at the right time. One grammar school student suggested that young people should be able to access a directory of volunteering and work experience opportunities.

The Rothschild Foundation should prioritise getting all 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks some meaningful, appropriate form of work experience. The Foundation's grant-making should seek to address some of the issues identified in this section, including the employment 'Catch 22', lack of access to non-academic opportunities and poor signposting. Possible grant-making opportunities might include:

- An organisation set up to support work experience for 16- to 25-year-olds with SEND and workplaces, with in-work support provided to reduce employer workload and boost the retention of participant young people.
- An organisation set up to provide young people with work in a sector in particular need of employees in Bucks, simultaneously providing useful experience for young people and addressing a need in the county's economy.

Part-time work

"I feel quite happy while I work ... I think the key thing is just to make sure that you are confident in your ability, and you are enthusiastic about making sure the guests have a good time" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

Several of the young people we spoke with, particularly those aged between 16 and 18, had taken on part-time work to earn money and gain work experience along the way. One student at a post-16 college campus in Aylesbury is studying for a Level 3 qualification in Health and Social Care and plans to start a job as a retail assistant to

give her valuable experience of working with others. Prior to the pandemic, another young person worked at their local cinema, where they found their manager supportive and felt they were gaining good work experience.

"When it comes to jobs, there's not many for teenagers" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

Other young people felt that part-time job opportunities are limited in Bucks and while schools might provide a reference if they apply for jobs, they often do not provide support in finding a job. One young person noted that they had to get a part-time job in Milton Keynes as there were none available in Buckingham where they lived, meaning they have to get the bus to work every day, juggling this against school commitments. Another had recently applied for a job in Swinburne but would need a lift to get there. One college student explained that there are few working opportunities for her in Chesham. She recalled that when she finally found a part-time job advertised at a wedding shop, the job had gone. Consequently, she applied for jobs in Watford and felt she might move there in future, in search of job opportunities.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grants for organisations aiming to help young people into part-time work. This might include:

- Assistance with CV writing, catering for those who might not have much work experience to reference.
- Facilitating/subsidising travel to part-time work opportunities for young people in rural areas.
- An organisation acting as a convener between employers and schools/colleges.

Apprenticeships

"Apprenticeships are so hard to get" (Student in alternative provision)

While apprenticeships were attractive to the young people we spoke to, for a number of reasons (immersion in the workplace, immediate earnings etc.), there were concerns about their availability in the current labour market. One teacher at a PRU noted that the pandemic had led many companies to either go under or reduce their capacity. Meanwhile, Covid restrictions had placed a limit on face-to-face placements.

As with work experience and part- and full-time employment, the Rothschild Foundation should draw on organisations like Bucks Business First to support a network of organisations that may consider offering apprenticeships for young people in Bucks.

Living in Bucks

As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, many young people struggled to access work experience, part- and full-time work, apprenticeships and other career-related opportunities. This, combined with other factors – such as a perception that there are more opportunities for young people outside out of Bucks – may lead to young people leaving the area. As a young person at a youth forum focus group put it, there are few "pull" factors keeping young people in Bucks.

"I want to move to London. I want to be near everything." (Post-16 college student in Wycombe)

"Being in a big city where there's lot of different sorts of people, you can just be who you want to be" (Post-16 college student in Amersham)

"I imagine many of our students will leave the area" (Teacher at a grammar school)

Opportunities elsewhere: For some young people, moving out of Bucks was part of a move to reportedly higher-status universities and better working opportunities. Of those intending to attend university, Bucks provides some opportunities for work while they are studying at post-16 level, but there was a perception that large cities like London would provide more exciting and lucrative job opportunities in the longer term.

Lack of large firms: While some young people felt that small towns offered them opportunities to work at small- to medium-sized businesses when they were starting out, they generally felt there are not many larger firms set up in Bucks. Others noted that there are several centres of work, such as Bicester Village in Milton Keynes, but that these are not always easily accessible.

Cost of living: There was a strong sense among people from all parts of Bucks that the cost of living is prohibitive, particularly when it comes to housing. This, combined with a perceived lack of available work, led many young people in Bucks to consider a move elsewhere at the end of their compulsory schooling. While the cost of living seemed to be on many young people's radar, one grammar school teacher explained that many young people move out of Bucks after gaining their post-18 qualifications as they are surprised by the financial implications of living in Bucks. She said there was a need for more IAG surrounding rent costs, for instance. Similarly, young people felt that they could benefit from more practical advice surrounding taxes and other financial matters.

"A lot of people in Aylesbury don't want to travel or can't travel out of the area for family reasons, money-wise as well, Aylesbury is not the most ... my area is not the most glamorous" (Post-16 college student in Aylesbury)

Travel and rural access: For young people who cannot drive, afford a car and/or who are unable to access free or subsidised travel, there are reduced opportunities for work. One student had started a job so he could save up for a car in order to drive to other areas like Milton Keynes to find other work, as there are so few jobs in Buckingham where he lives. Young people also noted a slower pace of life in Bucks, which is generally less attractive to young people. There was a perception that certain parts of Bucks cater for a more elderly population and those who are settling down with established jobs, rather than young people.

Family ties and other networks: While many young people we spoke with are keen to leave Bucks for study and work, some explained that they have extended family in the county, which would be a draw for them to return. Others said that they are keen to make their own place in another part of the county or another county altogether.

There seemed to be many 'push' factors that made a move out of Bucks attractive to young people, with few 'pull' factors outside of networks of family and friends. Some of these 'push' factors raise broader structural economic questions (e.g. the availability of jobs in certain sectors in Bucks and the concentration of jobs in large cities like London), which are not in the remit of the Rothschild Foundation's grant-making. However, the Rothschild Foundation should support grantees that give the support that young people need to start their working life in Bucks. This might include:

- IAG surrounding the cost of living in Bucks, including how to apply for affordable housing, taxation information, and guidance surrounding grants and other support they may be eligible for in Bucks.
- Signposting to larger firms in Bucks and the post-16/18 steps that may be required to work for them.
- IAG surrounding remote working opportunities, which may open up the labour market to those in rural and/or poorly connected areas

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Support organisations offering 16- to 25-year-olds support with getting into employment, from work experience right through to gaining stable, full-time employment.
- Include a 'tick box' on its grant application forms that asks organisations whether they would consider hosting young people for work experience.
- Take labour market context into account when judging grantee evaluations and other evidence concerning employability provision.
- Work with organisations like Bucks Business First to feed granular, Bucks-specific labour market information to organisations looking to support young people into work.
- Prioritise getting all 16- to 25-year-olds in Bucks some meaningful, appropriate form of work experience. The Foundation's grant-making should seek to address some of the issues identified in this section, including the employment 'Catch 22', a lack of access to non-academic opportunities and poor signposting. Possible grant-making opportunities might include:
 - o An organisation set up to support work experience for 16- to 25-year-olds with SEND at workplaces, with in-work support provided to reduce employer workload and boost the retention of participant young people.
 - o An organisation set up to provide young people with work in a sector in particular need of employees in Bucks, simultaneously providing useful experience for young people and addressing a need in the county's economy.
- Support grants for organisations aiming to help young people into part-time work. This might include:
 - o Assistance with CV writing, catering for those who might not have much work experience to reference.
 - o Facilitating/subsidising travel to part-time work opportunities for young people in rural areas.
 - o An organisation acting as a convener between employers and schools/colleges.
- Draw on organisations like Bucks Business First to support a network of organisations who may consider offering apprenticeships for young people in Bucks.
- Support grantees that give the support that young people need to start their working life in Bucks. This might include:
 - o IAG surrounding the cost of living in Bucks, including how to apply for affordable housing, taxation information, and guidance surrounding grants and other support they may be eligible for in Bucks.
 - o Signposting to larger firms in Bucks and the post-16/18 steps that may be required to work for them.
 - o IAG surrounding remote working opportunities, which may open up the labour market to those in rural and/or poorly connected areas.

3.3. Accessibility

3.3.1 Access to affordable local housing

A familiar story: hard to save, extortionate PRS, insufficient new housing

"Finding suitable, affordable accommodation is an absolute nightmare" (Staff at a housing charity)

At the national level, there are great concerns about the cost of housing. Over the last few decades, house prices have risen significantly relative to earnings. For young people who cannot rely on the 'Bank of Mum and Dad', it can be difficult to save for a deposit and get on the housing ladder. This, combined with long waiting lists for council housing, mean many will have to rely on the expensive and often insecure private rented sector (PRS). Rent and other living costs then eat further away at any potential savings, making home ownership seem an even more remote possibility.

"Private rents in Buckinghamshire are extortionate" (Staff at a virtual school)

"Landlords rarely want to take on young people" (Staff at a housing charity)

"There is 'affordable housing', but it's whether it's affordable for them" (Staff at a housing support service)

During the consultation, young people in Bucks cited the familiar story noted above. A programme coordinator at a large youth charity said that many of the young people she works with feel they will never be able to afford to buy a home and are resigned to private renting. Indeed, participants in a youth forum group explained that high deposits make it nearly impossible for many young people to get on the housing ladder in Bucks. In addition, a professional working in operations at a housing charity explained that landlords are often reluctant to take young people on in the first place, giving them a smaller pool of PRS options, many of which are out of budget.

Young people also felt that the county's commuter-belt status pushes up house prices in better-connected towns (though, as discussed, weak infrastructure means that those outside of these towns find it hard to access any benefits surrounding access to big cities, like London).

We spoke with a variety of organisations that are helping young people to improve their housing situation. These range from schools, colleges, council staff and others who have heard young people's concerns and provide IAG concerning the options available to them, to organisations set up explicitly to tackle youth homelessness, providing shelter, counselling and other support. One of the professionals we spoke with works in the youth services part of their charity, supporting those facing challenges with their housing situation, such as rent struggles and homelessness. Alongside staffed homeless shelters, their organisation conducts outreach and mediation work with families as preventative steps to empower young people to take control of their own lives. Elsewhere, another organisation provides similar preventative support to those aged 16 and above² across Bucks, alongside training in money management and budgeting, to prepare young people for future tenancies.

² Though only a small proportion of the organisation's work covered this age group.

One method of reducing house prices is building more affordable housing. Those we spoke with during the consultation did acknowledge that, in certain areas, new housing developments are increasing supply. However, adults and young people both had concerns about how well-targeted this housing is and whether young people would realise any benefit from it. They felt that this new housing is:

- Meant to be 'affordable housing' but is not actually affordable to young people.
- Aimed at accommodating the overflow from London.
- Accommodating those who can afford to move to Bucks who then compete with young people in the labour market.
- Not sufficient to provide a downward pressure on house prices.

It was clear that housing was front of mind for young people when they considered their future in (or out) of Bucks. In interviews and focus groups oriented more towards HE, employment and other issues, young people and youth-facing professionals brought concerns about difficulties in accessing affordable housing into the conversation.

As with the issues about employment and the labour market, many of the challenges facing young people when it comes to affordable housing (e.g. housing supply and the wider conditions of the PRS) are outside of the Rothschild Foundation's remit. However, again, there are interventions that can make a significant difference to young people, within the current constraints of the housing market. The Rothschild Foundation should therefore support grants for organisations that are focused on improving young people's access to affordable housing. This may take a range of forms, including:

- Giving IAG to young people on how to access affordable housing and signposting them to other 'cost of living' support that is available to them.
- Working as mediators with PRS landlords to ensure young people are paying manageable rent.

Housing challenges for particular groups of young people

"If they've left care, then it's not great" (Staff at a housing support service)

"The housing situation is just not a stepping stone for young people" (Young person in a focus group at a small housing charity)

The principal barriers to affordable housing are (unsurprisingly) a lack of money (income, support from family/friends etc.) and the cost of housing itself. However, youth-facing professionals and young people explained that certain groups face particular challenges, which warrant concerted attention, such as:

- Care leavers, who may lack the support networks (such as parents and previous care-related networks) to help them access affordable housing, particularly if they have recently left care.
- Young men, whose previous bad behaviour or issues with a tenancy can be held against them, making it harder for them to find affordable housing.
- Young people with SEND, who may struggle to find accommodation that meets their needs. A member of staff at a special school supports young people with applications and assessments for social services. She reported a lack of availability in supported living places, and noted that the process can take months, which is very disruptive for young people.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grants for organisations that are focused on addressing barriers that certain groups might face when looking to access affordable housing. This might include:

- Supporting young people with SEND to find appropriate accommodation.
- Support with relevant life skills (e.g. giving clear directions and support over how to use household appliances, how to set up standing orders etc.).

Troubled transitions and a lack of 'move on' options

With home ownership unobtainable, long social housing waiting lists and an extortionate PRS, many young people we spoke to faced particular housing challenges when it came to key points of transition, whether this be a student moving elsewhere in Bucks for post-18 study or a young person leaving care.

Insufficient state support: The design of the benefit system means that young people were getting limited state support with access to affordable housing. A professional at a housing charity explained that young people would be expected to move into shared accommodation when they transition out of the charity's accommodation support. While a young person could technically get a flat on their own, this would not be covered by housing benefit, so would be a challenge to many young people.

Lack of 'move on' options: A member of staff at a housing charity also explained that there is a significant gap in suitable 'move on' options. Young people are getting stuck in services (such as homeless shelters), which then have no viable, affordable housing for them to move on to. This leaves many moving into housing they cannot afford. She explained that services like hers are designed to increase young people's independence but there are few places they can then go on to live independently. This is particularly concerning given that several post-16 programmes are set up to teach young people life skills, which they then may not be able to put into practice due to the lack of availability of suitable housing. These issues may be even more pronounced for young people with complex SENDs, who may have particular housing specifications, which will be harder to meet in the PRS. Participants in a focus group at a youth housing charity explained that renting can be particularly difficult for young people who have started out in supported accommodation, with a need for greater support during this transition.

The Rothschild Foundation should support organisations that are focused on helping young people at key points of transition. This could take a number of forms, including:

- Support at the point of transition between supported accommodation and regular accommodation (e.g. one-to-one/group visits).
- Life skills top-ups for young people with SEND who have recently moved into the PRS.

Youth homelessness

Given the range of issues outlined in the previous section, youth-facing professionals noted that youth homelessness is a major concern in Bucks. Staff at a housing support service described a bleak world of punitive council tax and rent arrears, opportunistic loan sharks and family struggles, which push young people onto the streets.

"They don't have the initiative to make the phone call to these services" (Staff at a housing support service)

Professionals in youth homelessness charities explained that young people are often hard to reach and unable (or reluctant) to seek out support. With this in mind, several organisations have accessibility at the heart of their work.

One Buck-based organisation, which also takes referrals from those outside of Bucks, provides a one-stop shop for young people, including beds but also a drop-in for young people who might be struggling in other regards, like with family breakdown and mental health concerns. They have created a warm, homely environment to make all young visitors feel welcome. Where more specialist support is required, they look to refer young people to other services, though waiting lists mean that this is a challenge. A senior member of staff at the organisation also noted that small, community-based organisations like theirs often struggle to find time for grant applications. They also explained that the grants they are able to access are smaller and more prescriptive, meaning they have little autonomy or flexibility in terms of how money is spent, which reportedly slows their work down.

"Finding placements in supported living is very, very tricky" (Member of staff at a special school)

Elsewhere, a housing support service operates larger-scale services and goes out to visit young people who are struggling to access affordable housing. Like the smaller housing charity mentioned above, they felt it important to provide holistic support to young people, who are likely to be facing other challenges alongside access to affordable housing.

A member of staff at this larger housing support service felt that while VCS organisations and others are providing support for young people struggling to access affordable housing, many services are too short-term to produce sustained impact. She argued that one-off financial support, for instance, would not help address underlying issues, such as low income, ongoing rental payments and limited capacity to save. These concerns were mirrored in a discussion with students at a post-16 college in Aylesbury, where one felt that if they struggled to find work, they would be resigned to living in council housing or relying on benefits, which, as discussed elsewhere in this section, are not sufficient to support young people.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grants for organisations that are focused on addressing youth homelessness. This might include:

- Building contained flats/units for young people.
- 'One-stop shop' services that provide multi-stranded interventions (e.g. helping young people gain employment, teaching them about rent etc.) that reduce future risk of homelessness.
- An online service that centralises all spare beds/shelters available in Bucks through government, VCS and other organisations.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Support grants for organisations that are focused on:
 - o Improving young people's access to affordable housing. This might include:
 - Giving IAG to young people on how to access affordable housing and signposting them to other 'cost of living' support that is available to them.

- Working as mediators with PRS landlords to ensure young people are paying manageable rent.
- Addressing barriers that certain groups might face when looking to access affordable housing. This might include:
 - Supporting young people with SEND to find appropriate accommodation
 - Providing support with relevant life skills (e.g. giving clear directions/support over how to use household appliances and how to set up standing orders).
- Helping young people at key points of transition. This might include:
 - Support at the point of transition between supported accommodation and regular accommodation (e.g. one-to-one/group visits).
 - Life skills top-ups for young people with SEND who have recently moved into the PRS.
- Addressing youth homelessness. This might include:
 - Building contained flats/units for young people.
 - 'One-stop shop' services that provide multi-stranded interventions (e.g. helping young people gain employment, teaching them about rent etc.) that reduce future risk of homelessness.
 - An online service that centralises all spare beds/shelters available in Bucks through government, VCS and other organisations.

3.3.2 Digital access

The 'digital divide': school closures and beyond

During the pandemic, school buildings were temporarily closed, with teachers and pupils required to shift to online learning. Notwithstanding the extraordinary efforts of schools, local authorities, VCS organisations and others, many young people were unable to access remote learning, leading them to miss out on lessons, post-16/18 IAG and other vital support that schools provide. Some young people were not able to access an appropriate digital device for themselves to complete homework on. Others living in digital cold spots struggled to access live lessons. While Covid-19 put this 'digital divide' into stark relief, these issues are not new, and have wide-ranging consequences for young people.

Limiting opportunities outside of school: A post-16 student on a life skills programme explained that he used to do lots of coding when he was younger but as he no longer has access to a computer at home, he has had to use his phone, which has meant he cannot practise. He also explained that a computer would give help him access to work opportunities.

Not accessing support: A coordinator at a large youth charity explained that many young people are embarrassed to admit that they do not have access to devices and data. This makes it difficult for youth-facing organisations to understand non-attendance and provide alternative support.

Lost opportunities to connect with those who cannot travel: Digital access could allow youth services to reach young people who may struggle to travel. One programme coordinator explained that youth charities and other organisations like hers could convene sessions for young people who might struggle to access in-person sessions. This could also improve staff efficiency for large, geographically spread organisations, as

it could reduce travel time. Without equitable digital access, these benefits will not be realised.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grants for organisations that are focused on tackling the 'digital divide'. This could take a number of forms, including:

- Direct resource provision, such as laptops, with a focus on those outside of mainstream schooling.
- Developing apps that facilitate online IAG outreach for those with poor connectivity.

In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should use the interim report's digital mapping to help VCS organisations to audit digital access for their target groups of young people.

Improving access, both online and offline

We heard from several organisations that have sought to improve digital access during the pandemic and beyond. These include specialist organisations that have sought to address what they saw as pockets of digital disadvantage. One charitable foundation did this through the donation of equipment, among other support. Other youth-facing professionals explained that tackling the 'digital divide' is part of their work to improve access to their services. For instance, a professional at a housing charity explained that their organisation has recently received an award from a bank to purchase laptops for young people.

While tackling the 'digital divide' is an crucial part of equalising support and services to young people in Bucks, it is important to note that digital access is not a panacea and often no substitute for face-to-face provision. One programme coordinator explained that as lockdown went on, it became quite hard to get young people to participate in evening Zoom events after looking at a screen all day. She also noted that it is easier to read young people's expressions and cues to respond to them in person, whereas online some young people are able to 'hide'. Looking forward, she said her organisation is looking to complete some virtual work but most will be in person, as they feel it is important for young people to get back to face-to-face encounters.

There were also concerns about how accessible digital offers are to young people, particularly those with SEND. One member of staff at a special school explained that she has been in conversation with Indeed (website) about making it easier for young people with learning difficulties to apply for jobs online. She felt that improvements to the website interface and application process could help young people with SEND access job opportunities. However, she also emphasised the importance of face-to-face contact for young people when navigating these processes and looking to access opportunities. As well as providing devices and improving internet coverage, closing the 'digital divide' must mean improving the quality and accessibility of remote resources.

The Rothschild Foundation should encourage grant applicants (where relevant) to use online analytics to track who is using their online offer and whether this differs by geography, device used and other variables. In addition, it should ask grant applicants to explain steps that they have taken to ensure their content is of a high quality and accessible to a range of young people (e.g. those with SEND). Finally, we recommend that the Rothschild Foundation asks grant applicants to consider whether online or in-person provision in their programme is more effective/accessible, and whether providing some combination of both may improve effectiveness/accessibility.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Use the interim report's digital mapping to help VCS organisations to audit digital access for their target groups of young people.
- Support grants for organisations that are focused on tackling the 'digital divide'. This could take a number of forms, including:
 - o Direct resource provision, such as laptops, with a focus on those outside of mainstream schooling.
 - o Developing apps that facilitate online IAG outreach for those with poor connectivity.
- Encourage grant applicants (where relevant) to use online analytics to track who is using their online offer and whether this differs by geography, device used and other variables.
- Ask grant applicants to explain steps that they have taken to ensure their content is of a high quality and accessible to a range of young people (e.g. those with SEND).
- Ask grant applicants to consider whether online or in-person provision in their programme is more effective/accessible, and whether providing some combination of both may improve effectiveness/accessibility.

3.3.3 Rural links to opportunities

Weak infrastructure, young people in rural areas missing out

The issue of rural access permeates all other themes in this report. Whether it be post-16 colleges, counselling services, drop-in centres or employment, young people living in rural parts of Bucks felt they are less able to access opportunities than their counterparts closer to urban centres.

"I definitely want to leave Bucks. Where I live you can't even get a bus" (Grammar school student)

It is vital that young people in rural areas have access to local support or can easily travel to access opportunities in other parts of Bucks. Unfortunately, weak infrastructure in parts of the county too often limits young people's ability to travel. The grammar school student mentioned above reported no buses at all, leaving them stranded from provision they would have otherwise accessed. The student explained that if young people are not wealthy enough to have a car, they have no way of seeking out support outside of their area. Similarly, a student at a post-16 college in Wycombe, who lives in a village outside of town, has to travel a long way in to college and felt there is little provision for young people in her area. This chimes with the accounts of youth-facing professionals, who noted great variation in access to service provision across Bucks. One explained that non-drivers in villages often miss out, and that there are far more socialising opportunities for those in High Wycombe than in the villages surrounding Aylesbury.

Across the consultation, respondents viewed public transport in Bucks as patchy and expensive. A member of staff at a special school explained that many of her students rely on public transport but that Buckinghamshire Council has reduced transport support for the 16+ age group, meaning they cannot use their bus passes before 9am. This presents a great challenge for students looking to travel independently to school and arrive on time. She also explained that weak travel infrastructure hinders some young

people's ability to access evening activities and to find part-time employment. A professional at a youth charity noted that lots of young people in towns are able to access weekend jobs (supermarkets, restaurants, cafés etc.) in Aylesbury town and High Wycombe, whereas this is more challenging for pupils living in rural villages. She added that, in some instances, buses only run until 6pm, which means pupils have to rely on taxis, which many of them cannot afford. Elsewhere, staff at one charity explained that they had to adapt their psychology-informed interventions with young people depending on setting. They noted that where they might suggest that young people attend a gym or other outlets, there are often none nearby, which makes their work more challenging.

Another issue raised by some professionals and young people was that of High Speed 2 (HS2), the planned high-speed rail network. Many felt that the development is destroying houses and that they cannot see any benefit to it, as the train would not stop in their rural areas, just pass through them. They felt it is doing damage to the beauty of the landscape and that this may have both environmental and economic consequences.

Young people in rural areas tend to have poorer access to support near them and too often struggle to travel to access opportunities elsewhere in Bucks. The Rothschild Foundation should encourage grantees to use the interim report to map the opportunities available to young people, along with barriers to access, and for this to inform the targeting of their provision. In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should ask grantees to record access to their provision, particular focusing on figures for those in rural/remote contexts.

Support with travel

With weak public transport infrastructure in parts of Bucks, schools, APs, PRUs, VCS organisations and other youth-facing organisations work hard to ensure all young people can access their services. One organisation providing sports activities, with a focus on hard-to-reach young people, explained that they had recently convened a forum where they tried to tackle the assumption that young people will travel to towns for support. They were, like other organisations we spoke to, shifting the focus towards rural access for those unable to access cheap, reliable transport.

Some SEND specialist organisations, like special schools and post-16 life skills providers, give training to help young people navigate trains and buses so they can make use of existing public transport. Another approach is to provide alternative travel options to young people. A youth-facing professional who works for the council said she regularly drives to collect young people to ensure they can access the support being provided. They worried that smaller, more localised organisations may not have the funding and/or resources to access a range of young people from areas not well served by public transport. However, a leader of a localised young carers group explained that being a small community group allows them to speak with young people who have their local area in common, which aids group rapport.

Another approach to rural access is to meet people where they were. A charity specialising in psychology-based interventions explained that they usually visit young people at their home or foster care placement, or ask the young person to meet them somewhere they feel comfortable. They explained that some of the young people they work with can be anxious about public transport and while some young people have

taxis to college covered by their EHCPs, others do not have such support. Even with taxis, they noted that some young people are so uncomfortable with independent travel that they occasionally have a car follow their taxi to reassure them as they segue into independent travel.

These sorts of provisions speak to the dedication of the charity's staff but may be financially untenable for smaller organisations. One youth-facing professional explained that supporting rural access to sessions (e.g. through subsidised taxis) used to be more common practice but funding cuts had made this less common. That said, the leader of a localised young carers group explained that they were able to drive around the local area and provide care packages during lockdown, which was possible because they are based in a smaller (albeit quiet and remote) geographical area.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask organisations how they will ensure access for young people from rural/remote areas. This might include:

- Support with travel directions, including a contact to call if they get stuck.
- Subsidised taxi travel.
- Travelling to meet young people.

In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should consider grant applications from small community groups, where there is a clear benefit to localised support (e.g. a group of young carers who share a local area and may not be able to travel far to access support, due to their caring responsibilities).

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Encourage grantees to use the interim report to map the opportunities available to young people, along with barriers to access, and for this to inform the targeting of their provision.
- Ask grantees to record access to their provision, in particular focusing on figures for those in rural/remote contexts.
- Ask organisations how they will ensure access for young people from rural/remote areas. This might include:
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 - o Travelling to meet young people.
- Consider grant applications from small community groups, where there is a clear benefit to localised support (e.g. a group of young carers who share a local area and may not be able to travel far to access support, due to their caring responsibilities).

3.4. Disability

3.4.1 Supporting young people with SEND

The breadth of SEND and the need for targeted support

A key theme across our consultation was the support available to young people with SEND. The SEND category is very broad, encompassing young people who face a variety of challenges in their day-to-day lives, spanning travel, education, employment and a range of other issues. Young people and youth-facing professionals cited a range of these challenges, as well as placing a spotlight on some invaluable support being provided against the backdrop of pronounced funding issues.

An example of post-16 provision came from a post-16 SEND specialist provider in a South Bucks town. They take 16- to 24-year-olds with EHCPs through a diploma in independent living skills and an employability award, while providing basic qualifications (Levels 1 and 2) in English and maths for those who may have missed out on these qualifications at school. Many of the young people they work with have come from special schools, PRUs and other non-mainstream schools, and have a range of SENDs, including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Another form of support has come through an alternative provision provider, which runs a programme supporting students with EHCPs, covering life skills, catering, art and other subjects. A member of staff explained that the programme is very individualised in terms of destinations, with some ready to leave at the end of the course and others needing extra support at the point of transition.

Aspirations, attitudes and discrimination

Concerningly, many young people and youth-facing professionals felt that those with SEND often have to overcome deficit attitudes to pursue their ambitions.

A student at a special school noted that she wants to become a special needs teacher, as she feels that young people need more support and she wants to act as a role model for those with special needs. However, she explained that there is a perception that young people's options are limited by their needs and disabilities, and that she is therefore nervous about her career.

"Once I was going for this painting course, and they brought my disability into it. ... They said: 'We don't have any autistics. We want professionals.'" (Student at a special school)

In some instances, young people with SEND felt that they are indirectly discriminated against when applying for courses, employment and other destinations. A dyslexic pupil at one college explained that she sometimes struggled as there is no one to explain and help her navigate forms and understand course details. She said that any support, even a Zoom call, would help her as otherwise she is just reliant on her mother for support with future options and planning.

Others reported explicit discrimination on account of their disabilities. One student at a special school recalled attending a painting course where the course leader thought he would act out, despite not having done so since primary school. He explained that despite the discrimination he had encountered, he had managed to gain work experience in a community café and charity shops.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grantees about the steps they will take to include young people with SEND. The Foundation should also produce and disseminate anti-discrimination guidance/principles that would form part of the condition of grants awarded.

Funding crisis and a lack of support

There was a consensus among professionals working with young people with SEND that there is a distinct lack of funding. A member of staff at one AP provider explained that

schools have a 'magical £6,000' to spend before being entitled to local authority 'top-up funding'. She explained that this high bar means mainstream schools can struggle to secure the support that young people with SEND require. Young people noted long waiting lists for support, with one young carer explaining that their family had been forced to seek private support for her brother who has ADHD. She explained that getting appropriate SEND support can be particularly hard for young carer families, who may lack the time and resources to fight for referrals and support.

Other professionals explained that there are not enough places in specialist settings. A post-16 SEND specialist provider explained that few organisations offer education and employability support like theirs and that all of their programmes are massively oversubscribed. They also noted that young people often require special support in areas like mental health, which lies outside of their expertise.

A youth-facing professional who works for the council explained that a lack of funding and resources, along with changes to local authority structure, means that the council's SEND drop-ins have to cater for a wide 11–25 age range. They said that this makes it difficult to provide bespoke, age-appropriate support. It also creates a challenging situation, where those at the start of the 11–25 age bracket would make allegations about those at the upper end of the age range.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grant applicants for organisations focused on supporting young people with SEND, working with schools, APs, PRUs and others where appropriate/useful. It should also ask organisations to make support applications/onboarding as straightforward as possible, to support those who may be short of time/resources to seek out provision for themselves or others (e.g. young carers). In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should ask that grant applicants give a clear rationale for their target age group and offer their provisions to a specific age-range where appropriate and feasible.

Work experience and employment: improving access

Work experience and employment were front-of-mind to many of the young people with SEND who we spoke to. One young person in a specialist post-16 setting has been helping out at his family's construction firm, which he feels positively about. He said that the physical, outdoor labour is key to his mental health and that he enjoys the social dimension of it too. He is keen to find more opportunities for part-time work.

Many young people in Bucks reported challenges with obtaining work experience and part- or full-time employment. Several of these barriers were more pronounced for young people with SEND, who also faced some additional challenges based on their knowledge and skills and employer perceptions of their abilities. There was also a consensus that the pandemic had made it harder to access work placements and gain invaluable experience over the last couple of years.

"It can be quite hard, we've been trying to find places where they could go and do some work experience but a lot of people as soon as they hear 'special needs' they're like 'Nope, sorry'" (Tutor on a post-16 life skills programme)

"We have to make the opportunities" (Student at a special school)

At one special school we visited, a member of staff explained that they place a strong emphasis on employability as part of preparing young people for the transition to adulthood. This involves improving literacy, numeracy, communication and social skills (many pupils are autistic) and providing work experience. Unfortunately, she, like a tutor at a SEND specialist post-16 provider, found that many employers are reluctant to take their young people on, as they are concerned about whether their abilities and behaviours will allow them to function in the workplace. Organisations and young people themselves had thought hard about how to tackle this reluctance and ensure all young people are able to gain some meaningful work experience. These approaches included:

- **Helping young people with SEND to develop desirable knowledge and skills:** A member of staff at a special school who worked on post-16 support explained that while many of their pupils take naturally to the practical components of apprenticeships and other work experience, they are often compromised by their abilities in English and maths. As such, this is at the heart of their school's offer.
- **Working/mediating with employers:** A tutor at a post-16 SEND provider explained that two members of their staff team are well-connected with employers and are able to negotiate placements with employers. A member of staff at a special school had said that many employers are ignorant of learning difficulties and unsure how to support young people with these difficulties. As the school does not have enough staff to accompany young people to work experience placements, she felt that employers could be supported to understand the conditions that young people have. She emphasised that this should be done in laypersons' speak, rather than using medical/technical language, to aid their understanding and give them practical steps on what to do in certain situations (for instance, if a young person suddenly feels very uncomfortable in the working environment).
- **Setting up opportunities from scratch:** A member of staff at a special school has set up a café in local healthy living centre, providing work experience in catering and hospitality for her students. In addition to providing an opportunity for the young people with SEND working there, they explained that the café serves the most disadvantaged residents of Aylesbury. They also explained that the café will help showcase to local employers what their students can do.
- **Improving ties between specialist and mainstream settings:** A post-16 specialist at a special school explained that they work with a college in Amersham on a supported internship programme, which five people are currently participating in. Elsewhere, a coordinator at a large youth charity explained that through one of their programmes they have built good relationships with local SEND schools over time. She said that their specialist provision requires much more planning, with bespoke support such as one-to-one support plans. But she said that, to her knowledge, they have never had a young person who has not been able to participate due to having a SEND.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grant applicants that support young people with SEND to access work experience, part- and full-time work and other labour market opportunities. This may be done in several ways, including:

- Helping young people with SEND to develop desirable knowledge and skills.
- Working/mediating with employers.
- Setting up opportunities from scratch.
- Improving ties between specialist and mainstream settings.

In addition, the Rothschild Foundation could work with existing grantees to explore possibilities for young people with SEND to gain work experience with them.

Support at the point of transition

There were also concerns that the vital support young people receive would drop off at points of transition, namely post-16/18 movements to colleges and other destinations, and at 25, when young people's EHCPs come to an end. Some of this concern was about a loss of financial support. For instance, one special school pupil explained that his mother gets money for his ADHD but this ends at 18. Others bemoaned a loss of provision and services that young people would miss out on when they moved on.

One member of staff at a SEND specialist post-16 provider, explained that many young people develop a lot over their life skills course but some were worried about their next steps. They explained that they stay in touch with their former students and run mental health drop-in sessions where young people can do crafts and have conversations. However, they recalled some young people not feeling quite prepared for the 'real' world. The tutor felt that it would be useful if there is some support that bridges this gap. This might involve their course becoming two years long, with a second year being semi-independent. They noted that this was partially happening from September, with part of the diploma completed in the first year and the second year being more work-experience-based.

A youth-facing professional who works for the council explained that while there should be work at the post-18 transition for young people with EHCPs, this is hard to coordinate as staff are stretched. They acknowledged the important work that schools and services like the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) do to support young people with their transitions. However, they felt that many young people with SEND are left unsure about what to do after leaving compulsory education. They said many are recommended for catering or children's social care, rather than them exercising autonomy over their pathways.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants what support they will put in place to ensure any benefits to young people with SEND will be sustainable (e.g. handovers to other forms of support, phasing out check-ins over time etc.). In addition, the Foundation should support grant applications from organisations that explicitly seek to bridge the gap between young people's SEND/EHCP support and adulthood.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Ask grantees about the steps they will take to include young people with SEND.
- Produce and disseminate anti-discrimination guidance/principles that would form part of the condition of grants awarded.
- Support grant applicants from organisations focused on supporting young people with SEND, working with schools, APs, PRUs and others where appropriate/useful.
- Ask grant applicants to make support applications/onboarding as straightforward as possible, to support those who may be short of time/resources to seek out provision for themselves or others (e.g. young carers).
- Ask that grant applicants give a clear rationale for their target age group and offer their provisions to a specific age range where appropriate and feasible.
- Support grant applicants that support young people with SEND to access work experience, part- and full-time work and other labour market opportunities. This may be done in several ways, including:

- Helping young people with SEND to develop desirable knowledge and skills.
- Working/mediating with employers.
- Setting up opportunities from scratch.
- Improving ties between specialist and mainstream settings.
- Work with existing grantees to explore possibilities for young people with SEND to gain work experience with them.
- Ask grant applicants what support they will put in place to ensure any benefits to young people with SEND will be sustainable (e.g. handovers to other forms of support and phasing out check-ins over time).
- Support grant applications from organisations that explicitly seek to bridge the gap between young people's SEND/EHCP support and adulthood.

3.4.2 Tackling poor youth mental health

Lack of CAMHS and other specialist support

The overwhelming consensus from young people and youth-facing professionals we spoke to was that there is not enough youth mental health support in Bucks. Schools, APs, PRUs and other educational settings do their best to provide pastoral support and to refer to specialist services. However, a lack of CAMHS capacity means that waiting lists are extensive and referrals are often a dead-end. In this context, organisations like several non-specialist providers of youth support and services are trying to step up their mental health provision but are worried about overreaching in terms of their expertise.

High thresholds for support: One youth-facing professional who works for the council explained that many of the young people she has worked with have had negative experiences with CAMHS. She shared one story of a young person who had been in hospital eight times in the last year for attempted suicide, who was then discharged with weekly check-ins. She worried that the young person is now potentially at risk as they are not receiving sufficient support. Worryingly, these accounts were all too common. With limited CAMHS capacity, young people felt that the bar for service eligibility is so high that they would not get the help they needed, even if they were at crisis point. One young person we spoke to explained that they had been referred to CAMHS but were told their case was not serious enough to make them eligible for support. They now felt that they would be on the waiting list for so long that they will have to be referred to adult services. A young carer explained that she had self-referred and was assessed a week later, but then had a three-month wait before being reassessed and discharged without support. She feared that being discharged would hinder her ability to get referred in the future.

"There is a huge lack of support services in Bucks, and it's having a massive on YP [young people] and their mental health" (Staff at an alternative provision provider)

"Bring back Connexions, because they covered everything" (Staff at an alternative provision provider)

Decline in services: A teacher at an AP provider explained that many of the young people in their AP have serious mental health concerns but there is a complete lack of support that they can access. This spans right the way from regular counselling to high-needs CAMHS support. They, like many other youth-facing professionals, noted that Bucks Connexions services used to offer mentoring and counselling services alongside their careers offer. She also spoke of how CAMHS referrals have increased but capacity

has not kept up, meaning waiting lists are ever-growing. She felt that it would be useful to have a resident counsellor or a youth worker, who could be a sounding board for young people. For more serious concerns, she felt that Childline or the Samaritans could be helpful outlets, but ultimately felt there is no substitute for specialist CAMHS provision.

Geographical variation: There was also a sense that supply and demand for CAMHS vary by area. A professional at a housing charity explained that Wycombe counselling for adolescents in Wycombe is “terribly oversubscribed”. Elsewhere, a member of staff at a charity supporting young people with housing, felt that there is little support concerning mental health, drug and alcohol issues in Aylesbury. Similarly, a youth-facing professional who works for the council felt that in Aylesbury there is a lot of demand for mental health services in Aylesbury, whereas there is not as much in Chilterns and South Bucks. She also noted that where young people cannot access public transport and have parents/carers who are unable to provide support with travel, this can create access issues. This geographical variation highlights the need to better capture the mental health support that young people need to access and what is available to them.

“When my mum first died, and I had to move, there was no social support involved there – I just had to move” (Young person at a focus group for young carers)

Understanding young people’s circumstances: Certain groups of young people felt that their personal circumstances are not taken into account when looking to access mental health services. One young carer who had managed to access CAMHS was told that her mother needed parenting courses, which made her feel undermined. Another’s family have a social worker but they are focused on attending to their brother’s problematic behaviour, rather than supporting her with the challenges that their family are facing and the impact these challenges are having on her. Elsewhere, a tutor at a specialist post-16 provider felt that some of the young people with SEND who they support are not comfortable speaking with CAMHS and so they are looking for alternatives to help them communicate their feelings and experiences.

“Coming out of this pandemic, mental health issues are going to skyrocket, even more than they are right now. There are going to be a lot more inequalities identified over these next few months and years to come ... and I just hope that there will be the investment to help support these challenges” (Staff at a youth sports charity)

The pandemic and missing out on school: Young people and youth-facing professionals explained that youth mental health was a major concern prior to the Covid-19 outbreak and the pandemic had only furthered these concerns. Alongside fears about ‘lost learning’ due to school closures, a professional at a youth sports charity recalled a forum event where council partners explained that many young people in Bucks had not returned to school after the latest closures. These young people were missing out not just in terms of education but also socialisation and the wider pastoral support that schools provide. The charity had worked with a large college to offer activities for students, but constant changes to Covid restrictions had hindered delivery and negatively affected young people’s physical activity, which is tied to mental wellbeing.

Increased demand for support: Young people were concerned about how grades would be awarded, post-16/18 transitions, a concerning jobs market and restrictions

that stopped them accessing support and seeing friends. One member of staff at an AP, for instance, noted that students are under-socialised and that she has seen a decline in the mental health of students. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that many professionals noted a sharp rise in demand for their services. One charity, which supports young people with psychology-based interventions, explained that their waiting list has grown during the pandemic, with one space left for October (2021) and no capacity to support any more young people until January (2022). The previous waiting time for their support was about six weeks but this has been adjusted in response to the pandemic. Young people themselves noted that demand for counselling seems to have escalated because lots of young people have been struggling with isolation and anxiety, and CAMHS are at capacity.

Reduced support services: Alongside this rise in demand, services became harder to access and pandemic restrictions reduced the services that were available to young people. Youth clubs, many of which provided pastoral support for young people and helped with referrals to specialist services, closed and never re-opened. Elsewhere, a young carer explained that they had been unable to get any in-person social worker home visits during the pandemic. In this context, a youth sports charity had offered CAMHS the opportunity to have some waitlisted young people participate in some of their physical activities. They felt that this could be a meaningful, positive opportunity for some young people, but also acknowledged that it may not be appropriate for those in desperate need. While no substitute for access to specialist services, their innovation spoke to a need to provide support for those who are waiting for CAMHS.

The challenges facing youth mental health are substantial and wide-ranging. Again, many of the issues, such as a lack of CAMHS capacity, cannot be solved through the Rothschild Foundation's investment alone. That said, the Foundation can make a significant contribution to youth mental health through its grant-making. This requires the Foundation to seek a greater understanding of the geographical distribution of demand for and supply of youth mental health support in Bucks. From this vantage, the Foundation should support grant applications from organisations looking to improve young people's mental health. This might include:

- Expert, evidence-informed mental health interventions.
- 'One-stop shops' that provide counselling support and are able to make referrals to CAMHS.
- Intermediate support, for those waiting for CAMHS or who are in the transition between CAMHS and adult mental health services.

In addition, the Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to detail how they plan to overcome access and delivery challenges concerning certain groups of young people (e.g. those with SEND who may be uncomfortable communicating with CAMHS). Finally, the Foundation should also support organisations that support young people with SEND who may be on the margins of support (e.g. those who are waiting for EHCP referral).

Areas of support: school and beyond

Schooling

Given that all young people must be in some form of education until they are 18, schools, colleges, APs, PRUs and other educational settings are an important support system for young people. Indeed, the teachers and staff we spoke to were mindful of

the challenges facing youth mental health and they are working hard to support their students in this regard, through pastoral support, contact with parents/carers and referrals to specialist support. However, those working in these settings were concerned that a lack of CAMHS capacity has meant that the young people they support are too often left without the provision they need to address mental health concerns. Moreover, young people reported that school-related pressures are themselves presenting challenges to their mental health.

"Here, you're expected to get nothing less than 'A'. Anything below an A is not good"
(Pupil at a grammar school)

For instance, several students, particularly at one of the Bucks grammar schools, reported academic pressures affecting young people's mental health, which too often slips under the radar. They explained that while their school has high aspirations for them, they felt there is not enough emphasis on taking appropriate rest.

Elsewhere, a member of staff at a virtual school explained that many of her students came into their care late, following fairly negative experiences of education, which had damaged their confidence. She felt that they were playing 'catch-up' at post-16 level, with little capacity or funding to support students' mental health. A member of staff at an AP explained that their role is often supporting young people who have not had a great experience of education so far, including in terms of wellbeing and mental health. However, a professional at a virtual school felt the post-16 'monopoly' of a large multi-campus college group means that vulnerable young people will have little choice but to attend and will find the size of the campuses overwhelming.

The Rothschild Foundation should encourage grant applicants to work closely with schools to aid their capacity in terms of mental health support and to share practice.

Having a place to go

With many young people noting that youth clubs had closed and that there are few places available to them, generalist 'one-stop shop' organisations are an incredibly important means of accessing support. They create a safe, relaxed environment for young people to visit and socialise with one another, while also providing counselling and other pastoral support. While some young people in Aylesbury were referred to a small housing charity, the housing charity in question also seeks to make referrals to opportunities and specialist services. A youth sports charity also noted that working with PRUs, youth organisations and other non-mainstream gatekeepers allows them to reach more vulnerable young people and spread the impact of their work.

The Rothschild Foundation should encourage grant applicants to work closely with non-mainstream settings (e.g. APs and PRUs) to aid their capacity in terms of mental health support and to share practice.

Support at transition and length of intervention

As with several other themes discussed in this report, there were great concerns among young people and youth-facing professionals about a drop-off in mental health support at significant points of transition, and issues surrounding the length of interventions.

A professional at a housing support service explained that when young people leave children's services, there is suddenly a far greater onus for them to take responsibility for themselves when many are not yet ready. In particular, she noted that young fathers often struggle to get support, as they have been let down by services and do not have access to health visitors and nurses like young mothers do. Schools, colleges, youth groups and others worried about what young people will do once they grow too old to access support from CAMHS. Teachers at a special school and at a PRU we spoke with, said they stay in touch with young people after they transition out of their educational institutions and give them pastoral support, but this is not funded, it is reliant solely on goodwill and it is no substitute for access to specialist services.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to consider how they will support young people in making a transition out of their services. This might be through:

- Transferring young people to a suitable adult mental health service, alongside other support from VCS and other organisations.
- Slowly phasing out regular check-ins with young people to avoid a sudden drop-off in support.

There were also concerns about the length of mental health interventions themselves. A professional at a housing support service felt that provision is often too short-term and that there is a need for longer-term support. Others argued that more needed to be done to bridge CAMHS and adult mental health services. Elsewhere, staff at a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions acknowledged that longer-term interventions may be appropriate in certain instances but felt that their own intense short-term programmes are effective for what they are trying to achieve with the vulnerable young people they are supporting. This speaks to the need to consider the length of interventions and forms of support.

Case study – a charity specialising in psychology-based interventions: We spoke with one charity that runs short-term, intense interventions with young people, seeing them three to four times a week, at their house or somewhere else they feel comfortable. They work on a SMART target-based model, helping those who are 'stuck' and struggling to move forward. For instance, a young person may have been out of school for a while or been in a repetitive cycle, such as getting repeatedly excluded or self-harming. They give them targets that will help improve their situation, such as self-regulation strategies and self-awareness, which the young person sets out to achieve through intervention. They also place a lot of emphasis on 'closure documentation' and hand over their work to the professionals around the young person so they can continue their work. This forms part of their multi-agency work, where they support young people to engage positively with other services. One young person, who had received support from the charity, felt that support staff were friendly, approachable and had helped them understand their actions and to grow in confidence. The intervention involved eight-weeks of personalised support, which they felt was sufficient to make progress without being too demanding. A professional from the charity explained that part of the rationale for having shorter interventions and multiple staff members on each case team is to avoid attachment issues. They also work with parents and carers to empower them to carry on the work with the young person after the intervention is over.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants to justify the length of their mental health intervention and its suitability for what they are trying to achieve.

The Rothschild Foundation should...

- Seek a greater understanding of the geographical distribution of demand for and supply of youth mental health support in Bucks.
- Support grant applications from organisations looking to improve young people's mental health. This might include:
 - o Expert, evidence-informed mental health interventions.
 - o 'One-stop shops' that provide counselling support and are able to make referrals to CAMHS.
 - o Intermediate support, for those waiting for CAMHS or who are in the transition between CAMHS and adult mental health services.
- Ask grant applicants to detail how they plan to overcome access and delivery challenges concerning certain groups of young people (e.g. those with SEND who may be uncomfortable communicating with CAMHS).
- Support organisations that support young people with SEND who may be on the margins of support (e.g. those who are waiting for an EHCP referral).
- Encourage grant applicants to work closely with schools and non-mainstream settings (e.g. APs and PRUs) to aid their capacity in terms of mental health support and to share practice.
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 - o Transferring young people to a suitable adult mental health service, alongside other support from VCS and other organisations.
 - o Slowly phasing out regular check-ins with young people to avoid a sudden drop-off in support.
- Ask grant applicants to justify the length of their mental health intervention and its suitability for what they are trying to achieve.

3.5. Diversity

3.5.1 Amplifying diverse perspectives

Across the consultation, young people appreciated the opportunity to have their say on the challenges they face in Bucks, the support they have found useful, gaps in support, and what additional support they feel they need to make a meaningful transition to adulthood. While some young people felt that their voices are heard in Bucks and that they are able to effect change in the provision available to them, others felt ignored. Both young people and youth-facing professionals noted that different areas of Bucks have different age demographics, ethnic compositions and socioeconomic distributions, and that too often these communities are poorly integrated.

Turning youth voice into action

As part of our consultation we spoke to members of a Bucks youth forum, an organisation that had been established several years ago to advocate for young people on issues including knife crime, transport and SEND support. The young participants valued having an opportunity to share their views with people of influence. They recalled speaking to the council about a change in the PSHE curriculum. In addition, one of the coordinators noted that previously other youth voice groups would consult with an executive group of youth members, who would then meet to discuss policy changes with the council. They generally felt the group was a good way of meeting different people, particularly as young people outside the group would contact them to share their thoughts and suggestions.

Outside of the youth voice group, young people were keen to share their views and to advocate for better support for those with similar backgrounds and experiences. One pupil from a post-16 college in Amersham, for instance, felt that he had not received sufficient support with his ADHD during his schooling and that there needed to be better-informed support regarding SEND. He therefore gave a presentation on the subject at school, placing disability in a wider societal context. At one grammar school, a member of staff explained that they have broadened their student leadership structure, to give students more of a say in how the sixth-form is run. In addition, they have provided training to the student senior leadership team on presenting to governors, dealing with gatekeepers and other matters, to help them with their roles and give them practice in building professional relationships.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grant applicants whether/how they have consulted the young people they are targeting in their provision.

Lack of diversity in youth voice

There was a perception that there is a certain profile of young person (confident, academically high-achieving, well-connected) who will be in youth advocacy positions, while young people in non-mainstream settings struggle to access such opportunities. One professional who supported the youth voice forum noted that while there are some neurodiverse young people and young carers represented in the group, there is a disproportionately high number of grammar school students, very engaged head boys and girls and those who are involved in other advocacy groups, with few from non-mainstream schools. Young people noted that often their peers are not aware that the youth voice group exists and staff felt that this could mean that more marginal youth

voices in Bucks are not being heard. One member of staff contrasted this with a previous year-long programme (now discontinued), which was reportedly far more diverse than the current youth forum. She explained that the group would see young people in care spending time with those from more affluent backgrounds, all getting along with one another. She felt that more support is needed to ensure the youth voice group can realise this sort of diversity and facilitate productive contact between young people of different backgrounds.

The scale and resources of the previous programme also meant that different areas were represented and one-to-one youth workers could refer young people to the programme. This contrasted with the youth forum, where they have previously met with Wycombe youth council and are planning to meet other groups in the future, but progress has been slower. Youth forum staff explained that they are thinking about how to broaden youth participation, which is part of an ongoing consultation with the council. They noted that ties with other areas have faded out, meaning they have lost out on the focuses and campaigns of other forums (the Chesham group had focused on LGBTQ issues, for instance).

It is important that young people are able to have their voices heard and are given the opportunity to inform the support that is provided for them. The Rothschild Foundation should involve a diverse range of young people in its grant-making process/decisions in some capacity.

Divided communities and encounters between those from different backgrounds

There were concerns about social division among different groups of people in Bucks. One young person at an AP provider felt that the Chesham community is segregated between the Pakistani community and the white population. Similarly, a college student at a post-16 college in Amersham, who lives in a village outside Amersham, felt that Pakistani pupils are regularly racially abused by white pupils and that this has become normalised. Elsewhere, a young carer explained that their local Buckingham community is made up principally of older white people, whereas Milton Keynes and Aylesbury feel more diverse.

One college student at a post-16 college in Aylesbury felt that Covid bubbles had divided people into social groups but that the learning community felt far more cohesive than school, where there are stronger social divides. Another student at the college felt that there are separate social groups and that she generally liked sticking with the same students, though occasionally liked to meet new people.

Given the lack of community integration in parts of Bucks, schools, APs, PRUs, VCS organisations and others are keen to promote contact between those from different backgrounds. One youth programme coordinator explained that their programme may tend to attract young people from particular schools or areas of Bucks. To address this, they are placing increasing emphasis on facilitating contact between young people from different backgrounds. They felt that these encounters improve understanding between groups, while allowing young people to develop their confidence along the way.

The Rothschild Foundation should support grant applicants who will facilitate productive contact between groups of young people from different backgrounds (e.g. socioeconomic background, ethnicity and area of Bucks).

Bespoke support

As well as promoting encounters to foster community cohesion, youth-facing professionals were keen to be sensitive to young people's diverse backgrounds and adapt provision accordingly. A member of staff at a housing charity explained that while Bucks is quite multicultural on the aggregate level, lots of young people still feel alienated if they belong to a minority ethnic group. She gave the example of a young, unaccompanied Somali boy, who is struggling to access opportunities. Elsewhere, a grammar school teacher described how parents from some ethnic groups often hold expectations for their children to pursue particular professions, which can be misaligned with their children's attainment at school. She said it was important that the school also provides these pupils with guidance on alternative routes.

The Rothschild Foundation should ask grantees to consider appropriate adjustments to their services to better support young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. This should be done in a manner that responds to the young person, avoiding blunt assumptions.

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