

Evaluating The Skill Mill programme to lower violence and offending in young people

Submission date 17/02/2026	Recruitment status Recruiting	☒ Prospectively registered ☐ Protocol
Registration date 24/02/2026	Overall study status Ongoing	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☐ Results
Last Edited 20/02/2026	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data ☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

The study has been commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and involves an impact and process evaluation of The Skill Mill (TSM), an intervention targeted at young people (YP) aged 16-18 who have offended and referred to the Youth Offending Service (YOS). Involvement in violence and crime can have a major impact on YP, as both victims and perpetrators. Many of those involved have experienced challenging or traumatic events in their lives. Being involved in crime can lead to mental health problems, risky behaviours, and increased costs for health and justice systems.

The Skill Mill is an intervention designed to address youth offending by providing at-risk YP with paid, six-month employment in environmental and practical work, alongside skills development. YP work in small crews under supervision, are paid weekly, and receive support to set up bank accounts and access statutory employment benefits. The programme includes practical and accredited training, wrap-around support in collaboration with YOS, and a three-month post-employment phase that helps participants secure further work, training, or education. The intervention focuses on building both soft and practical skills, aiming to improve employment prospects and foster positive personal development among participants.

The current evidence base for the effectiveness of employment programmes in reducing youth crime is not very strong. The available evidence suggests that the impact of employment programmes on youth offending is quite modest. According to recent reviews, such schemes show a small positive effect on reducing violence-related offences and the likelihood of offending, but they do not make a significant difference across all outcomes related to offending.

The trial will examine whether a 6month paid employment placement with specialist supervision, followed by 3 months of postemployment support from a pathway advisor, reduces reoffending among 16–18yearolds who have already offended. In addition to this primary outcome, the study will explore whether the programme also improves a range of secondary outcomes, including reductions in behavioural and overall difficulties, increases in selfefficacy and positive work aspirations, improvements in employment status, and reductions in reoffending between 7 and 12 months after randomisation.

Who can participate?

Healthy volunteers aged 16-18 years referred via YOS.

What does the study involve?

The evaluation will collect baseline and 6-month, 9 month and 12-month follow-up data relating to YP in both intervention and control groups via a combination of an online questionnaire and administrative datasets. The primary outcome measured will be re-offending within 12-months. Data on re-offending will be obtained from the Police National Computer (PNC). The secondary outcomes relating to offending and NEET status will also be captured through administrative data sets. Secondary outcomes speaking to behavioural difficulties will be measured through the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire via an online survey. A self-reported self-efficacy scale will also be used as will questions relating to career/employment aspirations. Online surveys will be completed by participants with the process supported by Supervisors employed by TSM based within YOS.

All participants will be offered a £20 voucher as an incentive for completing the baseline survey. Participants in the control group will be offered an £80 voucher as an incentive for completing the follow-up survey.

The study includes an implementation and process evaluation (IPE) and a cost-consequence analysis as well as the study. The IPE will involve collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from YP in both intervention and control groups and from partners involved in the administration and implementation of the intervention. All YP will be invited to take part in a short survey at the end of the intervention period. The survey themes will include experiences and views of the Skill Mill programme (among the intervention group only); other services received (including business as usual services); and YPs goals and employment aspirations and their attitudes to violence and offending. YP will also be invited to take part in a qualitative interview at the end of their six-month employment placement. These interviews will explore their experiences of the programme, life experiences that have potentially impacted on their offending behaviour, and factors that have contributed to the achievement of outcomes. Interviewees will be given a £30 voucher for taking part in an interview.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Benefits and risks not provided at time of registration

Where is the study run from?

The study is being run within YOS across 22 local authority areas across England and Wales, UK.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

The study will begin in March 2026 with four cohorts recruited across the following two years. Delivery of the intervention will be complete by May 2028. Data collection will be complete by September 2029.

Who is funding the study?

The Youth Endowment Fund, UK.

Who is the main contact?

Dr Lucy Loveless (Principal Investigator), lucy.loveless@icf.com

Dr Aisha Ahmad (Project Manager), Aisha.Ahmad@icf.com

Contact information

Type(s)

Principal investigator

Contact name

Dr Lucy Loveless

Contact details

ICF Consulting Services Ltd, 62 Threadneedle Street
London
United Kingdom
EC2R 8HP
+44 0121 2338196
lucy.loveless@icf.com

Type(s)

Scientific, Public

Contact name

Dr Matt Barnard

Contact details

ICF Consulting Services Ltd, 62 Threadneedle Street
London
United Kingdom
EC2R 8HP
+44 020 30964915
Matt.Barnard@icf.com

Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

The Skill Mill programme to reduce the risk of violence and offending: a two-armed randomised controlled trial with an internal pilot

Study objectives

The primary research question addressed by the efficacy trial will be: Is a 6-month paid employment placement with specialist supervision followed by 3-month post-employment support with a pathway advisor delivered with young people aged 16-18 who have already offended an effective approach to reducing young people's rates of reoffending, 12 months after randomisation, compared to business-as-usual?

The secondary research questions addressed by the efficacy trial will be: Is a 6-month paid employment placement with specialist supervision followed by 3-month post-employment support with a pathway advisor delivered with young people aged 16-18 who have already offended an effective approach to:

- a. Reducing young people's behavioural difficulties compared to business-as-usual?
- b. Reducing young people's total difficulties compared to business-as-usual?
- c. Increasing young people's self-efficacy compared to business-as-usual?

- d. Increasing young people's positive aspirations to work?
- e. Reducing the proportion of young people not in employment compared to business-as-usual?
- f. Reducing young people's rates of reoffending, between 7 months and 12 months post randomisation, compared to business-as-usual?

Ethics approval required

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Ethics approval(s)

Approved 06/02/2026, ICF Research and Ethics Committee (ICF Consulting Services Ltd, 62 Threadneedle Street, London, EC2R 8HP, United Kingdom; +44 02030964915; ethics.committee@icf.com), ref: TSMEA30303762

Primary study design

Interventional

Allocation

Randomized controlled trial

Masking

Open (masking not used)

Control

Active

Assignment

Parallel

Purpose

Prevention

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Prevention of re-offending by young people with an offending history with one or multiple convictions of any type of offence

Interventions

The intervention (The Skill Mill) consists of a six-month paid employment, with young people (YP) working in cohorts of four (a 'crew') with a supervisor who works with the cohort over the full six-month period. Following the employment phase, YP receive three months of post-intervention support, which is aimed at helping them transition from The Skill Mill to a new employment opportunity or a training or educational opportunity. The Skill Mill model aims to integrate employability and practical skills training through providing short courses (up to a day in length) in the use of equipment such as basic tools and machinery and on-the-job training by the supervisor. Post-employment support lasts three months and consists of: one-on-one work with the YP to support career development and job progression; practical support such as the co-creation action plans, support with CV writing and interview coaching; and acting as an advocate for young people. Alongside practical training, The Skill Mill provides wrap-around support in collaboration with youth offending services, including therapeutic input e.g. when participants experience bereavement or trauma.

The evaluation will be a two-arm, multisite, randomised controlled trial. Randomisation will occur at the level of the individual young person, stratified by the Local Authority, with allocation to the intervention and business-as-usual control using a 1:1 allocation ratio.

Business as usual: Young people randomised to the control group will receive 'business as usual' support/services from youth offending services (YOS) and other external services according to their individual circumstances and needs.

The support and interventions YOS deliver include individual and group interventions, such as anger management, victim awareness programmes, decision-making skills, and support for substance misuse. In addition, YOS work with education and training providers, with the aim of engaging YP in meaningful activity and developing their skills, and can provide family support, such as signposting to services such as mental health, addiction or domestic abuse services and those offering parenting support. In addition, YOS will provide practical assistance, such as helping YP to find suitable housing and access to health and mental health services. The range and nature of support from YOS will vary depending on the location of the service. No YOS service before the advent of The Skill Mill is understood to provide paid employment programmes.

Alongside inputs from YOS, YP may be receiving support from other local statutory and third sector organisations, including:

- Children's Social Care Services – if they are on a child protection plan they will regularly meet with a social worker and they and their carers may be receiving a range of support services, including parenting programmes or support for parents/carers with mental health, addiction or domestic abuse issues; children designated a child in need may also receive support, as may their parents/carers though it is likely to be at a lower level. Support offered varies across different local authorities (NHS, 2023a).
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) – children who have been identified as having a mental health condition may have been referred to the local CAMHS service, where they can receive support from a psychiatrist, who may prescribe medication, and from psychotherapists. The support available and waiting lists vary across different integrated care boards, which are responsible for commissioning local NHS services (NHS, 2023b).
- Third sector organisations, such as Young Minds.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Proven re-offending, defined as any violent or non-violent offence, within 12 months of randomisation, measured using data collected from Police National Computer (PNC) data at one time point

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Behavioural difficulties & total difficulties measured using the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) at 6 months post randomisation

2. Self-efficacy measured using the New General Self-Efficacy Scale at 6 months post randomisation

3. Employment status measured using HMRC data at 9 months post randomisation

4. Employment aspirations measured using Sub-set of the New Philanthropy Capital Journey to Employment (JET) Framework at 6 months post randomisation

Completion date

04/09/2029

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Aged 16-18 years old inclusive at the date of referral and date of engagement with the programme
2. Must have left school (completed year 11)
3. Offending history with one or multiple convictions for any type of offence
4. Will have received a youth justice board approved youth justice assessment such as asset plus or equivalent
5. Will be open, and active cases or and recently closed cases
6. Must be willing and able to use public transport to get to the meeting point every day
7. Must be willing to work outdoors in all weathers as well as indoors
8. Must be willing to work towards gaining the cscs construction industry green card

Healthy volunteers allowed

Yes

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

16 Years

Upper age limit

18 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

0

Key exclusion criteria

1. Physical impairments that would prevent them from undertaking physical work of the kind that TSM is contracted to undertake
2. Substantial mental health issues that would prevent them from engaging in sustained employment or working within a team environment with other YP
3. Gang affiliations or personal history of violence such that YOS and TSM judge their inclusion to put at substantial risk the safety of other YP and/or supervisors and pathway advisors
4. Are not involved in any other trials of interventions running concurrently

Date of first enrolment

02/03/2026

Date of final enrolment

31/12/2027

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Wales

Study participating centre

The Skill Mill

The Skill Mill Abbott's Hill, Gateshead NE8 3DF

Gateshead

England

NE8 3DF

Sponsor information

Organisation

Youth Endowment Fund

Funder(s)

Funder type

Funder Name

Youth Endowment Fund

Alternative Name(s)

YouthEndowFund, YEF

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location

United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available