



# Advancing youth transitions research

University of Westminster | 3 June 2025

Conference sponsors



Conference organisers



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# About us

## Overview

We are a group of organisations with a shared aim to raise awareness about evidence gaps in the field of youth transitions and enable researchers to address them using administrative data. We are primarily interested in the journeys of disadvantaged young people into and out of education and employment.

We welcome all individuals and organisations with an interest in youth transitions to join our diverse and growing community. This provides free access to our data navigation tool, training, online resources, conferences, and forums. Together, we can drive transformative insights around what works to support youth transitions and reduce inequalities.

## Project team

This project is co-funded by ADR England, Youth Futures Foundation, and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO).

It is led by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), together with co-investigators at the University of Westminster, UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, and FFT Education Datalab.

Jude Hillary: Principal Investigator  
Professor Jake Anders: Co-investigator  
Natasha Plaister: Co-investigator  
Dave Thomson: Co-investigator  
Professor Peter Urwin: Co-investigator



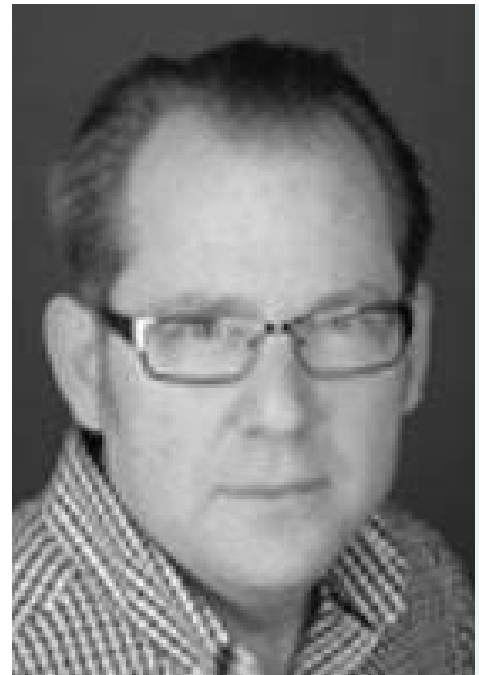
# Welcome

Welcome to the Advancing Youth Transitions Research conference, and thank you for joining us. This marks an important moment in our collective effort to improve the evidence base on the journeys of disadvantaged young people into and out of education and employment. I'm delighted to welcome over 100 academics, policymakers, funders and youth sector leaders to this flagship event.

Over the past year, our team has worked to map the existing research landscape while also engaging directly with stakeholders from across research, policy and practice. These conversations have been invaluable in highlighting the strengths of current evidence, but also its limitations: key groups remain underrepresented, methodological gaps persist, and vital questions about "what works" too often go unanswered.

One of the most powerful resources we have to address these challenges is administrative data. The UK holds rich, longitudinal datasets – such as LEO and ECHILD – that, when linked and analysed thoughtfully, offer enormous potential to track young people's journeys and generate robust, policy-relevant insights. Today's sessions will showcase how these data are already being used, and explore what more we can do to unlock their full potential.

But the value of this conference doesn't end today. The real importance lies in sustaining the momentum – turning the insights and relationships forged here into meaningful collaboration, actionable research, and a stronger, more inclusive evidence base that can inform and improve policy and practice for years to come.



Jude  
Hillary

Principal investigator

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the University of Westminster for generously hosting us, and to our project funders – ADR England, the Youth Futures Foundation, and TASO – for their continued support and belief in the importance of this work. I'd also like to thank all of today's speakers and panellists for their insights and contributions.

**Let's use today to connect, challenge, and learn from one another. Together, we can ensure that every young person's journey is better understood – and better supported.**



Karen  
Powell

ADR UK

# Welcome

It is a real pleasure to welcome you to the Advancing Youth Transitions Research Conference on behalf of ADR England. This event marks a significant milestone in our Community Catalyst initiative, and I'm delighted to have such a diverse and engaged group of stakeholders joining us to explore how we can improve outcomes for young people.

At ADR UK, our mission is to unlock the potential of linked administrative data to generate insights that can shape and improve policy and practice. We bring together data from across public service systems and make it available to researchers in a secure, ethical, and accessible way.

The Community Catalyst model is a pilot approach designed to drive the use of our flagship datasets – and this event is a testament to what is possible when we build a shared research agenda around a common goal. The Youth Transitions and Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes projects, have convened researchers, data owners, policymakers, and practitioners to identify and prioritise the most pressing evidence gaps – and crucially, those that can be answered with linked administrative data.

This work is innovative not just in what it sets out to answer, but in how it brings people together to answer it. Alongside building technical skills and capacity - through resources, training and events - the projects are building focused communities – made up of people who understand the data, know how to use it well, and are committed to interpreting and applying findings with context, clarity, and a shared purpose.

Our ambition is that this approach will lead to research that is not only using administrative data, but genuinely useful – co-shaped with those who need it most and poised to inform the decisions that matter. We are proud to fund this important work alongside our partners and co-funders, the Youth Futures Foundation and TASO. Thank you for being part of this growing community and for helping to realise the transformative potential of administrative data in the lives of young people.

# Welcome

Established as London's first polytechnic in 1838, the University of Westminster has a proud history of helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their full potential. 57% of our students are first in their families to come to university, and about 32% had free school meals. We provide education that is transformative and are ranked second for social mobility among English universities (Sutton Trust & Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021: Which university degrees are best for intergenerational mobility?).

We are committed to making a difference, continuing to expand our approaches to widening participation and supporting the progress in Higher Education of young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Our high-quality research engages extensively with policymakers and practitioners, so they can apply its insights and findings, to secure societal benefits and impact. For instance, our investigation into the experiences of the 'Forgotten Third' of 16-year-olds who do not achieve a grade four or above in English and Maths GCSE identifies fractured post-16 learning pathways, high levels of drop-out, inactivity and unemployment. We have put forward actionable recommendations to improve the employment prospects of these young people.

This work funded by the Nuffield Foundation is one of our many studies that investigate the experiences of disadvantaged young people as they make the transition from school to college and university, and on to the labour market. Much of this work using administrative datasets, such as the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO), is carried out in collaboration with FFT Education Datalab. As part of the ADR England Research Community Catalyst: Youth Transitions consortium, we are working with Datalab, UCL and NFER to promote wider use of administrative data to inform



Professor  
Peter  
Urwin

University of  
Westminster

policymaking for disadvantaged young people at risk of marginalisation and build a diverse community of stakeholders. Our research is always focused on answering questions of policy and practice, to ensure we contribute to the changes that are needed to bring about more sustainable futures. This is a key focus for the University which has been recognised as one of the top 15% out of over 1960 universities globally for its work on contributing to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

**We hope you will engage with our work. We always invite challenge. All we ask is that you also challenge yourself, so we can all move beyond rhetoric that currently stifles debate and bring about effective change that is evidence-led.**

# MORNING

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## Agenda

Tuesday  
3 JUNE | 2025

09:30 - 09:45

### Opening remarks

Kayla (Youth Employment UK Young Ambassador) - Conference Chair  
Professor Peter Bonfield (University of Westminster)  
Karen Powell (Administrative Data Research UK)

09:45 - 10:10

### Tips for influencing government policy

Chris Webber (Open Innovation Team, HM Government)

10:10 - 11:00

### Breakout sessions

11:00 - 11:10

### Refreshments

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11:10 - 12:00

### Data developments and the future of linked data

David Burnett (Department for Education)  
Emma Gordon (ADR UK)  
Stephen Jobling (Ministry of Justice)  
Graham Knox (Department for Work and Pensions)  
Chair - Rebecca Wheeler (NFER)

12:00 - 13:00

### Lunch and networking

# AFTERNOON

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13:00 - 13:10

## **The big picture: Shaping sustainable futures for youth transitions**

Professor Peter Urwin (University of Westminster)

13:10 - 14:00

## **Research priorities in youth transitions: A funders' perspective**

Ben Gadsby (Impetus)

Chris Goulden (Youth Futures Foundation)

Olly Newton (Edge Foundation)

Dr Emily Tanner (Nuffield Foundation)

**Chair - Jude Hillary (NERF)**

14:00 - 14:30

## **Youth justice: Educational influences and labour market consequences**

Rob Street (Nuffield Foundation)

Veruska Oppedisano (University of Westminster)

14:30 - 15:00

## **Addressing evidence gaps in youth transitions**

Group discussions

15:00 - 15:10

## **Refreshments**

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15:10 - 16:00

## **Breakout sessions**

16:00 - 16:20

## **The power and potential of administrative data**

Dr Emma Gordon (Administrative Data Research UK)

16:20 - 16:30

## **Closing remarks**

# BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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## Using administrative data to research transitions into and out of NEETHood

### LG.08

- Professor Peter Urwin (University of Westminster)
- Dave Thomson (FFT Education Datalab)

This session will set out the challenges of studying young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). These largely stem from having to work with data that is essentially missing in administrative data sources. We will set out the strengths and limitations of using LEO to study the NEET group, and discuss how the data can be further improved and consider where new data linkages (for instance, IDBR) have the potential to overcome limitations and to create evidence that informs policy to enhance lives; building attendees understanding and allowing them to share their own insights.

## Using administrative data to research transitions into and out of higher education

### B.01

- Professor Jake Anders (UCL)
- Professor Claire Crawford (UCL)

This session will provide researchers with the opportunity to learn about and discuss the possibilities, opportunities and challenges of using administrative data to research transitions into and out of higher education. We will also provide an overview of the training and capacity building resources available to support working with these data, along with advice on the process for applying to make use of these data. To support this, we will provide a very high-level overview of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset and its relevant constituent parts, with particular focus on those relevant to this research area. Specifically, for transitions into we will focus on records of pupils time in school from the National Pupil Database (NPD), in further education from the Individual Learner Record (ILR), higher education admissions data from the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), and higher education attendance data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). For transitions beyond HE, we will also introduce the employment earnings and benefits data from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The session will include group activities to discuss research ideas and how these can be taken forward.

# BREAKOUT SESSIONS

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## Using administrative data to map young people's policy journeys: challenges and conundrums

### B.02

- Lorraine Lanceley (Institute of Employment Studies)
- Peter Traynor (Youth Futures Foundation)

In 2024 Youth Futures Foundation commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to map the transitions from education to employment of four marginalised cohorts of young people, through mapping administrative data and related policies and support. This presentation will describe the project and some of the challenges that were encountered, mostly related to the complexity of the landscape. This is important, not least because some of these challenges will mirror those encountered by young people themselves in traversing this complicated terrain at an already difficult period of transition.

## Identifying equality gaps and evaluating outcomes in higher education using administrative data

### B.03

- Rob Summers (TASO)
- Nicholette Pollard-Odle (TASO)

In this session we will use some of TASO's research findings to illustrate how administrative data can be used to understand inequalities in access, participation and success in higher education. Linked datasets accessed through the Secure Research Service have provided a detailed look at how students with different experiences of social care enter higher education and how different educational backgrounds affect future earnings and employment. Outside of the Secure Research Service we will explore how a near-nationwide database that is used to record pupil interactions with higher education pre-entry programmes facilitates the evaluation of widening participation activities.

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## From gaps to priorities: Strengthening the evidence base on youth transitions

Jude Hillary

Principal Investigator, ADR Research Community Catalyst: Youth Transitions



**Good policy needs good evidence. Yet, when it comes to youth transitions – the journey young people take from education into employment or further study – our evidence base contains some notable gaps. These gaps represent policy blind spots, hindering interventions that could transform lives.**

The ADR England Research Community Catalyst: Youth Transitions project has spent the past year mapping the landscape of existing research and consulting with stakeholders. What we found was both revealing and important.

Certain groups, such as mature learners or those who have been in the youth justice system, are notably absent from the evidence base. Equally, the kinds of research that policymakers most need, particularly robust causal studies on ‘what works’, are significantly outnumbered by descriptive studies that focus on documenting trends.

Some groups are simply harder to study than others. Take young people who are not in education, employment, or training – they often go unnoticed in existing datasets, making it incredibly difficult to track their journeys to this point. The consequences of this data gap are considerable: without robust evidence, policymakers struggle to create effective strategies to support those most at risk of becoming part of this group.

Similarly, while there is a significant body of research on socio-economically disadvantaged young people, the definition of disadvantage varies considerably. Free school meals eligibility, the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and other measures all capture different facets of economic hardship, leading to a fragmented picture. We need a more consistent approach – either standardising definitions or encouraging researchers to test their findings across multiple measures.

The same problem exists with ethnicity. While ‘ethnic minority’ appears frequently in studies, broad categorisations in administrative data obscure the experiences of distinct groups. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, for example, are among the most educationally disadvantaged in the country, yet their outcomes are rarely examined in the research.

If gaps in populations are a problem, gaps in methodology are an even greater one. Descriptive studies dominate the literature, mapping pathways and transitions but stopping short of answering the fundamental policy question: what actually helps



Causal studies – those that evaluate the impact of specific interventions or policies are limited. Yet these are the studies policymakers rely on to inform policymaking, programme design, and funding decisions. We need more work exploring not just whether young people from disadvantaged backgrounds access higher education or secure stable jobs, but also what interventions improve their chances of doing so.

At the same time, there is limited research on the impact of policy changes on youth transitions. Reforms have often been implemented in recent years with limited evaluation. Without rigorous studies assessing these changes, we are left without a clear understanding of their effects and risk continuing with a policy or programme which is not achieving its desired aims. Even worse, it could be causing more harm than good.

The UK has an extensive and valuable repository of administrative data, offering significant opportunities for youth transitions research. Linked datasets such as Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) and Education and Child Health Insights from Linked Data (ECHILD) provide powerful tools for tracking young people’s journeys over time. While LEO has been increasingly utilised, there are opportunities to link together other datasets, which hold great potential for further insightful analysis.<sup>f</sup>

A key focus for the research community should be ensuring that these rich data sources are fully leveraged. Investing in the infrastructure and skills needed to access and analyse these datasets will enable researchers to generate more robust evidence, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of interventions and policies designed to support young people’s transitions.



The task ahead is becoming clearer.

There is a need for us to:

1. Prioritise intersectional research – recognising that young people’s experiences of education and work are shaped by multiple overlapping factors, not just single characteristics.
2. Focus on under researched groups – looking at the educational and/or labour market outcomes for mature learners, young people who offend, and young people with experience of physical and/or mental health issues.
3. Fund more causal impact studies – to shift the balance away from description towards actionable evidence on ‘what works’.
4. Continue to invest in data infrastructure and skills – so researchers can better access and use linked datasets to answer pressing policy questions.

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort. This is where this Community Catalyst project plays a crucial role. By bringing together researchers, funders and policymakers, we can work collectively to bridge these gaps and build a more comprehensive and nuanced evidence base that truly reflects the diverse experiences of young people.

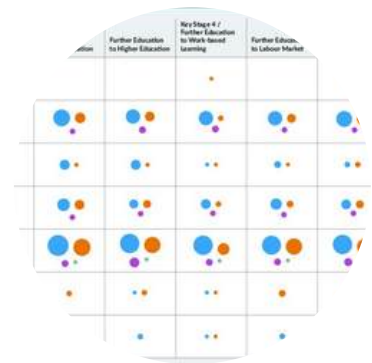
If we succeed together, we can move towards more informed policy and practice – where every young person, regardless of their background, receives the support they need to navigate the transition from education to work.

**The gaps are visible. Now it is time to address them together.**

# Resources

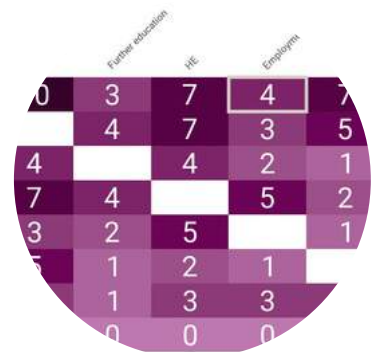
## Evidence gap map

Our updated map of the youth transitions evidence base is now live on the ADR UK website. This highlights key research themes – and where significant gaps still remain.



## Online data navigation tool

Our online tool is designed to help users navigate and interpret administrative data related to youth transitions.



## Upcoming training and 'how-to' guides

To stay informed about upcoming training sessions, data clinics, and events, please sign up for updates:





Thank you for being part of this important event

[More information](#)

