

# The Impact of the Archbishop of York Youth Trust Young Leaders Award

Professor Andrew Parker,  
Mr Jamie Crowther,  
Dr Colin Baker and Dr Anita Navin  
University of Gloucestershire

## Correspondence:

Professor Andrew Parker  
Faculty of Business, Computing and Applied Sciences  
University of Gloucestershire  
Oxstalls Campus  
Gloucester, UK  
GL2 9HW

Tel: +44 (0) 1242 715387  
Mobile: 07920 210333  
Fax: +44 (0) 1242 715222  
E-mail: [aparker@glos.ac.uk](mailto:aparker@glos.ac.uk)



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University of Gloucestershire  
Faculty of Business, Computing  
and Applied Sciences

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the findings of an independent external evaluation of the Young Leaders Award (YLA) which is hosted by The Archbishop of York Youth Trust (ABYYT). As a charitable organisation, ABYYT seeks to positively impact the lives of young people in relation to their personal, social and educational development and their potential as transformational leaders. To this end, the Young Leaders Award (YLA) comprises a unique active citizenship and character development programme which is specifically targeted towards young people aged 7-18 years (available for Key Stages 2, 3, 4 and Post-16) with the aim of engaging and empowering participants ‘to lead and be the change they want to see’ in their lives and local communities whilst at the same time allowing them to develop key leadership and character skills.

The evaluation commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016 and concluded on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 and was funded by ABYYT. A mixed method research model was deployed in order to investigate the impact of the YLA on the young people concerned. Quantitative data was collected from project participants via a standardised questionnaire survey which investigated how and to what extent pupils believed that the YLA had helped them to: (i) develop as an individual (i.e., personal skills and attributes), (ii) develop in their relationships with their peers (i.e., their social skills), and (iii) develop in terms of their sense of citizenship (i.e., their awareness of their communities). The qualitative aspect of the evaluation involved in-situ observations of YLA delivery and small group semi-structured and focus group interviews with project participants, 1-1 semi-structured interviews with Link teachers (those responsible for YLA delivery), and 1-1 semi-structured interviews with Headteachers. In addition, documentary analysis of existing data (local, regional, national) and published reports concerning similar initiatives was undertaken. The overall aim of the evaluation was to explore the extent to which the YLA meets its stated aims and objectives and, with these issues at its core, this report sits comfortably amidst broader debates surrounding character education in UK schools (see, for example, Arthur, Harrison & Taylor, 2015; Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse, & Jones, 2015); Birdwell, Scott & Reynolds, 2015) and social and political agendas concerning youth and community development (see Department for Education, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, Morgan, 2016).

### **Key findings**

The key findings of the report are as follows:

- Young people spoke positively about the impact of the YLA, particularly with respect to educational, personal and social issues. Survey findings indicate that perceived educational impacts included motivation to do well at school and to be around positive people. For personal impacts, improvements in decision making and a desire to try new things featured highly, while working with and helping others were highlighted by participants as key social impacts. Perceptions between girls (55%) and boys (45%) concerning the impact of the YLA on educational, personal and social issues did not differ significantly suggesting that the programme has cross-gender appeal.
- There is evidence to suggest that the YLA provides a motivational foundation for volunteering in the future with findings indicating that participation in the Award helped foster a more confident mind-set that recognised the importance of school, trying new things and working with and supporting others. Overall, 60% of pupils stated that they ‘agreed’ or ‘partly agreed’ that they would continue to volunteer after completion of the YLA programme.
- Many young people believed that the YLA had assisted them in their personal development including the acquisition of a series of skills and attributes. Numerous respondents directly cited ‘confidence’ (both in oneself and in others) as one of those skills. Young people also indicated that a particular catalyst for this kind of personal development was participation in activities that provided new opportunities for interaction (including group work), and that such experiences transferred to other areas of the curriculum (particularly confidence and communication skills).
- Headteachers and Link teachers believed that YLA participation helped young people to develop skills and attributes such as leadership, confidence and resilience. There is also evidence to suggest that the Award has the potential to engage young people who may be viewed (or view themselves) as ‘educationally disengaged’.
- Several young people reported how taking part in the Award had encouraged them to develop in relation to emotional awareness and this included increased levels of tolerance and respect both at the interpersonal and broader social level. Participants also noted raised awareness of previous and current social and political debates. Faith issues were

another topic that young people identified as central to their learning and how this had enhanced their understanding of contemporary world events.

- At a social level, participants recognized the positive impact of social action initiatives for themselves (i.e., interacting and working with peers and people outside of their immediate school environment), their school, and their communities. A number of participants alluded to the belief that activities such as working with the elderly had changed the opinion of people in their communities towards the school which they attended and towards young people per se. Teachers commented on the broader benefits of the YLA for participants such as: confidence, self-esteem, resilience, aspirational thinking, communication skills, emotional intelligence and moral development.
- Young people recognised how the Award positively impacted their futures by preparing them for adulthood and work, shaping their aspirations and assisting them in practical tasks. At Key Stage 4 this included completing UCAS forms, university applications and CVs.
- Headteachers and Link teachers noted the YLA's capacity to aid the development of school values (including the potential to aid the promotion of British and Christian values), the reinforcement of institutional ethos, and the enhancement of organisational profile and reputation.
- The YLA was most successful where it was embedded into the culture and ethos of participating schools. In total, 75% of pupils undertook the YLA during lesson time, less than 3% doing so after school or during personal time. Evidence suggests that the Award represents an effective model for helping to develop character education and for building and developing character and leadership in pupils whilst at the same time enhancing their educational learning and engagement.
- Survey findings suggest that the YLA had a greater impact on those aged 13 years old and under than those aged 14-15 years old. That said, qualitative data suggest that the Award had clear benefits for those at Key Stage 4.

## **Conclusions**

In terms of the specific aims and objectives of the YLA, this report indicates that the Award makes a valuable contribution to the personal, social and educational development of those young people who engage with it. What the report also demonstrates is that the YLA can be effective not only in developing and further engaging young people in school and community life but, at the same time, it has the potential to act as a valuable support mechanism for wider curriculum delivery. In the geographical contexts featured here, the YLA is a key facilitator of such benefits.