

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION WITH SEA CADETS

Preparing young people for a changing world

Findings from cadet-led workshops at the Conservative
and Labour Party Conferences, Autumn 2023



From left to right: Cadets Wesley, Maisie, Sharlize and Keiren



From left to right: Cadets Talitha, Jerusalem, Jonathan and Josh, with MССC CEO Martin Coles CBE

Introduction

Both government and opposition are really clear that this is an incredibly challenging time for the UK, and particularly for its young people. This is certainly reflected in what our young people are telling us; but our cadets are also reporting that their time with Sea Cadets is making a hugely positive difference to their lives.

To better understand how Sea Cadets' model of non-formal education can help young people adapt to a changing world, a group of our cadets worked with senior Marine Society & Sea Cadets (MSSC) employees to co-design a research project. This took the form of two interactive and cadet-led workshops at the Conservative and Labour Party Conferences of October 2023.

The aim was to capture the cadet experience of non-formal education in the context of their wider lives and communities. But as well as focusing on the opportunities and outcomes non-formal education delivers, the cadets identified the importance of exploring the barriers that could prevent them from accessing it.

The cadets also wanted to ensure that conference attendees could see how initial basic activities led to big changes in their skills, confidence and outlook, and be

able to follow their journey of increasing engagement and excitement as they discovered their passions. Ultimately, the cadets wanted both to articulate how their experience of non-formal education at Sea Cadets changed them, and to explore how that process could help even more young people across the UK.

Their teamwork and confidence shone through in the way they led the workshops, skilfully harnessing the expertise of conference attendees. They were delighted to be joined by so many influential policymakers with a genuine desire to improve the life chances of the next generation. And we're sure that those delegates will be further motivated by our cadets' thoughts on the barriers to non-formal education that are holding back some of their peers.

We hope the workshops – and this summary of the points they raised – will generate ideas that will resonate with policymakers across the political spectrum and youth development sector. It is only through closer collaboration that we will unleash the full potential of non-formal education, so that all young people can play a leading role in shaping the skills-based society that will guarantee the UK's future prosperity.

The workshops

At both conferences, four cadets each led a team of conference attendees in a discussion about their Sea Cadets experience, before brainstorming ideas. By analysing the difference that non-formal education has made to our cadet's lives, the adult participants worked with them to explore how these changes could benefit wider society and identify the barriers which could prevent Sea Cadets and other youth groups from developing more young people.

The findings presented in this document give a concise snapshot of the discussion from both party conference workshops. We have also combined the findings to create a more comprehensive model for unlocking the potential impact of non-formal education. The recurring themes and shared concerns from the workshops inform a number of proposed next steps; we believe our proposals would have widespread public and political support and could help to develop policies that allow the next generation to reach their full potential – with huge economic and social benefits for the UK.

Workshop leads

Manchester:

Cadet Wesley, Fraserburgh
Cadet Maisie, Fishguard
Cadet Sharlize, Wigan
Cadet Keiren, Redditch
& Bromsgrove

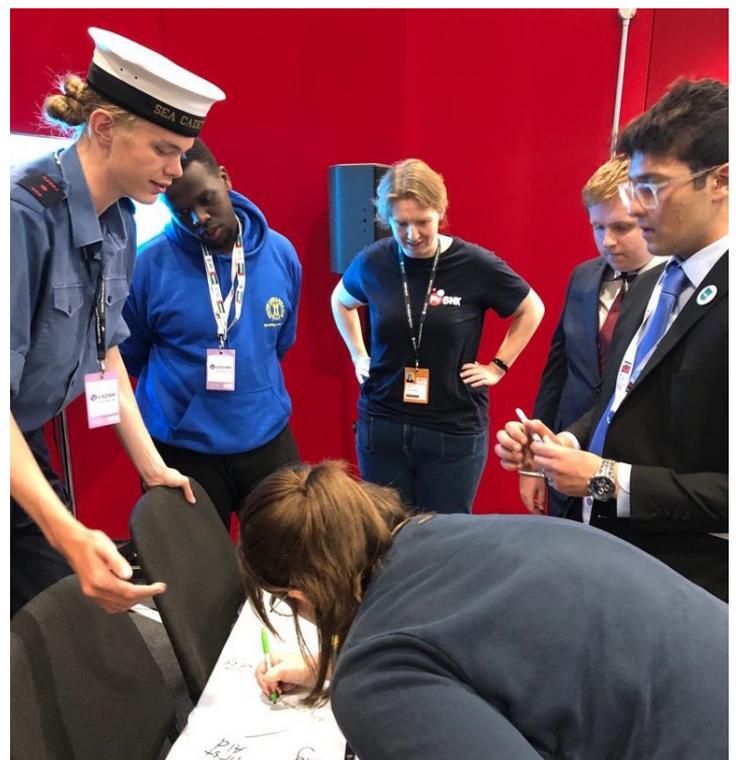
Liverpool:

Cadet Talitha, Wakefield
Cadet Jerusalem, North Shields
Cadet Josh, Hull
Cadet Jonathan, City of London

Marine Society & Sea Cadets staff coordinators:

Martin Coles CBE, CEO
Andrew Weston, Head of Policy and Insight
Jane Winfield, Young People
Support Manager
Ben Bridge, Data and Policy Analyst

Findings co-produced with attendees at the Sea Cadets workshops at Conservative and Labour Party Conferences, Autumn 2023



Summary findings of the Sea Cadets workshop at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, 2 October 2023

1 What non-formal education have you received at Sea Cadets?

CADETS

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

e.g. learning musical instruments to play in Sea Cadets bands.

TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES

e.g. using an air rifle in a safe and supervised environment.

LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

e.g. taking Peer Educator modules to be able to teach other cadets; participating in Cadet Voice.¹

CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES

e.g. displays of drill and marching at public parades and community events.

ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES

e.g. boating and aviation; trying new things.



2 What have you gained from these activities?

CADETS

RESPECT AND INTEGRITY

Knowing how to work with others as part of a greater whole, while still being able to stand up for what I believe is right.

CONFIDENCE

Being able to make scary 'first steps' to achieve what I want to achieve; feeling able to stand up in front of people and make my case or try something new and challenging.

RESILIENCE

Being able to recover from failure and keep pushing forward to achieve my goals.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Feeling comfortable supporting and instructing others – starting with other young people, but then taking a leadership role in my community.

TEAMWORK SKILLS

Being able to work together with others to organise and achieve shared objectives and drive the changes we want to see in our lives and the wider world.



3 What are the outcomes of Sea Cadets' non-formal education?

CADETS & WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

OVERARCHING BENEFIT

– Developing young leaders who can work together and have the principles, drive and resilience to face the challenges of a changing world.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

– Cadets become leaders and role models in their communities, driving the change the community wants and needs. Participants agreed that, in this regard, young people could make the biggest difference in 'left behind' communities.

– Diverts young people away from crime and criminal exploitation.

– Young people volunteer (in youth work or elsewhere) creating lifelong personal development and enhancing local services.

INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS

– Young people have the skills they need to thrive in the workplace and build better careers.

– Better social mobility.



4 What are the barriers to positive change through non-formal education?

CADETS & WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

MATERIAL BARRIERS

– Lack of funds; particularly in relation to providing equipment, developing facilities, and supporting access (through bursaries etc.) for young people from marginalised backgrounds.

– Maintenance and adaption needs for older buildings.

– Lack of transport for young people to get to activities: e.g. poor public transport and parents working or without cars.

While these barriers are felt everywhere, workshop participants agreed that they would have the biggest impact on poorer, 'left behind' communities and parts of the country.

CAPACITY BARRIERS

– Lack of sufficient skilled volunteers, preventing the creation of more spaces for young people.

Participants agreed that more skilled volunteers would provide individual benefits by helping young people *and* upskilling the volunteers themselves.

¹ Sea Cadets' forums and working groups to allow young people to shape organisational change.



Summary findings of the Sea Cadets workshop at the Labour Party Conference in Manchester, 2 October 2023

1 What non-formal education have you received at Sea Cadets?

CADETS

TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES

e.g. using an air rifle in a safe and supervised environment.

CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES

e.g. displays of drill and marching at public parades and community events.

COMMUNITY IMPACT ACTIVITIES

e.g. community volunteering, or being a representative for other young people to make sure their voices are heard.

MENTORING ACTIVITIES

e.g. taking Peer Educator modules to be able to teach other cadets.

ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES

e.g. boating and aviation; trying new things.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

e.g. public speaking.



2 What have you gained from these activities?

CADETS

BETTER PHYSICAL HEALTH

Both developing physical fitness through youth work activities and getting into a habit of healthier behaviour.

CONFIDENCE IN ACHIEVING GOALS

Feeling comfortable taking the big steps needed to make the change I want to see in my life and the lives of others.

RESPECT AND INTEGRITY

Knowing how to work with others as part of a greater whole, while still being able to stand up for what I believe is right.

EXPERIENCE TALKING WITH DIFFERENT AUDIENCES AND RELATING TO PEOPLE HOLDING DIFFERENT VIEWS

ABILITY TO ACT AND THINK INDEPENDENTLY / SOLVE PROBLEMS

Knowing how to resolve the problems I have in my life, with minimal support.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Knowing how to resolve disputes between different people in a way that lets us best achieve mutual goals.

SENSE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY – WANTING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Seeing the difference volunteers and other young people make in the wider world and being inspired to make a difference to others in my own life.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Being able to express myself with confidence and share information clearly.



3 What are the outcomes of Sea Cadets' non-formal education?

CADETS & WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

OVERARCHING BENEFIT

- As young people progress and grow, they build the flexibility and drive to adapt to changing circumstances and shape their own future and goals.

INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS

- Young people want to tackle issues in their own lives.
- Young people have the flexible and transferable skills they need.
- Young people can seek the careers and lives they want in a changing world.



4 What are the barriers to positive change through non-formal education?

CADETS & WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BARRIERS

- Lack of transport for young people to get to activities: e.g. poor public transport and parents working or without cars.
- Lack of opportunities for young people with special educational needs and/or disability to access non-formal education.
- Lack of coordination with schools that could make it easier for young people to balance exams and non-formal education.
- Lack of opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds to engage in non-formal education, and a lack of awareness of the opportunities that do exist.

The workshop participants agreed that these are the biggest barriers to access for the young people with the highest levels of need, and at crucial points in their lives (e.g. from the ages of 16 to 18, while also tackling exams).

CAPACITY BARRIERS

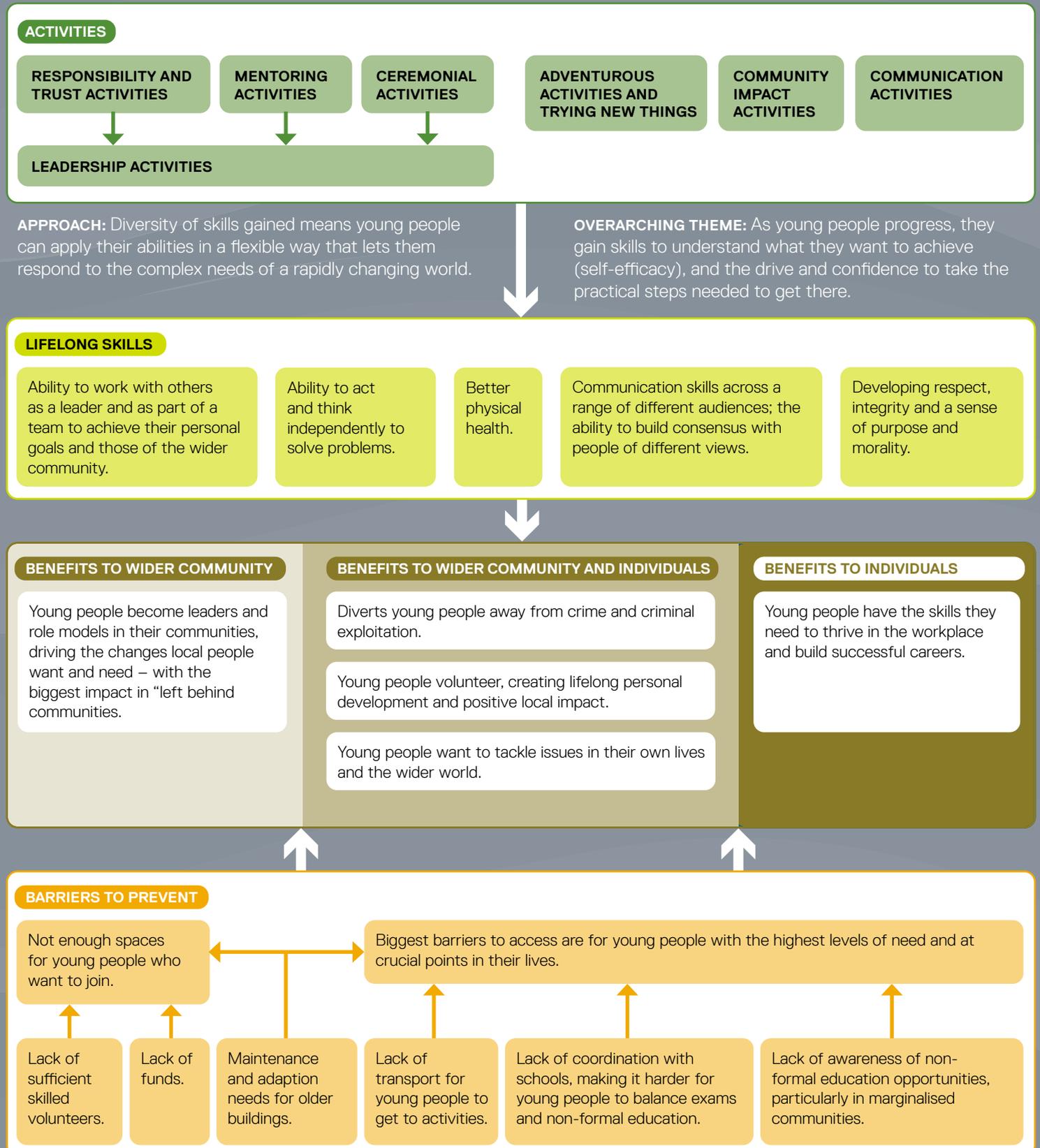
- Lack of funds.
- Lack of sufficient skilled volunteers.

Participants agreed these were the main factors behind the lack of available spaces for all the young people who want to join.



A unified model for the impact of non-formal education on young people

Created by combining the common themes from both cadet-led workshops to build a bipartisan model that could be applied to all youth groups.



Common themes on the impact delivered by Sea Cadets

In reviewing the discussions from both party conference workshops, it is clear that the variety of activities delivered by Sea Cadets not only sustains young people's engagement with the organisation, but gives them the lifelong skills to ensure they thrive into adulthood,

The abilities and attributes that cadet workshop participants said they gained from these activities form the basis of the transferable skill set outlined below:

SELF-EFFICACY

Young people gain a better understanding of what they want to do; they feel empowered to pursue their ambitions and have the confidence and maturity to take practical steps to achieve them.

TEAMWORK

Young people develop an ability to work with others, whether as a leader or by playing a supporting role, in order to achieve their own personal goals and those of the team or wider community.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Young people experience challenging and unpredictable environments that hone their ability to think independently and act decisively to find solutions.

RESILIENCE

Improved physical fitness and mental health means young people are able to perform to the best of their ability whether seizing opportunities or overcoming setbacks.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Young people learn how to speak with people at all levels of society and engage with a range of different views, fostering their ability to listen, advocate and build consensus.

SENSE OF PURPOSE

Young people are instilled with the respect and integrity that drives a desire to help others and enhance the wider community.



These skills combine to give young people the best possible chance to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world – both in forging successful careers and family lives, and in making a positive contribution to their communities and wider society.

An emerging consensus on non-formal education

Despite their obvious differences in outlook, workshop participants at both conferences identified remarkably similar ideas and discussion points when considering the benefits of non-formal education.

One specific focus of Conservative conference attendees was that young people receiving non-formal education could have a particularly significant community impact in parts of the country that have been 'left behind'.

Labour attendees focused more on how non-formal education can give young people the flexibility and mindset to tackle the issues that matter to them, and on the importance of making non-formal education more accessible to groups that have been excluded from it.

The two key areas of **agreement on the benefits of non-formal education** can be summarised as follows:

- Clear bipartisan support for the idea that non-formal education has a positive impact on young people and can make a real difference to their development.
- Non-formal education makes a massive contribution to giving young people the skills they will need to excel in the workplace and fulfil their life goals.

There was a similar **consensus on the need to address the barriers to non-formal education**, with the following conclusion being reached at both conferences:

- Support is needed to help non-formal education providers to grow and thrive, including unlocking opportunities for volunteering and increasing access to appropriate resources.



Our proposals to support the growth of non-formal education across the UK

Based on the priorities identified by delegates from both main parties, MSSC suggests that some reasonably low-cost solutions could include:

- **A Volunteering Levy** combining the Conservative’s 2015 proposal for statutory volunteering leave with an apprenticeship-style levy. This would introduce a tax on businesses to generate funds to support the charity sector, with businesses offering volunteering leave not required to pay the levy.
- **Stronger guidance for public transport commissioning processes**, recognising the importance of established youth sector hubs (e.g. long-running units or scout huts) as central local infrastructure – equivalent to schools – that must be served by transport links.
- **Greater coordination between political figures and youth sector leaders**. The central way non-formal education is distributed is through organised youth work, with proven models for making it accessible to target communities. Policymakers must therefore seek to work closely with youth sector leaders to help make sure this support reaches groups with the highest level of need – in line with the wider priorities of the Department for Education and Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

If you can contribute to any of these next steps, or have ideas of your own to help non-formal education make a difference, please contact MSSC’s Head of Policy & Insight, Andrew Weston, on **0777 997 2026** or by emailing: **aweston@ms-sc.org**





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