



Image: Members of Brighton YAC take part in a tunnel tour beneath the Royal Pavilion, Brighton.

Young Archaeologists' Club Impact Study



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England

1. What is YAC?

The Young Archaeologists' Club (YAC) was established by the Council for British Archaeology in 1972, giving children and young people the opportunity to discover archaeology through hands-on experiences. Today, the network includes 80 clubs across the UK, supported by c. 500 volunteer leaders, assistant leaders and young leaders who deliver regular activities for over 2,000 members aged 8–16.

Based in museums, heritage sites and community venues, YAC clubs bring history to life through excavations, historic objects and practical activities. Members explore their interests, meet archaeologists and heritage professionals, make friends and experience what it is really like to work in archaeology.

2. What did we want to know?

The YAC Impact Study (2024–2027) was commissioned by the Council for British Archaeology and funded by Historic England to understand the difference YAC makes to young people's lives. Over three years, members, parents, carers and volunteer leaders have shared their experiences through surveys, interviews, observations and creative evaluation activities.

Working with seven clubs each year has enabled the study to understand not only the impact of YAC, but also what makes it successful. The findings are helping strengthen the network while demonstrating the wider social value of investing in hands-on heritage.

2025-2026 participating clubs:

Brighton YAC, Brighton, East Sussex

Canterbury YAC, The University of Kent, Kent

Headlands YAC, Headlands Primary School, North Yorkshire

Manchester YAC, Bolton Museum, Greater Manchester

Museum of Farnham YAC, The Museum of Farnham, Surrey

Northamptonshire YAC, The Chester House Estate, Northamptonshire

The Sill YAC, The Sill National Landscape Discovery Centre, Northumberland





3. What did we find out?

Across three years of evidence, the Impact Study has shown that YAC is much more than a place to learn about archaeology. It is a welcoming community where young people explore their interests, develop lasting friendships and grow in confidence. Hands-on heritage is the starting point, but the benefits extend into many areas of young people's lives.

Hands-on heritage creates opportunities to connect, belong and grow.

YAC provides a unique space for young people

YAC offers something many young people cannot find elsewhere: a place to meet others who share their enthusiasm for archaeology, history and heritage. Members consistently described feeling accepted rather than judged for their interests, helping them build friendships, develop a sense of belonging and be themselves. As demand for YAC continues to grow, after-school clubs are helping more children discover archaeology from an early age.

"I feel like I can be me." - YAC Member



Membership and participation

Over six monthly sessions across seven YAC branches | September 2025 - April 2026



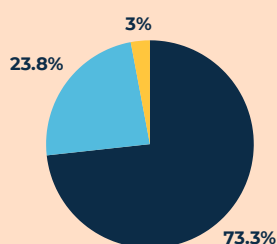
YAC inspires everyone to enjoy learning

YAC makes learning enjoyable through hands-on activities, practical problem-solving and opportunities to explore archaeology in real-world settings. Flexible approaches help all members participate, particularly neurodiverse young people and those who find mainstream education challenging. Parents and leaders consistently described young people becoming more curious and developing increasingly positive attitudes towards learning.

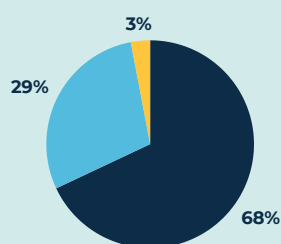
“YAC has enabled him to access learning about a subject he enjoys without feeling that he is failing or that he is not good at it.” - Parent/carer



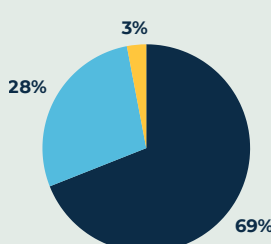
I enjoy taking part in YAC



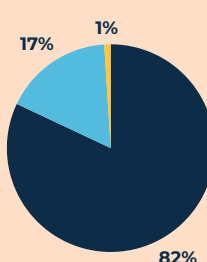
YAC activities are fun



I enjoy learning at YAC by doing hands-on activities



At YAC, I am able to take part in the activities



● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Not sure



Members of The Museum of Farnham YAC practice their handwriting as part of a Victorian classroom experience

Young people learn new skills together

By working with museum collections, archaeological objects and heritage professionals, members develop practical and specialist skills that are rarely available elsewhere. Alongside these experiences, they strengthen teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills that parents describe transferring into school, family life and other community settings.

"It has improved confidence to go into unfamiliar situations and locations and interact with people they don't know." - Parent/carer



85%

of members feel more confident working with young people at YAC since they joined.



74%

of members feel more confident working with young people who are not the same age at YAC.



A member takes part in a hands-on heritage craft activity at Northamptonshire YAC

YAC supports communities of interest

Shared interests create strong communities where young people feel welcome, included and able to be themselves. Members, parents and leaders consistently described YAC as a place where lasting friendships develop and a genuine sense of belonging grows. Many young people remain involved for several years, allowing relationships, confidence and skills to develop over time.

"It's amazing, I love having a community where I feel like I belong." - YAC Member



Members have an average belonging score of

4.5/5

99%

of parents and carers agree their child is well supported at YAC

Young people improve their confidence and self-esteem

Confidence develops through taking part, being recognised and feeling that you belong. Members become more willing to share ideas, communicate with others and try new experiences, while parents described growing confidence in unfamiliar situations and stronger social skills. Older members also have opportunities to support younger children and progress into Young Leader roles, enabling confidence to continue developing over time.

"It gave him a safe environment to be in an unfamiliar situation with people he didn't know. This helped his confidence considerably." - Parent/carer



61%

of younger members
feel more confident
since joining YAC



68%

of parents and carers say
YAC has had a positive
impact on their child's
confidence or self-esteem



88%

of older members had
normal or high self-
esteem (Rosenberg
Self-Esteem Scale)



A member and Young Leader enjoying a conversation at Canterbury YAC

YAC members experience greater wellbeing

YAC provides welcoming, inclusive environments where young people feel accepted and able to participate on their own terms. Members and parents consistently described improvements in mood, motivation and overall wellbeing, with positive effects extending beyond YAC into school, family life and other activities. Members also reported higher than average happiness than young people of a similar age nationally.

"It has made me happier because there are other people there who like the things I do."
- YAC Member

"[My son] often struggles with social interaction... This is never a problem at YAC and he always comes out positive."
- Parent/carers

Members have an average happiness score of

8.4 / 10

83%

of parents said their child's mood improves after attending YAC



A member of Manchester YAC experiments with printing techniques inspired by the Early Modern period.

Young people develop positive identities and future pathways

As confidence grows, many members begin to see archaeology and heritage as part of who they are, not simply something they enjoy. Experiences with archaeologists, museums and heritage organisations, together with opportunities to become Young Leaders, help some young people imagine future education, volunteering and careers in the heritage sector.

YAC strengthens meaningful connections with heritage

YAC helps young people develop meaningful connections with archaeology and heritage in their community through museum collections, archaeological sites and local history. Members increasingly help shape club activities, ensuring programmes remain relevant while strengthening youth voice and ownership of YAC.

"He feels more confident that his opinion matters and that he should offer his ideas." - Parent/carers



These findings are drawn from three years of surveys, interviews, observations and case studies involving members, parents, carers and volunteer leaders.



4. Helping young people shape YAC

During the 2025–26 Impact Study, YAC piloted a set of consultation and evaluation activities to strengthen youth voice and support continuous improvement across the network. The activities gave young people meaningful opportunities to share their ideas, reflect on their experiences and help shape future club activities, while providing volunteer leaders with practical tools to gather feedback and understand what matters most to members.

Following positive feedback from both members and leaders, the tools have been refined and are ready to be rolled out across the wider YAC network, helping to embed youth participation, reflection and evaluation as part of everyday YAC practice.

5. Recommendations for the future

Grow the network

- Expand and strengthen the after-school club model to reach new audiences.
- Increase access to archaeology experiences within history-focused clubs.
- Continue embedding hands-on, inclusive learning across the network.
- Continue to strengthen support, recognition and succession planning for volunteer leaders.

Strengthen partnerships

- Build stronger links with archaeologists, universities and community archaeology organisations.
- Strengthen partnerships with museums and heritage organisations.
- Use the evidence from this study to champion YAC's unique contribution to young people's learning, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement with heritage.

Continue listening to young people

- Embed consultation and evaluation tools to strengthen youth voice.



A member proudly displaying his contribution to the YAC DIY consultation activity

6. Next steps

Building on three years of evidence, we will continue measuring YAC's long-term impact on young people, including through research with Young Leaders and alumni. We will roll out the evaluation and consultation tools across the YAC network, use the findings to strengthen delivery and share good practice, and seek funding to extend the impact study across all four home nations where YAC operates.

7. Thanks

We would like to thank all the young people, volunteers and parents/carers who told us their stories and contributed to this report, in particular the volunteer leaders of the participating branches without whose support and cooperation this would not have been possible.

Thanks also to our funders, UK Government and Historic England.

