



YAC IMPACT STUDY

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1. WHAT IS YAC?

The Young Archaeologists' Club, or YAC, was established in 1972, to provide opportunities for children and young people to take part in archaeology. Today, the network has grown to c. 80 clubs throughout the UK run by a dedicated team of over 500 volunteers: leaders, assistant leaders, and young leaders (aged 16 and 17). The volunteers deliver regular activities for over 2000 members aged 8-16.

Clubs take place in community venues, schools, museums and historic sites with a focus on hands-on learning, engaging young people with archaeology and bringing history to life. Young people find out what it is like to be an archaeologist, experience live digs, explore the historic environment and learn archaeology skills.

2. WHAT DID WE WANT TO KNOW?

The Council for British Archaeology commissioned a study to measure the impact of YAC on the young people who take part, funded by Historic England from 2024 to 2028. The pilot found that YAC makes a significant difference to its members, providing access to archaeology, building a strong sense of belonging and empowering learners to explore their interests with confidence. In 2025 the study worked with a further seven clubs (10% of the membership) to build on the findings of the pilot, understand how clubs support members and learn from best practice across the network. Between September 2024 and April 2025 volunteer leaders, young people and their parents told us about their experiences, explored what YAC means to them and shared their personal journey through a series of evaluation activities, interviews, surveys and group discussions.

Participating Clubs:

- Chichester YAC, New Park Centre, West Sussex
- Pontefract YAC, Pontefract Castle, Yorkshire
- Solihull YAC, The Core Library, West Midlands
- Rusty Club YAC, Weston Museum, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset
- The Auckland Project YAC, Bishop Auckland, County Durham
- Heronsgate YAC, Heronsgate Primary School, London
- Bedford YAC, The Higgins, Bedfordshire



3. WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

Membership remains high and growing

246 young people took part in archaeology activities in their local community between September 2024 and March 2025. The seven clubs provided 52 YAC sessions for members, 965 instances of participation over a six-month period.

Membership remains in high demand despite new clubs opening; some clubs deliver two sessions each month to accommodate more young people and others experience competition for places. A large proportion of members are aged 8-11, clubs can find it difficult to recruit and retain older members.

Young people develop a strong sense of belonging at YAC

The skilled leaders, friendly people and supportive environment make members feel welcome and confident to be themselves. Members scored an average of 4 out of 6 on our belonging scale. Meeting people who share and value their interests helps members feel they belong. YAC is a safe, inclusive space where members with SEND build belonging on an equitable basis with their peers.

“Everyone has just been so friendly, and [you] don't feel like you have to be someone else.”

- YAC Member

Leaders support new members to settle in at their pace; parents and carers give the induction process a 95% satisfaction rating. YAC activities are accessible for most members; however, transport can pose challenges for some families and rising costs put pressure on membership fees.



“Staff have made my daughter feel **welcome** and have been **patient** in supporting and encouraging her- this has given her the confidence to participate fully.”

- Parent/Carer

YAC is an inclusive environment for the high proportion of neurodivergent members, but volunteers can feel unprepared to support them and some venues pose sensory challenges. Some clubs struggle to meet the needs of the wide age range; older members would like more activities suited to their needs.

YAC members are happier with their life as a whole

YAC sessions have a positive impact on members' mood and motivation; members report an average 17% increase in wellbeing. 60% of parents and carers noticed an improvement in their child's wellbeing after attending YAC. YAC contributes to members' wellbeing by providing opportunities to learn new things, connecting with people with similar interests and finding out about the world around them.

“This is me, archaeology world. Here we go. You know, **forget about everything else** and exams and all that for like, two hours.”

- YAC Member

Young people reported high levels of happiness with their life as a whole for the second year running, higher than the national average according to the Understanding Society Survey (Good Childhood Report, 2024). Regular participation affects wellbeing in different and more lasting ways, increased confidence, social skills, attitudes and behaviour. Members experience greater social connectedness and positive attitudes towards learning, at YAC and in other areas of their lives.



“He’s always in a **much better mood** having attended the session and this increase in positivity helps with his schoolwork. He is bored of school (Year 6) and likes his brain to be stimulated.”

- Parent/Carer

Parents and carers said that YAC has an important positive impact on the wellbeing of their children with SEND; reasons include an emphasis on belonging, feeling accepted and valued by their peers.

YAC contributes to young people’s self-esteem

65% of parents and carers report that YAC has a positive impact on their child’s self-esteem.

The findings suggest that members aged 12-16 have normal or high levels of self-esteem. Participating in YAC improves members’ self-esteem through increased confidence, independence, feelings of capability, social skills and self-value. Parents and carers link these improvements to the unique ability of YAC to nurture their child’s specialist interests.

Greater self-esteem impacts members in different ways; individual stories include feeling more confident to pursue their own interests, more determined to become an archaeologist and developing leadership skills.

“I think what YAC’s done... is that it's kind of allowed me to actually realise it's **all right to be enthusiastic** about things and you can talk about them”

- YAC Member



YAC inspires a love for learning

Members prefer learning at YAC because they feel listened to; they enjoy learning at a more relaxed pace; and everyone is motivated to learn. YAC leaders create a learning environment that is different to school; they focus on hands-on learning, fun and enjoyment, topics that are not studied in the curriculum, and activities that have real world applications.

“In YAC, it's like a history lesson, but **everyone's really interested** in history. That's why I like it.”

- YAC Member

68% of parents and carers said YAC has had an impact on their child's education, they highlight changes in attitudes towards learning, increased knowledge and more positive experiences of formal education. YAC helps members become confident, capable learners, they feel assured about what they know and enjoy sharing their knowledge in school. Members are more curious and enthusiastic to learn about history both in school and outside of it. YAC supports home-educated members, providing an extension of the learning they receive at home.

“Loves **learning history** and school now.”

- Parent/Carer





YAC brings archaeology to life

96% of members enjoy taking part in YAC and 95% have fun, exceeding our target for the second year running. Learning new things about archaeology or history and making friends boosts members' enjoyment of YAC and their enthusiasm for archaeology. YAC often attracts young people who are passionate about archaeology or history before they join, participation broadens their interests and deepens their understanding. The after-school clubs have an important role in the network, appealing to young people with diverse interests and introducing them to archaeology.

"I think archaeology **connects us** to the past, and we can see how people lived and what they were doing and how they thought and even what they believed. That's what really, really does it for me."

- YAC Member

YAC brings archaeology to life, and members value the opportunity to meet real archaeologists. They enjoy learning a broad range of practical archaeology skills such as surveying and recording, as well as the historical research that supports their knowledge and understanding. However, clubs do not all have access to the equipment, resources and expertise necessary to provide these experiences. Members find live excavations inspiring, but opportunities for young people to take part in digs are limited across the UK.

"YAC has given my son **opportunities** to engage with archaeology in a much more hands on manner and spend time with real-life archaeologists who have **brought the subject to life.**"

- Parent/Carer



Involving young people in decision making increases the relevance of YAC

Members learn about a range of topics from local and British history alongside archaeology skills and techniques, most common are Romans, Saxons and Prehistory. 59% of members aged 8-11 and 75% of members aged 12-16 said the topics they learn about at YAC are usually or always relevant or important to them.

We asked members what makes a YAC topic relevant and important to them. They want to learn new knowledge or skills and take part in hands-on activities that are accessible for everyone. Members would like to explore diverse cultures from around the world and understand what it is like to be an archaeologist.

Topics are often chosen to correspond with local sites and stories. We asked older members what topics they want to explore, they shared broad historical interests that are not currently being met at YAC. Clubs would like to include more culturally diverse and global topics but lack the knowledge or resources to do this in a meaningful way. CBA resources and training support leaders to introduce new topics into their programme. Involving members in decision making at club level has the potential to increase relevance and engagement.

“It makes me feel **happy and curious**, because it's always fun learning about how different cultures lived.”

- YAC Member





YAC supports young people to develop friendships and connections

YAC is an informal, friendly environment where members socialise at their own pace. 71% of members said they had got to know people or made friends at YAC. YAC is a safe, equitable space where members with SEND make friends at the same rate as their peers.

84% of parents are satisfied with the support their child has been given to get to know people at YAC.

The leaders support members who are shy and those with SEND who may need help negotiating social situations. Members agree with parents and carers that working in small groups is the most effective way to make friends at YAC. Parents and carers said that introductions by the leaders are important, whereas members highlight friendly people and social activities.

Approximately one third of members do not experience any barriers to making friends at YAC. The most common barrier for younger members is their lack of confidence, whereas for older members it is the lack of people a similar age.

“It has given [him] the confidence to **explore other social situations** and **make friends** which he has traditionally found difficult because he has a love of reading and doesn’t enjoy sport!”

- Parent/Carer

“...they showed me to a seat with some kids my own age, and involve me in all the conversations, so I wasn't left out, and that **gave me confidence**”.

- YAC Member



Young people increase their confidence to communicate

90% of members improve their communication skills at YAC.

The communication skills that members learn most often are listening, the ability to share their knowledge and ideas and asking questions.

Members build their confidence to communicate with people of all ages. Leaders combine an informal approach with more targeted techniques to encourage members who speak less often, celebrating their contributions. These improvements impact their interactions and relationships, helping young people find their voice at YAC, in school and other social situations.

“Helped them find **their voice**.”

- Parent/Carer

“Speaking up in class more at school, **sharing ideas** and **taking the lead** in projects with peers.

- Parent/Carer





YAC nurtures a long-term interest or career aspirations

69% of members explore their interest in archaeology, heritage and/or history outside of YAC. They visit museums and heritage sites, watch programmes or videos, and read books. Leaders signpost places of interest and relevant programmes, and the YAC pass makes visiting historic sites more affordable for families. Members are taught to read the landscape like an archaeologist and are encouraged to share their interests with the YAC community.

“England is full of history. Anywhere we go on holiday, I find some **interesting history.**”

- YAC Member

“I've looked at places, at churches and buildings and thought, oh, that's interesting. I wonder why it looks like that, but I've never actually known before YAC, **why they look like that**, why this happens, and why that happens.”

- YAC Member

75% of members aged 12-16 have gained knowledge of volunteering, work experience or training at YAC and 69% have gained the confidence to explore volunteering, work or training.

Participating in YAC intensifies members' passion and ambition, providing inspiring role models and a realistic understanding of what it is like to be an archaeologist. Leaders have a critical role, they help members think about career options and course choices, and support work experience and



university applications. However, clubs do not have equal access to high-quality careers advice, professional speakers and work experience or volunteering opportunities.

“YAC has helped **support their existing interests** and aspirations. They would now consider the study of history to be a viable path.”

- Parent/Carer

Some clubs mentor older members to develop their leadership skills, preparing them to become Young Leaders.

“It’d be **really fun to help** the younger members of the YAC”

- YAC Member





4. WHAT MAKES YAC SUCCESSFUL?

- An inclusive, welcoming atmosphere
- A child-led induction process and support getting to know people
- Opportunities to make connections with people with similar interests
- Support to develop communication skills and confidence
- An informal, hands-on approach to learning
- Topics that are relevant and important to members
- External speakers who can share their professional experiences
- Nurturing members' long-term interests outside of YAC
- Quality careers advice and signposting
- Skilled, supportive leaders with a range of skills and experiences
- Accessible activities that meet the needs of members of all ages and those with SEND
- Listening to members feedback and ways for them to contribute to YAC
- Sustainable funding and investment to support areas of development or accessibility
- An affordable, accessible venue



5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Ensure all clubs have access to archaeology expertise and resources
2. Diversify the historical topics covered at YAC
3. Increase access to digital skills, projects and resources
4. Provide all members with an induction
5. Support clubs to confidently engage children and young people with SEND
6. Improve provision for older members, including careers information
7. Continue to support branch leaders to develop their skills and knowledge
8. Amplify youth voice within clubs
9. Encourage ongoing reflective practice at club level
10. Define the audience for YAC in consultation with branches

6. NEXT STEPS

We will continue to measure the impact of YAC on young people in England, demonstrating its value on an annual basis.

We will develop the evaluation methodology co-created with young people and volunteers and ensure it continues to be relevant and useful for everyone.

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.

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