



# YAC IMPACT STUDY



Final Report, May 2024

Rebecca Jacobs, Arts and Heritage Consultant

Supported by funding from Historic England



Council for  
British Archaeology



Historic England



## WHAT IS YAC?

### Young Archaeologists' Club

The Young Archaeologists' Club, or YAC, was established in 1972, to provide opportunities for children and young people to participate in archaeology. It became part of the Council for British Archaeology in the early 1990's. Today, there is a network of 76 clubs throughout the UK run by a dedicated team of over 400 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 local and global history, heritage and archaeology, and bringing the past to life. Young people experience live archaeology, explore the historic environment and investigate real artefacts.

## WHAT DID WE WANT TO KNOW?

In 2023 the Council for British Archaeology, the parent organisation of YAC, commissioned Rebecca Jacobs, Arts and Heritage Consultant, to measure the impact of YAC on the young people who take part and understand how it makes a difference to them. Seven clubs took part in the study (10% of all clubs in England), which was funded by Historic England. Between September 2023 and April 2024 volunteer leaders, young people (members) 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:

- Chiltern, Jordans and Seer Green Village Hall, Buckinghamshire
- Fulham Palace, Fulham Palace House and Garden, London
- MAYA (Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists), Museum of Somerset, Taunton
- Mersey and Dee, Museum of Liverpool, Liverpool
- Sheffield, Weston Park Museum, Sheffield
- Stoke on Trent, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Sheffield
- William Hulme, William Hulme School, Manchester

**“I think the club helps you see that **archaeology isn't just digging up stuff all the time, and the different aspects of the field that you wouldn't necessarily know if you didn't have an expert like Alexis [YAC volunteer] to talk to about it.**” (YAC member)**





## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

### Membership is in high demand

Between January and December 2023 young people took part in **92 sessions** across the seven clubs, a total of **1,476 instances of individual participation**. Clubs provide regular monthly sessions year-round and membership is high and growing: four of the clubs were full or had waiting lists. However, membership at some clubs is only just returning to pre-Covid numbers.

### YAC increases young people's enthusiasm for archaeology, heritage and/or history

YAC has a powerful impact on young people's enjoyment, affecting positive feelings during and after sessions, as well as nurturing a deeper, longer-term passion for archaeology, heritage and/or history. Learning and making friends are the biggest contributing factors to enjoyment, closely followed by going on digs and doing hands-on activities which bring archaeology to life for these young enthusiasts.

Young people are often interested in history before they join YAC, however long-term participation broadens and deepens their enthusiasm, introducing them to all aspects of archaeology and challenging popular misconceptions about being an archaeologist.

**97% OF MEMBERS AGED 8-11 AND 100% OF MEMBERS AGED 12-16 ENJOY TAKING PART IN YAC**



**88% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID THEIR CHILD'S ENTHUSIASM FOR ARCHAEOLOGY, HERITAGE AND/OR HISTORY HAD INCREASED SINCE THEY JOINED YAC**

**“I think what I have enjoyed the most... is when we are getting close up with the artefacts because you get this connection with people of the past and I think it’s a special thing that you can't really get anywhere else.” (YAC member)**

## Young people engage in unique, positive learning experiences

Young people are actively engaged in and enjoy learning at YAC. They learn about key periods from history in a way that is relevant and accessible to them. Young people value the unique experiences organised by subject specialists, professional archaeologists and knowledgeable volunteers that are not available elsewhere.

YAC gives young people a broad introduction to and experience of archaeology. They learn a wide range of practical archaeological and heritage skills and use specialist equipment (surveying, excavating, handling historic objects, identifying finds, research and post-excavation).

The knowledge and skills young people learn at YAC have a positive impact on their confidence at school.



## 81% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID YAC HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION

“I enjoy the **practical activities** because they help me understand what we’re learning about better.” (YAC member)

“...you get to learn about being an actual **archaeologist** and you do digging and get to use actual equipment...” (YAC member)

## YAC nurtures a long-term interest or career aspirations

YAC nurtures an interest in archaeology, heritage and/or history outside of sessions and encourages families to explore these interests together, expanding their ambitions and deepening their understanding.

“He was always interested in the concept but is now **asking** for us to do more concrete **archaeological activities** as well as YAC (his latest suggestion was a day trip to Pompeii!).” (parent/carer)

Young people regularly meet and are inspired by archaeology and heritage professionals at YAC, external speakers provide members with important role models from across the sector, but guests can be challenging for volunteers to organise and finance.



YAC has a significant impact on older members' interest and readiness to pursue archaeology, heritage and/or history in the future. YAC volunteers respond to requests for help navigating HE courses and finding relevant work experience; however, this is dependent on their personal networks and experience.

**75% OF MEMBERS AGED 12-16 HAVE DEVELOPED THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND 71% HAVE DEVELOPED THE CONFIDENCE TO PURSUE THEM**

**“He now wants to work in a museum for a living. He has a purpose and direction to move towards because of YAC and this has helped ease his anxiety after leaving school.” (parent/carer)**

## Young people develop teamwork, communication skills and confidence

Group activities are a key component of YAC sessions. Young people learn to work in mixed-ability and mixed-age groups, fostering communication skills and teamwork. Older members and young leaders support their younger peers, modelling social skills and building a sense of community. Expert presentations help young people hone their speaking and listening skills, giving them confidence which has an impact outside of YAC.

**94% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID THEIR CHILD IS BETTER AT WORKING WITH OTHERS SINCE THEY JOINED**



**73% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID THEIR CHILD HAS IMPROVED THEIR COMMUNICATION SKILLS SINCE THEY JOINED YAC**

**69% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID THEIR CHILD'S SELF-CONFIDENCE HAS INCREASED SINCE THEY JOINED YAC**

**“We joined during Covid, so the online meetings were a good way of keeping interactions with other children. This has continued into the real-life meetings and helped **develop social skills and confidence.**”**  
**(parent/carer)**

## Young people value being part of a community of interest

Meeting people with similar interests and building social connections with them is very important to young people and their parents, something they may have struggled to find elsewhere. YAC supports members to make “YAC friends”, people who they spend time with at YAC who help them enjoy sessions and feel comfortable being their whole selves. YAC celebrates specialist knowledge and a passion for history, contributing to a strong sense of belonging amongst members and increased self-esteem.

**98% OF MEMBERS HAVE A YAC FRIEND, FIRM FRIEND OR CLOSE FRIEND AT YAC**

**94% OF MEMBERS AGED 8-11 AND 89% OF MEMBERS AGED 12-16 ENJOY MEETING PEOPLE WITH SIMILAR INTERESTS**



***“What I really like about the club is that you can be a geek... just being able to **share your ideas**, really delve into stuff.”***  
***(YAC member)***

## YAC members are happier with their life as a whole

Young people and their parents reported high levels of positive wellbeing. Young people reported a high level of happiness with their life as a whole, higher than the national average for their peers according to the Understanding Society survey (Good Childhood Report, 2023). Parents and carers identify a clear and direct link between increased happiness and participation in YAC both short and, in some cases, long term.

We asked young people, volunteers and parents which of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing YAC contributes to the most, they identified: Keep learning, Connect with others and Take notice.

**100% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID YAC HAS HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR CHILD'S WELLBEING, AND 86% OF PARENTS AND CARERS SAID THEIR CHILD IS HAPPY OR VERY HAPPY**

**“She feels **excited and engaged in the sessions**, and also feels **part of a community**... going to YAC was the first time she travelled alone, so a great feeling of **independence**. All in all, a positive impact on her wellbeing.”** (parent/carer)



## Young people feel welcome at YAC

YAC members feel welcome and have a strong sense of belonging. 97% of members feel welcome at YAC, other members and the volunteers are the greatest contributing factors.

Awareness of YAC may be limited to those with existing knowledge of cultural heritage and waiting lists create barriers to participation.

YAC is an inclusive environment for the high proportion of neurodivergent young people, but volunteers can sometimes feel unprepared to support them and the wide age range can leave older members less engaged.

**“Being able to take part in activities on my favourite subject with other people who enjoy it as well. Because I feel included, in a way I don’t feel in most environments, and I can be myself.” (YAC member)**





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Develop a theory of change for YAC that can be used by clubs to increase consistency and sustainability based on best practice happening at current branches.
- Support the network to gather data and develop their understanding of participation and membership trends.
- Continue to provide and develop opportunities for YAC volunteers to network, share best practice and support each other.
- Build awareness of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing that YAC contributes the most to (Keep Learning, Stay Connected and Take Notice).
- Work with volunteers to diversify the membership.
- Ensure SEND members are fully supported.
- Encourage volunteers to include a broader range of historical periods and world cultures in sessions.
- Support volunteers to extend their networks and organise a range of professional speakers and guests.
- Promote ways volunteers can support members to make friends at YAC.
- Build understanding of what older members are looking for from YAC and how to support the continued development of soft skills and friendships up to 16.



- Provide advice about studying and working in archaeology and heritage.
- Provide clubs with up-to-date impact data to support them to make funding applications and promote their work.
- Continue to address gaps in provision around the country to ease demand on clubs and widen access.

**“Routine is very important to our daughter and YAC is a very positive part of this she looks forward to each month. She is **very proud** to tell others she attends YAC. She feels **valued and welcomed** there and can share her **passions and interests** in ways she cannot always do at school.” (parent)**





## NEXT STEPS

We will continue to measure the impact of YAC on young people in England, using the baseline data in this study to demonstrate its value on an annual basis. We are also seeking funding to extend this across the home nations that YAC serves.

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

## 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 Historic England who kindly funded the pilot study.

Figures correct at August 2024