The life chances of young people in England continue to be determined by their backgrounds. Although education should be one of our greatest tools for delivering equality of opportunity, for many it does not change their course. Inequalities in the education system are widespread and shaped by factors such as socioeconomic background, postcode, gender, ethnicity, special educational needs and access to networks. These factors, among others, contribute to stark disparities in outcomes such as academic attainment and acquisition of essential skills and qualities, which in turn determine young people’s opportunities to progress throughout their education and into employment.

For instance, in 2014/15, only 37% of pupils who qualify for free school meals (FSM) pupils achieved five A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent including English and maths. This compares with 65% among those from non-eligible backgrounds. Our Social Enterprise UK (2017) report of the state of social enterprise in the UK shows that education is the third-biggest social sector and that 25% of social enterprises are under three years old. Our Young Academy programme harnesses the potential of innovative, early-stage education ventures by providing specialist business incubation support and investment capital to help them tackle education inequalities at scale.

The Young Foundation report Social Investment in Education highlights the significant opportunities for social ventures to improve education outcomes and recent research shows that education is the third-biggest social enterprise sector and that 25% of social enterprises are under three years old. Our Young Academy programme harnesses the potential of innovative, early-stage education ventures by providing specialist business incubation support and investment capital to help them tackle education inequalities at scale.

Attributes that have been identified as key to children becoming active, engaged and flourishing citizens. Social and emotional skills, social networks and the ability to navigate them, and work experience are all recognised as critical foundations. Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are often disproportionately less likely to develop these skills during their school career.

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This investment will enable us to improve our offer to schools and allow the organisation to scale rapidly, through which we will be able to have a greater impact on a larger number of young people. The process of obtaining this investment has also been incredibly useful for us. Going through the Young Foundation’s due diligence process has helped us to create better plans and to be more confident of them.

Greg Sanderson, Co-founder of Smart School Councils Community, which democratises the acquisition of essential skills and increases civic participation among young people.

As a result of the success of the Young Academy, we are now focusing on further growing its ambition and impact in partnership with a range of partners.

Paul Main, Founder of Structural Learning, which transforms pupils’ critical and creative thinking processes.

Levelling the Playing Field in Education

To date the Young Academy has:

- Incubated 52 innovative ventures from across England, operating primarily in the South East, the East Midlands and Yorkshire.
- Supported approaches to reducing education inequality focused on key areas such as supporting teaching and learning, developing essential skills, and improving access to ongoing education and employment.
- Helped ventures to increase their aggregate turnover by 240%, secure over £4.5m in growth finance and reach over 153,000 young people and 9,000 educators.
- Invested over £500,000 of capital from our own fund.
- Leveraged over 2,000 hours of highly skilled pro bono expertise from programme partners.