Portal Trust

Grants Strategy 2026+ Make It Happen!

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Our Vision

"For all young people in London to have the opportunities and support they need to meet their full potential."

Our Mission

To promote the education of young people in London through:

Our grant programmes for individuals, institutions and organisations, giving priority to those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds; and

Contributing to and influencing the development of educational policy, practice, and research to shape and meet the evolving needs of London's young people.

Our Chair of Grants
Denise Jones

I'm pleased to share our new multi-year Grants Strategy, developed over the past two years through close and thoughtful collaboration between our staff and Trustees. For me, this strategy is about opening doors. It's about making sure young people aren't held back by circumstance, and that the right support is there when it's needed.

We know that education is about much more than qualifications alone. This strategy reflects our commitment to widening access, removing barriers and supporting creative, inclusive approaches that help young people engage with learning and build confidence. I'm grateful to everyone who has contributed to this work and look forward to seeing the impact it will have in the years ahead.

Denise Jones
Grants Committee Chair

Who We Are

The Portal Trust is a progressive, independent, and apolitical grant-maker, committed to improving the educational outcomes of young people in London, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. Our grants strategy supports our conviction that education is a powerful force for social equity and change. As the needs of young people in London evolve, so must our response.

We support individuals, institutions, and organisations across all education sectors. We pride ourselves on being open to risk, collaborative in our outlook, and committed to enabling long-term, sustainable change. We aim to deepen our impact, strengthen our partnerships, and respond effectively to the dynamic challenges and opportunities in London's educational landscape.

Portal Trust

Our Governance

The Portal Trust has a long history of supporting education in London. Our governing Scheme, which sets out our constitution, was first registered with the Charity Commission in 1895, updated by the Secretary of State for Education and Science in 1970, and most recently revised in 2021 when we adopted our current name. We have a board of governors. Two of these serve in ex officio roles, while the remaining governors are co-opted for fixed terms and may be reappointed on expiry. Together, the governors bring a wide range of professional expertise and lived experience. They work collectively to set the Trust's strategy, oversee its grant-making, and ensure that our resources are used effectively in pursuit of our charitable objectives.

Strengthening Our Strategy Through Research

The Portal Trust commissioned Professor Graeme Atherton, a leading expert on social mobility and educational equity, to produce an independent report on the current state of education in London: *Education, Skills and Inequality in London*. This decision was rooted in our belief that effective grant-making must be informed by robust evidence and a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of young people across the capital. The report draws on a wide range of data sources and research, shedding light on the persistent and emerging barriers that young Londoners face, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It highlights the widening attainment gap, disparities in access to enrichment and progression opportunities, and the systemic challenges that disproportionately affect learners from racialised communities, disabled students, and those with experience of care or migration.

Commissioning this research was not a one-off exercise. It was a deliberate step in shaping a strategy that is targeted, impactful and attuned to where the need is greatest. *The findings have helped us:*

- **Identify priority groups within our area of benefit where our support can make the most difference.**

- **Understand the interconnections between poverty, place, and educational outcomes.**

→

- Refine our funding themes, ensuring they reflect current challenges while remaining responsive to future shifts.

- Engage meaningfully with organisations rooted in their communities and best placed to develop relevant solutions.

- This work also aligns with our commitment to influencing the broader educational landscape. By sharing the findings with policymakers, fellow funders, and education practitioners, we aim to contribute to collective efforts to close the gap in outcomes for young people in London. As a Trust, we are committed to embedding research and learning in everything we do. Professor Atherton's report is just one example of how we strengthen our evidence base to ensure that our strategy and funding decisions remain grounded in reality, bold in ambition, and focused on impact.

Our Approach to Grant-making

Equity Focused

We prioritise projects and organisations that address the needs of those most likely to be left behind. We support targeted interventions that actively seek to reduce inequity.

Innovative and Bold

We are willing to take calculated risks and fund new, untested ideas and alternative models that have the potential to drive systemic change in London.

Enabling and Supportive

We aim to build trust with our partners and provide more than just funding. We offer flexibility, advice, and support, and are responsive to the evolving needs of our grantees.

Collaborative

We believe in the power of partnership. Whether working with delivery organisations, research bodies, funders or policymakers, we value learning together and sharing insight for broader impact.

Inclusive and Reflective

Our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion guides our grant-making. We continually reflect on who we fund, how we fund, and the barriers we might unintentionally create.

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Our Grant-making Themes and Process

Our Grant-making Themes

1 Missing Out
To improve the outcomes for young people at risk of missing out on education.

2 Next Steps
To ensure that young people in London have the necessary opportunities and learning to reach their potential.

3 Scholarships, Bursaries & Grants
To remove financial barriers and empower young Londoners to achieve their potential in education.

4 New Ideas
To influence and improve education policy and practice through supporting new ideas.

5 Stepping Up
Promote personal development, quality of life and social responsibility, equipping young people for their future.

6 Portal Networks
To encourage collaboration to increase impact, share resources and address complex challenges

Eligibility

Who your project should support

To be eligible for funding, your project must:

- Support children or young people aged under 25.
- Focus on those from low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Be based in one of our 14 inner London boroughs *(pages 16 & 17)*
- Your project must also align with at least one of our six grant-making themes.

What we won't normally fund

Projects that don't align with our funding priorities

- General fundraising appeals or campaigns
- Supplementary schools.
- Youth or community groups not directly linked to our focus areas.
- Equipment or staff costs that local authorities or the central Government should fund.
- Projects seeking to replace reduced or withdrawn statutory funding
- Activities or work that have already taken place before applying
- Costs that are already covered by other funding or grants
- Capital costs solely for things like buying or repairing buildings, vehicles, sports gear, or improving school grounds

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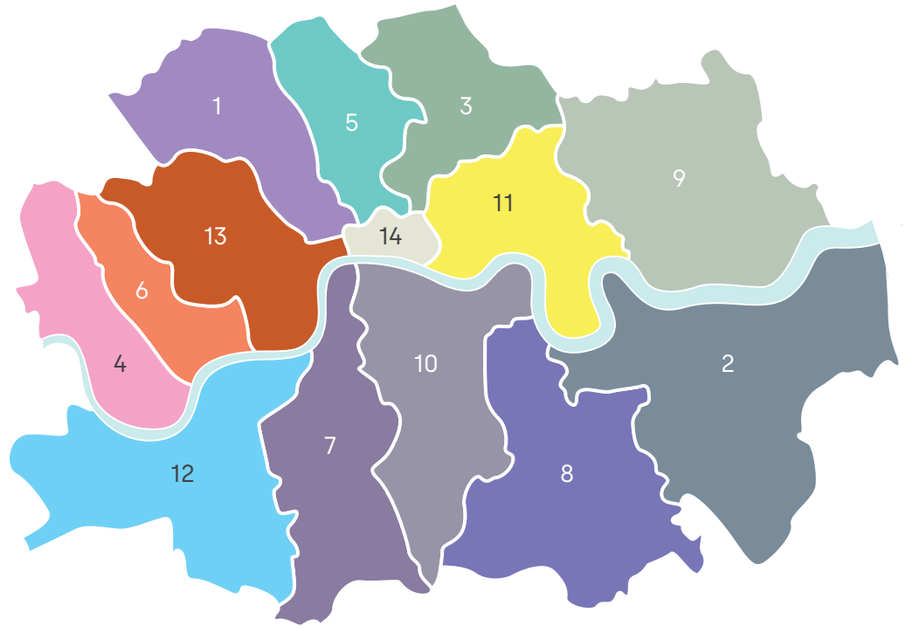
Our Area of Benefit

Our Area of Benefit



1 Camden
2 Greenwich
3 Hackney
4 Hammersmith & Fulham
5 Islington
6 Kensington & Chelsea
7 Lambeth
8 Lewisham
9 Newham
10 Southwark
11 Tower Hamlets
12 Wandsworth
13 Westminster
14 City of London

Our Multi-Step Application Process

1

Eligibility

Check your organisation's eligibility & apply online.

Please also read our grant-making themes, and feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

2

Initial Enquiry

Complete and submit the first stage of your application by completing the online Expression of Interest.

Please use our budget sheet.

3

Questions

If there are any aspects of your application that we don't quite understand or need a bit of clarification on, we will aim to contact you within four to six weeks

Remember Applications can take eight months or more and we cannot guarantee a specific meeting

4

Stage 2

If the Grants Team believe that your project is a good fit for our funding, you may be invited to submit a second stage application.

5

Introductions

The Grants Team will follow up on your second stage application and may want to arrange a visit to your organisation to better understand your proposal and your project's outcomes. It is also an excellent opportunity to introduce ourselves to each other and explain our work.

6

Commitee

Our Grants Committee meets three times per year: June, October and March. Our Grants Team will present your application to our Grants Committee for a decision.

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Missing Out

Context

1

In London, many young people under 25 face barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in education. These may include exclusion from school, poor mental health, time in care or the justice system, homelessness, or difficult family circumstances. Some are not in education, employment or training (NEET), while others attend alternative provision such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), or YOIs [Youth Offender Institutions] where quality and consistency can vary.

Without the proper support, they risk falling behind.

The Portal Trust funds work that directly tackles these challenges. We support organisations that help young people re-engage with learning and progress towards qualifications, training or employment.

We focus on achieving lasting change. We aim to foster strong relationships with young people and the people who support them.

Missing Out

1

Aim

To improve the outcomes for young people at risk of missing out on education.

The changes we want to see

- Improved attendance and engagement with education or culture for young people
- Greater support to groups of young people who otherwise might be missing out is provided to access education or training for any reason at any level.
- Engaging education or cultural opportunities for young people in PRUs and YOIs, leading to better learning outcomes and future opportunities.

How you might do it

- Projects that are evidence-based with an identified need
- Projects providing education and support to young people in schools, hospitals, PRUs, YOIs, and prisons, including those in custody or children of people in prison.
- Working with young people impacted by (or likely to be impacted by) the criminal justice system
- Initiatives to improve attendance through mental health or emotional well-being interventions
- Projects working with disengaged young people, NEETs, or those at risk of truancy or exclusions
- Work with care-experienced or homeless or other vulnerable groups, such as young people from the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community or children in a hospital.
- Work with schools and communities to improve their school attendance rates
- Support for organisations that provide the above

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Next Steps

Context

2

We recognise the importance of offering credible and accessible alternatives to traditional educational pathways. Not everyone thrives in, or benefits equally from, conventional academic structures, and it is essential to support people in pursuing opportunities that align with their skills, interests, and aspirations.

Our commitment is to equip individuals with the tools and resources to explore different routes to success, build confidence in their direction and remove barriers that limit access to opportunities beyond mainstream academic routes. By taking a more inclusive, holistic approach to career development, the Trust aims to demonstrate that achievement can take many forms and that non-traditional pathways are equally valuable in shaping fulfilling, impactful careers.

Next Steps

Aim

To ensure that young people in London have the necessary opportunities and learning to reach their potential.

The changes we want to see

- To open pathways to education, employment and training for young people in London, including apprenticeships, internships or cadetships.
- Young people to be better prepared for their careers, with skills that will be in demand as adults.
- Develop relevant and compelling advice and guidance for young Londoners

2

How you might do it

- Projects that are evidence-based and offer young people a suitable pathway for their needs.
- Projects to fill an identified or expected skills gap in an industry or sector.
- Initiatives collaborating with employers to provide work placements, paid internships and sector-specific mentoring.
- Projects supporting young creatives.
- Funding for individual apprenticeships, internships or cadetships, including those focused on heritage or traditional craft skills.
- Tailor-made careers advice that follows an established methodology.
- Support for organisations that provide the above.

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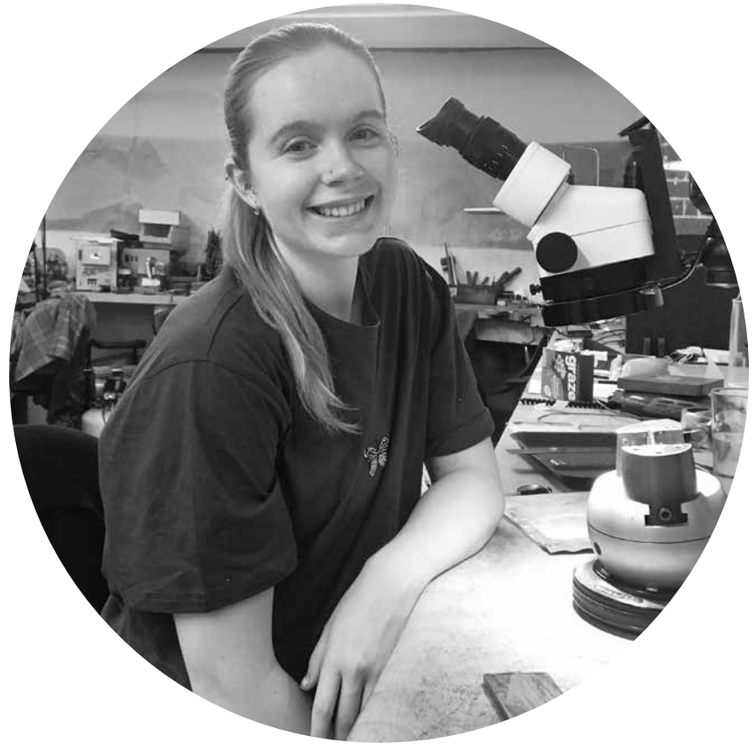
3 Scholarships, Bursaries and Grants

Context

3

We award scholarships, bursaries, and grants to young people seeking access to higher and further education. This type of support is vital for breaking down financial barriers that often limit opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, by opening doors to academic and professional advancement and empowering students to pursue their ambitions.

We at the Portal Trust want to do our bit to create a more equitable society by ensuring that talent and hard work, not financial circumstances, determine a young person's future.



Scholarships, Bursaries and Individual Grants

3

Aim

To remove financial barriers and empower young Londoners to achieve their potential in education.

The changes we want to see

- Young people from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds are financially supported through their education

How you might do it

- Providing bursary and scholarship schemes through an institution

- Individuals can apply directly to the Portal Trust online for bursaries at www.portaltrust.org. Applications open in August.

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4 New Ideas

Context

4

London's educational landscape is diverse and constantly evolving, yet young people and the organisations that support them continue to face long-standing and emerging challenges.

Through New Ideas, the Portal Trust aims to support bold and innovative early-stage work that explores new ways of teaching, learning, and supporting young people. This might include work that uses new technologies or proposes creative solutions to persistent educational barriers.

By supporting these initiatives, we aim to contribute to broader changes in education policy and provision, ensuring institutions are better prepared for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The focus is on learning from innovation and capturing insights to improve how education is delivered in London and beyond.

New Ideas

4

Aim

To influence and improve education policy and practice through supporting new ideas.

The changes we want to see

- Introduce new and groundbreaking approaches to learning that have the potential to enhance and influence education policy and practice
- New work that focuses on identified needs and gaps in statutory provision.
- Increased institutional readiness for future challenges and future opportunities
- Developments in best practice and/or policy

How you might do it

- Projects that are pioneering and original in their approach to teaching or learning
- Projects addressing an identified need within a geographical area or learning establishment that are new and innovative in context
- Projects that integrate new or future technologies and education, such as Artificial Intelligence and new technologies
- Projects aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for primary and secondary school pupils

Portal Trust

Stepping Up

Context

5

Stepping up supports initiatives in arts, sports, environmental, educational, faith, or community settings that help young people move beyond their usual experiences, promoting individual growth, well-being, and social responsibility. This could include developing creative skills, participating in community life, or receiving support during a transition or challenge.

They may involve young people with additional needs, such as those with SEND or those who have experience of the criminal justice system.

We are particularly interested in projects that build soft skills—confidence, communication, resilience, and teamwork.

We want to support young people in navigating adult life and contributing positively to society. The Portal Trust supports work that makes these experiences accessible to those who might not otherwise have them.

Stepping Up

5

Aim

Promote personal development, quality of life and social responsibility, equipping young people for their future.

The changes we want to see

- Increases in soft skills and employability levels, including creativity, resilience, and interpersonal skills.
- Improvements in well-being and quality of life for young people
- Gains in community standing and cultural capital for young people

How you might do it

- Projects identifying a particular need or gap in general education
- Projects helping young people's artistic or musical development
- Projects connecting young people with the environment
- Projects working with young people with SEND
- Projects using volunteering, such as Scouts, Girl Guides or community groups
- Projects that work to help rehabilitate young offenders or work with children and families of people in prison.
- Projects delivered in Church of England or other faith-based settings that foster young people's personal development, confidence, and social interaction skills
- Sports and fitness activities that build young people's personal development, resilience, and social skills.

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Portal Network

Context

6

The Portal Trust is dedicated to fostering educational excellence through collaboration. Our Network brings together a diverse range of academic institutions, and we invite other organisations to work with us in strengthening opportunities for young people.

Within the Network are three organisations that hold a special place in the Trust's charitable [2023] scheme:

The Aldgate School, Stepney All Saints Secondary School, and London Metropolitan University. Alongside these core institutions, we welcome broader partners to share expertise, pool resources, and collaborate on projects that broaden opportunities and enhance educational practice.

The Network theme aims to showcase the valuable work already being done and to highlight the impact of collaboration across our educational network.

Portal Network

6

Aim

Encourage collaboration to increase impact, share resources and address complex challenges

The changes we want to see

- Improved collaboration across the Portal Network to enhance opportunities and outcomes for students
- Support and strengthen the missions of our network institutions by improving learning and development
- Ideas that contribute to making the Portal Network synonymous with educational excellence

Organisations that have collaborated with our Network include

- Hampshire County Council: *Argoed Lwyd Outdoor Education Centre*
- London College of Fashion
- Migration Museum
- Young V&A
- Bayes Business School
- University of East London

How you might do it

- An education project at one of our network institutions that prepares students for future careers, higher education, or apprenticeships.
- Work with the pupils of The Aldgate School, Stepney All Saints School and London Metropolitan University through projects that extend learning beyond the classroom and into after-school opportunities.
- Projects that align with the educational work of our network while taking a holistic approach to education, including wellbeing, sports, and cultural activities.
- Projects that help improve academic outcomes and open up pathways into vocational training