

New national review highlights impact of UK sail training sector on young people's wellbeing, education and skills

ASTO's 2026 Impact Review shows how sail training boosts UK youth wellbeing, education, and employability, supporting 10,000+ participants annually.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, July 2, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Association of Sail Training Organisations (ASTO) has today published its Spring 2026 [Impact Review](#), setting out the scale and contribution of a national sector which supports more than 10,000 [young people](#) and disabled participants each year through residential adventures at sea, delivered by over 30 ASTO member organisations.



Young person on sail training adventure

ASTO works to enable, advocate for and strengthen the sail training sector. Drawing on evidence from across its national member network, the review highlights the role sail training plays in supporting young people who face growing challenges around mental health and [wellbeing](#), engagement with education and future employment.

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For so many, sail training has given them an opportunity to experience something different, and we know from direct evidence that it improves their lives for the better.”

*Vice Admiral Sir Jerry Kyd KBE,
President of ASTO*

“This review comes at a time when many young people are facing increasing pressures on their mental health and wellbeing, alongside rising poverty, reduced youth services and fewer safe spaces to connect and belong,” said Kerry McMillan, Chief Executive of ASTO.

“And since the recent announcement that more than one million young people are now not in education,

employment or training (NEET), we know the scale of this challenge is only growing. Too many

feel uncertain about their future and unprepared for the world of work. These challenges are even more pronounced for disabled young people, who face additional barriers to opportunity and inclusion.

“As traditional support structures have declined, access to high-quality opportunities beyond the classroom has become increasingly important. Evidence shows that structured, experiential environments, where young people take responsibility, face meaningful challenges and build connections, can play a vital role in improving wellbeing, re-engaging young people in education and supporting longer-term outcomes. This review brings together that evidence, highlighting the role the sail training sector can play in responding to these challenges.”

The review includes a variety of member stories and case studies demonstrating the transformative impact of sail training. One example is a young person who joined a voyage after moving schools following a difficult experience in education, arriving with low confidence and anxiety about entering another unfamiliar environment. During the programme, they gradually became more involved in life on board, taking on responsibilities and developing practical sailing and teamwork skills. A key milestone came when they led the preparation of a meal for the entire crew, coordinating tasks and bringing others together. By the end of the voyage, they had grown in confidence and were supporting fellow participants, with staff noting a remarkable change in their willingness to engage and lead. In the months that followed, they took part in a public presentation about their experience and began exploring future opportunities within the maritime sector, illustrating the lasting personal development sail training can help unlock.

Last year, 10,684 participants across the UK took part in sail training voyages delivered by ASTO's member organisations, collectively spending 47,467 days at sea across 1,334 voyages. Operating more than 60 vessels, the sector reaches young people through schools, youth services, community organisations and open-access programmes.

As an enrichment activity, sail training is a powerful form of experiential learning. It provides a structured, purposeful and immersive environment where young people succeed, often in ways they didn't think possible, working collaboratively to achieve shared goals. For disengaged pupils, the experience of being valued, trusted and capable onboard can be transformative, supporting attendance, engagement and behaviour in ways that classroom learning alone cannot always reach.

“The national conversation about enrichment is vital,” added McMillan. “This is reflected in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's new Every Child Can report, which sets out plans to expand access to high-quality enrichment across arts, sport, nature and life skills. Our Spring 2026 Impact Review shows how enrichment like sail training delivers exactly this, strengthening the skills young people need for life.”

Experiential learning is equally powerful for young people with SEN or social, emotional and mental health needs: this alternative learning environment builds self-belief and a positive

identity as a learner, providing a route to success outside traditional settings. The evidence on outdoor learning is consistent, it improves behaviour, strengthens cooperation, and opens opportunities for those who may not thrive in classroom-only environments.

The review highlights the sector's contribution across three key areas: supporting young people's wellbeing and mental health, sustaining engagement with education, and building skills for life and work.

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