



Wigan Youth Service Report

**Better
education
and care**

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Introduction

1. The Youth Service in Wigan is part of a multi-agency team located within the Local Authority Children and Young People's Services. The service is accountable to the Assistant Director for Engagement. In addition to the Head of Service and a youth development manager, there are 6 managers with responsibility for multi-agency area teams, 3 managers with responsibility for aspects of borough wide youth provision, 12 full-time and 82 part-time youth workers. An additional 10 full-time equivalent youth workers are funded from external sources.
2. Youth work is delivered from 26 leased or hired premises, Connexions Centres, High Schools, and an outdoor education centre as well as through outreach and detached provision. The service provides programmes for the 11-25 age range but gives priority to 13-19 year olds. There are 31,000 young people in the 13-19 age range. Expenditure from the local authority budget was £54.30 per head (13-19 year olds) in 2005-6. The budget made available by the local authority for 2006-07 is £1,748,219 augmented by £700,711 from external sources. The service reached 17% of young people aged 13-19 in 2005-6, which is below the national benchmark of 25%.
3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation and observed a sample of youth work sessions in Norley as part of the JAR neighbourhood study, as well as work in other parts of the borough.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Wigan delivers a good youth service that provides good value for money. Young people are achieving well in all types of provision. The quality of youth work practice is good. Staff are well qualified and experienced and are effectively managed and supported. Very good partnership work is adding value to the quality of young people's learning, enjoyment and progression. Leaders and managers have established a clear vision and strategic priorities for the service that are effectively communicated to staff and partners at all levels. Resources are carefully managed and targeted to meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. The service is modestly funded and, despite success in attracting external funding, there is significant unmet demand for youth service activities. Many of the venues for youth work are not readily accessible, suitable or sufficiently attractive for youth work and this limits the curriculum that can be delivered. The involvement of young

people in the design, management and evaluation of provision is underdeveloped.

Strengths

- The standard of young people's achievement is high.
- The quality of youth work practice is good.
- Effective partnerships add value to the quality of young people's experience.
- Managers provide a clear sense of direction and purpose.
- Planning and performance management procedures are robust.

Areas for development

- The budget available to the service limits provision.
- Young people are insufficiently involved in reviewing and recording their progress.
- The lack of attractive, well equipped and accessible venues limits the service's capacity to engage young people.
- The involvement of young people in the design, management and evaluation of provision is underdeveloped.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	3

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: *A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:*

Grade 3: *A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:*

Grade 2: *A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:*

Grade 1: *A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.*

Part B: The youth service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes

5. The service makes a good contribution to Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes in a number of areas. A productive partnership with the Neighbourhood Road Safety Initiative has resulted in young people's involvement in a range of imaginative projects to reduce the incidence of road accidents, which is a key strategic priority. The service plays a key role in the development of the borough's strategy for youth participation and is effectively brokering relationships between township councils and young people to enable their views to be heard and responded to. Diversionary programmes are having a positive impact on the attitudes and achievement of young people identified as exhibiting anti-social behaviour. Projects targeted on young people from vulnerable or marginalized groups help young people to respond to the challenges they face and develop self-confidence. There are good opportunities for some young people to gain formal accreditation for their achievements and potential to extend these opportunities to more young people.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

6. The standard of young people's achievement is high across all types of provision. Young people are gaining a range of practical and vocational skills including driving skills, life skills, child-care, first aid, organisational and presentation skills. They are developing self-confidence and social awareness. Many young people are learning about and contributing to democratic processes and becoming more active in their community, in particular those involved in youth action schemes, the UK youth parliament and in youth councils.

7. Young people's attendance at youth centres and projects is regular and sustained. They form positive relationships with staff and their peers. Although some young people were quite boisterous, no incidents of bullying, oppressive or inappropriate behaviour were observed. Where offered, young people welcome and are taking advantage of opportunities to gain accreditation for their achievements and progress. Awards are not always informed by young people's perspective and there is little active involvement of young people in reviewing and recording their progress.

8. The quality of practice is good overall and no unsatisfactory work was observed during the inspection. Workers plan their sessions well and in keeping with the service's priorities and a clear focus on learning. They have a sound knowledge of the local area and of the needs of the individuals with

whom they work and this is used to inform programme planning. Workers are skilled at supporting and guiding young people and make effective use of referral to a wide range of specialist services. In the satisfactory practice observed, lack of challenge and a limited variety of activities resulted in some young people becoming disinterested. Some provision, where workers have focussed on a small number of young people over many years, would benefit from review to ensure the work remains relevant and inclusive.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The service has a clear and comprehensive curriculum framework, linked to borough and service priorities, and informed by local knowledge and strategic data. The curriculum is well targeted to support vulnerable and high risk groups and there is very good specialist provision to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those at risk of offending. Overall, the service offers a broad range of activities in line with its curriculum priorities although some, such as peer education, healthy eating, and creative arts are not consistently available across the borough and are not co-ordinated well enough.

10. Staff are well qualified and experienced. A good in-service training programme attends to individual and service training needs identified through supervision and appraisal. A well-planned trainee scheme provides opportunities for career progression. The service has achieved Investor in People status and the assessors commended in particular the development opportunities provided for sessional staff. Good use is made of advanced practitioners to support less experienced staff. There are no significant recruitment and retention issues.

11. The service has established effective partnerships with a wide range of agencies including the voluntary sector, which enhance the quality and extend the availability of provision. Good use is made of specialist staff from arts organisations, advice, guidance and counselling services and vocational training providers to enhance youth service programmes.

12. Effective safeguarding procedures are in place, including comprehensive child protection procedures and off-site guidelines. Procedures for the reporting of racist and homophobic incidents are in place. Criminal Records Bureau clearance processes are effective.

13. The service's reliance on shared community venues limits the sense of ownership by young people, creates practical difficulties with regard to the storage of equipment, and restricts the range of activities that can be offered. A high percentage of the community premises visited were in a poor decorative state, with unwelcoming frontage, poor signage and lighting and restricted access for those with mobility difficulties. The service has not

conducted an accessibility audit of the premises that it leases or regularly hires.

14. The service has a well-managed central resource library stocked with a wide range of up-to-date materials to support the curriculum. Access to information technology and multimedia equipment in much of the provision is poor.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Strategic and operational management are good. Managers provide a clear sense of direction and priorities are well communicated to staff and partners at all levels, resulting in high morale and shared sense of purpose. The service is well represented on a wide range of strategic and area partnerships and is held in high regard by all its partners. Highly productive relationships with Connexions and the Educational Welfare Service are contributing to improved outcomes for young people.

16. The service makes good use of available resources. There is a clear rationale for resource allocation and staff deployment, reviewed annually, based on population and indices of need. Managers have been effective in helping to build the capacity of the voluntary sector to respond to needs. Financial management is sound and good attention is paid to cost effectiveness and efficiency. Careful budget management and a review of staffing structures has resulted in an increase in the number of youth workers in recent years.

17. There are robust mechanisms for planning and performance management. Operational objectives flow logically from strategic priorities and are suitably ambitious. Clear targets are set and monitored at team, branch and strategic partnership level on a regular basis. Relevant data is collated and analysed regularly and used to inform service developments. The observation of practice by managers and peers provides a good balance of challenge and support and is improving the quality of practice. The service has good separate procedures for assessing projects and the work of individual staff. These are not sufficiently linked. The service does not evaluate sufficiently the impact of provision on the ECM outcomes or assess its contribution to the achievement of strategic targets.

18. The involvement of young people in the design, management and evaluation of provision is underdeveloped. There are some good examples of young people's involvement in the revision of the curriculum, the development of a youth pledge, a review of youth facilities and the assessment of provision but the numbers involved are small. A youth pledge and related young people's complaints procedure have been developed but are not yet fully implemented. The service conducts an annual satisfaction survey amongst those who use the service but does not involve non-users in assessing needs or identifying barriers to inclusion.

19. The service prioritises its resources on young people who face disadvantage and exclusion both in terms of locality and other factors such as ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. Effective action is taken to promote positive images of young people and to celebrate diversity. The service has yet to develop strategies to support the integration of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into mainstream provision.

20. The service is modestly funded and, therefore, has limited capacity to reach out and engage more young people and respond to a wider range of needs. The national benchmarks for participation and contact with young people are not being met. The limited availability of open access provision is of concern to young people, partners and communities.