

# Youth Work in Wandsworth

Wandsworth Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. The London Borough of Wandsworth has a population of 280,000. There are about 15,650 young people in the 13 to 19 age group, around 40% of whom are of minority ethnic origin. Participation in youth work activities is in line with the national benchmark of 15%.

2. Local authority youth work is provided primarily by Wandsworth Youth Work Service and its voluntary sector partners who receive an annual grant from the local authority of approximately £200,000. The Youth Work Service (YWS) forms part of the Integrated Youth Service (IYS) created in April 2004 when the Youth Offending Team (YOT), Connexions, Positive Activities for Young People and the YWS moved under one management structure. The 2006-07 council budget for youth work, including £800,000 from external sources, was just over £4 million. Combined with former Connexions funding just over £6.5 million is now available for integrated youth support activity. The staffing complement for the YWS is equivalent to some 59 full-time posts.

3. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

4. The borough values its youth work provision and its overall quality is good. It sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. The relatively high level of funding over a long period of time has enabled the YWS to make some highly effective provision in conjunction with its partners. Standards of achievement are high and youth workers successfully engage with many of the most vulnerable young people. Most of the work is of high quality. The service also makes an impressive contribution to safeguarding young people. Managers know most of the strengths and weaknesses of the work they carry out and in most areas the service is well led and managed, in particular the way the service works with its partners. Senior managers have rightly identified the need to raise participation as one of the challenges they face. Participation has fallen to a level where it is now only in line with national benchmarks whereas a few years ago it was much higher. Too few young women access the service. Another challenge is to broaden the curriculum offer and to embed accreditation schemes more consistently. While provision is effective, staff deployment could be improved. Young people still do not play a sufficiently active role in shaping programmes at a local level.

## 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	2
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: excellent / outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

## Strengths

- The service has the strong support of elected members.
- Overall the standards of achievement and youth work practice are high.
- Strong partnership working has a beneficial impact on young people.
- Safeguarding procedures are clear and are consistently implemented.
- Young people with disabilities are well supported.

## Areas for development

- To increase participation by broadening the curriculum to reach out to meet the needs of those groups that are either not accessing or benefiting from current provision.
- To involve young people more consistently in shaping programmes of work, especially at the local level.
- To increase the ways in which young people can gain accreditation.

## Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Achievement is good. Most young people who have sustained contact with the service make good progress particularly in their personal and social development. Relationships with staff are very good and young people derive much enjoyment from their involvement. Most young people succeed in gaining

worthwhile knowledge and social skills from the activities they take part in. An increasing number are gaining accreditation either through the Wandsworth local award scheme or the Duke of Edinburgh's award. However, there are missed opportunities to accredit their skills and competencies more widely. The local award scheme is embedded well in some centres but not yet all. A more consistent approach to its delivery is needed if the award is to gain widespread acceptance and credibility.

6. In the sessions visited some young people demonstrated high levels of skill in areas such as cooking, photography and the use of the latest music recording technology. At a Duke of Edinburgh's award session those attending participated well in the drama session and with the planning for their expedition. The latter group displayed sound map reading skills and had a realistic appreciation of what lay in store for them. In other activities most young people displayed an interest in the work on offer but some did not stay on task for long enough to benefit fully from the advice and opportunities presented.

7. At a meeting of the borough youth forum young people were able to discuss relevant issues with maturity and insight and were sufficiently confident to disagree and challenge each other appropriately. At the Alton youth centre a group of ten girls had successfully bid for Youth Opportunity Funding for a fashion project. All members of the group were actively involved in this first session where they established their ground rules and talked animatedly about what they wanted to achieve. Despite these excellent sessions too few channels are open for young people to participate in decision making and planning at a local level.

8. The quality of youth work practice is good. The most skilled workers negotiate the content for the session with young people and reflect on how successful their interventions have been to help plan future work. Workers successfully establish good relationships with young people, many of whom are potentially very challenging either in terms of behaviour or because of their physical and emotional needs. At the George Shearing Centre for young people with severe physical disabilities the youth work practice was excellent; workers responded to the needs of each young person. Individual files are kept of progress and these include individual risk assessments. Here young people are encouraged to develop new skills and to interact with each other as well as with the workers. The senior youth worker used video and photography to record the young people's reactions and this evidence is used to plan future programmes. In the minority of sessions where practice was less effective workers failed to capitalise on some good starting points to build up a sustained interest in a planned programme of work.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of the curriculum and resources are adequate. Work is delivered through seventeen staffed youth centres, including the training and resource centre. Eight of these centres are operated by the voluntary sector and run in a close partnership with the YWS. The open access club provision is generally popular, particularly with young men but there is relatively little provision during the day time and at weekends.

10. Participation by young people is broadly in line with national benchmarks but until recently it was significantly higher. The service plans to develop and adapt the curriculum offer but there is insufficient analysis of the needs of young people. Some of the data used by the YWS is dated and of limited value as an aid to targeting provision effectively. The YWS also use data provided through the Council's Policy and Strategy Unit and the Children Services Department Policy and Development Division to inform service delivery and priorities. Young people with disabilities are well served but the provision for other groups varies across the area. For example each of the open access youth clubs offers a good choice of activities for those who attend but there is relatively little specialist provision for some vulnerable groups such as lesbian and gay young people and some minority groups who may be reluctant to access youth centre provision.

11. The service is making a good contribution overall to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes particularly through its work on safeguarding and disabilities. The curriculum guidance is organised according to a clear set of principles that take good account of equality, inclusiveness, diversity and the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*. However, staff interpret the guidance in very different ways. Where the curriculum is being delivered effectively, as at the Tooting Hub, workers relate the activities closely to the youth service model and the outcomes are made explicit.

12. The quality of accommodation for youth work is uneven across the borough although most is accessible, safe and well maintained. The centres with state-of-the-art music equipment attract good numbers of young people who take part with enthusiasm. The Tooting Hub centre has recently re-opened after a £1.5 million refurbishment but two of the voluntary sector centres are in a poor state of repair.

13. Full-time staff are well qualified but part-time staff much less so. The latter are however well supported by their colleagues and the authority but there is a lack of expertise in some settings which reduces the impact of the work. Staff are not always deployed appropriately. On some occasions a relatively generous ratio of workers to young people was seen and on others too few workers. With a high proportion of part-time staff on three hour contracts it is proving difficult to deploy them as flexibly as the situation demands.

## Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Leadership and management are good. The local authority has already taken key strategic decisions to ensure that it secures sufficient youth work provision. Youth work receives a high profile in the Children and Young People's Plan and support from elected members is good. While commissioning arrangements are very much in their infancy there are good examples of the YWS acting proactively to support partners to deliver youth work more effectively. For example seconding a full time worker to the Devas Youth Centre has contributed significantly to a much needed revitalising of the work.

15. Managers have an accurate view of the quality of youth work practice although this is gained through informal contact as recorded observations of youth work practice are carried out periodically rather than systematically. Performance management and supervision takes place and is valued by staff although the system works better for some staff than others as its implementation is uneven.

16. Partnership working is strong. The voluntary sector can access training, resources and use buildings without charge. The head of youth service has shared policy and procedures with voluntary sector bodies and given very good individual support. There is scope to take the partnership working further by creating a better understanding among partners of the way commissioning arrangements will work and integrated delivery developed. The teen parents' project currently provides an excellent example of effective integrated working. Youth work staff work alongside Connexions and those working to help young people move on to education, employment and training as well as maintaining close links with health visitors, midwives and social workers, all of whom contribute to the programme. Good joint working with social services continues to benefit young people with disabilities.

17. Robust safeguarding procedures are in place including risk assessments for activities and accommodation, good child protection procedures and comprehensive guidelines for off-site working. Robust procedures for clearance by the Criminal Record Bureau cover all staff and volunteers. The local authority has made good progress in implementing equality and diversity policies; effective measures for the reporting of racist incidents are in place.

18. Most of the issues identified by inspectors are acknowledged by managers in their position statement and business planning documents and in most areas appropriate actions are planned to further improve performance on the ground.