

City of Westminster Youth Service Report

City of Westminster Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Westminster Youth Service is part of an integrated youth, play & sports service within the Children's Services Department. The Head of Service is managed by the Director, Children, Young People and Families and accountable to the Young People's Board. The youth, sports and play service senior management team includes the Head and Deputy Head of Service, Connexions Manager, Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) manager, playcentre manager, sports manager and two youth officers. Some 129 staff are currently employed in face to face youth work, equivalent to 59.8 full time posts. The council budget allocation for youth work in 2006/07 is £2,789,300. A further £1.1 million is secured through external funding, including the Connexions partnership and PAYP. Approximately 63% of the budget is used to commission youth work from voluntary and community sector partners.

2. Youth work takes place in 27 units including 11 youth clubs, residential settings, detached and project based work also in sports and play facilities. There are 15,981 young people in the 13-19 age range. The service is in contact with 38% of these, and around 22% participate in youth activities.

3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work. Inspectors considered the 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 the City.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. City of Westminster council provides a good youth service. With sustained improvement from a low base over the last three years, good standards and very high levels of accreditation achieved by young people, Westminster Youth Service now delivers good value for money. The service reaches a high proportion of teenagers, particularly in areas of greatest deprivation, although the proportion of young women among them is low. Youth work practice is good overall. Youth workers and young people consistently form positive relationships and excellent work has been done to promote community cohesion in areas of tension. Funding levels are good. The significant funding secured through partnerships and integrated services, is used well to provide a programme with exciting elements and to meet diverse needs. Newly built and refurbished premises increase accessibility for those with disabilities although the range of premises used are variable in quality. The information and communications technology infrastructure successfully enables the service to gather data and assess its effectiveness. Quality assurance and staff support arrangements are satisfactory. The involvement of young people in the management of provision at the unit level is

underdeveloped. Safeguarding arrangements are in place and are consistently well monitored.

Strengths

- The proportion of 13 to 19 year olds in the area taking part in youth work activities is high.
- Achievement is good and enables an outstanding proportion of participants to gain nationally recognised awards.
- Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are well served.
- Youth work practice is good overall; staff promote good relationships in projects and in the wider community.
- The service invests well in youth work.

Areas for development

- Increase the proportion of young women in the area who participate in youth work.
- Increase the involvement of young people in the management of provision at the unit level.
- Ensure that quality assurance monitoring visits and peer-inspector visits are frequent and routine.

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: Excellent/outstanding: a service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: Good: a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: Adequate: a service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: Inadequate: 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 outcomes in a number of areas. Young people are encouraged to take part in sports, dance and other physical activities and to eat healthily although the impact on local obesity targets is not yet known. High quality training and guidance services have been commissioned to raise young people's awareness of the effects of substance misuse. Sound procedures and staff training contribute strongly to safeguarding. Youth work raises aspirations and young people enjoy what is on offer. Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, those in public care and care leavers are among those who achieve highly. There is a good focus on positive behaviour. The integration with PAYP and Connexions help many young people to gain real benefits from a range of voluntary activities and work placements in preparation for working life.

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 standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice are good overall. In most settings young people's progress is good or better; in the remainder it is at least satisfactory.

7. Young people acquire a wide range of personal development and technical skills, which they value highly. The greatest gains are made through participation in small targeted groups and purposeful, specialist arts, media and sports projects under expert guidance. Dance groups and those contributing to the excellent *Ouch!* youth magazine make great progress. Many have done well in popular football and parkour (free running) events. At the Stowe centre, young people skilfully mix and record music using the industry-standard music technology equipment. Young people do better in the settings where they are directly involved in the management of the project but this is not uniformly put into practice.

8. An impressively high proportion of young people, some 75% of actual participants, gain formal accreditation through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance, Duke of Edinburgh and other nationally recognised awards. Many young people in vulnerable groups and some in targeted areas of economic deprivation are among these high achievers. The service celebrates achievement frequently and to good effect for the young people involved. Gala events include the Caxton fashion show, the Mayor's awards and an exciting partnership presentation of the *Jump Westminster* film.

9. Universally, taking part in youth work activities develops positive attitudes. This is particularly apparent in young people's wide ranging discussion at the Speak Out forum and in responsible behaviour seen throughout. Young people develop high aspirations in the well targeted guidance groups at Westminster Education Support, the plumbing vocational course and the young women's project, Seed.

10. There is a strong ethos of nurturing young leaders; a few come through to provide charismatic role models and act as capable facilitators within the service. Recently, young people themselves tackled the drive to increase the numbers voting in Youth Parliament and Youth Council elections, exceeding expected targets.

11. Staff work hard to focus on better learning outcomes for young people and foster good relations. Within the best generic youth programmes, staff are adept at following up topics of interest, such as the impact of racism and healthy lifestyles alongside broadly recreational programmes. Youth workers make good use of opportunities to extend young people's knowledge on issues of local democracy and administration. The quality of planning is satisfactory. Youth workers' skills in recording, evaluating and accrediting outcomes are at various stages of development although there is some very good practice. Active support is available from senior staff to tailor accreditation to the need of individuals and groups.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

12. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. A broad range of provision, including youth clubs, one-stop information shops, advice and guidance, PAYP programmes, residential and outdoor activities capitalises upon the close links which exist between the youth service, Connexions, sports and play. The use of youth centres, community facilities, parks and sports facilities spreads youth work locations well in the areas where most young people live, with good uptake. Activities at a dedicated digital media unit, theatres, climbing, riding stables and boating facilities in the city enrich the curriculum greatly for some.

13. Only a third of participants are young women. Imaginative projects such as the Avenues homework club are targeted successfully at young women who have not previously benefited from youth work. However, the small scale of these projects makes little impact on citywide numbers yet and the proportion remains low overall.

14. Investment in premises with co-funders has contributed to the good progress in implementing requirements under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and extending accessibility. Funds are committed to bring two remaining venues up to standard. Plans for fully integrated sessions for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities at the flagship Stowe and Ebury centres are well advanced but not yet implemented. Organisations in the voluntary sector have a successful history of providing varied youth work for high numbers of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

15. The curriculum plan is coherent; the outline is thoughtfully linked to Every Child Matters outcomes and local children and young people's plan targets. A satisfactory balance is achieved between targeted, special interest and generic work. There is less flexibility in programmes in shared community premises although staff work well with the resources they have. The service identified that the detached team lacked a clear focus and is taking steps to improve the contribution of its work to delivery of a balanced curriculum.

16. A good proportion of youth workers hold national youth work qualifications or are working towards qualification. Training and development support is equally available to directly employed and commissioned staff groups. Staff have opportunities to share good practice and are mostly well deployed. Effective use is made of volunteers and young people on work placements.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

17. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. The service sets ambitious performance targets in the purposeful Youth service's outcomes framework. A clearly established structure, integrating youth work with other support to young people, and the youth work commissioning strategy have contributed greatly to sustained improvement in outcomes over recent years. The breadth of experience in the senior management team inspires the confidence of the voluntary and community sector partners who are central to the delivery strategies. Robust work by the Board ensures that the service is well supported by the council and partners, with a satisfactory remit within the area's plans for children and young people.

18. Funding levels are good. Managers make good use of opportunities to secure additional resources in cash and kind. The significant share of funding from partners enhances the provision of high quality targeted services to the most vulnerable groups.

19. The relatively high spend on youth the service is, nevertheless, good value for money. Good numbers engage overall and do well. The programme and improvements already made clearly reflect the service's sound grasp of local needs. Plans acknowledge that there is still more to be done to attract larger numbers of young women and ensure that the limitations of some shared premises are overcome.

20. The service has suitable policies and guidelines to safeguard young people and adults. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out on all staff and volunteers working directly for the council. Supervision of staff is satisfactory. Service managers rigorously monitor CRB clearance as part of quality monitoring. Child protection training is equally accessible to council employees and staff from the voluntary sector.

21. The collection of data was made considerably more efficient by the introduction of a scanner and barcode system in April 2006. The management team make good use of data. Youth officers give effective support to projects

when difficulties are identified. Quality monitoring arrangements are satisfactory but not fully routine.

22. The contribution of young people to monitoring and managing the service is satisfactory with some innovative but as yet underdeveloped features. The few who act as peer inspectors in a new scheme contribute ably and in depth but it is too soon yet to see the impact of their findings. Young people are adequately consulted through surveys, representatives and the developing Youth Council.