



Slough youth service report

Slough Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Slough Services for Young People (SS4YP) is located within the local authority's Services to Schools and Young People branch of the Education and Children's Services Directorate. The authority operates eight youth centres and another two are run by voluntary organisations. Detached youth workers and Connexions intensive personal advisers work in two small teams. A holiday programme is co-ordinated in association with the Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) programme. The service has 47.5 full-time equivalent (fte) staff comprising four fte managers, 7.4 fte administrative staff and 34.7 fte staff (18 full-time and 36 part-time workers). The service's budget provided by the local authority was £1,107,817 in 2004/05 and £470,310 additional income was raised. Slough has 11,292 young people aged 13 to 19. Systems for collating data are not reliable and it is not possible accurately to calculate the service's overall participation rate with young people.

2. 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. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions throughout the area.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. The service is inadequate and provides unsatisfactory value for money. Although local authority members and senior managers value the youth work carried out and allocate adequate levels of funding, the service has drifted with ineffective leadership and managerial oversight. Relationships between young people and staff are very good and well-targeted work benefits young people. The lack of rigorous quality assurance or management information, however, means this good practice is not maximised. Too many members of staff are unqualified and there are high staff vacancy rates. There is insufficient planning and evaluation for a significant minority of the provision.

Strengths

- There is good personal and skills development for young people, particularly in music, drama and dance.
- Relationships between young people and staff are very good.
- Specialist equipment is good.

- Local partnership working is effective.

Areas for development

- Quality assurance and management information systems are inadequate.
- Financial management is weak.
- Curriculum leadership from managers and senior youth workers is insufficient.
- Young people are insufficiently involved in the planning, delivery or evaluation of work.

Key aspect inspection grades

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

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

4. Many youth workers and their local partners contribute well to the *Every child matters* outcomes for young people, but inadequate leadership and management of the service have detracted from the full potential and range of this work. Youth centres provide a safe environment for young people to enjoy themselves and make friends. Young people generally benefit from youth work and, in some cases, those who might not normally participate are encouraged to do so by running groups for young women or specific ethnic minority groups. A broad range of project work provides the opportunity for young people to gain skills, particularly in music, dance and drama, and raises their awareness of issues around citizenship, sexual and general health and the use of illegal drugs. Sporting activities are popular at many youth centres. However, young people are not sufficiently involved in the planning and evaluation of work in their youth centres.

Effective specialised provision is in place for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although more effort should be made to integrate their involvement with the general work of the service. A popular programme of events is run during school holidays to reduce anti-social behaviour. Good advice and guidance is provided to young people by Connexions personal advisors and other staff. This covers personal problems, practical help on housing and benefits and preparation and encouragement for employment, education and training.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. The standard of young people's achievement is adequate, although there are significant variations across the borough. There is some very good provision which encourages young people to develop their self-confidence and skills. Dance, drama and music are used well to engage young people and develop their talent. Relationships between young people and staff and between themselves are very good. Young people provide encouragement, support each other well and display sensitivity and tolerance. Many young people showed much growth in their personal development. For example, a group of individuals with behavioural problems, and in some cases excluded from school, learnt to moderate their unacceptable behaviour and take part in activities with enthusiasm and interest. Vulnerable young people are well prepared for their future careers and are helped to stay in education and training. The atmosphere of clubs is welcoming and attendance rates are generally high.

6. Achievement was low in a small minority of sessions observed by inspectors. In these sessions, young people behaved immaturely and were reluctant to join in the learning activities planned. A few young people were lacking in self-esteem and had made little progress, despite attending provision for a long period. They did not wish to contribute to the broader community.

7. A broad range of externally accredited learning programmes is in place and workers have developed a local Slough award scheme which includes young people on the validation panel for the award. Some 163 young people were the first recipients to receive the Slough award at a well-organised awards ceremony. The service emphasises the value of gaining accreditation to young people, but in some cases the opportunity to accredit young people for their work is not taken.

8. The quality of youth work practice is adequate. Effective youth work practice identifies learning outcomes and young people are set individual targets to stimulate and challenge them. Where workers have a good knowledge of their area, provision meets the needs of young people. A successful Asian girls' group encouraged the young women to participate in specialist provision, when parental pressure made it difficult for them to attend a general youth centre. A programme covering the basic training required of a nail technician also gave the opportunity

for the participants to progress to a job or further training. Young people who are senior members of clubs are trained to become youth leaders and are well prepared for their new role. Workers refer young people to relevant agencies when appropriate and work well with a wide range of local partners. A few sessions were not well planned and many recording sheets are completed superficially. Not all workers challenge young people when they display inappropriate behaviour or offensive language.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is inadequate. Youth centres are found in most parts of Slough, although not all neighbourhoods are covered and there is duplication of work in some areas. Good targeted provision offers young people the chance to learn skills covering the performing arts, music and sports. Programmes are run for specific ethnic minority groups including young Asian women and Sikhs. High-quality provision is provided for a specific group of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but insufficient efforts are made to integrate these young people into mainstream provision. There is insufficient detached and outreach work, mainly due to staff vacancies. A popular holiday programme is organised in conjunction with the local Connexions partnership and a high number of young people participated in 2004–05 in a wide range of activities, including 441 young people taking part in residential activities.

10. A well-designed youth service curriculum document and toolkit has been developed recently that is valued and understood by staff. The curriculum is based on the outcomes from the Every Child Matters agenda and is a good start, but there is insufficient curriculum leadership by managers and senior youth workers. Inexperienced youth workers require far more detailed information and learning resources to enable them to be effective in their work. Insufficient sharing of good practice or resources takes place.

11. A shortage of qualified staff across the service, compounded by the high vacancy rate and difficulties in recruitment and retention, is detracting from the performance of the service. Poor deployment of staff only worsens the situation. In some sessions, relatively large numbers of staff gave no additional value to the quality of the provision, whereas in other sessions the lack of staff limited the variety of work available. The service's staff training programme has suffered from a lack of co-ordination. Child protection training takes place for all staff, but more training opportunities are needed, for example to develop the new curriculum framework.

12. Most centres provide a welcoming and comfortable environment for young people. Access for young people with limited mobility is generally good. Sports facilities for basketball and football are popular. One centre has radio broadcasting equipment that is used by young people to make programmes of social relevance. High quality ICT resources are well-utilised for music technology and other activities in some centres, but overall they are under-used or lacking, both for

young people and staff. Inclusion and diversity issues are well promoted and the ethnic diversity of the staff team generally matches that of the local community.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

13. Leadership and management of the service are inadequate. There is strong commitment and genuine goodwill on the part of members and senior managers of the directorate to support the work of the service, but major leadership and management issues have not been addressed. This has adversely affected the quality of provision. The funding available to the service is comparable to other similar areas and high levels of additional income are generated, but these resources are not utilised effectively. Centre managers have insufficient budgets to employ enough part-time workers, while at the same time there is a high proportion of senior managers and senior youth workers who have little face-to-face contact with young people. As a result, some clubs are under-used.

14. Senior youth workers are located in specific centres. They do not have cross-borough management or development roles and are under-utilised. The service lacks the drive to take forward curriculum and other initiatives. The large number of vacant posts has led to significant gaps in provision, such as detached and outreach work. To compound these problems, key staff on extended leave have not had their duties covered, resulting in serious shortcomings in quality assurance and staff training. The service's latest annual plan for 2005–06 seeks to improve performance where it is currently weak, but each youth centre follows its own priorities. The setting of targets and annual planning is not done well. Service targets are vague and many have no timescales, making it difficult to monitor the progress of the plan.

15. A broad range of good local partnership arrangements is in place. A team of intensive Connexions personal advisers provides much needed support to vulnerable young people. Different centres have strong local links with the police and health agencies, drug awareness team and voluntary and community organisations. The service plans to develop links with schools which are currently under-developed. The service promotes inclusion and diversity issues and this aspect is good. It meets its statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 (SENDA). Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out.

16. Operational management is weak. The assessment of need is generally not carried out well. Each centre has a set of basic demographic data but little formal needs analysis is carried out. Where needs are recognised, actions are sometimes slow to follow. Quality assurance procedures are rudimentary. Some limited observation of practice has taken place recently, but no improvement actions are identified as a result of this work. Financial management is poor. Budgets are controlled centrally and there is insufficient delegation to senior youth workers managing centres. Young people play a full role in the planning and evaluation of some work, but overall they are insufficiently involved across the full range of provision.

17. Management information systems are under-developed. Due to a shortage of compatible ICT equipment, data collection is paper-based and not evaluated centrally. As a result, youth service managers are not able accurately to analyse basic information such as the number of young people participating in the service. Without this information, managers cannot ensure resources are allocated to areas with the greatest need or to evaluate the success and cost-effectiveness of different projects.

18. Senior managers fully acknowledge these weaknesses and restructuring of line management responsibilities has helped to identify, but not yet remedy, them. Recent work, such as the development of a curriculum framework, is promising and a review of the entire service, including the management structure, is planned.