

Liverpool Youth Service

Liverpool Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Youth work forms part of the Integrated Services division of Children's Services. It is delivered through a combination of the City Council's youth service and service level agreements with the voluntary sector. The majority of the work is provided through the latter. The City Council manages these various functions through five area teams plus a city wide project team. There are 45,447 young people in the 13-19 population. The service's net budget for youth work for 2006-07 was £6,205,180 with £1,852,702 additional income from other sources. Of the 113 full-time equivalent posts, 59 are based in the voluntary sector.

2. 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

3. The local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Overall, the provision is good. Youth work in Liverpool is founded on a well established model of local authority and voluntary sector provision. Collectively, these provide good opportunities for young people with much of the work very responsive to local needs. The voluntary sector work is further strengthened by secondments of city council workers. Achievement and youth work practice are generally good and many projects are successful in engaging vulnerable groups. Youth work projects are sensitive to minority groups and workers are responding well to the needs of changing communities and inward migration. Use is made of various funding strands to provide high quality resources in music, sound recording, animation and mobile provision. Together with responsive workers, such provision is proving attractive to young people. A significant minority of the building stock is of unacceptable quality. There are at times disappointing inconsistencies in respect of delivery, curriculum and management across the five areas. The service could usefully identify and build on best practice where it exists. Service-wide and area plans are weak and staff in both sectors are not always deployed to best effect. Strategically the youth service and its partners are well placed to contribute to the evolving integrated youth support service due to be launched in 2008. Youth service staff have helped pioneer the City Council's new area committee structures. Quality assurance procedures are satisfactory but the service struggles with data collection, albeit that new procedures are beginning to make an impact. Staff undergo the necessary Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks but slow recruitment procedures lead to delays in their deployment.

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

- Good achievement and some innovative practice.
- Highly effective use of specialist provision and specialist staff.
- Effective engagement and empowerment of young people.
- A strong focus on neighbourhood issues.
- Sensitive and responsive youth workers.
- Good and improving engagement with an increasingly diverse range of agencies.

Areas for development

- Address inconsistencies in practice across areas.
- Review the management of the curriculum.
- Introduce an accommodation strategy.
- Improve planning, particularly in respect of service and area targets.
- Ensure the effectiveness of all area committees.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

4. Achievement is good and in a few cases outstanding. Young people are enthusiastic and actively engage in activities, often as a result of their previous and rewarding involvement with youth work. In the weaker sessions, achievement was adversely affected by young people's very limited concentration span and their inability to listen or to stay on task.

5. Young people develop creativity, self-expression, political skills and an awareness of social issues. In Croxteth, for example, a group used photographs and cartooning to create mini-films to capture young people's views about their area in a sophisticated way to help counter the negative press they are experiencing. Those attending a City Council forum had prepared well and posed considered and challenging questions to elected members. More generally, young people learn much from their wide-spread involvement in decision making processes. Young disabled people in the Splice Project, supported by sensitive youth workers, worked alongside their peers in tackling preconceptions about disability.

6. Young people use information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their learning through highly creative animation projects, music performances, survey design and a website. Those on alternative education programmes are generally well motivated, gain in confidence and self-esteem and often achieve some form of accreditation. Their attendance is significantly better than in mainstream education. The involvement of youth project groups in designing and implementing city-wide evaluation reports of activities, such as Splash and the Youth Opportunity Fund, is well-conceived and members learn research, media and marketing skills as a result.

7. Young people were respectful to each other and staff and were aware of the standards of behaviour that were acceptable, even in those settings where achievement was at best adequate.

8. A high proportion of youth work was judged good; some aspects were outstanding. Youth workers build good relationships with young people and are thoughtful in their practice. Many have a firm understanding of equality and diversity and recognise young people in their own right rather than according to where they live, their sexual orientation or ability. Workers react well to young people's needs locally. Increasingly, the service draws on specialist staff in animation, recording, music and dance. Combined with good 'generic' youth workers, this menu works well and the highly skilled specialists add much to the learning. A minority of sessions were bland and unappealing.

9. There are some examples of effective use of accreditation, albeit that the best practice is in inclusion and alternative education programmes. Generally though, workers have insufficient understanding of processes underpinning accreditation. Too much work is set at too low a level. Such contrasts are also evident in sessional planning and evaluation. Some workers use these to good effect to help focus their work but others resist the notion of planning strongly. Overall however the approach to such disciplines is too variable.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate. The service and its partners provide an eclectic mix of programmes responsive to the needs of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Collectively they are strong on young people contributing to civic affairs, user voice and surveys, peer mentoring, inclusion projects and one-to-one support through the Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS).

11. The Greater Merseyside curriculum document is designed to guide staff but in reality has very limited influence on what young people learn. Neither is it universally embedded in practice or sufficiently linked to *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The learning content of much work is driven more by local priorities linked to participation, diversity, community regeneration and diversionary programmes. In this respect much of the work meets needs but overall, however management of the curriculum has been allowed to drift.

12. Resources are very mixed. A significant minority of buildings is poor and only limited progress has been made in establishing area 'primary centres', one of the cornerstones of recent service remodelling. To its credit, the service has carried out an accessibility audit of centres which exposed significant weaknesses. Building improvements have been made as a result but the poor condition of a few precludes them from further development. The quality of some recently acquired buildings and resources are of a high order and has had a positive impact on young people's motivation and achievement. Mobile provision is being used to good effect and is welcomed by neighbourhoods. Given the proposed developments in respect of young people's services more widely, and the potential of alternative routes to capital funding, there is a lack of strategy to address shortcomings in infrastructure.

13. At area and project level there is a lack of critical analysis in respect of staff deployment within multi-agency initiatives. Moreover, the rationale for the involvement of different organisations in projects is unclear leading to potential inefficiencies. Full-time youth work staff undertake an element of face-to-face work in both local authority and voluntary sector provision, a factor which contributes well to higher standards.

14. The service has used staff development well to support improvement. Full-time youth workers are well qualified but, at 50%, too many sessional workers are not. In part, this is due to high staff turnover and new incoming staff. Systems

exist to bring young people into the workforce as well as secondments for longer-serving staff. The continuing professional development needs for those undertaking the new advanced practitioner's role have not been fully considered.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Leadership and management are good. The strategy for securing youth work is unlike most other local authorities with a large proportion of work, over 50%, commissioned through the voluntary sector. This significant voluntary input adds value to youth work in the city through extending provision. The local authority has built on these arrangements well in the last few years. A competitive element however remains among providers which frustrate short and longer term planning. Deployment of City Council workers to voluntary sector organisations and support for their management committees helps build capacity in the local community. New and emerging relationships with, for example, social landlords, regeneration initiatives, police and community safety programmes add further to this 'mosaic'.

16. Links with key statutory agencies, including Connexions and the Youth Offending Service, are fruitful. An arrangement is in place whereby youth service managers are consulted by police about the application of dispersal orders in an attempt to allow space for youth workers to positively intervene. Work with schools is developing well, but its impact is undermined by poor communication and lax procedures in schools, particularly with regard to tracking young people's progress.

17. Recent remodelling of the youth service, including shifts in resources, has been timely and its rationale well communicated. Whilst at an early stage, the new advanced practitioner's role is having a positive impact. The service has a key role in the introduction of City Council-led area committees with some more effective than others. Facilitating the committee process presents challenges for youth service managers and their success must remain a priority. At 2.2% of the education budget, Liverpool is a comparatively higher spender than statistical neighbours. The budget from the local authority has remained stable over a number of years. Arrangements for the introduction of an integrated youth support service in 2008 are evolving and the ambitions for youth work are clearly stated. Workers from Connexions and the youth service have had the opportunity to meet, other key staff, such as those from the youth offending service, have yet to be engaged.

18. The service states that it reaches some 37% of young people; however data are not sufficiently robust. This frustrates efforts to performance manage city council and commissioned work. Managers wisely took a decision to cleanse data and introduce new procedures earlier this year. These are already providing more secure figures.

19. Targets and performance measures in service and in area plans are weak and sometimes arbitrary. Plans provide a useful commentary on the nature of the activity being undertaken, but lack baseline judgments from which to set clear

targets and measure progress. The poorer quality of planning does not match the quality of the work viewed by inspectors.

20. Peer and management inspection is central to the quality assurance system. Notwithstanding weaknesses in data, reports are generally evaluative and provide secure judgements. They also give clear indications of areas that need to be improved in the short and medium term and managers act on the outcomes. Self assessment plays a useful part in the process. CRB checks on employees in the statutory and voluntary sectors take place.

21. Areas operate relatively autonomously, a strategy which the City Council will build on through its area committees. However, management weaknesses have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of future plans. For example, underperformance of staff is not consistently addressed and best practice locally is not used to raise standards across the city. Recruitment processes adopted centrally by the City Council are laborious and are not supporting the flexibility needed by the youth service.