

North Tyneside Youth Service Report

North Tyneside Children's Services Authority Area

Age group:

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Introduction

1. North Tyneside Youth Service focuses its provision on targeted and partnership work. It also offers open access sessions, detached youth work, residential activities and local events. The head of service is supported by an operations manager, four area team leaders and the youth project manager. The service is supported by the Training and Awards Unit and an administration team of four staff. The youth service is located in the Children, Young People and Learning directorate within Learning and Skills. An equivalent of 39 full-time staff comprises 27 full-time and 20 part-time youth workers. At the time of the inspection there were two full-time and four part-time posts vacant amongst youth workers, including an area manager. The budget made available in 2006/07 by the local authority was £1,339,361; an additional £589,137 was obtained externally for a variety of projects. In 2005/06, 13% of the 15,100 young people aged 13 to 19 participated in youth work, an additional 11% took part in sexual health and relationship education and 52% had some contact with the service through youth council elections and consultation events.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the self-assessment and met with officers, a cross-section of staff, partners and young people. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observations of a small sample of youth work sessions including some in the neighbourhood study areas of Howdon and West North Shields.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. North Tyneside has a good youth service that provides good value for money. Young people achieve well. Youth work practice is good overall although youth workers at times have too low expectations of what young people can achieve. The service makes a good contribution to Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. Suitable provision is made for vulnerable and minority groups. Well qualified staff are supported in their practice by effective training and development. The lack of suitable accommodation impedes the development and delivery of youth work. A high level of vacancies and sickness absence has at times interrupted provision or delayed development work. Young people are involved at a strategic level in aspects of the service such as the selection and recruitment of youth workers but they are not yet systematically involved in planning or quality assurance. Partnership working is strong and enhances the provision for young people. The service plays a leading role alongside partners in well developed plans to introduce integrated youth support services from April 2008. Management strategies have improved the quality of the service, in particular youth work practice.

Strengths

- Achievement and youth work practice are good.
- Well qualified and experienced staff are supported by effective training and development.
- Effective management has improved the quality of provision.
- Partnership working is strong and enhances the provision for young people.

Areas for development

- The lack of suitable accommodation impedes the development and delivery of youth work.
- The management of staff vacancies and sickness absence is not always effective.
- Young people are not systematically involved in planning and quality assurance.

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	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

4. The youth service makes a good contribution to the ECM outcomes in particular being healthy, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. Effective targeted sexual health and relationship education is planned and delivered in partnership with the Primary Care Trust, the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership and schools. Multi-agency work such as the Howdon Youth Project has helped reduce anti-social behaviour in the area. The youth service takes a lead in supporting young people's successful participation in decision making through the well established youth council and consultation events. Four area youth forums have involved a small number of young people in useful community projects although meetings are not generally well attended. The Youth Project for young people excluded from schools supports them well to develop their interpersonal and social skills as well as gaining awards for their achievements. The Training and Awards Unit offers a good range of accreditation and pathways to qualifications for young people including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and National Vocational Qualifications in Youth Work and Play.

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 standards of young people's achievements are good overall. Achievement is best where provision is well designed to meet young people's needs, such as the Youth Project. Youth workers and teachers work well together to provide a well-planned and structured programme that enables young people to gain confidence, develop personal and social skills and achieve awards including those provided by the Award Scheme and Accreditation Network and the Duke of Edinburgh's scheme. The Graffiti project supports young people well in developing not only their creativity and skills in project management but also their social awareness through engagement with the local community. They have produced a mural for a local nursery and their work is to be displayed on the metro at Wallsend.

6. Members of the youth council demonstrate very good skills in all aspects of running this formal consultative group. They develop a good understanding of democratic processes through participation in the council and consultation events such as "Be Heard" and the World Café meetings. They have gained valuable expertise through their involvement in the recruitment and selection of youth workers and the allocation of funds through the Youth Action Fund. Members of the North Shields youth forum have successfully worked together to involve the community in designing a mosaic to be installed near the library.

7. The service has not met its targets this year for the proportion of young people gaining recognition or accreditation for their achievements. Improved procedures for assessing and recognising achievements are not fully established.

8. The quality of youth work practice is good. The best sessions seen during the inspection were well planned to meet young people's needs. Youth workers develop good relationships with young people and listen to what they have to say. They provide effective leadership while allowing young people to participate actively in sessions and offer good support for personal and social development. In the Pathways project young people learn about health issues of interest to them and are encouraged to take responsibility for choosing a healthy lifestyle. In schools, effective sessions on sexual health and relationships engage young people in discussion about issues of concern to them and develop their knowledge and understanding. Youth workers present information clearly and in a lively way that suits young people.

9. In the few less effective sessions seen during the inspection, the curriculum was not sufficiently varied to provide challenge for young people or extend their experience and skill. In some sessions youth workers' expectations of what young people could achieve were too low and there were insufficient opportunities for their progress to be formally acknowledged where this was appropriate.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of the curriculum and resources is adequate overall. Across the area young people have access to a broad mix of youth work provided by the service and its partners, in particular those in the voluntary sector. In planning to provide Integrated Youth Support Services from April 2008, partners have begun to analyse the offer across North Tyneside to coordinate provision more effectively. While having a broader offer, the youth service has focussed on developing effective targeted programmes such as those supporting youth participation and providing sexual health and relationship education. In consultation events and surveys young people say that there are not enough youth centres and "things to do". Young people are not always aware of what is available. The service acknowledges that marketing and promotion fails to have sufficient impact.

11. The curriculum policy, in conjunction with the youth service delivery plan, provides youth workers with a sound basis to help them plan and deliver the curriculum. The service's needs analysis takes account of a good range of data and local knowledge. Equality and diversity are integral to the work of the service which makes suitable provision for vulnerable and minority groups such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, asylum seekers and young people who do not achieve well at school. The service is responsive to young people's needs. For example, in Whitley Bay it worked effectively with the police and neighbourhood wardens supporting young people to build a shelter where they could meet their friends and engage with youth workers.

12. Well-qualified staff are supported effectively to improve their practice by well planned, high quality training and development programmes. These respond to national and local priorities and meet needs identified through the performance review and development procedures. Staff have good opportunities to gain qualifications in youth work at all levels and are supported well to do so. Appropriate policies and procedures for child protection are in place.

13. A high level of vacancies and sickness absence has at times interrupted the continuity of provision or delayed development work. Occasionally, attendance by young people was low and the numbers of youth workers and other adults relatively high; in a few sessions there were no young people.

14. Accommodation and other resources are adequate overall. The service has responded well to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001). All buildings used for youth work are accessible to wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties. However, the service owns only two of the premises used for open access youth work and these are small and limited in what they can provide. Leased premises, while clean and bright, do not all offer a stimulating environment or a sufficiently broad range of resources suited to youth work.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Leadership and management are good. The location of the youth service within Learning and Skills services has enabled managers to plan provision that aligns well with the Children and Young People's Plan. Youth service managers make effective use of their membership of a variety of groups such as the Youth Participation and Inclusion Strategy Group, the Youth Issues Group, Area Children's Strategy Groups and Local Agency Meetings to inform service planning and development. The youth service is playing a leading role alongside partners to introduce integrated youth support services. The authority has well planned structures and activities supporting this development.

16. The local authority has significantly increased the budget available to the youth service in recent years and this is now in line with national figures. This investment has enabled the service to recruit staff and develop a structure that supports effective provision. Participation by young people in youth service activities has improved and is now well above the national average.

17. Young people are supported well by the youth service to participate in decision making in council services as a whole. They developed the youth charter and were involved in the development of the council's drug strategy but there are no structures within the youth service to enable them to contribute to strategic planning. They have opportunities to give feedback on individual sessions and programmes and youth workers take their views into account. However the involvement of young people in observing youth work as part of peer review is at an early stage of development.

18. Managers have successfully implemented strategies to improve the quality of youth work practice. A key aspect is the review by senior staff of youth work practice within their teams and support for staff where development needs are identified. Senior workers provide positive role models working alongside their teams. However the formal recording of peer review observations which will enable managers to have an overview of quality across the service started only at the beginning of the year. Managers are increasingly making systematic use of clear, well presented reports on participation by young people, budgets and staffing to monitor and manage the service. Quality assurance of staff training and development is thorough and comprehensive.

19. Partnership working is strong and extends and enhances provision for young people. Effective multi-agency working has helped reduce teenage pregnancies and anti-social behaviour in targeted areas. The service works well with Connexions to provide young people with a good range of information, advice and guidance. There are many examples of effective cooperation such as the use of the Community Centre at Backworth for youth work in an area where there is limited provision for young people. Appropriate service level agreements are in place with a range of partners in the voluntary sector including Barnado's, the YMCA and the North Tyneside Disability Forum. Monthly meetings of the Voluntary Sector Youth Forum provide good opportunities to exchange information.