

# Northumberland Youth Service Report

Northumberland Children's Services Authority Area

---

**Age group:** All

---

**Published:** 14 August 2007

---

**Reference no:** 929

---

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Part A: Summary of the report</b>	
Main findings	2
<b>Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects</b>	
Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice	4
Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources	5
Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management	6

## Introduction

1. Northumberland youth service is located within the division of schools and family support. Delivery of the service is devolved to fourteen area partnerships. In thirteen, the service is managed by high school head teachers and in one by a voluntary sector organisation on behalf of the head teacher; senior youth workers oversee provision within each area. The county's strategic management group for the youth service directs the implementation of the authority's strategy which is led and coordinated by a development officer and an assistant development officer. An equivalent of 59 full-time staff comprises 31 full-time and 238 part-time youth workers. The service is supported by a central administration team of two staff; additional administration is provided in schools. The budget made available in 2006/07 by the local authority was £1,460,670. Additional funding was obtained for a variety of projects within partnership arrangements. In 2005/06, authority figures show that 23% of the 26,642 young people aged 13 to 19 participated in youth work.

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 across the county.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. Northumberland provides an adequate youth service that offers satisfactory value for money. Achievements and youth work practice are adequate. Young people's achievements are celebrated and recognised in a variety of ways. In weaker practice, expectations of what young people can achieve are too low. Curriculum and resources are adequate. The service provides a reasonable mix of provision but it does not consistently meet needs across the county and there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity. In recent years, the authority has shown effective leadership, in particular in restructuring the service and realigning budgets. Carefully targeted development work is improving the quality and consistency of provision but there are too few policies and procedures to guide the service. A web-based quality assurance reporting system is helping develop a self-critical culture amongst youth workers but procedures for assessing the quality of provision and the use of management information are underdeveloped. Figures are not always reliable. Young people are not sufficiently involved at a strategic level in planning and quality assurance. Local partnerships are strong and benefit young people.

## Strengths

- Young people's achievements are celebrated and recognised in a variety of ways.
- The authority has set a clear direction through strong leadership.
- Carefully targeted development work is improving provision for young people.
- Strong partnerships at a local level extend and enhance provision.

## Areas for development

- Quality assurance procedures and the use of management information are underdeveloped.
- There are too few policies and procedures to guide management and practice.
- There is insufficient promotion of diversity and equality.
- Young people are not sufficiently involved in strategic planning or quality assurance.

## 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	2
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	2

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 service makes an adequate contribution to the five outcomes. There are examples of good practice, in particular in being healthy and enjoying and achieving. The sexual health provision by the youth service at Prudhoe, Cramlington, Berwick and Hexham is well used. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, residential and overseas trips, and provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities offer young people good opportunities to enjoy learning but not always sufficient accreditation of their achievements. At Prudhoe and Coquet, young people have taken part in voluntary work overseas. The Blyth, Astley and Bedlington partnerships provide help for the unemployed to progress to work or further study. Young people and staff are provided with a safe environment; appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place.

## **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 achievement are adequate. In the better sessions observed during the inspection, young people learn valuable skills and achieved good personal growth through participating fully in the planning and delivery of the work. Their gains are celebrated and formally recognised where appropriate. They learn to work effectively in teams and to take responsibility for challenging projects. They demonstrate good social and interpersonal skills. At Astley High School one group of young people worked well together learning to prepare a meal while others took responsibility for all aspects of organising a DJ mixing event. A third group reflected on what they had learned on their residential outward bound weekend. At the Hirst Riverbank after-school club, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities took part in challenging activities supported well by youth workers who understood their needs. Their art work is displayed at the centre; they are proud of their achievements. At the Alnwick Gallery, young people are learning to relate constructively to the community, the police and other members of their group through dance, drama and art. They enjoy the activities and gain valuable insight into their circumstances and the choices they make.

6. Young people have good opportunities in the majority of partnerships to gain awards and have their progress recorded. They obtain National Vocational Qualifications and local certificates through high quality work between schools and the fire service; they also learn valuable life skills such as cooperation, trust and reliance. In 2005/06, around 10% of those aged 14 to 19 took part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, an increase of some 8% on the previous year. However, only 29% gained an award. The service acknowledges that procedures for recognising and accrediting achievements vary too much between the 14 partnerships and

that there are no clear progression routes. New procedures are to be introduced in September 2007.

7. Overall practice is adequate. In the better examples, workers provide responsive leadership and create an environment that enables young people to express their views and listen to each other. They challenge inappropriate behaviour and help young people take responsibility within sessions; they stretch them to achieve well. Youth workers have established very good relationships with young people that sustain their progress. Workers at Haydon Bridge supported young people well in their successful bid for funding from the Youth Opportunity Fund to establish a community-based arts and crafts project on the themes of drug and alcohol misuse. Young people's plans are displayed in the centre. At the Crazi Geordies girls' group, workers respond well to individual needs and are skilful in enabling the young women to organise their own work.

8. In weaker sessions, expectations of young people are too low. They are not sufficiently challenged by the activities provided and make modest progress in developing new skills or understanding. A few sessions offer little more than recreational activities with insufficient opportunities for development. Session planning, recording and evaluation are not always thorough enough to provide an effective basis for good youth work.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate overall but it varies too much between the 14 area partnerships. The service provides a reasonable mix of open access clubs, mobile and detached provision, outdoor education and residential activities. In some areas, targeted work meets the needs of minority and vulnerable groups such as young parents, those who are not in education, employment or training and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but this is not always the case. The authority's curriculum framework and well considered entitlement provide a sound basis for planning. Together with robust procedures for the approval of local plans, these are helping improve the quality and consistency of provision.

10. The authority has provided a comprehensive statistical analysis to support local needs analysis. The majority of area partnerships have good knowledge which they use well in planning provision. For example, in Bedlington there is a good variety of work based on a detailed local analysis as well as the views of young people and local organisations. In a few partnerships, provision offers too little variety and plans have been rejected by the Strategic Management Group because they do not meet young people's needs. The 14 partnerships do not work together sufficiently closely to ensure needs are met across the county.

11. Overall there is insufficient promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion across the service. The authority complies with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 in having an equalities action plan but monitoring of its impact has only just begun. Policies developed for schools apply to the youth service and these are

not always wholly appropriate although the authority has developed safeguarding procedures that are suited to the service.

12. The small central team has been successful in developing a sense of team work and high morale amongst youth workers. In most partnerships staffing is adequate but deployment is not sufficiently flexible across the authority. The 14 senior youth workers and most full-time staff have suitable qualifications but a large proportion of part-time staff do not. The authority provides high quality training targeted to improve the quality and consistency of the service but this is compromised by a lack of capacity or resource to provide a training programme to meet the needs of the service as a whole.

13. Accommodation and resources are adequate. Overall there are sufficient, well maintained resources but accommodation varies a great deal in quality. The Berwick Voluntary Youth Project is based in an outstanding purpose built block which includes a large café bar, accommodation for six young people and spacious well designed, attractive facilities for providing information and advice. The Hirst Riverbank centre provides good facilities that include provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Prudhoe centre offers an attractive, accessible, centrally located facility. In contrast, there is unsuitable accommodation. The authority has made satisfactory progress in meeting the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Adaptations have been made and specialist resources put in place. However, some premises remain inaccessible for wheel chair users and those with restricted mobility.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Strategic and operational leadership and management are adequate. In recent years, the local authority, working through the Strategic Management Group, has provided effective leadership in setting a clear direction for the service and improving the quality and consistency of provision. The authority, after consultation, has made difficult and unpopular decisions. Revised financial procedures and rigorous monitoring ensure accountability; funding is now allocated to area partnerships on a more equitable basis. The service has been restructured with a senior youth worker managing provision in each of fourteen partnership areas. The small central team has been effective in establishing an appropriate curriculum and improving the quality and consistency of planning and quality assurance but its capacity limits the support and challenge the authority can provide to improve the service. A revised service handbook is being prepared but currently there are too few policies and procedures that apply to youth work. Some important practices, such as quality assurance procedures and staff appraisal, vary too much between areas.

15. Funding allocated to the youth service by the authority is low in relation to national comparators. The majority of the funding is distributed to area partnerships who provide resources such as accommodation, equipment, sporting facilities and in some cases staff. Senior youth workers in some areas are



successful in obtaining funding and grants. The ratio of youth workers to young people is low.

16. At a local level, partnership working with voluntary and statutory bodies is good and benefits young people. The youth service works well as a member of the crime reduction partnership and with member agencies such as the police and voluntary sector agencies tackling drug and alcohol abuse. Valuable sexual health services are provided in partnership with Teenage Pregnancy. Joint work with district councils and community groups are productive. The service has a formal agreement with Connexions that guides their work and which is increasingly collaborative.

17. There are examples of young people's involvement in shaping provision but these are piecemeal and depend too much on the initiative of individual workers. At Cramlington, young people contributed to the design of a café in the youth centre. Bedlington is setting up a youth panel to represent young people in the area. Youth workers are responsive to young people's requests for activities but there is no formal structure to involve them at a strategic level in planning and quality assurance.

18. The recently introduced web-based system for quality assurance reporting is helping develop a self-critical culture amongst youth workers and establishing a framework for making judgements. However, there is no quality assurance policy or systematic, evidence based procedure for assessing the quality of provision or moderating judgements. Although senior workers often work alongside their staff, there is no formal observation of practice to inform judgements about quality. A new management information system has been installed but its use is underdeveloped. The service acknowledges that figures are not always reliable.