



**Better  
education  
and care**

# Newcastle upon Tyne Youth Service Report

Newcastle upon Tyne Children's Services Authority Area

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## Introduction

1. Newcastle youth service is located within leisure services, which is part of neighbourhood services. It is a jointly managed service alongside play, with 26 full-time staff, of which five are management posts, and 50 part-time workers equivalent to 11.2 full-time posts. The service has a budget of £1, 822,831, lower than that found in authorities with similar characteristics, and nationally. From this total budget, £178,000 is used to commission work from voluntary youth sector partners. There are 26,256 young people in the 13-19 age range. The latest reach figure, at 25%, is in line with the national average. The participation figure, at 19%, is above the national benchmark of 15%.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment of its current practice and key service documentation. Inspectors met with officers, a cross-section of staff, representatives of the voluntary sector and other partners, and some young people from Newcastle, including the two UK youth parliament representatives. A number of observations at day and evening youth sessions were carried out across the city.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. The youth service provides at least adequate support to the young people of Newcastle. Provision is appropriately varied and generally provides a suitable range of accreditation, recreational and social opportunities for young people. Standards are adequate overall, and better when the sessions are well-planned and focused on the identified needs of the young people. The curriculum takes good account of the outcomes in Every Child Matters, but the service has yet to focus specifically on the outcomes, as opposed to the quality of provision. Staff have good relationships with young people, but the quality of line management for front line staff is too variable to guarantee consistent and effective quality assurance and performance management. Strategic management is progressing well towards the formal approval for a restructuring of the service, although the vision for future improvements has yet to be fully understood by all stakeholders, including the voluntary sector. There is no formal mechanism for assessing value for money, but the service achieves adequate value for money.

## **Strengths**

- The service knows well its strengths and areas for development.
- Standards are adequate overall, and better than that when the sessions are well-planned and focused on the identified needs of the young people.
- Staff have good relationships with young people.
- In the vast majority of youth settings, the environment is safe, well lit and inviting. Overwhelmingly, young people use equipment safely and sensibly.
- The vast majority of youth service workers are well qualified; with experience and expertise that matches the needs of young people.

## **Areas for development**

- Improve the quality and consistency of line management of front line staff to ensure effective quality assurance and performance management.
- Develop planning to identify more effectively the specific outcomes expected, especially in relation to Every Child Matters.
- Involve young people more actively in evaluating, planning and monitoring of work, including decision-making opportunities about their youth provision.
- Ensure that all computers used in youth service settings conform to the council's safeguarding and protection policies and practices.
- Develop further opportunities to engage vulnerable young people in youth service activities, especially those from minority ethnic groups and those with defined learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## 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 youth service contribution to outcomes for young people is adequate. Many initiatives contribute well to these outcomes. Accredited work on sexual health contributes significantly to young people's personal, social and mental well-being. Commissioned work from the voluntary sector, often in collaboration with the youth service, also makes a significant contribution to 'being healthy', by providing accessible information and services which raise young people's awareness, builds their confidence and enables them to make informed choices about their lifestyles and relationships. Young people have opportunities to develop their confidence in taking responsibility for their own actions, gaining awareness of their rights, and making informed choices that help reduce risk-taking behaviour. Young people generally feel safe in youth service settings, within which there is good awareness of safeguarding issues, with security checks generally tight. Progression and achievement are recognised and celebrated through accredited learning experiences. Young people have opportunities to contribute to the evaluation of provision using a variety of feedback methods. However, this has yet to develop into consistent, city-wide practice that engages young people in regular decision-making about planning, evaluating and monitoring of provision. Young people gain skills that contribute to their employability, for example through initiatives funded by the Key Fund and the Big Boost. Collaborations between the youth service and Connexions' personal advisers increase the opportunities for young people to engage in training, education and employment.

## 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. The majority of work observed during the inspection showed that young people are developing knowledge, understanding and skills in a range of learning activities. For example, as part of an accredited sexual health course, young people showed that they were knowledgeable about sexual matters that affected their personal health, including some of the moral and social factors that account for contemporary sexual behaviour and attitudes. The quality of this work has helped to develop these young people's awareness and confidence. In a number of activities observed, young people showed evidence of developing their skills in planning, organising, budgeting and fundraising, all of which have helped them to develop confidence in making informed decisions and taking responsibility for their own actions. Work of this standard was seen in local authority sessions and in commissioned work from partner agencies in the voluntary sector.

6. However, not all activities reach this standard, which limits the ability of some young people to achieve in line with their potential. In one session seen, for example, a lack of detailed planning meant there was insufficient emphasis placed on raising young people's expectations sufficiently highly to ensure that it brought about improvements across a range of different skills.

7. Across the local authority, the quality of youth work practice is adequate, and occasionally good or better. Local authority workers have very good relationships with the young people they serve. Young people, in turn, say that they trust the adults with whom they come into contact, and believe that staff work hard to provide interesting and varied activities. Across the service there is consistency in using a standard recording template for planning and evaluating all local authority youth work. However, while most planning is adequate, and is carried out diligently by all staff, there is too much variation in the overall quality of provision across the service. Where it is best and most effective in bringing about improvements, workers know well the individual and group needs of their young people, and they plan activities that stimulate, engage and aid learning. Planning of this quality is seen mostly in accredited courses that use well-established curricular syllabuses. Where planning is less effective, as in some open access sessions, workers are insufficiently precise in identifying what young people will gain from their involvement in the activities provided. Too often in these sessions, improvements occur in a piecemeal rather than planned way and do not always reflect the needs or potential of the participants.

8. The service's requirement for all workers to record every session's contribution to the outcomes in Every Child Matters is appropriate. However, the current approach does not provide a sufficiently clear indication of what has been achieved. In a number of sessions, there are limited opportunities for young

people to become actively involved in evaluating, planning and monitoring of work. Although young people are encouraged to voice an opinion about session related issues, there is little to indicate that they are able to take a more active role that directly influences what they receive, and how they receive it. Local democratic bodies for young people, such as area youth forums, are under-developed.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of the curriculum is adequate. The overall programme on offer reflects adequately the needs of young people. There are, for example, a number of opportunities for young people to engage in health related activities, gain accreditation, develop their personal and social skills, as well taking part in leisure activities as part of free choice sessions. Recent developments in the youth service curriculum, to reflect the outcomes of Every Child Matters, are good, but are still at an early stage of development. Local authority staff are fully aware of the need to plan a curriculum that focuses on improving one or more of these outcomes, although the level of audit in relation to the identified needs of the young people is under-developed and too inconsistent in quality across the authority. Insufficiently robust quality assurance procedures, including data collecting and analysis mean that these inconsistencies in curricular provision and quality have yet to be addressed fully.

10. The overall quality of accommodation is mostly adequate or better, although in some sessions observed, the nature of the building limited access to resources. These limitations were seen in particular in sessions where the building was a community-based facility that served the needs of adults more readily than that of young people. In the vast majority of youth settings the environment is safe, well lit and inviting. Overwhelmingly, young people use equipment safely and sensibly, although the computers that are used for internet access in some local authority youth centres are not linked to the council network and are not part of the city-wide secure network.

11. The vast majority of youth service workers are well qualified with experience and expertise that matches the needs of young people. Good use is made of centrally provided corporate training that covers aspects of safeguarding, including child protection, and other health and safety issues. However, the service has yet to develop a robust approach to identifying other training needs that arise from performance management, and quality assurance reviews and processes that identify other areas of personal training needs; this includes assessment of the impact that training has on the quality of provision for young people.

## Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic leadership and management are adequate. Proposed changes to the service management structure better suit the needs of staff and young people, and embrace the strategic direction of the local authority in moving towards a fully integrated children's service.



13. The service's self-assessment is accurate in its grades for the three key aspects, but does not always give sufficient evidence. For example, there is a lack of information about outcomes for young people because this information has yet to be collected regularly, and analysed systematically. The move to an electronic database to record and collate participation, accreditation and other aspects of involvement from young people is timely but has yet to be implemented fully.

14. Partnership links are mainly good, and help contribute to the overall quality of youth service provision across the authority. The overarching vision for the youth service is sound, and based logically on identified local and national priorities. However, the vision for the service's future is not yet fully understood by all workers and partner agencies, although they accept that change is needed in order to move the service forward. This lack of clarity is due, in part, to the lack of a detailed youth service action plan that outlines clearly all priorities and actions, timescales, success measures and costs. Assessment of value for money in all planned activities, including commissioned work, is under-developed.

15. Operational leadership and management are adequate overall. Senior and middle managers have a shared vision for moving the service forward. They appreciate the efforts of front line workers, and have generally established sound relationships with them. However, line management is too inconsistent across the service, with an insufficiently robust approach to quality assurance procedures and performance management. The planning link to the outcomes in Every Child Matters is sound, but workers get little feedback about the quality of their recording, or the quality of content or the issues raised. Too little use is currently made of first hand evaluations by the young people about the services and activities they receive.

16. Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities are under-represented across the service. Young people from different minority ethnic groups are also under-represented, although the youth service is targeting greater involvement from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

17. Although the youth service takes safeguarding issues very seriously, and recent updates to checks by the Criminal Record Bureau for all staff is an indication of this, concerns remain. For example, staff are aware of their health and safety responsibilities, but safeguarding relating to computer usage in some centres has not been addressed. Similarly, procedures for recording and reporting different types of anti-social behaviour are not yet robust enough.