



**Better  
education  
and care**

# Youth Work in Islington

– Islington Young People's Services Report

Islington Children's Services Authority Area

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## Introduction

1. Youth work is located within Islington Young People's Services, together with play work and Connexions and forms part of the Community Education Division of Children's Services. The Head of Service is accountable to the Assistant Director, Community Education. The management team includes an Assistant Head of Service, Connexions Manager, four Area Officers, a Positive Activities Co-ordinator and a Training and Development manager. The service currently employs 300 staff, equivalent to 136 full time posts. The budget for youth work is £2.2 million, a further £2.5 million is generated through external funding, £1.5 million of which is from the Connexions Partnership.

2. Youth work is delivered through 31 units. These include youth clubs, adventure playgrounds, detached youth work programmes and project based work. Approximately 20% of the budget is used to commission youth work from voluntary and community sector partners. A further 5% of the budget is used to second staff to voluntary organisations. There are 13,760 young people in the 13-19 age range. The service reaches approximately 28% of these.

3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work. Inspectors considered the service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation and observed a sample of youth work sessions in the borough as well as work in the JAR neighbourhood study area.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

4. Islington council provides adequate youth work that delivers satisfactory value for money. The service reaches a good proportion of teenagers. Whilst the standards of young people's achievements are good there is a body of work that lacks an educational focus and therefore fails to challenge and stretch young people sufficiently. Universally, youth workers and young people have very good relationships. Youth work practice is good overall but planning and recording is inconsistent across the borough. The breadth of programmes is good but the historic location of some provision and that which is commissioned through the voluntary sector is not based on a current needs analysis. Premises vary greatly in quality. The vision for young people's services is insufficiently defined or communicated. Funding levels are good and the high level of external funding is used well to enhance provision. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Good work has taken place to improve failing provision and young people are involved in visiting and assessing youth work programmes. The use of management information to assess the performance of the service is underdeveloped. The Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

infrastructure is currently inadequate to gather data efficiently. Safeguarding arrangements are in place but Service managers do not adopt a sufficiently consistent approach to monitoring compliance in the case of commissioned work. On a day to day basis managers support staff well but not all service wide initiatives are implemented effectively.

### Strengths

- The standards of young people's achievements are good
- Youth work practice is good overall
- Staff and young people have very good relationships
- The proportion of young people using the service is good
- A broad range of opportunities is available to young people

### Areas for development

- The consistency of outcomes for young people across programmes
- The educational focus of youth work and its planning and recording
- The strategy and priorities for young people's services and the historical location of some provision
- The poor quality of some premises and inadequate ICT infrastructure
- The use of management information

### 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	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

5. The service makes a good contribution to *Every Child Matters* outcomes in a number of areas. Young people's physical health is effectively promoted through well integrated sports and other physical activities, including football, basketball and dance. 'Access to Sport' successfully promotes not only participation but builds the capacity of local young people to lead sports activities. The service contributes to Pulse N7, a successful one stop shop supporting young people's physical and mental health. There is a good focus on reducing anti-social behaviour and the service's work in this area is highly valued by partners. Clubs and projects provide a safe haven for many young people where they receive good personal support from caring adults. The range of provision is good and a very good proportion of teenagers regularly take part. Many young people are keen to take responsibility, volunteer and lead activities for others; they are well supported in doing so. Information, advice and guidance is provided through the Connexions service. Good support is offered through the REACH programme to looked after children and care leavers.

## Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. Overall the standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice are good. The progress that young people make though differs between settings. In most settings they make good progress; in the remainder it is at least satisfactory.

7. In the best sessions, young people make good gains and in some their achievement is outstanding. In the best sessions, young people achieve very well. In a minority achievement is outstanding. At the White Lion Centre young people developed skills in photography, ICT, music and music technology. At St Mary's Youth Club participants developed dance, performance skills and learnt team work. They make great strides in their personal development, grow in confidence and are able to take responsibility, leading activities for other users. In these settings there is a purposeful environment where users are fully engaged in what is on offer. These units have a strong infrastructure to support young people's development; good leadership, skilled staff who plan and record work carefully, a strong focus on learning and development, and good quality premises and equipment. In the less successful sessions there is insufficient focus on young people's learning. These sessions lacked an emphasis on developing relevant skills, knowledge and understanding.

8. There is a strong ethos of support, empathy with and encouragement for young people. Staff take pride in young people's progress and achievements. There is good personal support for individuals and a well established tradition of young people being nurtured and helped to take responsibility within the service. Since 2003, over 100 young people have successfully undertaken an access course for youth and play work. They are well supported to take leadership roles within the community and good examples were seen of young people's active involvement in local affairs. For example through the Easy Club young people with disabilities have successfully sought grant aid and are planning a conference for others with a disability. However in some youth centres young people's involvement is superficial and limited to choices about what activities they would like.

9. Planning and recording of youth work is inconsistent across programmes with a variety of tools in use. In the least successful work, planning does not give enough attention to young people's learning and progress. As a result the work does not sufficiently challenge young people. Conversely, some planning and recording is very good and has a strong focus on the outcomes sought. Accreditation is well used in some settings and not others. Where it is used well it helps successfully match work to meet young people's interests and needs. Overall the use of accreditation is not sufficiently well established. Young people respond very well to youth workers, they are respectful and behaviour is consistently good. Attitudes to each other, staff and the wider community are generally positive and co-operative. In some projects where part time staff are working in challenging circumstances, they lack the capacity to make a significant enough impact on the outcomes for young people.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of curriculum and resources is satisfactory. There is a good range of provision that is well used by young people. This includes youth clubs, adventure play, information, advice and counselling, detached work, Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP), Summer University, work with young refugees and asylum seekers and looked after children. Outdoor education and residential experiences are well utilised. However there is a lack of coherence in planning provision and the curriculum. The curriculum offer is uneven at a local level. Programmes in youth clubs and projects vary in scope, quality and effectiveness. Whilst many programmes tackle important issues such as race and culture others do not. Needs analysis does not effectively inform service development. The historical location of some provision, including that commissioned through the voluntary sector is not based on a current needs analysis. Some areas of the borough are less well served than others.

11. The new curriculum framework and guidance has not yet had a marked impact on youth work practice. There is a lack of understanding of the youth work curriculum by youth workers and this restricts opportunities for young people in a minority of settings. In contrast there are some excellent examples where young people pursue and develop their interests and where they make outstanding

progress. For example, The Summer University provides an excellent range of activities including the opportunity to develop skills in animation and sound recording. At Freightliners City Farm young people learn expertise in animal care and horticulture.

12. The service reaches approximately 28% of 13-19 year olds, a very good proportion. However users of the service do not always reflect the local community. Some clubs are attended almost exclusively by young men and older teenagers. Young people from Kurdish and Turkish backgrounds are less likely to use the provision. There are insufficient plans in place to respond to these needs. The service has made adequate progress in implementing measures under the special educational needs and disability act (SENDA). Approximately three quarters of premises have access for those with mobility difficulties.

13. Premises vary greatly in quality. There are some excellent facilities, for example at the Islington Boat Club, alongside some that are shabby and poorly furnished. There are, however, plans in place to re-develop two centres and build a new youth centre as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. Staff manage well with what they have at their disposal and consistently create safe and welcoming environments for young people.

14. There is a good focus on training and development. Around 75% of youth workers have a local or national youth work qualification, a significant improvement since 2005. Staff are mostly well deployed. Many are well established, they know the community and young people very well.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Strategic and operational leadership and management are satisfactory overall but a vision for young people's services is insufficiently defined or communicated. As a consequence, planning for service development is short term.

16. Funding levels are good; external income is high. The service responds well when additional resources become available and managers make very good use of funding opportunities to extend opportunities for young people. Partnerships are successful in extending the provision, for example through the development of sports and vocational opportunities. Connexions provision is a part of the broader service offer to young people and work with youth workers is generally well integrated.

17. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The strengths and weaknesses of projects and programmes are clearly identified by the service and closely match the findings of the inspection. Observations of practice are routinely undertaken by managers. Young people have undertaken their own evaluation of provision. Focused work has been undertaken to improve failing provision, including helpful work by the training and development team. These activities have been successful in improving poorer provision. Work that is commissioned through voluntary sector organisations is also monitored. However the local



authority makes insufficient use of performance indicators to judge the effectiveness of provision.

18. The collection and use of data is underdeveloped. A new electronic management information system is being introduced which can provide very good data. However not all units currently use the system. Its introduction throughout the service is inhibited by the poor ICT infrastructure; too many projects have no access to up to date computers. The service management team, with good support from corporate services, are beginning to bring together a range of information to evaluate the performance of the service. Some early work has taken place on identifying value for money measures. However the systematic analysis and use of data and other management information is not yet embedded.

19. The service has appropriate policies and guidelines to safeguard young people and staff. A programme of relevant training is in place. Staff directly employed by the local authority undergo mandatory Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. For work commissioned from the voluntary sector, it is a condition of the grant aid that staff should have CRB clearance. Service managers do not however adopt a sufficiently consistent approach to monitoring compliance.

20. On a day to day basis managers are visible and accessible to staff and this contributes to the good morale within the service. Supervision and appraisal are in place and staff feel well supported. However some important initiatives such as curriculum planning using the new framework and the routine collection of management information are not consistently implemented.