



Gateshead Youth Service Report

Gateshead Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

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Introduction

1. Youth work in Gateshead is the responsibility of Youth and Community Learning, which is located within the Children and Young People's Service. The Head of Service has responsibility for play, youth and community learning, early years, Sure Start, extended schools and the teenage pregnancy strategy. In addition to three youth and community learning managers and five area officers, there are 44 full time and 110 youth support staff (15 full-time equivalents) the majority of whom are seconded to work within voluntary and community organisations.
2. Youth work is delivered from 13 directly maintained centres, 27 voluntary grant-aided centres, 8 community based service centres and 3 children's centres, as well as through outreach and detached provision. The net budget made available by the local authority in 2005-6 was £1,572,043, which represented 1.43% of the total expenditure on education. This was augmented by £522,607 additional income from external sources. The service estimates that it reaches 20% of young people aged 13-19 annually.
3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth 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 Bensham as part of the JAR neighbourhood study, as well as work in other parts of the borough.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Gateshead borough council provides an adequate youth service and delivers satisfactory value for money. Young people achieve well in the provision that is clearly focussed on learning. Most youth workers are well qualified and experienced although the quality of the practice observed was variable. Strong partnerships with the voluntary and community sector are effectively extending and enhancing provision. Leaders and managers have set a clear direction for the service and have a good understanding of many of the key areas for improvement. Plans are insufficiently focussed and management of the curriculum is weak. The service is well resourced but does not yet have robust management information and is, therefore, unable to determine how effectively or efficiently the resources are deployed.

Strengths

- Many young people, particularly in targeted provision, are making good progress.
- There is good provision to meet the needs of some vulnerable, excluded and minority groups.
- Strong partnerships with the voluntary and community sector effectively extend and enhance provision.
- The service has a clear sense of purpose and direction.

Areas for development

- A significant proportion of the provision observed during the inspection offered insufficient challenge.
- Young people's involvement in the design, delivery and quality assurance of provision is underdeveloped.
- The management and co-ordination of the curriculum is weak.
- The collection, interpretation and analysis of the data needed to inform planning is insufficiently robust.
- Young people's involvement in reviewing and recording their progress is inconsistent.

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 some areas but weak curriculum management and a lack of prioritisation is standing in the way of the service contributing its full potential. Youth workers have created welcoming environments in which young people feel safe and relaxed. There are good opportunities for some young people to gain formal accreditation for their achievements, though access to such opportunities is variable. The service provides good support to the Gateshead Youth Assembly and young people are being encouraged to represent their peers on some management committees and on the newly-established area youth fora. The effectiveness with which they are supported and enabled to play an active role in decision-making through these fora is variable. The service is making a significant contribution to the reduction in teenage pregnancy rates through a range of initiatives, including c-card outlets at youth and community centres, enabling young people to acquire condoms. Further work is needed to develop opportunities for volunteering and extend health awareness programmes in keeping with the authority's and the service's priorities.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. From the sample of youth work observed, the standard of young people's achievement was good overall. Young people in targeted provision such as the Young Women's Outreach Project and the Lobley Hill Alternative Education programme are achieving well, in many cases from a low base line of attainment. In this provision, young people are making demonstrable gains in their self-confidence and esteem, as well as developing a range of practical and interpersonal skills including first aid, cookery, driving, anger management and communication skills.

7. Young people's attendance at youth centres and projects is regular and sustained over time. They value the provision, show consideration to one another and to adults and, in some cases, are training as community volunteers. Where offered, young people value and take opportunities to gain formal accreditation for their achievements and progress.

8. Achievement was less good particularly, though not exclusively, in open access provision, where too many young people were passive recipients of the programme on offer. Those young people who are involved in the Gateshead Youth Assembly and the developing youth fora are able to articulate the skills and understanding they have developed as a result of their involvement. Across the

range of provision, however, young people's active engagement in decision-making processes is underdeveloped.

9. The quality of practice was good overall. Young people readily seek advice and information from youth workers and rate highly the quality of the advice they receive. Youth workers are aware of the range of services to which they can refer young people for specialist advice. They know the young people well, have developed positive relationships with them and established appropriate boundaries for behaviour. This contributes to a welcoming environment where young people feel safe, relaxed and happy to socialise. In the best practice, programmes were carefully planned, workers knew the subject matter well and were able to generate discussions and activities that involved and inspired the participants. At the Bangladeshi Outreach project, for example, workers skilfully and sensitively managed a group discussion on racism with a mixed group of white and Bangladeshi young men whose attitudes towards minority groups in their community demonstrably changed by the end of the session.

10. In some of the practice observed, workers had planned what they wished to achieve but lacked the expertise to implement their ideas effectively. They paid insufficient attention to the dynamics of the group or to the needs of the individuals within it. In the open-access provision observed, too much was reliant on routine recreational activities and there was limited involvement of young people in planning and evaluation.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate overall. The service has a clear and comprehensive curriculum statement that defines the core curriculum, the processes and values that underpin it, the range of activities to support it and outcomes for young people. This document has recently been revised and now makes reference to Every Child Matters outcomes. The management and co-ordination of this curriculum is weak. Curriculum plans, where they exist, pay little reference to the needs of young people that have been identified and prioritised either locally or strategically. Some staff are confused about what constitutes the new curriculum and the extent to which they are able to translate the document into a workable and responsive programme for young people is highly variable. Key aspects of the curriculum are not supported by in-service training and development opportunities, nor by learning resources. There is limited access to information and communications technology to support the curriculum.

12. Well resourced and accessible provision is supporting the needs of vulnerable, excluded or minority groups such as teenage mothers, young Asian women, young people with learning difficulties and disabilities and persistent school refusers. A gender imbalance in the take up of open-access provision favours young men, and there is limited integration of young people with special needs into mainstream provision. There has been insufficient consultation with non-users of the service to identify needs and barriers to inclusion. Whilst some

opportunities, such as outdoor education, are offered borough wide, provision has developed on a more ad hoc basis rather than as the result of a coherent strategy and is, therefore, not available to all young people. A statement of entitlement is in place for all young people, but is not monitored.

13. The service makes good use of community premises in local neighbourhoods to extend the availability of provision. Despite significant investment in recent years, a high proportion of these premises are not fully accessible for those with mobility difficulties, some are in poor condition and others are clustered in the same area. The service has recently completed a premises review in order to attend to these difficulties, to rationalise its use of premises and to ensure that they all meet requisite standards.

14. Effective safeguarding procedures are in place, including risk assessments for activities and accommodation, comprehensive child protection procedures and off-site guidelines. Procedures for the reporting of racist incidents are in place. Criminal Records Bureau clearance processes are effective.

15. Youth workers and managers are well qualified and experienced. Turnover is low and there are no significant recruitment problems. The service has good in-service sponsorship arrangements to enable some staff each year to complete the professional youth work qualification. A high percentage of part time staff have completed the initial level 2 training through an in-service course. A partnership has now been established with Gateshead College to deliver the NVQ2 in youth work from September 2006.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Strategic and operational leadership and management are adequate overall. The strong leadership from the Head of Service provides a clear sense of purpose and direction. The service has recently undertaken a re-organisation of management structures and re-focussed youth service provision on the 13-19 age, in line with national priorities. This process was well managed and the resulting improvements in internal communication, supervision and support systems are contributing to the high morale and motivation of staff.

17. Figures provided by the service indicate that it receives a level of funding from the authority that places it within the top quartile nationally for expenditure on youth services. Difficulties in disaggregating budgets for youth from adult and play provision indicate that these figures may not be entirely secure. The service estimates that it is reaching 41% of the 13-19 population of which 20% are active participants. It relies on paper systems for the collection of data, which have been unreliable and therefore of little value in monitoring, review or forward planning. An electronic system is due to be implemented within the next 12 months but, in the current absence of robust data, the service is not in a position to measure its cost effectiveness.

18. Senior and area managers have a sound grasp of many of the key areas for improvement. The service's forward plan is aspirational but is not supported by a delivery plan with measurable targets or defined accountabilities. Area plans, where they exist, are of variable quality. Strategies to support continuous improvement are under-developed. The expectation that managers will observe practice is not supported by mechanisms to ensure that this happens consistently. Too many of the service's partnership arrangements are not underpinned by written service-level or partnership agreements

19. The active involvement of young people in the specification, management and quality assurance of the youth service is under developed. The effectiveness of the newly-developed youth fora and of young people's contributions to management committees is highly variable. The service provides good support for the Gateshead Youth Assembly and the young people involved speak highly of the opportunity this has created for their voice to be heard.

20. The service has developed strong partnerships with a wide range of providers, including local community groups, national and regional social enterprise and strategic partnerships such as Connexions, and the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership. Partnership work is effective in extending the availability of the service to a wider number of young people and good use is made of specialist staff and partner agencies to enhance some programmes. Representatives from voluntary community centres speak highly of the contribution the service is making to their capacity to deliver neighbourhood services.