

Durham Youth Service Report

Durham Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Durham County Youth Service provides a wide range of youth work opportunities. Delivery is through 76 units or projects that include youth centres, community centres, school sites, mobile and street based work. Voluntary management committees made up of local people support almost all. The service is part of the Education in the Community Service, and is managed by a Head of Service and five Area Managers who have shared responsibility for youth and adult services. Operations are delivered by 4 full-time equivalent (fte) managers, 27 full-time workers, 22 substantive posts (9.2 fte) and 207 hourly paid youth workers (52 fte). The service is located in the Children and Young People's Service of the County Council. The teenage population is 44,400. The budget provided by the County Council for 2006/07 was £2,557 million, augmented by £1,707 million of external income, including £578k allocated to the Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds. In 2006/07 the service reached 20% of young people aged 13-19.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the service's self-assessment and met with officers, partner representatives and a cross section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out a number of direct observations of youth work sessions.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. The youth service is good and provides good value for money. Young people achieve well. Youth workers deliver consistently high standards across a wide range of provision in conjunction with partners and leadership and management are good. The council provides low core funding for the service that is well below that of statistical neighbours and other comparable authorities. Managers use the budget imaginatively and efficiently and outcomes for young people are good, but some areas of the county are less well served due to the financial constraints. The service has done well to raise a considerable amount of external monies, which have contributed significantly to raising standards and achieving outcomes but are unsustainable long term and restrict long-term planning and flexible delivery. Expectations of the service, coupled with demands to increase provision in some areas, are unrealistic given the current financial context.

Strengths

- Young people achieve to a consistently high standard and practice is good.
- The comprehensive internal inspection programme has led to improvements in standards.

- Strategic and operational management are good.
- A number of effective partnerships at local level enhances the range of provision.
- Good training and staff development programmes contribute to improvements in quality.

Areas for development

- In a few practical sessions, the recording of young people's learning was underdeveloped and there was insufficient challenge.
- There is insufficient strategic direction and commitment to equality and diversity.
- Young people are not consistently involved in shaping the service.

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	3
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: A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: 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 is making a good contribution to outcomes. A Healthy Youth Work Standard has been developed in partnership with the County Durham Primary Care Trust (PCT); 10 projects have achieved the standard to date. Sex and relationship education work is contributing to a reduction overall in teenage pregnancies, greater Chlamydia awareness and more young people signing up to the C-Card condom distribution scheme. The overall winner of the 'Youth Work that Works' annual award was a group of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who created a leaflet on sexual health for county-wide distribution. Over 1,900 young people took part in positive activities over the summer holiday period. Young Gay Men's project is providing good support and a safe place to meet for potentially vulnerable young people. Work with young

people who are looked after is in the early stages of development, however some good work has been achieved to date, including some accredited work in mainstream provision. Alternative curriculum work with schools is helping young people stay in education, prepare for employment or move to further education. Young people are successfully running the Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds; to date 45 young people have successfully allocated over £400k to projects across the county. Effective safeguarding policies and practice 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. Many young people achieve high standards. Their knowledge about health, personal development and decision-making has been enhanced by their involvement in structured sex and relationship education sessions, achieving a range of national awards, and running programmes to distribute Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds. Recording achievement and accrediting learning are central to the delivery of youth work programmes. Young people have designed their own systems of recording their learning and in the majority of sessions were able to articulate their progress.

6. The county-wide Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme is well managed and young people achieve an impressive number of awards each year. Alternative curriculum work with some schools is providing a wide range of accredited learning opportunities, and improvements in attendance, behaviour and overall attainment at Key Stage 4. Young people achieve excellent standards at the Gilesgate Community College through sessions run by the Mid-Durham Projects team, which concentrates on environmental issues. Young people's involvement in delivery is enhanced through the area 'Rep groups', where they are consulted on unit, area and service plans, and can influence service delivery. Many young people make good personal gains through targeted work, in particular the work with young people who are disabled and some of the Youth Fora activity, such as at Derwentside District, which has been recognised nationally as achieving 'Beacon status' for its work to involve young people.

7. Youth work staff are enthusiastic, display high morale and strong commitment to their work. In the majority of sessions observed in the review, youth work practice was of a high standard. Youth workers have a thorough understanding of youth work principles and apply this very effectively within a community education model. At the Coxhoe youth project, youth workers displayed very good skills and subject knowledge in delivering a session for young women and men on sexual health. Youth workers skilfully plan, implement and evaluate programmes and sessions. However, in a minority of work, insufficient challenge and low levels of expectation weakened the potential achievements of young people. In a few sessions, the recording of young people's learning was

underdeveloped, particularly so in centre-based and open access work. In these sessions planning, monitoring and evaluation lacked rigour.

8. A large number of youth workers have been trained to deliver sex and relationship education through the Sexual Health in Perspective project (SHIP) project, in partnership with the PCT. This has provided them with the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality work, achieving good outcomes for young people and making a valuable contribution to a reduction in teenage pregnancies across the county. Most centres and units are recognised as achieving the county 'Investing in Children' standard recognising high standards of commitment and delivery in their work. An annual 'youth work that works' award recognises and shares good practice across the county; this and other initiatives including an impressive internal inspection programme, have led to improvements in standards overall.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is good overall. A broad range of provision is offered across the county in a variety of venues. The partnerships established with communities greatly enhance the range of provision. Detached work, targeted work with specific groups such as young travellers, and work with schools all complement the predominantly centre-based provision and offer a variety of good quality delivery points. The service's curriculum responds well to the needs of young people. It imaginatively links the five outcomes to youth work programmes and to corporate objectives. The curriculum framework is now dated and is scheduled for replacement; to supplement this the curriculum coordinator has produced a range of guidance statements that offer good direction for staff. This is underpinned by the provision of effective training, which equips staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the key curriculum priorities. Good quality curriculum resources support learning. Young people are actively engaged in making decisions about responses to the five outcomes at area level through the 'Rep groups' and at unit level through representation on some, though not all, of the centre management committees.

10. The service provides a number of examples of effective targeted work for young people at risk of social exclusion and those in rural isolated locations. Provision for young gay men provides the chance for them to make new friends and the opportunity to discuss sensitive issues in a safe non-judgemental environment. Good work is being done with disabled young people through specific groups in each area, but integration into mainstream provision is less well developed. Targeted work with young people who are looked after is in the early stages of development. The needs of some groups though are not being met.

11. Youth work staff are appropriately qualified and generally deployed well. Due to budget constraints, sessional staff are employed on restricted contracts and some centres generally close during holidays, causing in some cases disruption to the continuity of provision. Administrative support for youth workers varies considerably and in some cases is insufficient. Supervision and annual appraisal

are undertaken regularly and are valued by staff. Standards of accommodation vary considerably across the county. The 12 buildings owned by the council are of high quality and are used well by young people and the wider community. Associated resources to support the curriculum are good. However the service uses a large number of buildings that it does not own or maintain and in these, standards and resources are not as good. Comprehensive health and safety checks of all accommodation used are undertaken regularly.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. The service is well established as part of the Education in the Community Service and is linked closely to wider corporate activity. It has been effective in implementing its key aims, negotiated with young people, of "enjoy, achieve and realise your potential". Youth work is making a valuable contribution to the Children and Young People's Service targets through a range of innovative work. The budget allocated to the youth service is well below that of comparable authorities and has been reduced in this year. Efficient and imaginative use is made of available funding and the service is creative in securing additional external resources. The necessity to do so requires staff to divert their attentions to fundraising at the cost of their youth work. For these reasons the service is able to maintain good progress towards meeting its performance indicators. However, it relies too much on external funding to compensate for inadequate core funding.

13. Good annual self-assessment at unit, area and service level lead to continuous improvement. A very good internal inspection programme, where each centre or unit is inspected at least once each year has led to significant improvements in standards. These arrangements, linked well to a management information system, are providing senior managers with good quality monitoring information. Service, area and unit plans are all of good quality and reflect national and local priorities. The production of plans involves detailed consultation with young people and real attempts are being made at an operational level to involve them in determining provision. There are, however, inconsistencies in the levels of young people's involvement at strategic and operational levels and there is limited opportunity for young people to engage in decision making at county level.

14. There is insufficient strategic direction given to equality and diversity issues and a lack of precise target setting. There are some good examples of effective practice, but these have been largely piecemeal and rely too much on the good work of individuals and are not part of a planned strategy.

15. The partnerships established with some secondary schools are of high quality and are contributing well to outcomes. There has been some good work with Connexions and the Youth Engagement Service at an operational level, such as the Positive Activities programme, but partners are not working together sufficiently well at a strategic level to meet the needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training, young offenders and other vulnerable

groups. Grant aid arrangements are good and support both infrastructure and direct delivery.

16. A good range of policies and procedures effectively safeguard young people, including good health and safety and risk assessment and good off-site educational visits procedures. Criminal Records Bureau checks are undertaken and are up to date. All staff have received at least Level 1 Child Protection training, with most having received the safeguarding update; all are scheduled to complete by year end. All buildings have been assessed for compliance with special educational need and disability legislation, but not all are currently fully compliant for those with mobility difficulties.