



Devon Youth Service Report

Devon Children's Services Authority Area

Publication Type	Published	Reference no.
All	10 October 2006	878

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: 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

Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes	3
Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects	
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	5

Introduction

1. Devon Youth Service is located within the Learning and Educational Effectiveness Division of the new Directorate for Children and Young People. Prior to 2003 it was devolved and locally-managed by community colleges. The service is led by a principal youth officer (PYO) who manages a team of three divisional youth officers (DYO) and a quality and performance officer. The DYOs lead 10 locality teams between them which are mainly coterminous with city or district council boundaries. Of the 121 full-time equivalent (FTE) youth work posts, 51 are full time. Seventeen percent of the 63,827 13-19 population participates in the work of the service. The budget made available to the youth service by the local authority currently stands at £4,175,917 and has increased by £125,000 in 2005-06 and a further £250,000 in 2006-07. Partnership working ensures that considerably more resources are dedicated to youth work in the county.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self assessment and key service documentation. They met with officers, a cross section of staff, representatives of the voluntary sector and other partners. Direct observations of a sample of youth work sessions were carried out in the Wonford area of Exeter and in Bideford as part of the JAR neighbourhood study area as well as other observations of practice across the county.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Young people in Devon are served well by the youth service. Achievement and practice are good. New resources have been secured as a result of increased investment by the council but not all main towns are provided for. Partnerships are constructive and creative and managers make an informed contribution to multi agency planning. As such, the youth service is well placed to take forward proposals for the greater integration of wider youth support services. There is some good innovative practice. The service is well managed and has an increasingly good profile within the community and the council. However, the local authority has insufficient means of evaluating the strategic impact of the service and the local application of some county policies is inconsistent in areas such as training and supervision. The youth service is effective and provides good value for money.

Strengths

- Achievement and youth work practice are good.

- The service provides an impressive range of activities and programmes.
- Partnership arrangements are very effective.
- The workforce is competent and committed.
- Management is good and forward looking.

Areas for development

- Improve the capacity of strategic managers to measure the impact of youth work and build fully on the strengths of the youth service.
- Tackle inconsistencies at divisional and local level.
- Seek ways of establishing a youth work presence in all major towns.

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: 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 judges itself as making a good contribution across all five ECM outcome areas. Inspectors concur with this judgement. An increasing range of youth projects are universal in nature and provide regular opportunities for young people to enjoy themselves and learn. Residential weekends, international visits and county wide youth festivals are well supported by young people. The service plays an important role in developing systems to promote young people's involvement in decision making processes. It also advocates well for young people and has done much to develop their political literacy. Individual advice provided by specialist youth workers in relation to health and relationships is good and at times compensates for the otherwise poor access to support services in rural areas.

Pupil inclusion projects linked with schools complement the formal curriculum well. Staff are very mindful of the need to risk assess activities.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Young people achieve well. The relationship which young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities establish with workers and their peers assists greatly in their development, examples of which were seen at the Kool Klub and the Knight Club. In a high proportion of settings, young volunteers take responsibility for planning and overseeing activities, willingly and to good effect. A combination of simple, but well-designed, recording systems, training events and good youth work practice have assisted young volunteers in articulating what they gain from such involvement. Peer mentoring at Tiverton High School has sharpened young mentor's skills in listening and managing relationships. Young people conducting a consultation exercise on the streets in Bideford did so with confidence and assurance, demonstrating their ability to put their training into practice.

6. In work with schools, pupils are more amenable to addressing their disruptive behaviour and, through youth advice sessions, more able to make informed decisions about particular personal or academic issues. Young people are learning about political and democratic processes through their involvement in youth forums and international visits. Members of the new Newport young people's project had contributed well to its formation. In much of the work seen, young people demonstrated maturity and self assurance. Some were able to act spontaneously to organise games and competitions. Young people participating in the good spread of outdoor education activities learn to co-operate and work as a team. Achievement was more modest in a minority of sessions when, for instance, young people were engrossed in casual Internet use or where their long term involvement in a project manifested itself as simply 'somewhere to go'.

7. Practice is good and youth workers are well motivated and generally skilled. Inspectors observed examples of gentle, supportive but challenging work in groups and in one-to-one sessions. As a team, workers at The Bank in Ashburton, for example, were firm with those few members failing to adhere to ground rules. In other settings, workers modelled skills linked to those which the project was designed to promote, for instance, listening and inclusion. A sense of progression was evident in the better sessions and workers are generally confident in the use of accreditation. A variety of recording methods have evolved, with some staff teams adopting a local but constructive approach to monitoring which helps them reflect on and plan their work.

8. In the weaker practice, workers lacked zest, had an insufficient focus on learning outcomes, and did not have the skills to deal with low level dissent. A sizable minority of sessions had too few young people in attendance. Local needs analysis is satisfactory and improving but not all projects are succeeding in engaging target groups.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. Increased funding by the council has led to new and joint use of buildings, three mobile projects, a detached team, computer hardware and increased staffing. Well equipped youth centres such as Chudleigh and the Station in Ottery St Mary demonstrate the strong link between good resources and the provision of a rich and engaging variety of activities. Resources are greatly enhanced through partnerships and the long-standing and determined action of local communities in providing youth facilities for local young people. Notwithstanding this, some of the larger towns in Devon do not have suitable buildings to provide a base for youth work. Not all centres are compliant with current Special Educational Needs and Disability Act legislation.

10. Recent service plans identified the need for greater curricular coherence. In part, the service has succeeded in achieving this with the introduction of new and well presented guidance. Evidence of impact on practice is limited with some staff viewing the guidance as incidental to their planning. Good, practical steps have been taken to operate in a more inclusive manner; work with Gypsy families has been successfully established and opportunities are increasing for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are looked after in public care. Work linked to sexuality has a low profile and there remains a need for yet more targeted provision to ensure the inclusion of minority groups.

11. A commitment to professional development is paying dividends and supporting change. Difficulties in recruiting to full-time posts have been ameliorated by enabling some trainees to undertake qualifying training whilst in post. Part-time staff and volunteers have more development opportunities than previously, with some local areas far more responsive than others: this is creating unacceptable levels of disparity.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. The service is emerging from a period of significant organisational change and is now embarking on a new direction as part of an integrated Children and Young People's Services Directorate. It is well placed to do so, but strategically the local authority is not evaluating youth work and the service in terms of outcomes and impact well enough. Consequently, the council is not building fully on the service's strengths.

13. Youth service managers have succeeded in increasing the visibility of the service. They are well able to identify the key issues needed for further improvement and lines of communication and accountability are clearer than in the recent past. . . Morale is good and staff are welcoming of what they see as incremental improvements over the last few years. A participation rate of 17% of 13-19 year old is satisfactory.

14. Activities are risk assessed and secure incident reporting systems are in place. Health and safety audits are carried out some of which have unearthed concerns in shared buildings. Workers have been quick to act on such issues. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and corporate child protection procedures are applied and supported by associated training. The "Checking it Out" document has been well received and provides good child protection guidance for the voluntary sector and general public.

15. Given the size of the county, areas and divisions rightly operate with a degree of autonomy. Staff welcome service-wide policies on entitlements to, for instance, training and supervision, but are frustrated by their inconsistent application locally. The centrally-located quality and development team is largely effective in its county-wide functions in relation to developmental functions such as curriculum and training. Quality assurance reviews are serving a useful purpose, but not all review recommendations are fully followed up at area level. New locally devised data collection systems are due to be launched imminently and work is being undertaken on comparing unit costs. The service is able to make intelligent value for money judgments.

16. Joint planning arrangements with Connexions and the youth offending team (YOT) are fruitful, forward looking and bode well for the future. Work is being undertaken to devise and introduce common standards across a disparate range of youth, information and counselling services. In a few selected instances, the YOT is ceding appropriate elements of its caseload work to local youth workers. Partnerships with the voluntary youth sector are good with the sector informing grant-aid decisions, aiding communication and assisting in administering CRB procedures. A recent review has helped clarify roles within and between the sectors but scope exists for even greater clarity. The service has entered into a number of long term partnership arrangements with independent community based youth projects. Whilst challenging to manage on both sides, these are helping build capacity and extending what is on offer for young people.