

Youth Work in Blackburn with Darwen

Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Youth work in Blackburn with Darwen is provided through the Young People's Service (YPS) which is located in the Culture, Leisure and Sport Directorate. The head of YPS leads a strategic management team comprising three assistant heads each with responsibility for geographical and policy areas. Adventure Learning, participation and the youth bus are managed on a borough-wide basis. The YPS is commissioned by the Children's Services Directorate.
2. There are 40 full-time equivalent (fte) staff in the YPS. Fourteen are employed full-time in professional range youth work posts, five of whom have a borough-wide strategic lead covering vulnerable young people and those who are not in education, employment or training; community cohesion; sexual health and risk-taking behaviour; anti-social behaviour and youth voice. There are also 18 fte support workers and a small administration team. The remainder are part-time workers.
3. In 2007-08, the service had a budget of £1.37 million falling to £1.34 million in 2008-09. The service reached 15,433 young people, 16% of the age group. Levels of deprivation are high; 38% of the school aged population live in areas amongst the 10% most deprived nationally. About a quarter of the population is of Indian and Pakistani heritage and the proportion of the school age population from these communities is 37%.
4. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

5. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Young people are served adequately by YPS which provides a satisfactory range of activities to support their personal and social development. Young people's achievement is satisfactory overall with some being good. The service engages some of the borough's most vulnerable groups albeit that, more generally, participation rates of young people engaged in youth work activities are low. The quality of youth work practice is adequate, with a satisfactory understanding of the curriculum demonstrated by the majority of workers. Accreditation is not always used to best effect and young people are not always sufficiently challenged by workers. This limits young people's achievement. Youth forum members make an excellent contribution to civic life and political decision-making, although young people's involvement in day-to-day planning and evaluation of youth work is not as strong. Youth work is not sufficiently well led to secure the delivery of good practice in all provision. The quality of area and unit

planning is variable, targets are not always well conceived or measurable, and quality assurance is weak. The YPS is involved in a number of successful partnership programmes and voluntary sector partners enjoy a very positive relationship with the local authority. Arrangements for the provision of youth work has undergone significant change since April 2007 but the implementation of integrated youth support remains at a very early stage.

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	Leadership and management	1

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

Strengths

- There are examples of good standards of achievement by young people much of which is accredited.
- A high proportion of staff are qualified with appropriate professionally recognised qualifications.
- Partnership arrangements between the voluntary sector and local authority are good.

Areas for development

- Increase the numbers of young people engaged in youth work.
- Increase the active involvement by young people in the planning, development and quality assurance of youth work at all levels.
- Improve the capacity and quality of leadership and management.
- Ensure there are effective quality assurance and performance management systems in place.
- Communicate the strategy more effectively to establish the role and relationship of the YPS in the development of integrated youth support.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. Young people's achievement is satisfactory overall and some is good. Young people enjoy taking part in youth work and make progress in their personal and social development. In the best practice, they were fully engaged in stimulating and challenging activities focused on achieving positive learning outcomes. They could clearly articulate the importance of the work they were involved in and how they had grown in confidence and competence in organising themselves and planning together. For example, young people completing a health research project had learned about issues which affected their lives and could demonstrate good knowledge about matters such as smoking and HIV. They had grown in self-esteem and could talk confidently about their learning.

7. Young people were gaining new skills and experiences through their participation in formal accreditation opportunities in particular through the Princes Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh's award. Formal accreditation through AQA awards enabled them to extend their learning and knowledge in a range of settings and activities, for example go-karting, computer skills, football and peer youth inspection work. However, too often this work was pitched at a low level and an award too easily obtained. Young people did not fully understand the value or purpose of gaining the accreditation.

8. Too few opportunities exist for young people to become involved in decision-making. The inclusive youth forum provides a good example where they demonstrate the skills to make an excellent contribution to civic life and decision-making. This group is involved significantly in the Youth Opportunity Fund and has taken part in debates at a strategic level nationally and locally, for example through the Local Strategic Partnership. Overall however, young people are not included sufficiently in decision-making at a local level and insufficient opportunities are taken to promote young people as senior members of their clubs or projects.

9. The quality of youth work practice is adequate overall. In the best sessions work was well planned and made full and effective use of the skills, experience and expertise of workers. In the Accrington Road youth club young people were fully engaged in a lively and interesting programme which had been planned jointly and with their interests and needs at heart. In most settings youth workers knew the young people and the area well and had formed positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect. At times, however, too limited use was made of these positive relationships and opportunities to capture young people's interest and engagement were not taken. Behaviour was generally appropriate and young people moderated their language and attitudes suitably when challenged.

10. Group work was used effectively, particularly in projects such as the Youth Forum, to encourage and enable young people to take responsibility for planning and discussion about issues that were of concern and interest to them. This was not common practice in all sessions however. In the less effective sessions youth workers lacked confidence in their own skills and ability, and did not have clear plans or structures in place for the activities being delivered. These sessions often lacked purpose and direction. In a few instances youth workers provided insufficient challenge for young people to extend their learning and the young people settled for undemanding recreational activities.

11. Processes for recording and evaluating youth work are in place but are not applied consistently to improve quality. There are too few formal opportunities for workers to share and disseminate good practice although informal networks provide valuable support particularly for some workers.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

12. The quality of the curriculum and resources is adequate. Young people have access to a satisfactory range of youth work opportunities including centre-based, project work and detached work. However, the quality of such opportunities is variable and participation rates of young people engaged in youth work activities are low across the service.

13. The curriculum provides a clear strategic focus on the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes and a sixth additional priority of active citizenship and community cohesion. In the best practice the curriculum was interesting and innovative, well matched both to strategic direction and young people's needs. For example, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were enjoying a varied and interesting programme of trying new experiences such as go-karting to visiting a mosque.

14. Staff are well qualified although changes since April 2007 have left the management and development role for youth work training unassigned. This in part has led to a reduction in the quality and volume of opportunities available. All staff have Criminal Record Bureau checks, child protection training is in place and there are suitable procedures for the recruitment and training of volunteers.

15. Deployment of staff is generally satisfactory and the staff profile reflects the ethnic diversity of communities well. There are good retention rates and sufficient staff to deliver the programmes. A recent initiative to place Asian workers in areas where predominantly White young people meet has been received well and had a positive impact on attitudes.

16. Accommodation is generally good and most buildings are fit for purpose, accessible and comply with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001). However, in some instances shared use of buildings with other community groups restricts activities for youth work. Equipment and specialist resources to support the delivery of the youth work curriculum are adequate overall but are not of a consistently high standard; access and availability is inconsistent across the

service, particularly in rural areas, although some staff have been resourceful in sharing curriculum resources between projects and centres. Resources for adventure learning are good and young people have good access to residential experiences. The availability of information and communications technology in centre-based provision is too limited. Health and safety issues are addressed adequately and activities appropriately assessed for risk.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

17. Leadership and management are inadequate. The roles of the new senior management team are not yet sufficiently well established nor are they having a positive impact on provision and outcomes. The success of the management team in driving change and providing the necessary leadership to improve youth work practice is currently unsatisfactory. The low participation rate by young people has not yet been sufficiently tackled. Day-to-day support of youth work staff varies considerably. Communication of strategy is not always effective and this lowers morale and leads to inadequate understanding amongst staff of the place of youth work in the emerging broader youth support arrangements.

18. Nonetheless, the strategic lead for the provision of services is clearer but implementation is in the early stages. The council sufficiently secures the provision of youth work and management of resources is adequate. The Children's Services Directorate priorities focus well on young people and informs the commission for the Youth Service through the YPS. The alignment of services within the commission provides an opportunity for collaboration and greater coherence across a range of provision to improve outcomes for young people.

19. The relationship between voluntary sector partners and the local authority is strong. The primary relationship for voluntary sector partners is through the local authority, the Children and Young People's Trust and the developing neighbourhood teams. Informal relationships between voluntary sector partners and YPS workers are also good, a factor which has added value to the youth work offer at local level.

20. Quality assurance processes and performance management systems, including monitoring and evaluation of youth work, are insufficiently rigorous to ensure practice is of a consistently good standard. For example, observation of practice by managers has been minimal and there is little formal feedback to staff. Management information systems are not yet fully operational or sufficiently robust and cannot be relied upon to provide the service with accurate data to inform planning and development.