



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

# **Estyn briefing to the Welsh Assembly Government's Children and Young People's Services Division (CYPSPD)**

## **outlining the**

# **Good features and shortcomings of local authority youth services**



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**Estyn briefing to the Welsh Assembly Government's Children and Young People's Services Division (CYPSP) outlining the *Good features and shortcomings of local authority youth services***

**September 2007 – August 2009**

This paper has been prepared on behalf of the 'Youth and local authority services team' in Estyn who can provide further information as required.

We have evaluated aspects of local authority youth service operational activity and management functions as evidenced through youth support services inspections.

We intend the judgements and recommendations in this paper to help local authority youth services continually improve and strive for high standards for young people. In addition, the paper aims to guide CYPSP to support the local authority youth service more effectively.

The evidence that we have used to support our judgements comes from youth support services inspections and re-inspections conducted between November 2007 and March 2009. During this period we conducted inspections in Conwy, Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, the Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham and re-inspections in Ceredigion and Denbighshire. Evidence has also been taken from our remit work looking at the use by local authority youth services of management information systems (MIS), and how well local authority youth services train their qualified youth support workers.

The evidence is listed with the recommendations for action. Good features, shortcomings and recommendations are identified. The range of good features identified by Estyn in its reports, demonstrates the service's dexterity in meeting the needs of young people. Where there are aspects identified as requiring improvement, interventions will need to be considered at both strategic and operational levels.

In considering the information contained in this paper, it is important to bear in mind that the local authority youth service is a statutory service with a duty to provide a quality service within the context of the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales, Extending Entitlement and the Youth Service Strategy.

**Standards**

In most local authority youth service settings observed, young people behave well and respond well to staff. In some, young people participate enthusiastically and build positive relationships with each other and staff. However, in a few youth service settings, young people behave poorly.

There is a significant contrast between the numbers of young people attending local authority youth service provision in different local authorities. In one authority, a higher proportion of young people aged 13-19 attend youth service activities in comparison with other local authorities and there has been significant improvement since the last

inspection. In two local authorities, the number of young people attending local authority youth service provision compares well with other local authority youth services in Wales. However, in two authorities, young people's overall engagement with the service is as low as 8% of the 11-25 population and young women are in the minority. Overall, there is a balance of males and females attending the youth service activities visited.

In two authorities, the services are making good use of a range of methods for accrediting young people's achievement and positive progress is being made in developing progression routes for accreditation. In another authority, most young people make good progress in developing their personal and social skills, but only a minority achieve accreditation for these skills. Generally there is some distance to go in supporting young people to achieve accredited outcomes. There is evidence in one authority of over 80% of young people in contact with school based youth work achieving accredited outcomes.

There is good participation in and achievement through the Duke of Edinburgh award in two of the authorities inspected. One authority is now reporting the highest number of awards as a percentage of the 14-25 population in Wales. However, in one authority, opportunities for young people to engage with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme outside of schools are too limited. The number of young people that complete and achieve Duke of Edinburgh Awards in another authority is decreasing.

In five authorities, most young people do not use or have much opportunity to develop bilingualism or Welsh language and culture in youth service settings.

### **Education and training**

In one authority, in most settings, planning is well developed and focused on outcomes for young people. In another authority, the youth service does not plan effectively on any level. In most settings, staff plan a broad and balanced programme. However, a minority of staff do not plan programmes and activities well. Too often, planning does not take into account key skills, basic skills or locally identified needs.

There are not enough staff to deliver services bilingually and staff sometimes fail to seize opportunities to develop the Welsh language and culture. In one youth service, staff provide good support for Welsh speakers and learners to develop their bilingual and Welsh language skills in the community. However, in three of the authorities visited, few staff plan to promote bilingualism or Welsh language and culture. There are limited training or recruitment opportunities to improve Welsh medium delivery.

In three authorities, the youth service provides a good balance of universal and targeted settings. However, in one authority, youth club provision is limited to the first two terms of the academic year, and the provision to target and support young people who do not attend youth clubs is very limited. In two authorities, access to youth service provision is inconsistent. In another authority, there is substantial duplication of services funded by the youth service in the same areas. In two authorities, accommodation is of good quality. In another, it is variable and there are no good agreements regarding shared use of buildings.

In two authorities, young people have good access to information services provided by the local authority youth service. In one authority, young people have good access to information, guidance and support through an effective central information service. However, in another authority there is a lack of cultural sensitivity as a result of failure to research local information needs.

## **Leadership and management**

Each local authority has, in its annual financial settlement from the Welsh Assembly<sup>1</sup> Government, a nominal element for the local authority youth service. Three of the youth services visited receive core funding that is between 20% and 36% higher than this nominal element. However, in one authority, only 36% of the nominal funding is used to fund the youth service. In another authority, only 53% of this sum is used to fund the youth service. In 2006-2007, one local authority youth service achieved a significant income over and above its core budget from the local authority. Fifty-six per cent of that local authority youth service's gross operating budget is from additional income compared with a Wales average of 37%.

The Youth Service Curriculum is not linked consistently to operational or strategic planning in three of the authorities inspected. In only one authority, service improvement is based on performance management, self-assessment, quality assurance and improving analysis of the data held in the service's management information system. Here, the majority of youth service assessments are consistent with inspection findings. Young people are consulted fully in this process. In another authority, managers have no informed overview of performance or quality. They have no real understanding of why they need that information. This is reflected in ineffective strategic and operational planning. Too many local authority youth services do not contribute fully to local authority strategic community plans and children and young people's plans.

In three of the authorities, service level agreements with the voluntary sector are not rigorous enough to help the youth service monitor outcomes. Another authority does not have service level agreements in place with voluntary organisations that receive grant funding from the authority. Quality assurance, performance management against shared objectives or the evaluation of value for money is not possible in these circumstances.

In all local authorities where youth support services have been inspected, at least one self-evaluation has been completed. Most of the self-evaluation reports are based on first hand evidence and identified priorities for improvement. However, the reports focus too much on descriptions of the activities offered, rather than evaluating their quality or outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Assembly Government distributes its annual Revenue Support Grant to each Council through a formula called the Standard Spending Assessment or SSA. The SSA is the amount which the Welsh Assembly Government assesses is required to provide, in relative terms, a standard level of service in the area.

Data on outcomes for young people has not been fully developed and there has been limited use of data to inform more effective planning and service improvement. Most local authority youth services do not use robust management information systems (MIS), although there is increasing use of two commercially available systems, 'Quality Education Solutions Youth Services' and 'Cognisoft Insight and Outreach'. This means that planning at all levels is hindered by the lack of information. In addition, there is often only limited evaluation of how effective the youth service is in meeting young people's needs. The capacity to influence corporate budget decisions by reference to evidence of impact is therefore limited. However, at least one youth service has been able to influence local authority prioritisation by presenting effectively to cabinet and scrutiny utilising data on outcomes for young people. This has resulted in a much higher profile for youth work and increased investment in resources.

Three of the local authorities visited have made slow progress or have not taken action on all the recommendations made by Estyn in previous inspections. This reflects poor leadership and management and limited understanding of improvement strategies. In one authority, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

Most youth services provide a good range of staff training opportunities which are shared with partners. Two youth services have taken the lead to develop a training strategy for young people's partnerships to increase the opportunities for all youth support staff to attend a good range of accredited training. In another authority, the youth service delivers training to its own staff, the youth justice service, other services within the authority, and Careers Wales. In another authority, training is available to partners who are made aware of training events. However, this is not linked to wider workforce developments in the children and young people's plan.

One youth service has developed an effective workforce development strategy that has led to effective training to improve work with young people. However, national youth service strategy objectives for workforce development are not consistently met across Wales because of inconsistent strategic planning and use of resources. Further, local authority youth services do not fully recognise the contribution of well planned and targeted training to raising the quality of youth work provision. National priorities for the training of youth workers in Wales, as they are attached to the annual training grant, do not always match local needs.

In one authority, youth service staff are very well qualified. The proportion of staff qualified at level 3 or above is 97%, compared with the all Wales average of 24%. The remaining 3% are in training for nationally recognised youth work qualifications at NQF level 3. This has had a positive impact on outcomes for young people and standards have improved. However, youth workers in all regions do not have good access to training leading to recognised qualifications and so improved outcomes and standards are not achieved consistently.

## **Conclusions**

In most of the local authorities visited, inspectors observed a range of good quality youth work practice. Overall, staff and young people build constructive and supportive relationships.

With the exception of the development of bilingualism or Welsh language and culture in youth service settings, there is evidence that standards have risen steadily over the years of this cycle of inspection. However, not all local authority youth services have managed to make progress at the same rate and some have made relatively little progress. As a result, there is now greater inconsistency in standards across Wales. This can be clearly seen in data relating to attendance, accreditation and participation.

Overall youth services do not have mature self-evaluation processes. They cannot therefore plan for service improvement with any sense of certainty. This leads to ineffective planning and service developments that rely on subjective and not objective analysis of needs. Planning at all levels is hindered by the lack of robust management information and there is often only limited evaluation of how effective the youth service is in meeting young people's needs.

Overall, the shortcomings identified are closely linked to insecure leadership and management. There is inconsistency in methodology relating to self-evaluation, improvement planning and quality assurance. With these inconsistencies it is inevitable that the patchy standards being achieved across Wales will be the outcome for young people from their work with local authority youth services.

Local authority youth services rarely provide strategic leadership on the priorities of Extending Entitlement and the Youth Service Strategy in local partnerships. Where youth services contribute purposefully to children and young people's plans, there is a better chance that these priorities will be realised locally.

Estyn annual reports on the performance of local authority youth services have identified the same leadership and management shortcomings repeatedly. Limited and uneven progress has resulted in a widening gap between good and unsatisfactory performance.

## **Recommendations**

In order to secure the improvements that are needed, the Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R1 make sure there is high quality and focused training for youth service leaders and managers to enable them to improve service planning and quality assurance for local authority youth services; and
- R2 ensure there is a benchmark for service quality towards which local authority youth services can aim.

In order to secure the improvements that are needed, the local authority should:

- R3 make sure there is training for youth service leaders and managers in the development and use of appropriate business methodology to ensure the full contribution of the local authority youth service to corporate and partnership objectives, and secure continuous improvement.

In order to secure the improvements that are needed, the local authority youth service should:

- R3 develop effective management information systems to collect data on take up, attainment rates, drop-out rates and progression;
- R4 use the management information collected to better plan and co-ordinate provision to better meet the needs of young people, including supporting evidence-based decision-making by elected members;
- R5 ensure that ongoing quality assurance procedures include regular observation of direct work with young people and that information gained is used consistently to improve services; and
- R6 ensure that local authority youth service plans and performance management are firmly embedded in the corporate and local partnership strategic planning.