

Leicestershire Youth Service

Leicestershire Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Leicestershire Youth Service is located within the directorate for Children and Young People's Service (CYPS). It works closely with 20 partners in the voluntary and community sector to provide youth work across the county. There are around 55,500 young people aged 13 to 19 of whom 22% participate regularly in youth work activities and 32% are reached by these services, well above national figures. The head of service is supported centrally by three officers responsible for quality assurance and accreditation, staff development, training and curriculum, and for policy and premises. Seven district councils are covered by three areas where the work is managed by an area officer supported by two area coordinators. There are around 103 full time equivalent (fte) staff comprising 39 fte full-time and 281 part-time (44 fte) part-time youth workers supported by 20 fte administrative staff. In addition there are 100 volunteers. In 2006/07, the local authority allocated some £4.3m for youth work; the service obtained external income of £333,795 and provided £561,786 to help fund youth work in the voluntary and community sector.

2. 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

3. The quality of youth work provided by the authority in Leicestershire is good and the service sufficiently secures youth work.

4. Strong partnership working with the voluntary and community sector extends the provision and participation by young people is high. Sound preparatory work has been undertaken that will contribute to the development of integrated youth support services although detailed planning is in the early stages. The service contributes well to the local authority's range of education leisure time activities. Youth work practice and young people's achievements observed during the inspection were good and at times outstanding. The service has in place action plans to ensure consistently high performance across the county. Young people's personal and social development is very good; those taking part in the County Youth Council for Leicestershire (CYCLe) and local youth forums demonstrate an excellent ability to function well politically. Young people help shape the service in a variety of ways and their views are taken seriously. The service is well established as part of the CYPS and participates fully in wider local networks. The aims of the ambitious service are understood and shared by staff who make good use of the well considered curriculum framework to plan their work. They draw well on data and local knowledge in identifying needs and the service targets provision well for priority and vulnerable groups. The range and quality of

provision is outstanding. Full-time staff hold appropriate qualifications but around 50% of part-time staff do not. The well planned training programme helps improve youth work practice. Accommodation and resources are good. The attractive "the Jitty" web-site is well used by young people. There are sound policies to ensure that young people and workers have a safe environment and thorough safeguarding procedures are in place. Systematic performance management and rigorous quality assurance lead to improvements in the service. However reporting of the quality of youth work undertaken by voluntary sector partners is not sufficiently evaluative and the monitoring of quality is underdeveloped.

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	4
3	Leadership and management	3

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

Strengths

- Standards of young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice are good and at times outstanding.
- The soundly based curriculum offer includes well planned targeted work that provides effectively for the needs of priority groups.
- The effective contribution made by young people helps shape youth work provision and wider local authority services.
- Well planned staff training and development support workers to improve their practice and make progress in the profession.
- Partnership working with voluntary and community sector partners is well established and extends the provision available for young people.
- Systematic performance monitoring and rigorous quality assurance bring about improvements to the service.

Areas for development

- Ensure part-time staff continue to gain suitable qualifications.
- Improve the monitoring and reporting of the quality of youth work undertaken by voluntary and community sector partners.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. The standard of young people's achievements is good and at times outstanding. In particular their personal and social development is strong. Those young people involved in various youth forums demonstrate excellent skills that enable them to take part successfully in democratic processes and decision making. Young people are in the main confident and able to describe their development and achievements with clarity. Some tell of ways in which their participation in youth work activities has significantly improved their lives. Their growth in skills, self confidence and self esteem gives them a springboard to further achievements in youth work settings and the wider world of work and study. Young refugees and asylum seekers taking part in the Dreamers project develop in ways that help them build new lives as well as gaining language skills that support them as they move on to further study and employment. Individual files and records kept at certain youth centres and projects demonstrate the gains young people have made through a wide variety of activities and experiences.

6. There are good examples of young people making an effective contribution to the community. Young people develop their skills and broaden their understanding of their own circumstances and that of others through such participation. The Amazons have produced a DVD on "happy slapping" to be used in schools and an informative leaflet about date rape; young women at the Shepshed youth centre have devised and displayed a poster offering advice on matters such as puberty for younger women; the contribution to the Children and Young People's Plan by members of CYCLe includes a model for their participation adopted by the local authority. The service has worked hard to improve the recognition, recording, accreditation and celebration of young people's achievements; data returns, the service's own monitoring and articles in the newsletter show that this has been effective.

7. A high proportion of youth work practice observed was good or outstanding; none was inadequate. Good practice was observed in open access sessions as well as targeted and specialist provision. In the better practice, youth workers provide good leadership for young people and have high expectations of them focussing well on their learning and development. They challenge their attitudes and behaviour when necessary. They are imaginative and creative in their approach. Young people respond well and are highly motivated. At the Willow Park detached

project youth workers were making skilful use of the excellent resources on a double-decker bus engaging large numbers of young people in a range of positive activities. Workers at Youth Bike skilfully support young people's personal development as well as their gain in skills and knowledge about motorcycles. At the Birstall Space for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities workers were resourceful and reflective in meeting their needs. The service recognises that further improvement in youth work practice is needed to bring about consistently high quality across the county and is already taking appropriate actions.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

8. Overall, the quality of the curriculum and resources is outstanding. An excellent range of provision is made at 156 locations that include the authority's nine youth centres, accommodation used by partners, schools, village halls and community centres. Youth work is also offered through detached and outreach work. Young people take part in overseas trips, residential and outdoor activities. A number of projects and initiatives have won prestigious national awards. The curriculum framework provides a good basis for planning; a notable feature of the offer is the well planned targeted work that provides effectively for the needs of priority groups such as young people of black and minority ethnic heritage, travellers, young carers, young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual and refugees and asylum seekers. Looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well by the service to access youth work provision and to make a contribution to youth councils and forums. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Wall displays are chosen to challenge stereotypes; young people are given well considered opportunities to consider issues such as the realities of living with disabilities and the experience of leaving your home as a refugee or asylum seeker.

9. The service makes a very good contribution to the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes through its generic work and well targeted projects. It works effectively with partners to provide sexual health services which are widely used and valued by young men and young women. Young people are ably supported to contribute effectively to county and local youth forums and have good opportunities to take part in a variety of voluntary activities. They take part in a wide range of learning activities that they enjoy. The service works well with schools to support young people through transition points and the growing entry to employment provision helps a small number of young people to move on successfully to employment or further study.

10. Full-time youth workers are well qualified but too few of the part-time staff have completed this formal aspect of their training. Well planned staff development supports workers to improve their practice and make progress in the profession although voluntary sector partners are not always sufficiently involved. Support and supervision is used effectively by managers and they work alongside their staff modelling good practice and offering support. Specialist resources and accommodation are good overall. Youth workers make effective use of premises

that are not designated solely for youth work by bringing their own displays and equipment. "The Jitty" website and associated local radio station offer an outstanding resource that is managed by young people, supported well by youth workers. However there is insufficient access to information and communications technology at many centres. Young people and workers are provided with a safe, accessible working environment in most locations; thorough safeguarding procedures are in place.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

11. Leadership and management are good. The service has a clear vision and a demonstrable commitment to improving the quality of provision. Sound preparatory work has been undertaken that will contribute to the development of integrated youth support services although detailed planning is in the early stages. The work of the service is fully integrated within the CYPS and the wider council; plans at all levels align well. The service is represented within local networks and makes good use of these forums to contribute to strategic thinking and identify needs. The aims of the service are clear and understood by staff at all levels. The Children and Young People's Plan contains a model for participation developed by young people and adopted by the local authority. Young people have many formal and informal opportunities to influence decision making and to shape services. For example, some £600,000 was set aside to extend a community centre in Loughborough in response to a case put forward to councillors by young people. Elected members provide strong support for the service and young people.

12. In 2006-07 the local authority allocated around £4.3m to the youth service. This figure is broadly in line with comparable authorities but, as a proportion of the education budget, is below the national average. The service makes efficient use of this funding through careful monitoring and realignment of provision where necessary, for example when attendance is low. The local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Partnership working with voluntary and community sector partners is well established and extends the youth offer available to young people. Statutory partners value highly the contribution of the youth service to joint projects such as sexual health promotion and work with those at risk of offending. There is good joint working with Connexions, schools and district councils at a local level between individuals but this is not consistent across the county nor always sufficiently strategic.

13. Systematic performance management and quality assurance procedures that increasingly involve young people bring about improvements to the quality of the service and the outcomes. The service assiduously follows up action plans and checks that progress is made. The implementation of contracts with partners is monitored by link officers through regular meetings and data returns. However, the evaluation of the quality of the youth work provided by partners is not fully developed. Other than statistical returns, the authority has not specified in sufficient detail the requirements of partners and their annual reports tend to be descriptive. Managers increasingly make effective use of the improved computer based management information in monitoring the service and in planning.

However the accuracy of the paper based data returns from voluntary sector partners are more difficult to verify.