



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
YouthAction Northern Ireland

Report of an Inspection in
September 2014

Contents

Section	Page
1. Context	1
2. Overall finding	1
3. Key findings of the inspection	2
4. Conclusion	4
5. Inspection method and evidence base	5
6. Information about YouthAction Northern Ireland	5
7. Quantitative terms used by the ETI	6

1. Context

YouthAction Northern Ireland (YouthAction), established in 1944, is a regional, voluntary youth work organisation. It works with young people to tackle inequalities in their lives, improve their life chances and help them to contribute to building a peaceful and shared society. It is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. YouthAction's headquarters are in Belfast but it has a presence in Armagh, Ballygawley, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Newry.

Through a wide range of funding sources, YouthAction has developed a portfolio of education and training programmes for young people which focus on increasing their skills, qualifications and employment opportunities. Since 1989, YouthAction has provided apprenticeship programmes in youth work in order to widen access for young people to professional youth training and employment, particularly for those young people with lower educational achievements and who are from areas with socio-economic development needs.

Currently, YouthAction is contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to deliver the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in youth work at level 3 in Belfast and Fermanagh. Over the last four years, a total 67 apprentices have been recruited to the youth work apprenticeship.

At the time of the inspection, 14 apprentices were registered on the apprenticeship programme and were based in the Fermanagh area. On entry to the apprenticeship, the majority (64%) of the apprentices hold at least four GCSE passes at grades C or better. Most (71%) of them had achieved a GCSE in English and mathematics, or an equivalent qualification. In addition, just under two-thirds (64%) of the apprentices also hold a level 3 qualification.

The apprentices are employed by YouthAction for a period of 18 months to complete their apprenticeship. They are provided with a programme of directed training in YouthAction, together with work-based training in local youth work settings. These youth work placements are provided through YouthAction's strategic partnerships with both the statutory and voluntary youth service providers in Enniskillen and the surrounding areas, including the cross-border areas of Monaghan and Clones.

2. Overall finding

Overall, the quality of the training provided by YouthAction Northern Ireland is very good.

Summary of key findings

Overall performance level	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Very good
Quality of Provision for Learning	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good

What does YouthAction Northern Ireland need to do to improve?

- to strengthen further the self-evaluation process to ensure a more in-depth evaluation of the quality of the teaching, training, learning and assessment, to inform better quality improvement planning; and
- to ensure the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the apprentices' progress and achievements are more cohesive and effective.

3. Key findings of the inspection

3.1 Achievements and standards are very good.

Most of the apprentices are developing high standards of youth work practice. They are able to research, plan and implement a range of suitable programmes to support the development of the personal and social skills of the young people they work with. The apprentices are building to good effect their interpersonal skills and becoming increasingly responsive to the needs of the young people. It is clear from the planning work they undertake that they are aware of the multiple and often challenging needs of the young people, and of the communities in which they live. They demonstrate high levels of understanding, empathy and sensitivity towards the needs of others, and develop positive relationships with the young people they work with and one another.

Through participation in a wide range of projects, most of the apprentices are improving well their ability to organise programmes, work in teams, take initiative, resolve problems and negotiate solutions to effect change. They are also building their self-confidence and developing effective verbal communication skills. For example, they lead group discussions, present verbally to a wide range of audiences and build rapport with the young people they engage with. For a small number of the apprentices, their written communication skills are not well enough developed; as a consequence, their ability to produce detailed, coherent written responses in vocational assignments is limited.

The apprentices are highly motivated and enjoy their training. Most cope well with the challenges of their programme and demonstrate the ability to complete successfully their apprenticeship. They are well aware of the opportunity to progress to higher education in order to achieve a professional qualification in youth work. Alternative career progression opportunities are, however, less well understood by the apprentices.

Over the last four years, based on the information supplied by YouthAction, the retention rate is outstanding at 91% and most (90%) of those who remain achieve the full framework. In addition, almost all of the apprentices achieve additional relevant qualifications, including an undergraduate level module on diversity. Just under one-half (48%) of the apprentices who completed successfully the programme progressed to higher education.

3.2 The quality of the provision for learning is very good.

The breadth and coherence of the curriculum provision for the apprentices is outstanding. Based on the well-understood training needs for youth work, YouthAction has designed a coherent and comprehensive apprenticeship training programme. It provides a viable and alternative pathway for young people, who are unable to enter directly into professional youth work training, to progress into further professional training or employment. Consequently, the apprenticeship is matched well to the needs of the young people and the youth work sector. It is well-balanced and enriched with appropriate additional qualifications to ensure a broad range of experiences for the apprentices. The additional qualifications, which enhance significantly the apprentices' employability skills, include training in drug and alcohol awareness, safeguarding vulnerable groups, first aid, information and communication technology (ICT) and mental health.

A well-planned, comprehensive induction process is in place for the apprentices. Through an intensive four-week programme, the apprentices develop a clear overview of their forthcoming training and are well-prepared for their initial work in youth placements. While the apprentices complete appropriate initial and diagnostic assessments during this period, the results are not used well enough to plan for the ongoing development of their literacy and numeracy skills within the vocational work.

The quality of the directed training ranges from very good to good, and is good overall. The training sessions are well-planned and delivered. In the best practice, a wide range of training approaches are used to good effect to motivate and engage the apprentices in active and participative learning. Most of them find the training stimulating and appropriately challenging and they engage well in the learning tasks. On occasions, a few of the apprentices are overly reticent and do not engage fully enough in the group discussions or in answering open-ended questions. Additional strategies, such as more effective questioning, are needed to encourage and enable these apprentices to participate more effectively in group discussions.

The quality of the apprentices' work-based training is mostly very good. They have very good opportunities to develop and apply their skills and knowledge of youth work practice in suitable community youth work settings. Most of them are provided with regular supportive supervision and mentoring by experienced staff.

The apprentices' involvement in additional projects and events facilitated by YouthAction provide excellent opportunities for them to apply and consolidate their personal skills and capabilities. Their planning for, and participation in, activities such as public discussion forums, lobbying political representatives, and facilitating health and well-being fairs, contribute much to the development and consolidation of their leadership and team-working skills.

The arrangements for the assessment of the apprentices' progress and achievements are comprehensive. A well-designed suite of assignments and observations, mapped closely to the qualification standards, provides a manageable and graduated assessment regime to develop and assess the apprentices' knowledge and understanding of youth work practice. While very good progress has been made in developing an electronic portfolio to record the apprentices' achievements, the quality of the marking of their work and feedback on how to improve is inconsistent.

The quality of the apprentices' personal training planning process is good. The personal training plans are detailed and fit-for-purpose. They record accurately the apprentices' prior achievement and training arrangements. While the plans contain regular reviews of their progress, the reviews, however, do not include sufficient, timely feedback from the workplace supervisors, peer support workers and assessors. As a result, the setting of targets and actions to improve further the apprentices' performance is not always sharply enough focused to direct their work and progress.

The quality of the care, support and guidance provided for the apprentices is very good. At all levels, YouthAction seeks to promote an ethos of mutual support and positive encouragement. A key strength of the apprenticeship programme is the deployment of two peer support workers, dedicated to mentoring and supporting the apprentices, which is carried out sensitively and to good effect. The apprentices report positively about the role of the peer support workers in encouraging and supporting them in planning practical work and completing assessments. Regular case-conferencing is effective in identifying any necessary interventions to further support any of the apprentices identified as being at risk of not completing successfully the programme. A comprehensive schedule of careers events and workshops are in place to develop the apprentices' job search skills and capabilities.

3.3 The quality of the leadership and management is very good.

The strategic leadership of the provision is highly effective; it is meeting very well its aims to widen access to recognised youth work training and build leadership capacity in local communities. There is a clear vision underpinned by high levels of commitment, at all levels, to provide the highest quality learning experiences and progression opportunities for all young people irrespective of their background or prior achievements.

Through effective strategic links and partnerships with key stakeholders and Government departments, YouthAction has developed a coherent apprenticeship programme, which contributes to meeting the identified training needs of the youth work sector within Northern Ireland. This is evidenced in the well-developed and collaborative partnership agreements with the statutory and voluntary youth service providers in the Fermanagh area.

The arrangements for the quality assurance of the provision are mostly robust. A thorough, inclusive and well-planned quality cycle ensures that there are regular team meetings at all levels to review the quality of the provision, which are integrated into the monitoring of the annual quality improvement plan. The self-evaluation process is informed well by feedback from the apprentices, workplace supervisors and staff, and the outcomes of direct observations of directed training sessions. The self-evaluation report and the associated quality improvement plan identify and address most of the areas for development identified through the inspection. The evaluation of the extent of the progress made by the apprentices in their learning is, however, not sufficiently reflective and critical. As a result, the improvement actions to develop assessment practices focus more on the administrative aspects of assessment rather than on more effective pedagogy.

The staffing complement and their deployment in the delivery of the apprenticeship are very good. Most of the staff are suitably qualified and experienced to support the apprentices in their training, workplace supervision and assessment. There is an appropriate programme of professional development to ensure all staff hold the most appropriate, up-to-date professional qualifications for training and assessment. The opportunities for sharing and developing best practice in teaching, training and learning are not exploited fully enough, particularly to support and further develop the less experienced staff.

The quality of the accommodation and learning resources is very good. The training facilities are bright, spacious and fit-for-purpose. The provision of information and learning technology is a key focus of the organisation's quality improvement planning, and has resulted in the recent development of an electronic assessment portfolio and a web-based repository for electronic learning resources. Further work is required to embed these technologies to support and enhance effective learning and assessment.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, YouthAction has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the quality of the quality of training provided by YouthAction is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

5. Inspection method and evidence base

The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;
- the achievements and standards; and
- the quality of provision for training and learning.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in these three aspects of training supplier organisations, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning* <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards-iqrs-work-based-learning.htm>

A team of three inspectors observed a total of 13 apprentices in four directed training sessions. Inspectors visited nine workplaces and seven apprentices were interviewed in a focus group. The inspectors also held discussions with the Director, Assistant Director, Team Leader, course co-ordinator, tutors and assessors. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the apprentices' work, tutor's schemes of work and lesson plans and the apprentices' personal training plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were also scrutinised.

The inspection also focused on the arrangements for care, support and guidance and safeguarding of vulnerable groups. The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the apprentices to complete a confidential online questionnaire prior to the inspection.

The returns show that almost all of the apprentices enjoy and value their apprenticeship programme. All of the apprentices interviewed during the inspection reported very positively on the teaching, training and learning they received. They also appreciate the high levels of pastoral support they receive in YouthAction.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Apprentices	14	10	71%	1

6. Information about YouthAction

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI	14	100%

Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Youth work	14	100%

Qualifications of current apprentices on entry to their programme

Qualifications	Proportion (%)
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	57.1%
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	64.2%
(%) of apprentices with GCSE English and mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	71.4%
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	85.7%
(%) of apprentices with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	0%

Note: All data was sourced from YouthAction at the time of the inspection.

7. Quantitative terms used by the ETI

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments at week 4 of year one who completed their occupational training framework, measured over the full duration of their course.
Achievement	The percentage of trainees/apprentices who completed their occupational training framework and who fully achieved their framework qualification.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who progressed to further/higher education/training or employment.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2014

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk

