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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Belfast Education and Library Board Youth Provision in the North Belfast Area

Inspected: April 2008

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1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 The North Belfast area is one of four divisions within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) youth service, each managed directly by an Area Youth Officer (AYO). The geographical boundary of this division is defined by the main arterial routes of the Whitewell Road to the north, Clifton Street and the Crumlin Road to the south, the Crumlin Road and the Ballysillan Road to the west and the M2 motorway to the east. This area has 18 physical peace lines dividing communities, and in recent years has seen the most frequent and serious incidents of sectarian unrest and violence. The Dunlop Report 2002 describes North Belfast as ‘a patchwork of small communities often separated by walls and peace lines, in which people have an intense sense of belonging. Segregated living has become part of North Belfast’s spatial and social fabric’. This report recommended that the government should set up a dedicated unit to:

- build community capacity;
- develop a long-term strategy for the area;
- encourage partnerships; and
- take responsibility for addressing issues in interface areas.

The North Belfast Community Action Unit (NBCAU) was subsequently set up in August 2002. Within the NBCAU there are currently 13 community empowerment partnerships (CEPs) who work across North Belfast. These partnerships set out to deliver a number of programmes including:

- community education;
- youth development; and
- sports, arts and culture.

1.2 North Belfast has encountered significant decline in the social and economic infrastructure. This decline is illustrated in the large number of electoral wards in the area ranked amongst the most multiple deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland. Such deprivation is manifest in the high proportion of residents with no educational qualifications - 10% more than the Northern Ireland average. Economic activity in the north of the city is also lower at 53.3% when compared with Belfast at 56.9% and the Northern Ireland average of 62.3%, according to the most recent census in 2001.

1.3 According to the 2001 census figures the total youth population for Belfast between 4-25 years of age, is 88,512. The youth population of North Belfast within the same age range is 21,465 representing 24% of the total youth population for Belfast. The BELB provided details of the total membership of young people involved in registered youth groups in North Belfast over the last three years (see Appendix 1).

1.4 During 2005/06 and 2006/07 the total represented 34% of the total youth population in North Belfast. In the period 2007/08 the total increased to 39% of the total youth population exceeding the Department of Education's (DE) target figure of 38% for young people's participation in the youth service.

1.5 The BELB youth service operates under the direction of an Assistant Senior Education Officer (ASEO) who has overall responsibility for the management of the BELB youth service and two Senior Youth Officers (SYOs). At the time of the inspection the ASEO was absent and the SYO with line management responsibilities for each of the AYO's was appointed to deputise for the ASEO.

1.6 All staff within the BELB youth service are required to set out aims and objectives annually called Key Result Areas (KRAs). The KRAs must be established in line with the BELB overall corporate plan and all work must be co-ordinated under five specific headings (see Appendix 2). It is expected that at the beginning of each academic year, the staff of each project or centre together with the young people and local communities, set out a range of KRAs and individual targets based on their assessed needs. The KRAs and individual targets are evaluated annually by individual full-time youth workers and recently the BELB has requested them to produce annual reports. It is the role of the AYO to monitor progress against the KRAs in respect of the youth provision within North Belfast. In turn KRAs are set by the AYO and monitored by his line manager by means of regular supervision.

1.7 The North Belfast area does not have a sufficient complement of full-time qualified staff to provide leadership in its centres and to fulfil the objectives of the specific community initiatives. The youth provision within North Belfast includes two statutory and three voluntary full-time centres, each are staffed by professionally qualified youth workers with one exception where the youth worker is currently completing a recognised youth work qualification. Furthermore an additional post is currently funded through the Ardoyne/Marrowbone CEP until June 2008 and staffed by a locally qualified youth worker. In one of the other full-time statutory youth centres a limited programme is provided due to the difficulty in sustaining full-time youth provision.

1.8 The provision also includes the North Belfast Area Project (NBAP) which was established with the key focus of raising standards of youth work practice at a local community level. This project is currently staffed by a senior youth worker, two qualified outreach workers funded through DE until March 2009 and two trainee outreach workers funded through the 'Renewing Communities' initiative until August 2008. These four workers were on termination notices at the beginning of the inspection process and the senior youth worker was absent.

1.9 The BELB also reports that five qualified workers left the NBAP in 2006 to secure other employment and the vacant posts have not been filled because of reduced funding and a reduction in staffing arising from the Review of Public Administration. This substantial reduction in the original staffing levels of the NBAP and the short-term nature of the posts limits the project's capacity to fulfil its original function. The work of the NBAP is influenced by a local steering committee with representatives from the CEPs and uses KRAs to plan for and monitor its work in response to the agreed assessed needs of the local community. This steering committee has not met since June 2007.

1.10 In addition there are three part-time controlled youth centres each managed by a part-time worker-in-charge, with the support of paid part-time youth workers and volunteers.

1.11 The BELB also provide a small grant scheme to a range of registered groups illustrated in the table below.

Registered Groups in North Belfast 2007/08

Organisation	Number of groups
Boys' Brigade	9
Girls' Brigade	14
Scouts	11
Guides	2
Church Youth Club	17
Community Youth Club	18
Duke of Edinburgh Award Groups	7
Total	78

1.12 The total budget for the BELB youth service is £3.3million, of which North Belfast receives £741,000 representing 22% of the overall budget.

2. EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 During a pre-inspection meeting with the SYO and the AYO members of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) explained that the focus of the inspection was the youth provision delivered and managed directly by the BELB in North Belfast.

2.2 A total of 40 hours of youth work practice was observed over 22 youth work sessions and discussions took place with over 35 young people. In addition the Inspectorate observed a range of provision, including activity-based programmes, and outreach/detached work. All of the full-time youth workers were visited on at least two occasions and a member of the inspection team attended a voluntary youth centre management committee meeting.

2.3 The AYO provided a range of documentation including the North Belfast Area Plan 2007-2008 which the inspection team examined prior to and during the inspection. The AYO also completed a self-evaluation proforma in preparation for the inspection.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.1 In almost all of the programmes observed the young people displayed a sense of enjoyment and there were examples of good practice that encouraged and supported the young people to extend their understanding of others and to begin to explore and understand their own values and beliefs. The young people could describe and demonstrate good examples of developing skills and knowledge through their involvement in a range of youth provision, sometimes over a number of years. The full-time youth workers could easily recall how well individual young people had developed their social skills and self-esteem. However these achievements are neither recorded nor evaluated sufficiently to allow the young people's progress to be charted and measured.

3.2 Each of the full-time youth workers demonstrated a commitment to preparing young people to benefit from cross-community contact through a range of activities including sport, and residential experiences. This understanding is well illustrated through a combination of both cultural and social events including the young people's preparation and participation in the Festival of Light with the local Indian community, the Lord Mayor's Show and the St Patrick Day's Parade. The youth workers have good local knowledge, know the young people well and are aware of their needs.

3.3 In the best practice observed there was a good level of participation by members in contributing to the management of the programmes within the youth centres; such practice is infrequent. In one example two young people who achieved a recognised cheer-leading coaching award are making a valuable contribution to the good quality coaching within their youth centre. A group of young people also reported how they influenced the direction of their cross-community project for young women. Young people were motivated and committed to a range of activities and keen to develop their skills and share them with younger members.

3.4 In centre-based visits, the young people reported an increase in their self-esteem and self-confidence from their participation in recreational, cross-community and film-making programmes. There were good examples of single activity programmes with good planning for progression illustrated through dancing and football. There is a need to exploit the potential of these activities to deliver the youth work curriculum. There was little evidence of formal group work practice in the full-time youth centres.

3.5 A group of eight young people received a BELB certificate in recognition of their attendance and completion of a leadership training course delivered by the area youth workers. The area youth workers need to focus on the development of group work and continue to provide leadership training.

3.6 The young people's work is celebrated and often improves the appearance and atmosphere of the youth centre and the local environment. The 'Birds in the Park' project is one example where a group of young people set out to look at the bird life within their local park. They used their skills and knowledge to design a booklet and a DVD to summarise and evaluate their project. The community also benefited from this project and celebrated the young people's achievements through attending the launch of the project which attracted local media coverage.

3.7 In a minority of cases the practice observed lacked challenge, did not stimulate the young people's interest and did not engage the young people sufficiently. There was little evidence of how young people were involved in the decision-making process across the range of provision, for example through a members' forum.

4. QUALITY OF PROVISION

4.1 A significant minority of the sessions observed were good. The majority were satisfactory but with important areas for improvement. During the inspection the four NBAP staff made contact with approximately 30 young people. There is a need to ensure more planned face-to-face contact with a greater number of young people. The staff also identified the need for specific outreach and detached youth work training.

4.2 The full-time youth workers' interpretation and application of the KRAs is not effective in setting clear targets especially for the young people. The KRAs need to demonstrate how the full-time youth workers plan for their specific provision including the young people's achievements, progression and opportunities for accreditation. The full-time youth workers' evaluation of the KRAs is descriptive, and lacks evaluative comment and analysis of the outcomes for the young people.

4.3 In almost all of the youth work observed the staff set acceptable standards of behaviour that are agreed and understood by the young people. In some instances the youth work staff are working well with young people who have recognised learning and behaviour difficulties often without the necessary training or advice from relevant professionals.

4.4 The quality of pastoral care is good with continuous efforts being made to ensure that all staff and volunteers are vetted and have received accredited child protection training and ongoing support to keep abreast of current legislation. The BELB youth service continues to assure the quality of child protection through the deployment of the child protection officer who visits the range of youth provision and advises accordingly. The young people interviewed confirmed that they felt safe and valued by the youth workers. From observations it was clear that there was mutual respect between staff and young people. In almost all cases child protection procedures are in place and compliant with relevant legislation; in a small number of cases there is a need to ensure that all parents are informed about these procedures.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and management at senior and middle levels and the deployment of staff is not sufficiently influenced by an evaluation of what young people are achieving from the current provision, what is working well and what weaknesses or gaps in provision need to be addressed. There is a need to provide effective curricular leadership and management to ensure good quality provision to meet the needs of young people, staff and other stakeholders.

5.2 In recent weeks, the BELB youth service produced an area plan for North Belfast which provides a useful context and lays out objectives and key tasks. There is a lack of clarity about the key result areas which are focused almost exclusively on management issues to the exclusion of outcomes for young people within the area. The area plan does not demonstrate how quality improvement is assessed or how the organisation has the capacity to sustain continuous improvement including strategies to raise standards. The absence of a clear strategic plan with specific outcomes is all the more necessary in the context of reduced resources.

5.3 The AYO works hard to maintain positive working relationships with key stakeholders and with the full-time youth workers. He responds to a range of initiatives within North Belfast including Neighbourhood Renewal and CEPs but this is at the expense of effective management of the BELB youth provision within North Belfast. The AYO needs to demonstrate more effective strategic leadership.

5.4 The AYO makes some monitoring visits to the range of provision within the area and provides monthly supervision for all statutory full-time youth workers. The records of unit visits are not evaluative and often concerned with practical issues rather than addressing curricular issues. In recording these visits the AYO does not make sufficient reference to the KRAs. The systems in place for assessing the quality of provision and monitoring the effectiveness of provision are neither adequate nor robust. Performance reviews conducted through the supervision mechanism need to be used effectively to identify and meet individual staff development needs, including those associated with new or emerging roles. There is a need to provide further curriculum support and professional development for the full-time youth workers to extend the quality of the provision. There is a need to review the structure and deployment of staff within the NBAP to maximise the project's potential. There are insufficient self-evaluation and action-planning processes to review provision and effect improvement.

5.5 There are effective procedures to monitor and record the work delivered by the two trainee outreach workers. The format is well understood by the youth workers and provides a clear indication of outcomes in relation to the set targets which are specific and time bound. This model could be adapted by the other full-time youth workers to demonstrate the outcomes of their work.

5.6 There have been recent improvements to several buildings to bring them up to the standard stipulated by the Disability Discrimination Act.

6. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

6.1 The strengths of the provision include:

- the wide range of activity-based programmes within youth centres which allow young people to develop skills and knowledge through activities which engage their interest;
- the good collaboration with external agencies to enhance the provision for, and the experiences of, the young people through specific educational, cultural and social events; and
- the high standards of care and support for the young people displayed by the youth workers with good support from volunteers, all of whom have received child protection training through the BELB.

6.2 The areas for improvement include:

- a review of the area plan to demonstrate the outcomes for the young people, the quality of those outcomes and how the BELB will promote and sustain continuous improvement;
- more effective strategic leadership and management of the youth provision in North Belfast to ensure the best use of the limited human and physical resources, to establish a shared understanding of quality provision and to ensure that it is achieved; and

- all staff to identify their training needs, including those associated with new or emerging leadership and management roles, and to undertake continuous professional development to improve their capacity to fulfil the roles.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 There are a few strengths in the delivery by the BELB of youth provision within North Belfast. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the BELB is to meet effectively the needs of all the young people.

The BELB will be required to submit an improvement plan within three months. A follow-up inspection will take place within 12 months.

APPENDIX 1

The total membership of young people attending youth provision sponsored by the BELB in North Belfast over the last three years

2005/06	4-9 yrs	10-15 yrs	16-18yrs	19+yrs	Total
Male	800	2193	620	222	3835
Female	738	1981	517	158	3394
Total	1538	4174	1137	380	7229

2006/07	4-9yrs	10-15yrs	16-18yrs	19+yrs	Total
Male	870	2419	617	169	4075
Female	858	2022	501	115	3496
Total	1728	4441	1118	284	7571

The number of young people attending youth provision as detailed above represents 34% of the total youth population in North Belfast

2007/08	4-9yrs	10-15yrs	16-18yrs	19+yrs	Total
Male	825	2700	1596	199	5320
Female	853	2505	808	163	4329
Total	1678	5205	2404	362	9649

The figures above illustrate an increase of 21% in the number of young people attending youth provision sponsored by the BELB in North Belfast between the period 2006/07 to 2007/08.

The number of young people engaged in the BELB youth provision during 2007/08 represents 39% of the total youth population of North Belfast, representing an increase of 10% from the previous year and exceeding DE's target figure of 38% for young people's participation in the youth service.

APPENDIX 2

The BELB's overall corporate plan is organised under the following headings:

- Improving Standards;
- Developing People;
- Meeting Needs;
- Strengthening Partnerships; and
- Optimising Resources.

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