



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*



***Providing Inspection Services for***  
**Department of Education**  
**Department for Employment and Learning**  
**Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **North-Eastern Education and Library Board**

#### **Youth Provision in the Carrickfergus/Larne Area**

**Inspected: September 2009**

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## 1. CONTEXT

1.1 The North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) Youth Service operates under the direction of an Assistant Senior Education Officer (ASEO) and a Deputy Head of Youth Service. The responsibilities for each of the three geographical divisions within the NEELB are under the direction of an Area Youth Officer (AYO), who manages two senior youth workers. In addition, there is a cohort of professional area-based youth workers, who are managed centrally by a Senior Youth Officer (Projects) and locally, within each of the three divisions, by an Area Team Leader. The Carrickfergus and Larne area, the focus for this inspection, lies within one of the geographical divisions of the NEELB, which also includes Newtownabbey.

1.2 In the Carrickfergus and Larne area there is a senior youth worker, two youth tutors attached to two controlled post-primary schools, three full-time professional youth workers, three controlled centre-based part-time youth workers, three voluntary centre-based part-time youth workers, and two part-time community relations officers.

1.3 The area youth office is managed efficiently by an Executive Officer and two part-time clerical officers, who provide administrative support to all of the staff based in the youth office.

**Table 1: Type of provision and overall membership**

Type	Number of units	Total membership
Uniformed	53	3,431
Church Based	16	1,291
Community Based	11	757
Controlled	5	473
Other	2	113
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>6,065</b>

1.4 According to figures supplied by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, there are 87 units of youth provision in the Carrickfergus and Larne area. The total membership of 6,065 represents 30% of the total youth population between 4-25 years of age, which is only two-thirds of the Department of Education's (DE's) strategic objective of engaging with 43% of the age cohort by 2010.

**Table 2: Total membership of controlled provision over the last three years**

Age Range	Male 4-9	Female 4-9	Male 10-15	Female 10-15	Male 16-18	Female 16-18	Male 19+	Female 19+	TOTAL
<b>2006/07</b>	31	18	302	236	86	42	4	4	723
<b>2007/08</b>	38	24	238	199	85	44	5	2	635
<b>2008/09</b>	33	15	306	204	81	47	6	4	696
<b>Current membership</b>	47	24	321	224	98	54	10	4	782

1.5 According to the figures supplied by the NEELB the current membership of the controlled youth provision within Carrickfergus and Larne represents 13% of the total membership. Most of the current controlled provision (70%) is taken up by young people between the ages of 10-15, with one-fifth of the provision catering for the 16-18 age group.

While there is a slight increase reflected in the current membership, these figures have remained fairly constant over the previous three years. The progression and achievements of the young people who have attended controlled youth provision during this period have not been recorded.

## **2. EVIDENCE BASE**

The inspection team observed the work of almost all of the youth work staff. They held discussions with the ASEO and the Deputy Head of Youth Service, the AYO, the Child Protection Officer, the senior youth worker, and the Area Team Leader. Members of the team also held discussions with representatives from the voluntary and community registered groups.

## **3. CHILD PROTECTION**

The NEELB has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect well the guidance issued by DE. The name and contact details of the designated worker for child protection is clearly displayed in all statutory centres and all staff employed by the NEELB have received recognised training from qualified child protection staff. In a visit to one of the voluntary youth sector groups the child protection policy and procedures were not displayed. This was brought to the attention of the relevant staff member who took immediate and appropriate action.

## **4. PASTORAL CARE**

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the area is very good. Members of the inspection team held discussions with over 30 young people. Almost all of the young people interviewed stated that they felt safe in the centre and during the activities. The majority of the young people spoke positively about the programmes offered by the youth service and they stated that their opinions are valued.

## **5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

5.1 The AYO demonstrates a commitment to excellence and quality improvement at all levels of provision through the effective implementation of a local area youth strategy that reflects well the NEELB Youth Service Business Plan and Priorities. These documents have been developed in consultation with full-time staff and key stakeholders within the area. The AYO is enthusiastic, provides very good strategic leadership and has a clear vision for the development of youth provision within the area.

5.2 There is a good range of relevant management and support structures at all levels and appropriate processes to promote improvement in the overall service delivery. These structures include appropriate individual appraisals, the effective use of Service Level Agreements, good supervision and support structures, and staff development which meets identified needs effectively.

5.3 The Area Team Leader has good systems in place to monitor and support the area-based youth workers including the good use of personal evidence files, monitoring visits and regular team meetings.

5.4 The senior youth worker has direct line management for the controlled centre-based youth workers. He uses the management and support structures well to support staff, to prioritise their work and to respond suitably to local needs. However, the process of self-evaluation at centre level does not adequately demonstrate the qualitative and quantitative outcomes for the young people.

5.5 The 5-A-Live Information and Communication Technology (ICT) initiative is a data collection programme that has been piloted in five youth centres in the area since September 2008. This innovative programme includes a system of recording membership details and attendance patterns through a smart card system for each member. The senior youth worker in the NEELB with responsibility for ICT has provided very good training and support to the AYO, centre-based youth workers and administrative staff to develop their use of the programme as an evaluation tool. The officers recognise the potential of this system to record achievements and to track the progression of the young people.

5.6 The staff have a good understanding of the area; the AYO collaborates well with a range of voluntary and community partners to maximise the provision for the young people. For example, the NEELB funds the youth worker posts in Seacourt Youth Club and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Carrickfergus and Larne. The AYO represents the NEELB Youth Service on a number of inter-agency groups in Carrickfergus and Larne, including the Social Partnership Programme for Larne. He has secured additional resources for youth work projects from Peace III, Big Deal, the Local Community Fund, the District Police Partnership in Carrickfergus and Connect Youth. This collaboration is strategic and helps to build the capacity within the community to respond more effectively to the needs of the young people.

5.7 The working relationships between the area youth office and the registered voluntary and community youth groups in the area are extremely positive. Representatives of voluntary and community groups stated that the area youth team, including the part-time development officers and the administrative staff, provide appropriate advice, support and training to their organisations.

5.8 The NEELB management team is working together to improve the overall communication systems between the professional youth work staff and the centre-based staff in order to use, more effectively, the available expertise and human resources. There are occasions when youth workers from different teams are working out of the same centre but do not work collaboratively to meet the needs of the young people. The introduction of the bi-monthly meeting between the AYO, the Area Team Leader, and the two senior youth workers, observed during the inspection is a positive step towards improving the provision.

## **6. QUALITY OF PROVISION**

6.1 There was evidence of effective planning for individual sessions in a significant minority of the work observed; in the majority of cases there was insufficient planning for the progression of the young people's knowledge and skills. For example, in the majority of the centre-based provision it was not clear how the activities and programmes planned for the 14+ age group were building on and developing the young people's skills. The youth workers were not always clear about the purpose and nature of their intervention and how to improve the outcomes for the young people.

6.2 The quality of the youth work observed during the inspection varied from satisfactory to outstanding, with the majority of the work being satisfactory. In the best practice, observed less frequently, the workers used a variety of approaches well-matched to the young people's different needs and abilities. There was also evidence of good planning and

clear learning objectives which the young people understood. In the less effective practice, observed more frequently, there was an over-use of recreational activities and not enough evidence of issue-based or group work.

6.3 The management has identified correctly the need to address the variety in the quality of the overall provision, and particularly in the 14+ age group. For example, in one centre the area-based youth worker's experience and expertise could be used more effectively to support the part-time worker-in-charge in addressing the challenging behaviour of a minority of the young people.

## **7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

7.1 At all levels of youth work there is evidence of mutual respect, trust and positive working relationships. The staff and most of the young people have agreed standards of behaviour; the discipline and the behaviour of most of the young people were consistently good. The youth work staff provide stability, continuity and a safe environment.

7.2 A significant minority of young people benefit substantially from their involvement in specific youth work programmes including courses in the Preparation for Participation, and in Cultural Diversity and Good Relations. There is effective training to develop Carrickfergus Youth Council, and a good range of creative ICT projects. All of these programmes enable the personal and social development of the young people and contribute effectively to the development of their political awareness and employability. They also promote well the core values of equity, diversity and interdependence that the young people recognise and articulate confidently.

7.3 The management reports that the young people have a range of opportunities to take responsibility for organising programmes, including the cross-community summer camp, the forthcoming participation event being organised by the Carrickfergus Youth Council, and the European Exchange Programme. Those young people who have taken up such opportunities in the past reported that their participation helped them to clarify their attitudes and values, and to develop their self-confidence.

7.4 Since 2006, 50 young people between the ages of 14-16 have been involved each year in accredited courses for Youth Development and Trainee Leaders; these courses equip them to accept responsibility and to participate confidently in decision-making in their own youth setting and in the wider community. For example, as a direct result of the area youth worker's intervention the Urban Sport group is now more active in its community and is lobbying for additional resources. The Preparation for Participation course also equips the young people well to develop their communication and organisational skills which help them to contribute more fully to the life of their community.

## **8. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

8.1 The strengths of the provision include:

- the very good strategic leadership provided by the AYO;
- the good quality of the links with other youth providers and initiatives to build the capacity to meet the specific needs of the young people and their communities;
- the effective team-work of the management team that is addressing the variation in the quality of the delivery of youth work;

- the good opportunities for the participation of a significant minority of young people in the management and development of their own programmes;
- the good range of appropriate accreditation achieved by the young people; and
- the positive working relationships between the staff and the majority of the young people built on mutual trust and respect.

8.2 An area for development, which the management team has already identified, is:

- the need to continue to address the variation of the quality of provision through the more effective use of all of the human resources and expertise within the area.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 The quality of the youth provision provided by the NEELB Youth Service in Carrickfergus and Larne is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its youth provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the area for improvement.

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