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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

South-Eastern Education and Library Board Youth Provision in the North Down Area

Inspected: February 2009

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1. CONTEXT

1.1 North Down is one of the five divisions within the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) youth service. The total population of North Down is approximately 74,232, almost one-fifth of whom are children and young people under the age of 16 years. Approximately 50% of these young people attend registered youth provision in the North Down area. This figure exceeds the Department of Education's (DE's) target of engaging 42% of young people in youth service activities. At the time of the inspection there were 105 Level 1 registered youth groups, which make up the majority (80%) of the youth provision. The total membership of the registered units at the time of the inspection was 7,989. The figures, supplied by the organisation, indicate an increase in membership over the last three years and an increase of almost 50% in the 19-25 year old age group in the current membership for 2008-2009. (See Appendix.)

1.2 An Area Youth Officer (AYO) is responsible for the overall management of the division and works 25 hours each week. A senior youth worker has specific management responsibilities, alongside curricular leadership and youth work practice, which supports this arrangement well. There are six full-time youth workers, 30 part-time paid youth workers and 1,263 volunteer youth workers. Three of the full-time youth workers are centre-based, two within the voluntary sector and one within the controlled sector.

2. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

2.1 The AYO demonstrates a commitment to excellence and quality improvement at all levels of provision through a well developed area-based strategy document. There is coherence between the SEELB strategic plan and the area-based strategy document highlighting clear divisional priorities. These documents have been developed in consultation with the full-time staff and with key stakeholders within the division. In developing the divisional plan, the AYO has established strong links with local community groups such as the Kilcooley and North Down Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, the Community Safety Partnership and the Positive Futures inclusion programmes, to ensure that the young people's needs are accurately defined. The service level agreement with the North Down Young Men's Christian Association is a good example of how the AYO has been strategic and has established good partnerships with the community and voluntary sector for the effective delivery of services for young people, especially in identified areas of need and in the absence of other youth provision.

2.2 The relationships between the AYO and the voluntary and community youth groups in the area are excellent. The groups value the contribution of the divisional youth team and the administrative staff, who provide appropriate advice, support and training to their organisations. The small team of youth workers, when available, are effectively deployed in response to needs identified by members of the community. This collaborative working has created effective partnerships which also builds the capacity of local groups.

2.3 The AYO, along with senior management, has drawn up effective structures to ensure good quality provision which meet the needs of the young people, staff and the wider community. The AYO has a good understanding of the area and, in addition to the effective collaboration with voluntary and community partners, maximises the involvement of young people. There is clear and open communication between the young people, staff and relevant stakeholders. The staff demonstrate good interpersonal skills which they use to good effect

in youth, community and school settings. The division engages well with the young people and communities through a range of local and divisional youth forums and advisory committees and responds positively to issues and needs that they have identified. For example, the division has drawn together programmes to promote good community relations and to address issues such as under-age drinking and marginalised young people based on feedback from these groups.

2.4 The AYO works with the team to set appropriate targets and priorities for their work with the young people; the corporate and divisional planning informs individual sessions in a coherent and meaningful way. An appropriate range of effective processes informs the action planning, including the use of quality assurance indicators and good curricular leadership. The staff have clear roles, responsibilities and functions to support the strategic objectives of the division. There is an effective induction process and the ongoing system of support and supervision allows responsibilities to be reviewed and amended as required. The good staff development structures provide opportunities for in-house training, external training and professional development. The self-evaluation processes need to demonstrate more fully the qualitative and quantitative outcomes for the young people. There is a need to collate, interpret and use more effectively an appropriate range of relevant and reliable data.

3. QUALITY OF THE YOUTH PROVISION

3.1 QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1.1 The youth workers plan well for the long- and medium-term, using agreed planning processes. In most of the practice observed, the planning for individual sessions focused effectively on progression in the experiences of the young people. The youth workers use a variety of purposeful activities and strategies to engage and build on the skills and knowledge of the young people, and to encourage their participation and decision-making in a variety of youth work settings.

3.1.2 The youth workers have established good links with a small number of both primary and post-primary schools who have welcomed their involvement. They give effective support, especially in the area of personal development and mutual understanding. A particular focus of the work is on the transition phase between primary and post-primary school, where pupils in key stage 2 have been involved in the New Beginnings programme. In the sessions observed, the youth workers used a variety of appropriate strategies to encourage active learning. In the most effective practice, the youth workers asked open-ended questions which promoted thinking skills and elicited extended responses from the young people. Although there is evidence of learning intentions in the planning for these sessions, there is a need to incorporate more fully success criteria, in order to monitor and to evaluate more effectively the learning and development.

3.1.3 The young people's achievements are recognised at unit level and through the annual SEELB Outstanding Achievement Awards. In the Northern Ireland Youth Awards, organised by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, four youth groups from the North Down division received significant awards, which acknowledged their work in drug education, international exchange, inclusion and a youth advisory committee.

3.1.4 The quality of the youth work observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding, with the majority of the work being very good or better. At all levels there is evidence of mutual respect, trust and positive working relationships between the youth workers and the young people. There are agreed standards of conduct, and the discipline and the behaviour of the young people are consistently good. The youth workers use an appropriate range of approaches and resources to meet the young people's different needs and abilities, and to provide enjoyable, stimulating and challenging learning experiences.

3.2 QUALITY OF PASTORAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION

3.2.1 The quality of the pastoral care throughout the division is very good. The organisation has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect adequately the guidance issued by DE.

3.3 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.3.1 Throughout the division, the staff work effectively within a variety of settings, including centre-based provision, outreach and detached youth work, and specialist provision. The young people participate in a range of relevant and challenging activities which test their values and beliefs, build their confidence and expand their knowledge and understanding. The range of activities reflect well the identified needs and interests of the young people and offer a good balance of recreational and personal and social development programmes.

3.3.2 Across the range of settings, in the majority of practice observed, the young people contribute to the planning, implementation and evaluation of the sessions. They set explicit agreed targets towards which they work with commitment and many of which they achieve. In the best practice, the young people break the agreed goals down into practical and achievable tasks, which they delegate according to their strengths and skills.

3.3.3 The increased participation of young people is encouraged through several youth forum groups observed during the inspection. The young people discussed the skills and qualities of leadership knowledgeably. The workers facilitated these groups well; for example, one youth forum group took responsibility for the management of their group by electing their own chairperson and secretary. They debated, negotiated and agreed a process for electing their peers, expressing their views confidently and gaining the support of the other group members. By contrast, a few of the sessions observed were over-directed, which restricted the active involvement of the young people.

3.3.4 During the inspection, the North Down divisional youth forum planned and held the Catalyst conference for young people from throughout the SEELB. Many of the activities observed during the inspection linked directly into the planning for the conference. The young people in the 15-18 age group took a lead role in organising the venue, the content and the evaluation of the event. This was an excellent example of participatory youth work practice. Among other skills, the young people developed good organisational planning and learned how to co-operate effectively with others. They demonstrated good presentational skills and spoke confidently and enthusiastically about their needs and opinions. There was a

collegial approach to planning, with the young people working effectively in teams and reflecting together on their learning and the planned outcomes. Members of other youth forum groups across the SEELB had opportunities to organise and facilitate workshops. To support them, the North Down divisional youth forum designed and led ice-breaker exercises, which were interactive and creative, and encouraged active and enjoyable participation.

3.3.5 The level of attendance in the majority of the programmes is high. The young people engage well and are encouraged to take appropriate responsibility for the enjoyable activities. The youth workers exploit the good levels of participation by providing the young people with opportunities to work independently and in groups. The young people respond positively; they negotiate and undertake different roles and levels of responsibility and, in the best practice, actively challenge and seek clarity from one another. There were good examples of the young people extending their knowledge in particular areas, such as in health and drug education. In one example, through the use of persuasive writing the young people demonstrated the effective development and use of lobbying and literacy skills. These young people were encouraged to take responsibility for issues that affect them and others, demonstrating an understanding of the needs of young people in their community and the services available to them. Young people were also observed making very good use of the Internet; they researched topics and accessed information about funding organisations online to inform their group project.

3.3.6 In a significant minority of the group sessions, the youth workers use the creative arts effectively to encourage the young people to think about their own identity and their relationships with others. In these well-facilitated sessions, the young people develop their self-esteem, thinking skills and learn about the importance of team-work.

3.3.7 There are good opportunities for the youth workers and the young people to undertake a wide range of accredited and non-accredited training programmes. During the period 2006-09, a small number of young people (72) from youth work settings across the division completed the Open College Network (OCN) Trainee Leader programme. These young people make effective use of the knowledge and skills acquired in their particular youth setting. They organise and participate actively in practical exercises in both listening to and communicating information. The young people demonstrate a respect for others and an understanding and sensitivity towards their rights and feelings. They make worthwhile suggestions for improvement and are able to contrast their learning in both formal and non-formal settings. They display commitment and resilience and are keen to continue with their training, often progressing to leadership and employment.

3.3.8 Prior to the inspection the division made minimal use of statistics to inform planning. In one example a youth centre provided the statistics for a sample group of young people aged between 12-15 years over the five year period 2004-2009. The statistics show that less than 50% of these young people now attend the centre, 33% of these young people completed an accredited OCN Level 1 course and 20% had completed two or more accredited or recognised programmes. The staff now recognise the potential of the analysis of such data to influence future programme planning and development.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 The strengths of the division include:

- the very good achievements and standards attained by most of the older young people observed during the inspection;
- the very good range of opportunities for the young people to develop as individuals and to contribute positively to their community;
- the very good quality and range of the provision, and the appropriate variety of approaches used in the majority of settings;
- the well-conceived participative structures which allow the young people to develop their self-confidence and good leadership skills;
- the effective strategic management of the AYO, which is informed by a good infrastructure of stakeholders and young people; and
- the good external links with other services, including the formal education sector.

4.2 In the organisations visited during the inspection, the quality of the youth work provided in this division is very good. The youth provision is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the young people and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

APPENDIX

The total membership of the units registered with the North Down division over the past three years is as follows:

	Age Band	Male	Female	Total
2005-2006	4-9	1,452	1,153	2,605
	10-12	884	835	1,719
	13-15	765	677	1,442
	16-18	379	290	669
	19-25	157	135	292
Totals	4-25	3,637	3,090	6,727

	Age Band	Male	Female	Total
2006-2007	4-9	1,280	1,078	2,358
	10-12	839	717	1,556
	13-15	863	815	1,678
	16-18	427	387	814
	19-25	169	180	349
Totals	4-25	3,578	3,177	6,755

	Age Band	Male	Female	Total
2007-2008	4-9	1,179	1,213	2,392
	10-12	911	908	1,819
	13-15	1,026	1,042	2,068
	16-18	454	461	915
	19-25	179	194	373
Totals	4-25	3,749	3,818	7,567

The current total membership of units registered with the North Down division is as follows:

4-9 years	10-15 years	16-18 years	19-25 years	Total
2,460	3,770	1,106	651	7,987

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