



*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**

### **Report of an Inspection**

#### **Western Education and Library Board Youth Provision in the Strabane/Omagh Area**

**Inspected: October 2009**

## CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	BACKGROUND/CONTEXT	1
2.	EVIDENCE BASE	2
3.	CHILD PROTECTION	2
4.	PASTORAL CARE	2
5.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	2
6.	QUALITY OF PROVISION	4
7.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	5
8.	STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	6
9.	CONCLUSION	6

## 1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

1.1 The Strabane/Omagh division is one of four geographical areas within the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) youth service. Figures supplied by the organisation indicate that the area has a population of 86,100, almost one-third of whom are aged 4-25 years. The main population is found in the towns of Strabane and Omagh; the area is mainly rural with outlying smaller towns and villages.

1.2 The area youth officer (AYO) responsible for the overall management of the Strabane/Omagh youth provision is based in Strabane and has a board-wide remit for the co-ordination of training. There is an Assistant Senior Education Officer who has overall responsibility for the collaborative working of youth services in both the WELB and the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and two deputy heads of youth service who manage the AYO's within each Education and Library Board.

1.3 There are two senior youth workers, four full-time centre-based youth workers, one full-time area worker, one rural outreach worker (Strabane area only) and two youth tutors employed by Castlederg High School and Sacred Heart College, Omagh. The current part-time staff complement includes 89 part-time paid staff and 983 volunteers, most of whom work in the voluntary/uniformed sector. A senior youth worker with board-wide responsibility for drugs and alcohol education is based in the Strabane area.

**Table 1: Number of registered youth units at the time of the inspection**

Controlled full-time units	2
Controlled part-time units	2
Voluntary full-time units	1
Voluntary part-time units	46
Uniformed organisations	25
Other (community)	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>

1.4 There are two full-time youth workers based in the statutory full-time unit. All of the full-time youth workers attached to the centres have an outreach role, which includes at least three sessions working out of the centre. The inspection found that the outreach role of centre-based workers allowed for a more focused approach to project-based youth work and improved further the links with local communities.

**Table 2: Total membership over the past three years**

	<b>Male 4-9 yrs</b>	<b>Female 4-9 yrs</b>	<b>Male 10-15 yrs</b>	<b>Female 10-15 yrs</b>	<b>Male 16-18 yrs</b>	<b>Female 16-18 yrs</b>	<b>Male 19+ yrs</b>	<b>Female 19+ yrs</b>	<b>Total</b>
2006/07	1,220	1,332	1,921	1,709	403	241	167	118	<b>7,111</b>
2007/08	1,310	1,373	2,065	1,794	405	246	169	117	<b>7,479</b>
2008/09	1,253	1,299	2,190	1,826	345	240	203	166	<b>7,522</b>
Current membership	1,309	1,262	1,941	1,832	354	218	176	131	<b>7,223</b>

1.5 According to statistics provided by the organisation, approximately 32.4% of the population of young people aged 4-25 years within the Strabane/Omagh area attend youth service provision. The figures indicate that there is an upward trend in working towards meeting the Department of Education's (DE's) strategic objective of engaging with 43% of the age cohort by 2010. In the 16+ age group the inspection found good evidence of young people engaged in appropriate leadership roles.

## **2. EVIDENCE BASE**

2.1 The inspection team observed the work of all of the full-time staff, including direct observation of 27 youth work sessions. They met with the deputy head of youth, the AYO and all of the full-time staff that work in the Strabane/Omagh area. Meetings and discussions also took place with part-time youth workers, representatives from voluntary registered units and three teaching staff. The inspection team examined a wide range of documentation provided by the organisation, including area development plans, evidence files and samples of moderation records.

## **3. CHILD PROTECTION**

3.1 The WELB has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect well the guidance issued by DE.

## **4. PASTORAL CARE**

4.1 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the area is very good. As part of the arrangements for the evaluation of pastoral care, over 70 young people took part in informal discussions about their well-being and safety and the things they enjoy in the youth provision. Almost all of the young people talked enthusiastically about the activities and programmes provided for them. From the discussions there is evidence that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety, care and well-being. There is mutual respect between almost all the staff and young people and positive working relationships are developed in the range of programmes observed. The young people reported on the positive encouragement received from youth work staff that is enhancing their communication skills and raising their self-esteem, particularly in the observed group work sessions.

## **5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

5.1 The WELB/SELB youth service management team, including youth officers and senior youth workers, has recently been developing and refining its moderation and supervision procedures to improve the overall quality assurance of the youth provision. The management team is embedding the moderation and evaluation processes, which include a clear operational framework, at unit, area and headquarter levels. Members of the inspection team observed appropriate staff training prior to the inspection and found evidence of follow-through in the action plans prepared by the youth workers.

5.2 The Strabane/Omagh division has an annual development plan that is reviewed each year following consultations with youth workers, young people and various stakeholders. The subsequent action plan includes four key themes: participation, inclusion, health and support and development. The key themes are broadly reflective of the WELB/SELB youth service business plan and each full-time worker develops appropriately his/her work priorities from the themes identified. The area development plan for 2009-2010 has relevant objectives, associated actions and performance indicators in place that are meeting the identified needs of the young people. It is not clear enough in the development plan how appropriate self-evaluation processes will be used to review provision and effect

improvement. There is a need to develop further the methods of evaluation, including self-evaluation, to ensure that good practice and year-on-year improvement is recorded and shared more effectively.

5.3 The management and staff attend meetings and provide suitable advice and support to community organisations and other statutory agencies, in order to provide a more effective service to those rural areas most in need. However, the inspection team noted gaps in the provision in some rural areas, of which the WELB youth service is aware and is attempting to address through the reallocation of resources.

5.4 The AYO collaborates well with a number of external agencies and provides added value through the securing of appropriately targeted additional funding and services. There is evidence, for example, of good collaboration with local neighbourhood renewal areas for the additional provision of community-based youth services in a significant minority of the rural areas.

5.5 Almost all of the voluntary, part-time and full-time staff interviewed stated that the support provided by the administrative officer and the youth workers based in the Strabane youth office is very good. Part-time staff commented on the very good support received from the administrative officer in the application for the various financial assistance programmes, including the summer intervention programme and the processing of core grants.

5.6 The members of the full-time staff are suitably qualified and use their considerable experience to deliver effective youth work. Almost all of the staff co-operates well to implement the area plan and there is evidence of very good peer-working between youth workers from different centres and areas for the benefit of all of the young people across the geographical area. Examples of good co-operation include the good planning and facilitation of the personal development school-based programmes and area-based accredited training courses where staff plan and deliver the courses together.

5.7 The key functions of the senior youth workers in both Strabane and Omagh include a management and moderation role for the full-time centre-based workers, support and development for registered youth groups and the delivery of training courses. The changes in the role of the senior youth workers over the past year has meant that a minority of their overall time is spent working directly with young people. This has led to the most experienced youth work staff working fewer sessions with marginalised groups of young people. The senior youth workers provide a good support service to the registered units; the training sessions observed were planned and delivered well.

5.8 The two youth tutors are employed by two local post-primary schools. They provide evening-based youth work, one in a youth wing of a post-primary school and the other as part of the programme of a voluntary youth centre. The written planning for the sessions observed was poor and did not meet adequately the needs of the young people as almost all of the work observed was recreational. No annual action plans were made available to the inspection team. The Principals of the schools, the AYO and the management of the WELB youth service need to collaborate more effectively to ensure the more efficient use of the staff resources and to improve the quality of the learning opportunities for the young people in the evening.

5.9 The full-time centre-based youth workers observed spend almost one-fifth of their overall work planning and delivering school-based programmes. Three local post-primary schools link appropriately with youth work staff who deliver personal and social development programmes to year 12 pupils. However, there is little evidence of the overall strategic planning for the involvement of youth workers in schools. For example, the rationale and purpose of the school-based youth work is not clearly defined in the area development plan. The provision of school-based youth work programmes is very good; however, the rationale and management of the time spent by youth work staff needs to be reviewed.

## **6. QUALITY OF PROVISION**

6.1 Youth workers plan effectively for the progression in the young people's knowledge, skills and attitudes. There is a very good range of relevant learning experiences for young people including accredited courses, personal development courses and appropriate opportunities for young people to be involved in local and area-based youth councils. In all of the youth centres visited, the programmes reflected appropriately the core principles and aims outlined in 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice', with many of them developing the active participation of young people in their clubs and communities. The variety and range of activities in the centre-based provision was a positive feature of several youth centres with the direct involvement of a representative group of young people in the planning of programmes.

6.2 The overall quality of most of the youth work sessions observed was good or better; in a minority of the sessions, the quality of the practice was outstanding. The youth work observed in the full-time centres was of a consistently high quality. The good or better sessions were characterised by the clear planning for progression in the development of the young people's knowledge, understanding and skills. The young people were able to articulate the learning outcomes and the progression in the development of their personal, social and communication skills. In a few sessions, there was poor planning and little evidence of effective evaluation; there were missed opportunities for meaningful discussions and positive interactions with members.

6.3 The inspection team observed very good examples of inclusive practice youth work with individual groups of young people including, young mothers, an Irish-medium group, young people with disabilities, the work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered young people, a 'speaking out against poverty' group and work with ethnic minorities. To promote further inclusion the WELB has translated the area office youth information into four languages reflecting the ethnic minorities within the area.

6.4 The quality of the daytime school-based youth work is very good. The work of the Growing Learning and Developing programme, accredited by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, is well planned and pupils respond positively to the issue-based programmes that are relevant to their identified needs. The youth workers provide a good ethos of open discussion and debate that allow young people to explore important social issues in a safe environment. The teaching staff involved in the programmes are aware of the benefits of this intervention; one teacher reported that the programmes were increasing communication skills, self-esteem and had improved overall attendance.

6.5 The well-structured group-work programmes, including area and centre-based youth councils and senior member development courses, increase the young people's sense of personal and civic responsibility. In one session observed the senior members' were able to articulate how the learning enhanced their knowledge and increased their aspirations to take on leadership roles, not just within the centre but in their school and in their communities.

6.6 The many examples of good participative practice included participation at local community level by the 'CKS' youth committee, which was established in 2008. The group of 14 young people aged between 15-19 years is actively involved in the consultation on the refurbishment of their community centre, has raised funds and produced an informative news-sheet for young people in the area. From the observations made, the group is confident in making decisions and in finding appropriate and practical solutions to problems. The young people work very well together in a mature and responsible manner with minimum supervision and facilitation from adults.

## **7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

7.1 The quality of the achievements and standards for young people in the Strabane/Omagh area is very good. According to statistics supplied by the organisation 395 adults and young people successfully completed recognised accredited courses in the last 12 months; in the current year 230 young people have already completed similar training. Almost all of the part-time staff and volunteers interviewed stated their satisfaction with the quality of the training provided and the very good support from the full-time youth workers for the successful completion of the courses.

7.2 In almost all sessions observed the young people participated fully in an appropriate range of youth work activities and programmes. Young people across the area accepted appropriate roles of responsibility in groups and at an individual level. They demonstrated high levels of motivation and the ability to apply learning in new and different situations. For example, a group of young men in the Douglas Bridge area worked well with the rural outreach worker in the planning and construction of a shelter for use by younger children using a play space. They were able to articulate their achievements through the completion of this task and through the positive contribution to the life of a small rural community. The community representatives were highly complimentary of the work of the rural outreach worker in empowering this group, who were otherwise disengaged and marginalised, to develop a better understanding of their community. In another example, a group of young people in Fintona was challenged appropriately by the youth worker as to how they might effect and influence change in their community youth group. They completed successfully accredited training and took on the responsibility of planning and managing their own youth programme.

7.3 In the majority of projects and specific programmes, many of the young people respond well to the opportunities to take on leadership roles as a result of several years' involvement with youth work staff and youth centre programmes. Most of the young people observed in the formal group work sessions stated that they understood the progression from activity-based programmes to personal development work and the achievement of relevant accreditation. They are also clear about how the youth work experiences and accreditation will enhance their employability and further education opportunities. A majority of the young people is involved in a number of volunteering opportunities within their own centre or area as a result of the personal development programmes.

7.4 In another positive example of achievement, a year 13 enrichment programme for over 50 pupils from a local secondary school based in Omagh demonstrated effectively the connections between the formal and non-formal education that are developing further their personal attitudes, values and self-confidence. Both of these school-focused programmes involved very good collaboration between youth workers and teaching staff to ensure that the outcomes for the young people are appropriate and relevant. The young people reported that the confidence gained by working informally in a youth work situation was helping to improve peer and teacher working relationships in the school.

## **8. STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

8.1 The strengths of the provision include:

- the very good examples of active participation by young people aged 14 years and over in a variety of settings;
- the consistently high quality of youth work provision observed in the full-time centres;
- the very good range and quality of the relevant learning experiences for the young people, including accredited courses;
- the good collaboration of the AYO, with other agencies, to secure additional funding and services to enhance the youth work experiences of the young people;
- the good examples of inclusion including disabled, ethnic and Irish language groups, and the active promotion of the equality of opportunity; and
- the good quality of outreach work in rural areas for a minority of the young people.

8.2 The areas for further development include:

- the extension of the range of evaluation methods, including more focused self-evaluation at management and individual worker levels, to assess and improve practice; and
- the need to include in the area development plan the rationale and purpose for all of the school-based youth work and the need for a review of the evening work of youth tutors.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 The quality of the youth provision provided by the WELB youth service in the Strabane/Omagh area is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its youth provision. The inspection has identified areas 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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