



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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*Providing Inspection Services for*  
**Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of an Inspection**

### **An Evaluation of the Work of The Curriculum Development Unit**

**Inspected: January 2008**

## CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	METHODOLOGY	2
3.	QUALITY OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT'S DEVELOPMENT PLAN	2
4.	THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	5
5.	STRENGTHS	6
6.	AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT	6
7.	CONCLUSION	6
	APPENDIX	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 1999 there was a major review of the youth service in Northern Ireland (NI) culminating in the Report of the Youth Service Policy Review Group, 'A Youth Service for a New Millennium' (1999). This review confirmed the importance of the publication, 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice' which was first published in 1997, to provide guidance in curricular leadership in youth work. While the suggested curricular areas within the original model contributed to a common understanding of effective youth work practice, the youth sector recognised the need for greater consistency in understanding and implementing quality youth work. The need for more effective curriculum training was also a key recurring issue in reports by the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate).

1.2 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice' had been used to varying degrees within the youth service sector and was generally accepted as a seminal curriculum framework on which to base youth work practice. There was an acceptance across the youth sector for the need to re-launch the document and, prior to the re-launch, the Inter-Board Youth Panel recommended to the Department of Education (DE) that a youth work Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) be created to ensure that the principles set out in the document were fully implemented in youth work practice. The request was successful and funding was sourced from the Executive Programme Fund, originally for the two year period from 2002-2004. The current document was re-launched in 2003 and disseminated with the support and resources of the newly established CDU. Since 2004, CDU has secured funding of £155k on a yearly basis and has currently applied for funding for a further year.

1.3 The CDU is managed by a steering committee with representatives from all the youth service providers and the various bodies that have a responsibility to provide youth work training; DE and the Inspectorate have observer status. The executive committee has representatives from the statutory and the voluntary youth sectors, and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI). The North-Eastern Education and Library Board oversee the operational management of CDU on behalf of the Youth Service Partnership Initiative.

1.4 The short-term remit of the CDU is to raise the awareness of 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice' as a curriculum framework, to develop and share curriculum resources, and to share effective youth work practice across the wider youth work sector. Importantly, CDU recognises that some organisations use a curriculum specific to their own organisation to support the personal and social development of young people.

1.5 The CDU consists of three full-time professionally qualified youth workers: one staff member on a fixed term contract, and two on secondment. The CDU also has the equivalent of one and a half full-time clerical staff. At the time of the inspection, a member of staff had been seconded through additional DE funding to develop age-specific curricula, work relating to the Youth Work Strategy, which had been commissioned by the Youth Service Liaison Forum (YSLF).

1.6 The CDU has developed, as a sub-committee of its management committee, a strategic key contact group with the remit to support and encourage youth work curriculum development at all levels. This group provides an effective forum for representatives of the main agencies involved in curriculum development, to share ideas and to promote the development of good youth work practice. The members of the key contact group nominate youth workers from their respective organisations to participate in the training provided by

CDU, and subsequently, to cascade the training to part-time youth workers, volunteers and young people within their respective organisations. The CDU uses the cascade model to build capacity within the youth sector to provide sustainable youth work training. This training mechanism has the potential to impact positively on the quality of youth work practice and the outcomes for young people.

1.7 The management committee requested that the Inspectorate undertake an evaluation of the work of CDU.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Inspectorate had discussions with all CDU staff, with members of the executive and management committees, the key contact group and representatives from a wide number of user groups, including youth workers from the statutory and voluntary sectors. In addition, the Inspectorate observed working groups in practice and evaluated documentation and resources.

## 3. QUALITY OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT'S DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.1 The CDU staff, under the direction of the management committee, formulated a development plan for the period 2007-2008. The strategic aim of the development plan is to build capacity within the youth sector to sustain the development of the youth work curriculum. The plan consists of five core aims, each with clear objectives, methodology, specific budget allocation and a realistic timescale for delivery, reflecting the unit's short-term core aim and purpose.

3.2 **Core Aim 1:** To promote the consistency of language and understanding of the core principles which underpin effective youth work through the provision of training across the sector, the development of additional guidelines and the launch of a young people friendly version of 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice'.

3.2.1 The training to promote the consistency of language and understanding of the central theme and core principles of youth work across the youth sector accounts for 70% of CDU's programme section budget. Initially training was offered to individual Education and Library Board youth service workers, in particular, to full-time youth workers, to those who had a training role or to those workers who had recently changed their role and required an update in their training and understanding. This training provides a suitable response to the need for ongoing professional development, identified by youth workers and in inspection reports.

3.2.2 The cascade training examines the rationale of using a curriculum model to deliver youth work, looks at examples of suitable pedagogy and supports the student in planning an effective programme. This training is researched well and delivered effectively by CDU staff, who have relevant expertise and recent experience as practitioners; it takes place on a residential basis over two days. In order to maximise their resources and to have the optimum effect, CDU expect that participants will use the information to train other youth workers, thus making training more sustainable across the sector. The CDU also provides curriculum support to individual youth organisations and contributes to youth worker conferences and curriculum award evenings. The appendix illustrates the extent and range of support provided by CDU to a range of youth service providers.

3.2.3 The staff plan effectively for their work and, based on an assessment of the needs of each group, set clear learning outcomes for the different groups with which they work. Each training event is evaluated effectively, using a range of suitable methodologies including student evaluation forms, group feedback, de-briefing sessions and meetings with partners to reflect on and assess the outcomes of the training. These evaluations have led to CDU making improvements to both the content and the methodology of subsequent training events. For example, the material used to develop the concept of participation now reflects the current guidelines being developed by CDU. The material extends the students' understanding of participation within a range of youth work settings and contributes to a wider debate on the rights and responsibilities of young people's participation. The CDU also adapted its training materials in response to the specific learning and physical needs of some of its trainees.

3.2.4 The training resources include a CD-Rom version of 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice', leaflets, posters and practical training exercises, which can be used by the full-time staff as they cascade their training to part-time youth workers and volunteers. All of the youth workers interviewed report that they have integrated effectively the course materials and practical resources within their professional practice on accredited youth work courses, and into their work with senior members in youth centres. Inspection findings also highlight some instances of the resources being used well to support part-time workers and volunteers.

3.2.5 An external evaluation of CDU's work in 2005 recommended that CDU develop links with the University of Ulster (UU) to explore the further development of 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice' and its inclusion within the university's youth and community training courses. As a result CDU has made a helpful contribution to these courses at both the Jordanstown and Magee campuses of UU. This useful collaboration with UU provides CDU with further opportunities to fulfil its core aims. Over 130 students have benefited from the awareness-raising sessions which have been linked effectively to the students' assessment and in turn an evaluation of the impact of CDU training on the students' knowledge and understanding.

3.2.6 Since its inception CDU has funded two independent evaluations of its business plan and the effectiveness of its work. In response to these evaluations and to the needs of the sector as identified by the key contact group, CDU has developed good curriculum materials to enhance the participation and understanding of young people with regard to the youth service curriculum. For example, in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, CDU has produced a 'Young People's Version of the Model for Effective Practice'. The publication is relevant, user-friendly and informative for young people, a fact acknowledged by trainers, part-time workers, volunteers and the young people themselves.

3.3 **Core Aim 2:** To engage with youth organisations to develop and share models and examples of effective practice for the personal and social development of young people.

3.3.1 In partnership with UU and Youth Action, CDU organised practice and policy seminars, which provided further opportunities for practitioners and a wider audience from across the youth sector to reflect on practice and important social issues which affect young people. Building on the success of four seminars in 2005, a further six thematic seminars

were delivered in 2006 and 2007; over 300 people attended the seminars. The themes for the seminars, which were often suggested by practitioners, reflect topics which are relevant to the needs of the wider youth sector and how it should complement more fully the formal education.

The themes of the seminars are detailed in the table below:

The contribution of youth work to promoting the involvement of young people in volunteering.
Strategic and practical partnerships in meeting the needs of young people.
The contribution of youth work to peace building and inclusion within NI.
Engaging with young people through centre-based provision.
Youth work complementing the formal curriculum.
The challenges and opportunities of engaging marginalised young people in training and accreditation.

**3.4 Core Aim 3:** To engage with youth organisations in the process of obtaining, developing and producing resources which support effective practice.

3.4.1 The CDU has developed a comprehensive curriculum resource library for the use of the youth work sector. The library is well stocked with over 1,000 items and provides a range of useful resources appropriate for youth workers, under-graduate and post-graduate students and other agencies. The staff place considerable emphasis on ensuring that the materials are relevant and useful in embedding the core curriculum. The CDU has purposely aligned some materials with the UU programmes of study. The CDU website contains an electronic database of the library materials and allows users to preview the resources; a freepost borrowing service is available for most items and there is no charge to join or use the library.

3.4.2 While extending the use of the library is one of the core aims within the development plan, the current budget is restrictive. The management monitors and evaluates the library provision and has correctly identified the need to review the library provision and to assess how its use can be extended further. The library is not easily accessible and CDU has explored the possibility of relocating it. A survey of users is currently being prepared to gather information which would help to improve the service.

3.4.3 The CDU makes effective use of its website to disseminate information and youth work resources across the wider youth sector and analyses its use well. Recently details of the Youth Outreach Initiative and examples of effective practice across NI were added to the website. The staff realise the potential of the website to support the work of CDU, and of the youth sector in general, but a commitment to other priorities on the development plan has limited its further development.

**3.5 Core Aim 4:** To develop and sustain effective networks and communicate effectively with youth organisations.

3.5.1 The quarterly 'CDN' magazine uses just less than 10% of the total overall CDU budget and plays a significant role in developing an effective communication network within and beyond the youth sector. The magazine is a good means of disseminating current ideas, information about the development of parts of the Youth Work Strategy and examples of

good practice across the youth sector. In addition, the magazine is used well to inform and to advertise the services of other organisations which can support young people. The magazine is distributed to all 2,422 registered youth groups in NI with contributions from across the youth sectors and beyond. The growing range of contributors and the variety of articles underline the importance that the youth sector gives to the publication. Youth workers interviewed found that the wide range of articles and ideas published in the magazine extended their own thinking about more creative curriculum planning.

**3.6 Core Aim 5:** To develop clear flexible curricular frameworks that will support the delivery of effective age appropriate youth work across the youth sector.

3.6.1 The development of age-specific curricula for young people under the age of ten and for those over 16, links directly to the Youth Work Strategy and was commissioned by the YSLF. A worker has been seconded for six months to complete the draft curricula. At the time of the inspection, CDU had used clear protocols and key contacts to form two working groups which included personnel with an appropriate background in working with the specific age groups. This is a significant piece of work which has required CDU staff to work sensitively with each group to utilise the expertise from individual participants. For example, it has been necessary to combine the theory and concepts of play-work and the experience of youth workers as educators to take the work forward in a very short space of time. To ensure good quality outcomes the timescale for the completion of the work should be reconsidered.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The executive and management committees, CDU personnel and the clerical staff demonstrate a commitment to reviewing and improving the various services which they offer. Through their direct engagement with youth service providers and feedback from a range of users, CDU has adjusted its work programme to meet, as effectively as possible, the needs of the stakeholders. For example, CDU has responded to YSLF's request for age-specific curricula and to the need identified by the youth sector for additional guidelines for the three core principles of the curriculum. The CDU evaluates the different aspects of its work by monitoring written evaluations and listening to oral feedback from the range of user groups, and, in particular, from the key contact group who report back from their individual organisations. In the best practice, CDU follows up the impact of its work within an organisation and on the organisation's capacity to continue to provide training for its staff.

4.2 The staff are highly motivated and professional in taking forward the work of CDU. They are sensitive in developing excellent working relationships with the varied range of strategic partners including YSLF, UU, and YCNI. All of the stakeholders consulted during the inspection commented on the good quality of the relationships with CDU, the effective communication and the high quality of the training provided.

4.3 The annual development planning process is effective and produces a realistic and relevant plan reflecting the needs of the wider youth sector. Appropriate targets are set and the plan is adjusted in light of external factors and opportunities. The staff and management recognise the need for a long-term strategic plan to maximise the potential of CDU and the development of the curriculum across the youth sector. The current temporary and uncertain

funding of CDU has hindered such a development. To support further the development planning process it will be important that CDU, along with other agencies, develops more robust monitoring and evaluation processes to assess more accurately the extent to which its work improves the experiences of young people in the youth sector.

4.4 The CDU maximises the use of its limited physical resources and demonstrates that it fulfils its core function of raising awareness of the NI Youth Work Curriculum effectively. In addition, it has developed and shared its curriculum resources and youth work practice across the wider youth work sector. These functions are managed and delivered with robust budgetary controls.

## **5. STRENGTHS**

5.1 The strengths of CDU include:

- the professionalism and expertise of all the staff and the high quality of their work;
- the effective working relationships established with a range of stakeholders across the wider youth sector to support the development of a greater sense of common purpose for youth work practice;
- the good opportunities and materials which promote reflective practice and help to develop the youth work curriculum and practice in a range of settings;
- the effective use of the human and physical resources to support the continuous professional development of all those working in the youth sector; and
- the strategic vision of the management committee and the staff of CDU reflected in their effective short-term planning.

## **6. AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The CDU needs to, with other agencies, develop monitoring and evaluation processes to assess more accurately the extent to which its work improves the experiences of young people in the youth sector.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

7.1 The CDU has major strengths in the provision it makes for its user groups and in fulfilling its remit. The sponsors and the youth work sector can have confidence in CDU's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.



## APPENDIX 1

The extent and range of support provided by CDU to a range of youth service providers.

Type of support	2004/Number of participants	2005/Number of participants	2006/Number of participants	2007/Number of participants	2008 (Jan)/Number of participants
Cascade training for full-time workers	12 (SEELB)	25 (BELB) 18 (YouthCom)	25 (SELB) 24 (Inter-Agency)		25 (Inter-Agency)
Conferences for part-time youth workers	62 (SEELB)	12 (NEELB) 12 (SELB) 15 (NEELB)	67 (NEELB) 17 (SELB) 45 (SELB)	14 (Church of Ireland)	
Requested curriculum input	58 (BELB)	23 (YouthCom) 11 (Boys' Brigade) 19 (YouthCom) 22 (UUJ)	27 (UUJ)	10 (Springboard) 84 (UUJ)	31(UUJ)
Curriculum Awards			190 (NEELB)		

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