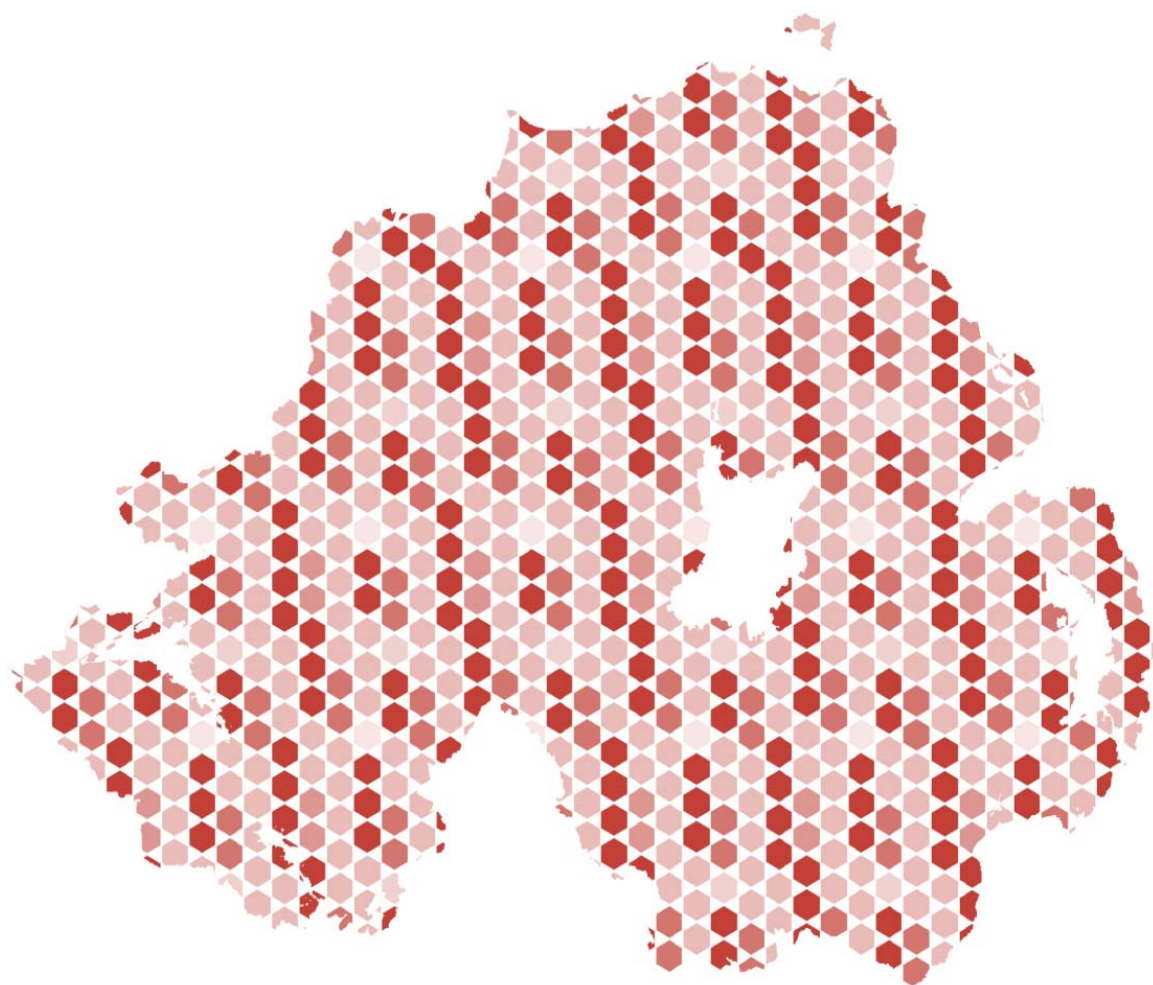


TRAINING INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Report of a Longitudinal
Inspection
YouthAction Northern Ireland
ApprenticeshipsNI Provision

Report of an Inspection
in October 2009 – April 2010

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by YouthAction Northern Ireland.

Grading System

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

Performance Level	Grade	Descriptor
Outstanding	1	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	2	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	3	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	4	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	5	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	6	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

PART ONE

SUMMARY

1. CONTEXT

1.1 YouthAction Northern Ireland (YouthAction) is a voluntary regional youth organisation which was established in 1944. It is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, and its headquarters is based in Belfast. It has further centres in Armagh, Ballygawley, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Newry. The centres in Enniskillen and Londonderry are located on the premises of the Western Education and Library Board's youth service. YouthAction works with young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable, to support them as active and equal citizens and to ensure that their voices are heard, respected and valued. The organisation's core values demonstrate clearly a commitment to realising the potential of young people, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, and contributing to peace building.

1.2 Since 1989, YouthAction has provided ten employment-based youth work training programmes in community leadership for young people aged 18 to 24 years old. Each programme has lasted for approximately 18 months, and has been tailored to specifically meet identified training needs in the voluntary youth work sector across Northern Ireland.

1.3 In September 2008, YouthAction was contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (the Department) to offer ApprenticeshipsNI programmes in youth work, in the three contract areas of Belfast, Enniskillen and Londonderry.

1.4 Through a range of additional external funding sources, YouthAction recruited a total of 40 apprentices for a period of 18 months to complete a level 3 community leadership apprenticeship in youth work. In September 2008, 14 apprentices were recruited to the apprenticeship programme based in Enniskillen. In September 2009, a further 25 apprentices were recruited; 11 to the apprenticeship programme based in Belfast and the remaining 14 to the apprenticeship programme based in Londonderry. Two of the apprentices left the Enniskillen programme early, and one additional apprentice has been recruited to this apprenticeship programme.

1.5 On entry to the apprenticeship, most of the apprentices hold at least four General Certificates in Secondary Education at grade C or above, or an equivalent qualification. Approximately 35% hold at least five GCSEs at grade C or above including English or mathematics. A significant minority do not hold a level 2 qualification in literacy (35%) or in numeracy (50%).

2. PROVISION

2.1 At the time of the inspection YouthAction had 38 community leadership apprentices registered on the Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme. They are completing a level 3 National Vocational Qualification in youth work, a certificate in Supporting Youth Work and essential skills at level 2. In addition, they complete the European Computer Driving Licence, First Aid Certificate and child protection training. The apprentices also have the option of completing entrepreneurial training, a module from the University of Ulster's Certificate in Youth Studies, and additional short accredited courses relating directly to their youth work placements. The apprentices based in Belfast also complete youth arts training to enable them to deliver youth work through the medium of performing arts.

2.2 The apprentices' directed training is provided by YouthAction for two days each week, delivered on their own premises in Belfast, and on the Western Education and Library Board's premises in Enniskillen and Londonderry. For the remainder of their 35 hour working week, they are placed in a youth work setting, within easy travelling distance from their home. These placements include voluntary organisations and statutory providers. During their placement, the apprentices have professional supervision by experienced youth workers who plan and supervise their youth work practice.

2.3 Each apprentice is also assigned a peer support worker who provides them with valuable one-to-one mentoring and support during their directed training, assessment and youth work practice. There is one peer support worker allocated to the eleven apprentices in Belfast, two to the 14 apprentices in Enniskillen, and two to the 14 apprentices in Londonderry.

2.4 For the apprentices requiring essential skills training, arrangements are made by YouthAction for each apprentice to attend their local further education college for this training. At the time of the inspection, there were two apprentices attending South West College and one attending Southern Regional College for essential skills provision. Appropriate planning is in place for the remainder of the apprentices requiring essential skills training to attend a suitable further education college.

3. THE INSPECTION

3.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) carried out a two phase longitudinal inspection of YouthAction's ApprenticeshipsNI programme; phase one occurred in October 2009 and phase two in April 2010. A team of four inspectors observed all of the apprentices in seven directed training sessions, and visited just over one-half of them in their youth work placements. Discussions were held with the Director, assistant director, training manager, co-ordinators, tutors, peer support workers, assessors, apprentices and their youth work placement supervisors. The inspection team also examined samples of the apprentices' work, their personal training plans (PTPs), the organisation's self-evaluation report, and other relevant documentation.

3.2 The arrangements for the inspection of the apprentices' pastoral care arrangements included the opportunity for them to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, and to participate in confidential apprentice focus group meetings with members of the inspection team. Thirty-nine questionnaires were issued to the apprentices; 36 (92%) of these were returned to the Inspectorate. The returns were very positive and show that almost all (95%) of the apprentices consistently agree or strongly agree that all aspects of their apprenticeship programme are at least good. Almost all (97%) strongly agreed that they enjoyed their apprenticeship programme and would recommend it to a friend.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 In the community leadership apprenticeship in youth work, the quality of the training provided by YouthAction Northern Ireland is outstanding; the quality of the pastoral care is also outstanding. The organisation has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- outstanding leadership and management, at all levels, demonstrated in the provision of a tailored programme to meet the needs of the apprentices and support social inclusion, peace building and economic development;

- rigorous and accurate self-evaluation and development planning processes, which are very successful in bringing about key improvements;
- very good to outstanding standards achieved by most of the apprentices;
- excellent retention rate at 95%;
- excellent quality of the training and assessment strategies, which are matched well to the individual needs of the apprentices and their youth work placements; and
- outstanding pastoral support arrangements for the apprentices to ensure they progress well in their training and achieve their full potential.

4.3 The main area for improvement is the:

- better integration of the apprentices' essential skills training provision within their professional and technical training.

TABLE OF GRADES

Overall performance level (grade)	Outstanding (1)
Contributory performance levels (grades)	
Leadership and Management	Outstanding (1)
Achievements and Standards	Outstanding (1)
Quality of Provision for Learning	Outstanding (1)
Areas of Learning (grades)	
Community Leadership in Youth Work	Outstanding (1)

PART TWO

OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The quality of the leadership and management at all levels is outstanding. Through effective strategic links and partnerships with key agencies, stakeholders and Government departments, YouthAction has developed a clear understanding of the training needs of the youth work sector across Northern Ireland, in particular the need for level 3 apprenticeships in community leadership. YouthAction demonstrates a clear commitment to excellence through the very well-designed apprenticeship programme, which trains and equips apprentices with the skills and knowledge to provide community leadership and to support a range of young people, including those who are vulnerable and marginalised. The programme is well-structured and well-resourced, and provides the apprentices with a comprehensive range of learning opportunities and clear progression pathways to employment and higher education. In particular, there is a strong and clear emphasis on equipping the apprentices with the skills and personal capabilities to work with young people to improve community relationships within the communities where they are placed.

5.2 YouthAction's processes and procedures to bring about continual improvement are high quality. Since the commencement of the apprenticeship programmes in community leadership, YouthAction have been very rigorous, at all levels, in implementing effective quality assurance systems. Through a range of reviews and surveys with the apprentices, tutors, peer support workers and placement providers, YouthAction use quantitative and qualitative data effectively to inform the self-evaluation process. The inspection confirms that the judgements made in YouthAction's annual self-evaluation report of the apprenticeship programme are accurate. The actions within their annual development plan address appropriately the main areas for improvement identified by them, and have been successful in bringing about key improvements. The programme co-ordinators and managers use effectively the organisation's development plan to regularly plan, monitor and review its progress in sustaining improvements.

5.3 The staffing complement and their deployment in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme are outstanding. The staff are suitably qualified and experienced to support the apprentices in their directed training, assessment and workplace training. The training team includes training co-ordinators/tutors, peer support workers, assessors and programme managers, all of whom are very committed and motivated, and are highly valued and respected by the apprentices. They have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and plan and organise meticulously all aspects of the apprentices' training programme.

5.4 The accommodation and physical resources across the various training bases are good or better. Most of the apprentices have access to bright and spacious training rooms, ICT suites, as well as a well-resourced library at YouthAction's headquarters. The apprentices based in Belfast benefit particularly from the modern accommodation which supports well their additional training in performing arts. The use of information and learning technologies to support and enhance the apprentices' learning and assessment are, however, under-developed. Although YouthAction has developed very good intranet-based resources for the tutors, there are limited electronic learning resources for the apprentices.

5.5 The range and quality of YouthAction's links and partnerships are outstanding. These include advisory boards, funding bodies, Government departments, statutory bodies and youth work placement providers. These links and partnerships are used to good effect to ensure the apprenticeship programme is well-designed, creative and fit-for-purpose, and the training facilities are well-resourced and of good quality. There is a focus on targeting identified economic and social need, and good youth work training placements are provided for the apprentices.

5.6 The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The programme is appropriately structured to provide excellent opportunities for the apprentices to train and work within an environment where strong community relations are promoted and valued at all levels. YouthAction is proactive in addressing the apprentices' barriers to progression, through supportive personal development, additional training and appropriate careers education information, advice and guidance.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

6.1 Almost all of the apprentices consistently achieve high standards of work, in line with best youth work practice. They are able to plan, facilitate and evaluate effective group work for a range of young people. They can also research, plan, implement and evaluate suitable intervention projects to tackle a wide range of community issues for various groupings; examples include community relations, personal development, mental health and well-being, and peer education programmes. The apprentices' understanding and application of the principles and values of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence are well-developed and evidenced through their personal and professional relationships.

6.2 The apprentices' communication skills are very good. They are able to make presentations clearly, facilitate small group discussions and produce well-structured written reports. Most are confident and articulate in a range of settings, including small informal groups, formal settings, one-to-one meetings, and professional reviews.

6.3 The apprentices are able to work independently or as part of a team. They take responsibility for their own learning and are effective in managing their own workload. They are also able to provide high levels of support for their peers, co-workers and for the young people in their youth work placements. The apprentices' employability skills are well-developed; they are reliable, have good organisational skills, are highly motivated, can maintain effective working relationships, and demonstrate high levels of commitment to achieve successful outcomes in all aspects of their work.

6.4 The overall retention rate is excellent at 95%, and almost all of the apprentices are making very good progress in achieving their full apprenticeship framework.

7. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

7.1 The curriculum provision is outstanding. It is well-designed to meet the needs and potential of the apprentices, and the needs of the youth work sector. The training programme is coherent, well-balanced and enhanced with additional short qualifications and options, matched to the apprentices' youth work placements and their career plans for higher education or employment. These additional qualifications enhance significantly their employability and progression opportunities.

7.2 Curriculum planning by the programme co-ordinators and programme managers is very good. There are detailed plans available for the apprentices, placement providers, supervisors and tutors to inform and help them prepare for directed training, various projects and placement training opportunities. The quality of the apprentices' PTPs is outstanding.

They are appropriately detailed and target-focused, jointly negotiated with the apprentices and their placement supervisor and are regularly reviewed and updated. The integration of the apprentices' essential skills provision within their youth work training, to utilise better the many naturally occurring opportunities for the development and assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills is, however, not yet fully developed.

7.3 The quality of the directed training is outstanding. The tutors plan and prepare thoroughly the training sessions. There is an effective range of training approaches deployed; they appropriately challenge and stimulate the apprentices' interest and promote active learning. There are regular evaluations of the apprentices' learning by the programme co-ordinators, which inform effectively the planning of future training sessions. The training is matched very well to the needs of the apprentices' youth work placements, and the apprentices' placement supervisors are encouraged to contribute to the content and to the delivery of training sessions. The apprentices' directed training and learning is regularly contextualised and embedded in 'real-life' youth work projects. These projects provided excellent opportunities for the apprentices to consolidate and apply their training. The apprentices in Belfast, for example, are able to apply their performing arts training to engage and communicate with young people about mental health and well-being through drama road shows.

7.4 The quality of the apprentices' youth work practice is good or better, and is mostly good. They have good opportunities to develop and apply their skills and knowledge in appropriate community youth work settings. The apprentices are supported effectively by experienced placement supervisors, most of whom provide good support and guidance. The planning and monitoring of their progress is managed well through regular tripartite meetings between the tutor, placement supervisor and the apprentice. Future training opportunities and targets are agreed and accurately recorded on the apprentices' PTPs.

7.5 The assessment arrangements are outstanding. The planning for, and the quality of, the assessment and internal verification process are rigorous. The support for apprentices during the assessment process is very comprehensive; there are assessment briefings and planning workshops, drop-in surgeries, individual support, and comprehensive marking for improvement. A particular strength is the role of the peer support workers, who encourage the apprentices to achieve high standards and meet assessment deadlines.

7.6 The pastoral support provided for the apprentices is outstanding. The apprentices have access to a comprehensive range of support measures, which they value and are effective in ensuring they remain on the programme and make good progress. The support includes the highly effective peer support workers who individually mentor and guide each apprentice, a buddy system to provide peer support and encouragement and well-structured professional supervision.

7.7 Safeguarding policies and procedures are well-developed, and have been recently reviewed and updated by the management board. They comply fully with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

7.8 The provision for careers education information advice and guidance is outstanding. Apprentices are well-informed of all possible career opportunities. They benefit from a wide range of work-related experiences, educational trips, exchange visits and external speakers to inform them of progression opportunities. In particular, they benefit from the opportunity to complete one module from the University of Ulster's Certificate in Youth Studies, which provides them with the excellent opportunity to make well-informed choices regarding progression to higher education. All of the apprentices interviewed had a clear understanding of possible career pathways, and most of them had an appropriate career plan.

PART THREE

8. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

8.1 YouthAction has a robust development plan, which accurately identifies the key priorities for development. These priorities for development match closely the Inspectorate's findings, and the key priorities for development identified include:

- the further integration and embedding of the apprentices' essential skills provision within their youth work training programme; and
- the development of a virtual learning environment to better support and enhance the apprentices' training and learning.

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