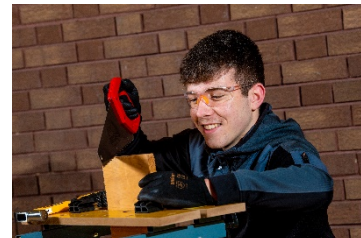
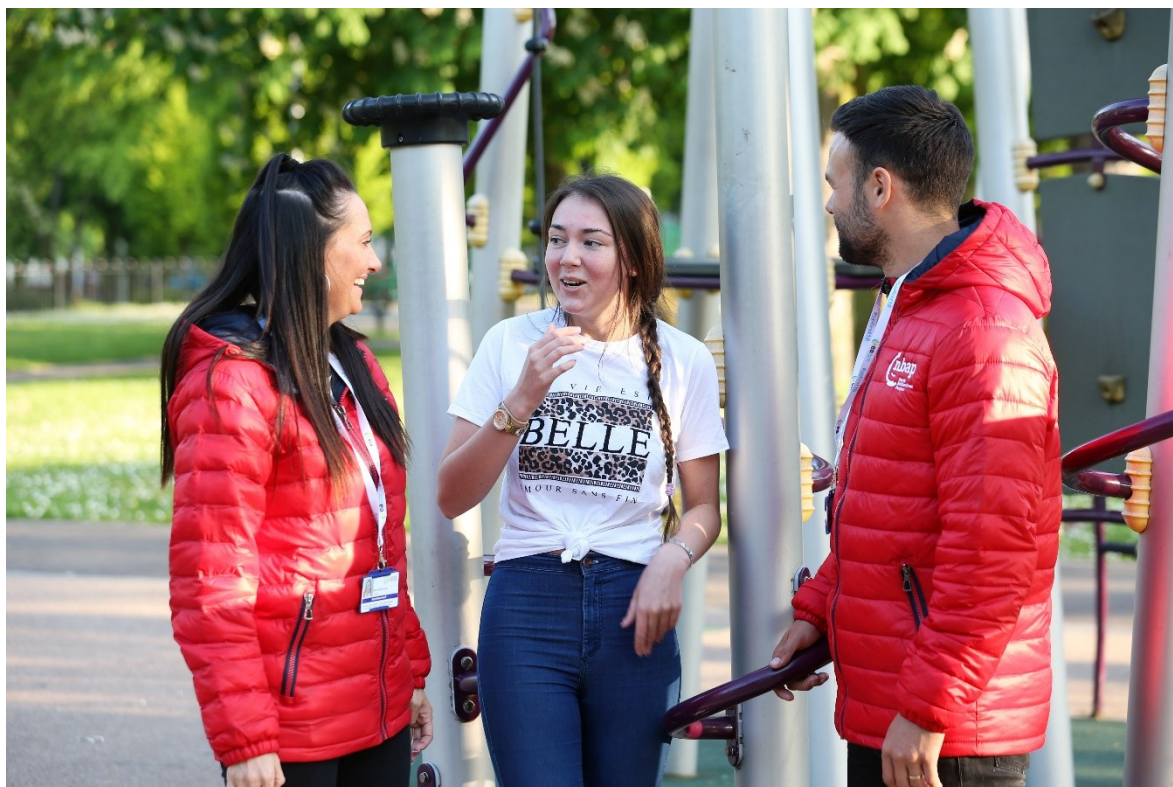


# Youth Phase Report

September 2018 to December 2020



Providing Inspection services for:  
Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



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## Foreword

The last year has brought challenges to education and training in Northern Ireland unlike anything we could have imagined. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) along with many others, had to re-think priorities quickly in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, including pausing inspection indefinitely.

Successful responses to the pandemic both, here and across the world have required understanding, adaptable and flexible leadership, underpinned by technological creativity; testing to the extreme the very attributes our education and training curricula endeavour to foster. Personal resilience is at a premium.

Maintaining operational integrity within and across the education and training system, continues to be a demanding, and increasingly exhausting undertaking for individuals and organisations. The long held ambition of providing access to education online had to be put in place virtually overnight.

Since March 2020, inspectors have been focusing largely on supporting leaders and practitioners to provide continuity of learning for children and young people and to support their wellbeing. Inspectors have shared their expertise and worked collaboratively with other key education and training stakeholders, to develop advice and guidance for a range of sectors.

This report is one of a series of seven individual reports (for Pre-school; Primary; Post-primary; Special; Education Other Than At School; Youth; and Further Education and Work-based learning) covering the period September 2018 to December 2020, replacing the previous biennial Chief Inspector's Report.

This series of reports sets out: to help to promote improvement in the interests of all learners; to identify, affirm, and share evidence of effective learning, so that all learners can benefit; and to provide a basis to continue the professional educational discourse between inspectors and educators, for the benefit of all children and young people.

The reports are intended to stimulate debate and discussion on what we are discovering about the nature of effective learning and teaching, that can not only support a swifter recovery but that can influence and shape the future of education in Northern Ireland.

The immediate future continues to be uncertain, but I feel privileged to lead ETI, in continuing to contribute our impartial and objective analysis, evaluation and expertise to the collective work of addressing the challenges facing the education and training system in Northern Ireland.

These reports mark a change of direction and a fresh start to our organisation and our work. I welcome your thoughts and contributions as to how we can continue to support learners and educators to adapt flexibly and quickly to changing and unforeseen circumstances in the future through capturing and building on the experiences of educators before and during the pandemic.



*Faustina Graham*

**Faustina Graham**  
**Chief Inspector**

## Context

The Youth phase report draws on a range of evidence including from inspections that took place between September 2018 and March 2020, work during the subsequent pause in ETI inspections; the Evaluation of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Camps Programme<sup>1</sup>; scoping work completed for the Department of Education (department) on the Priorities for Youth policy framework<sup>2</sup>; and district inspector knowledge based on substantial direct contacts with youth service managers, youth workers and young people between March and December 2020.

During the period 2016-18, there were major changes in the structure of the leadership and management of the youth service across Northern Ireland. The Education Authority (EA) developed two strands for youth service delivery, a local and regional service model led by two heads of service; this was intended to provide more strategic direction for the delivery and support of services across nine new geographical areas in Northern Ireland.

From March 2020, the ETI district inspection activity provides evidence of the response made by the youth sector to meeting the needs of young people during the Covid-19 pandemic. The redeployment of staff was critical to enabling the youth work response, and as a consequence, the roles and functions of most of the youth work staff were revised to meet better the changing needs of the young people with whom the sector was engaging.

Priorities for Youth refers to introducing revised funding arrangements for regional and local voluntary youth organisations with a focus on securing services on the basis of identified need to meet Department of Education (DE) objectives. The funding scheme was implemented at the end of this reporting period. The EA state that the funding will support youth work and the development of programmes and projects that will focus on positive attributes in young people and groups.

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<sup>1</sup> [An evaluation of the Together: Building a United Community Camps Programme \(2019/20\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Priorities for Youth outlines a set of priorities within a policy framework for youth work within education, strategically aligned to the overall DE policy and vision for young people.

## Inspection activity September 2018 - March 2020

During the period September 2018 to March 2020, there were ten inspections, and nine follow-up inspections, including two which were focused on safeguarding solely. Nine of the ten organisations inspected were evaluated as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement, or capacity to identify and bring about improvement; only one organisation was evaluated as having important areas for improvement. Improvement was evident in five of the seven follow-up inspections and in the safeguarding follow-up inspections.

### Youth inspection evidence September 2018 – March 2020

Number of inspections	10
Number of follow-up inspections	7
Number of safeguarding follow-up inspections	2
Total inspection activity	19 <sup>3</sup>

## Key findings from inspections September 2018 - March 2020

- The youth sector's focus on providing increased support for emotional health and wellbeing for vulnerable young people is working well in many communities as a result of targeted programmes; the emphasis on good relations is also benefitting young people who have a better understanding and respect for cultural differences.
- There is a strong focus on delivering programmes for young people that support their right to make choices and empowers them to voice their own ideas and attitudes. There is a lack of age specific, innovative and motivational programmes in the general provision for the 9-13 age group.
- A key strength in the youth area provision inspected was the inclusion of young people with disabilities and additional learning needs in the work of the organisations. Youth workers who work with these young people require further specialist training to enable them to identify and meet better their individual needs.
- Young people continue to demonstrate the ability to progress to meaningful leadership roles and they work effectively in small groups and in the best practice their contributions are valued and respected by youth workers and one another.

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<sup>3</sup> Not including district inspection visits.

- An increasing number of the young people attending youth service provision present with significant emotional health and well-being issues. The EA and other youth service providers have developed a number of short-term funded initiatives to complement existing emotional health and well-being programmes. The EA now need to examine ways to learn from and embed this important work into mainstream youth provision and build on the recommendations in the Emotional Health & Well-Being framework<sup>4</sup>.
- The ETI observations find that while outreach youth work has improved significantly across Northern Ireland, particularly with the community and statutory organisations, there is little evidence of the strategic development of detached youth work or developmental group work across the sector<sup>5</sup>.
- Almost all of the young people<sup>6</sup> attending provision in the three youth areas inspected, Causeway Coast and Glens; Newry Mourne and Down; and Fermanagh Omagh and Mid-Ulster, have gained accredited qualifications and/or recognised training<sup>7</sup>. The young people who attended training reported that they gained confidence, increased their self-esteem and further developed their personal and social skills; enabling them to make progress toward achieving their future career aspirations.

In the youth area inspections, the young people responded positively to the sensitive approach of the youth workers, and their appropriate interventions allowed the young people the time and space to build confidence, to learn and develop new skills. The care and welfare of the young people is intrinsic to the holistic view of youth work and was visible in almost every aspect of the youth work observed during these inspections.

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<sup>4</sup> [Informing the Development of an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#)

<sup>5</sup> Detached work takes place in the young people's own territory such as streets, cafes, and parks at times that are appropriate to them. Outreach aims to engage with the young people and then support them into centre or building-based youth provision.

<sup>6</sup> Figures supplied by the organisations indicate that almost 1500 young people took part in accredited training opportunities in a twelve month period, with 95% percent retention and achievement rates.

<sup>7</sup> Accredited training is linked to the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Recognised training is delivered in-house not linked to a formal qualifications but important in the overall personal and social development of the young person.

## Key findings from evaluation and scoping work for the department

During 2019-21, the ETI evaluated the T:BUC programme. The programme requirements specify that the T:BUC camps must be delivered on a cross-community basis and include participants from Catholic and Protestant communities. Key findings from the T:BUC evaluation include the:

- very good management of the programme by the EA;
- effective interagency collaboration;
- good support provided by the EA to the individual camps;
- positive attitudinal change by the young people towards others from different backgrounds and different cultures;
- issues raised by the majority of young people in focus groups were ‘coping with life’, ‘dealing with bullying’ and ‘feeling isolated’ rather than the legacy of the troubles and dealing with religious difference, though this is still a concern for a significant minority; and
- social action projects and the Ambassadors pilot programme are good examples of embedding learning from previous programmes, and involving young people in leadership roles beneficial to their community.

The ETI findings and recommendations from the evaluation, published in November 2020, including a small number of safeguarding issues were accepted by the T:BUC programme board and are being implemented.

The ETI scoping study of ‘Priorities for Youth’, included a range of focus groups of youth workers and stakeholders. Almost all of the focus group contributors agreed that youth work methodology is having a significant impact on closing the performance gap between the highest and lowest achieving young people accessing provision in both schools and other youth settings inspected by ETI. However, a minority of individuals interviewed stated that there is a need to continue to build on the links with schools and other education providers including further education and training. The scoping study identified a gap in evidence on the effectiveness of youth work in schools, and to what extent this is benefitting young people which will require further



analysis and evaluation. Other recommendations include the need to update the youth work curriculum, the Model for Effective Practice<sup>8</sup>, to include many of the issues that have been prominent in the response to Covid-19, including emotional health and well-being, building resilience with young people, working with anxiety in young people and use of social media within the sector.

## Key findings from district inspection activity, March - December 2020

Since March 2020, the ETI have been in regular contact with the statutory and voluntary youth sectors who have provided updates on the response by the youth service since the Covid-19 outbreak. The youth sector was quick to develop appropriate response planning to meet young people's needs through a range of specialised, innovative and flexible programmes. The Executive approved £19.3m additional funding for the provision of free school meals including £400,000 to DE to enable the EA Youth Service to support the Department for Communities to provide food for vulnerable young people.

Youth work staff were involved in the distribution of over 3000 meals to individual families of vulnerable young people as part of the 'eat well live well' programme during 2020. In addition, over 100 young people were referred to the Facilitating Life and resilience Education Project for vulnerable young people aged 11-25.

The youth sector has worked well in the preparation for a safe restart of youth services following closely the Public Health Agency guidance after each lockdown. An appropriate focus was placed on youth work interventions which were targeted at supporting those young people most in need. While the initial closure of youth centres and the loss of generic youth provision left a gap in services for young people, the increased online support and other intervention work by youth workers have demonstrated the resilience of young people to adapt to the current situation.

In one situation a youth worker informed an inspector of the continued work with vulnerable young people. As a result of her local knowledge and the good working relationship with many of her members she was able to identify her members most in need and through the Eat Well Live Well programme was able not only to deliver food parcels but also keep in touch through regular online meetings with members.

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<sup>8</sup> The Model for Effective Practice was designed to be a supportive framework and is broadly referred to as a curriculum framework.

While generic youth work has been paused, the youth sector has continued to provide targeted work with small focus groups of young people throughout the Covid-19 period. Recent inspection evidence has demonstrated the importance of small group work, connecting with young people and helping to reduce levels of anxiety. Properly facilitated focus groups, having good friends and positive relationships is recognised as an important protective factor for emotional health and well-being for young people. The EA have developed a comprehensive Youth Online<sup>9</sup> website to support remote engagement with young people during the pandemic. This includes Stay Connected<sup>10</sup>, an innovative initiative that enables young people to stay in touch with youth workers; this includes an appropriate emphasis on keeping youth workers and young people safe during engagements. The online service also provides a portal to keep youth workers and young people informed of developments and offers high quality, interactive guidance on restarting programmes. The youth workers report that as a result of the online engagement, there has been a small increase in new members to the youth service; this provides an opportunity for future growth in terms of attendance and programme delivery to both targeted and generic youth services, post-pandemic.

## Lessons learned during Covid-19

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the youth service was discussed with almost all of the participants in the focus groups during the scoping study of Priorities for Youth. It is clear from the discussions with young people that the youth sector is supporting them well through a variety of services including Youth Online and Stay Connected. However most agreed that in order to inform restart and future planning there is a need for research into the impact the pandemic has had on young people. Youth work staff reported challenges which include, upskilling in the use of technology, adaptability, increased speed in responding to needs and targeted work with young people with increased social anxiety. Youth workers also reported on the increasing levels of poverty and the impact of this on young people and their families; they also highlighted that in these challenging situations much of their work involved supporting parents. It is important to recognise the resilience and adaptability of youth workers in the response to Covid-19 and in particular the support they provided to vulnerable young people and their families.

One of the positive findings by youth workers from the North-West was their effective response to the increase in referrals from parents who were struggling to provide 'things to do' for their children. Youth work staff were able to provide ideas and general support for parents of vulnerable young people.

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<sup>9</sup> [Youth Online](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Stay Connected](#)

It is timely to review the youth work curriculum as outlined in 'The Model for Effective Practice' to reflect recent developments and current practice. While most of the curriculum is still relevant, the review should be informed by the impact of Covid-19 on young people, take more account of the way they now live, with a key focus on how the wider contexts including socio-economic status, gender, race, sexuality, culture, religion and disability, affect their ability to achieve personal goals or contribute to their community or society.

During Covid-19, the youth sector has been proactive in adapting to new ways of working and has developed expertise in the use of technology to support distance and blended modes of delivery. This form of engagement is likely to continue through restart and into the future, creating new challenges for young people and their families, youth workers, employing authorities and evaluators, including the ETI. Priorities going forward include developing the infrastructure, people and protocols to engage effectively, agreeing the parameters in which the youth work takes place, and establishing the effectiveness of that work. Where ETI finds evidence of effective practice in remote/blended learning<sup>11</sup>, this will be shared on the Good Practice section of the ETI website<sup>12</sup>.

Across this reporting period, there has been an increase in effective cross-departmental and cross-sector working with the youth service, for example the START<sup>13</sup> project that emerged from the Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime; the FLARE<sup>14</sup> partnership with the Public Health Agency; the work with The Executive Office on the T:BUC camps; and the youth work in schools, though it does require further analysis and evaluation, continues to be an important part of work with young people at risk of underachieving and who present with barriers to learning.

## Considerations for the Youth sector going forward

The Youth Sector continues to be flexible and adaptable as the disruptive impact of Covid-19 continues. Youth workers continue to develop creative and innovative ways to engage and support young people during the pandemic. The ETI evidence across this period identifies the following key priorities:

- reviewing and evaluating the quality and impact of remote/blended learning on meeting the support and developmental needs of young people;

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<sup>11</sup> Blended learning is a model that combines online and face-to-face learning spaces and experiences.

<sup>12</sup> [Good Practice](#)

<sup>13</sup> START - Supporting Teenagers Away from Recurrent Trouble

<sup>14</sup> Facilitating Life and Resilience Education - The Education Authority youth service has developed, in partnership with the Public Health Agency, an innovative support service for young people aged 11- 25 experiencing poor mental health.

- evaluating the quality and effectiveness of youth work in schools to better inform future policy and planning decisions;
- reviewing the youth work curriculum as outlined in the Model for Effective Practice to better reflect recent developments and current practice; and
- developing appropriate innovative and motivational programmes for the 9-13 age group, which are age specific and hold their interest.

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