

# Engaging young people

Local authority youth work 2005–08

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*Engaging young people* draws upon evidence from local authority youth services inspections which took place as part of Ofsted's joint area reviews of children's and young people's services from 2005 to 2008. It reports on the quality and impact of youth work. The report tracks recent but early developments in the introduction of integrated youth support.

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## Executive summary

*Engaging young people* draws upon evidence from the inspections of local authority youth work which took place as part of Ofsted's joint area reviews of children's and young people's services. The report covers the 100 local authorities that were inspected during the period September 2005 to September 2008.<sup>1</sup> It illustrates how the best youth work, properly planned and supported, contributes to young people's broad education, promotes them as active citizens and helps them acquire the wider skills and attributes needed to engage fully in society.

Of the youth services inspected in 2007–08, overall effectiveness was judged good in a higher proportion than in the two previous years. The lack of any inadequate services contrasts favourably with 2005–07. There was, however, one outstanding service in each of the previous years but none in 2007–08.

Inspection evidence from the 100 local authorities demonstrates that effective youth work can make a valuable contribution to young people's development in very practical ways, such as helping them to make and maintain relationships and become active citizens, as well as supporting them towards independence and building their capacity to assess and take risks safely. Obstacles to achievement identified by inspectors in the local authorities visited included insufficient action by managers to identify and tackle underlying weaknesses in youth work, and workers being insufficiently skilled in key areas of their practice. Professional development for part-time youth support workers, on whom services are highly dependent, was often lacking. Nonetheless, some youth workers were operating in an increasingly diverse range of settings, above and beyond the youth service. The most effective were able to forge strong, trusting and sustained relationships with young people. More broadly, some were successfully carving out a distinct role in their work across youth support agencies. The inspection evidence demonstrated a link between a youth work curriculum with a sound base and good achievement, particularly in work with targeted groups of young people. A well-grounded curriculum also helped promote equality.

In 2007–08, the proportion of services in which leadership and management were judged to be good was greater than in previous years, although none was outstanding. Strengths in leadership and management included the positive contribution made by youth work to corporate aims; effective operational planning that combined national priorities with local needs; a management focus on continual improvement; and the use of youth workers to support consultative processes with young people. In the better local authorities inspected, youth services were shown to be contributing well to the integration of youth support arrangements. Strategic

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of all the services visited, see the comprehensive table in the annex.

managers demonstrated increasingly high ambitions for young people's services but it is still the case that many local authorities, elected members and communities held unrealistic expectations of what the youth service could achieve with the resources available. Data and intelligence to measure the performance of youth work were insufficient. Youth service managers handled partnerships well and gave good attention to ensuring a healthy and safe environment for young people.

In respect of integrated youth support in the services inspected, there was a greater flexibility of approach across the new constituents of Connexions, youth offending services and local authority youth services, but less progress at practitioner level than strategic managers consider to be the case. Weaknesses in deployment highlighted the need for managers to apply a more informed approach to staffing.

Inspection evidence from the sample of local authorities inspected over the 2007–08 period points to the pivotal role played by directors of children's and young people's services and other senior strategic managers in ensuring that youth work retains its focus on education, enjoyment and informality. Inspection showed that the better services were achieving this but, in a few instances, the integration of services risked diluting these particular strengths. The most effective local authorities recognised the need for youth work to be secured within the broad spectrum of 'positive activities' (such as homework or special interest clubs, sport and volunteering activities) and as one of the key elements of inter-agency targeted support for vulnerable young people. Directors of children's and young people's services were very supportive of activities aimed at encouraging young people's involvement in decision making and in publicly celebrating their achievements.

## Key findings

The key findings are:

- The proportion of local authority youth services judged adequate or better has risen over the three-year period 2005 to 2008. Seven services were judged inadequate in 2005 and none in 2008.
- An increased proportion of services were graded good for young people's achievement through youth work in 2007–08 compared with the previous two years. However, in the same year, achievement was only adequate in one third of sessions.
- The most effective youth workers were able to respond well to young people's needs and interests, as well as contributing to the development of inter-agency work.
- Provision for young people is now a higher priority for local authorities. The best local authorities have an informed focus on the broad spectrum of young people's services.

- Initial work to integrate staff from different youth-related disciplines, such as Connexions and youth offending services, is promising. The most effective arrangements are able to capitalise upon the distinctive informal educational role youth work plays.
- Insufficient attention has been given by managers in the weaker services to the effective deployment of youth workers and inter-agency youth support staff.
- Performance management and quality assurance in youth services are not consistently effective.

## Recommendations

Directors of children's and young people's services should:

- continue to ensure that strategic priority is given to improving young people's services
- manage expectations of what youth work can realistically achieve within the resources allocated
- maximise opportunities to publicly celebrate young people's successes
- ensure the deployment of the range of youth support workers across young people's services is efficient and effective
- support the development of more meaningful and engaging local performance management arrangements
- ensure a clear role for educationally based youth work within the broader scope of positive activities and targeted support.

Youth work managers should:

- give greater consideration to the reasons underpinning the variability of young people's achievements and act accordingly
- ensure the demands and use made of youth work resources are realistic
- encourage the deployment of experienced youth workers in wider settings
- promote cross-agency youth support training
- attend to the workforce development needs of part-time youth support workers
- build on best practice in quality assurance and ensure the participation of young people and youth workers in quality assurance processes.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families should:

- support local authorities and their partners in developing more responsive performance measures

- communicate better the role youth work has in young people's education
- ensure workforce development planning supports the full range of adults involved in youth work.

## Introduction

1. The report covers a period of unprecedented transformation and change in youth services, youth offending services, Connexions and third sector providers. Government reforms introduced during this period include *Youth matters* and *Youth matters: next steps*, aimed at delivering opportunities for all young people and targeted support for the most vulnerable.<sup>2,3</sup> Statutory guidance on the Education Act 1996 made it clear that local authorities' duty to secure access to youth work provision formed part of the wider duty to secure access to positive activities. In 2007, *Aiming high for young people: a ten-year strategy for positive activities* and *Children's plan: building brighter futures* were launched, along with further developments in 14 to 19 education and training.<sup>4,5</sup> New legislation generally followed, the thrust of which was to secure contributions from the full range of local partners working through more integrated youth support arrangements. Considerable restructuring of young people's services has resulted, impacting extensively on local authority youth services. Additional Government funding was made available to support new developments. In 2007–08 the average service contacted 28% of its 13–19 youth population, with 17% actively involved in youth work programmes.<sup>6</sup>
2. Ofsted's *Framework for inspecting youth services 2004* was updated in 2007 to reflect these emerging national policies.<sup>7</sup> Of the 100 services which form the evidence base for this report, 28 inspections were undertaken in 2007–08 using the updated inspection framework. At the latter stage of the programme structures were changing, and inspectors took account of both the more established work of the youth service and, increasingly, of youth work in the broader context of integrated support services for young people. This report

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<sup>2</sup> *Youth matters* (cm6629), DfES, 2005;

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=Cm6629>.

<sup>3</sup> *Youth matters: next steps* (0260), DfES, 2006;

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-0260-2006&>.

<sup>4</sup> *Aiming high for young people: a ten-year strategy for positive activities* (PU216), HM Treasury/DCSF, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> *Children's plan: building brighter futures* (cm7280), DCSF, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *England's local authority youth services – NYA audit 2007–08* (129210), The National Youth Agency, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> *Youth work: a framework for inspection* (070183), Ofsted, 2007; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2307](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2307).

therefore looks back at youth work and also begins to set down some of the challenges local authority managers face in ensuring the effectiveness of new structures.

## **Demonstrating successes**

3. Effective youth work helps young people to develop essential personal and social skills and an understanding of their strengths and potential. It contributes to their understanding of their rights and responsibilities and how they can influence the decisions that affect their lives.
4. Assessing the impact of youth work can be problematic. The pressure from central and local government is to provide evidence of measurable outcomes, related to specific targets. Youth workers, on the other hand, often place more weight on the less tangible personal benefits that young people can gain from involvement in such activities. The two approaches are not necessarily incompatible. For example, involvement in a youth work project can provide young people with an increased sense of community which may contribute to a reduction in the number of recorded anti-social incidents in an area. Similarly, guidance from a youth worker can spur a young person on to securing a college place or becoming involved in work-based learning.
5. In judging achievement, inspectors take several factors into account, including young people's ability to function socially and politically; their acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding; and their attitudes, values and self-confidence. In the services inspected in 2005–06, achievement was outstanding in one, good in 16, adequate in 13 and inadequate in three. In 2007–08, 22 were good and 10 were adequate, with no service being inadequate or outstanding.
6. The following examples show how youth work can support young people in making and maintaining relationships; becoming active citizens; moving towards independence; and building the capacity to assess and take risks safely.

## **Making and maintaining relationships**

7. Getting relationships right is a skill and constitutes a core achievement in youth work. Inspectors met many young people in the services visited who had succeeded in establishing open and trusting relationships with friends, peers and adults. For some, involvement in youth activities provided them with a rare opportunity to move in social circles beyond the home and school, and to encounter supportive adults in non-traditional leadership roles. For many youth workers, tackling social issues was an important objective. This often took time but, in the services inspected, it was almost always easier to achieve where secure and open relationships had been established. The best youth workers

helped young people to show maturity and consideration in their dealings with others; to develop their capacity to resolve personal problems; to recognise, if not challenge, discrimination; and to manage the conflicts and disagreements they inevitably encountered. For example, when participants were instrumental in developing acceptable behaviour contracts and anti-bullying policies, they learned to take account of alternative views and expectations. Inspectors found that young people involved in campaigns to raise awareness of problems such as cyber-bullying and internet safety developed useful skills as peer educators and provided positive role models for younger teenagers. The following examples show how two services used effective practice to develop young people's self-confidence and build strong relationships with others.

## Case studies

### Solihull – Anti-Bullying Behaviour Alliance

Solihull's Anti-Bullying Behaviour Alliance (ABBA) offers young people, many who have themselves been the victims of bullying, the opportunity to develop their self-confidence in a safe and supportive environment. This outstanding project, delivered in partnership with other organisations including the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, enables young people to develop and deliver their own anti-bullying campaigns, alongside an impressive peer education programme. Youth workers empower young people to take control of the programme, with those who have been involved over a period of time encouraged to act as 'buddies' for new and less confident members. The young people demonstrate empathy, sensitivity, understanding and quite remarkable levels of honesty and mutual trust. Through this work, they have been instrumental in ensuring that bullying is taken seriously by the local authority and its partners.

### Leicestershire – Amazons young women's group

Amazons is a group for young women that provides an excellent range of social and educational activities. The young women are highly committed to making a positive contribution to their local community and to supporting their peers. The initiatives for which they have been responsible include a 'Be Safe' date rape card for use in local schools. They also raise funds for an annual trip to Gambia where they work as volunteers in a school, an experience which they describe as 'life-changing' and which has led them to be far more appreciative of the opportunities available to them in Leicestershire. Through participating in youth work they have developed a high degree of confidence and self-esteem, and excellent personal and working relationships.

## Young people as active citizens

8. This is an area of good practice in which the Government's youth opportunities and youth capital funds have acted as a catalyst. The most effective services have responded well to the increasing national focus on promoting active citizenship and involving young people more closely in tackling local issues. Inspectors found many instances where participation in youth forums and campaign groups had given young people a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities and enabled them to take action for their own and others' benefit. The community-based nature of much youth work offered considerable opportunities for young people to develop an understanding of social and political affairs by taking part in such activities as voluntary work or community action projects. In this way, they acquired confidence and the skills of leadership and organisation which they could apply to other contexts, such as acting as advocates for their peers or helping to improve local provision. The following examples demonstrate how services have developed such practice to good effect.

### Case studies

#### Essex – Mobile provision at Hatfield Broad Oak

A group of young people who use mobile provision had become active citizens in their local community. To tackle negative views of teenagers and to campaign for better local facilities, they produced a high quality video featuring interviews with prominent members of the community. In doing so, they had developed a wide range of skills in media production, research, filming and editing.

The older members of the group were keen to ensure that the younger ones would continue to have access to youth provision in the future. Therefore, they established a formal organisation, with an elected committee, to campaign for a new youth shelter and youth club. They also organised fundraising activities at the summer festival. They received excellent support from the youth workers, who helped them to identify sources of funding for the video, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the committee and arrange meetings with the parish council.

#### Luton – Bangladeshi Youth League

The Bangladeshi Youth League is a partnership initiative involving the local authority and the Bangladeshi Community Centre. It works with young people of Bangladeshi heritage, who hold it in high regard and who, through involvement in it, have developed a strong commitment to making a difference in their community. They take a very active role in planning, delivering and evaluating a range of projects, through which

they learn about important issues such as substance misuse. The youth workers have a thorough understanding of the area and use this to develop and deliver programmes that are relevant to local needs and appeal to the interests of the young people.

### **Kent – Tenterden Detached Project**

This detached project is led by very experienced and knowledgeable staff and successfully engages local young people from a wide rural area. With the support of the youth workers, the young people set about tackling the problem of the dearth of activities for them in the area. They consulted widely about the needs of local teenagers, lobbied and worked with the parish council, gained the backing of other adults in the community and organised a series of fundraising events. Now they organise a range of activities and run a weekly youth club, which provides a busy social meeting place for 11- to 17-year-olds. The young people formed their own band using a grant from the Youth Opportunities Fund. Through these experiences they have developed political literacy and the skills of leadership, teamwork and public speaking.

### **Young people as risk takers**

9. Youth work has the potential to help young people test the boundaries between reasonable and risky behaviours. The most effective programmes seen by inspectors encouraged young people to draw on their existing knowledge and experience to analyse the degree of risk in the situations in which they found themselves. For example, through discussion and information gained through youth centres and the internet, they developed the confidence to ask questions and share their views on a range of sensitive issues, such as sex, relationships, alcohol, crime and anti-social behaviour. Discussions and group work often focused on issues identified by the young people themselves or on concerns raised by others, such as parents, the police, health workers or community leaders. In the best instances, young people contributed to debate, learned to listen and felt able to seek out confidential advice and support without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. For example, young people would choose to be screened for chlamydia with the comfort of knowing that there was someone to help if necessary. In the case studies below, youth work supported young people in making important changes in their behaviour.

### **Case studies**

#### **Luton – Teen Learning Centre**

The Teen Learning Centre is a partnership initiative involving the primary care trust, the youth service and a local school. It is located in the school's youth club and provides information and advice on health issues in an attractive and informal environment. The centre is managed by youth

workers, with specialist support from GPs, a school nurse and sexual health and drugs workers. Young people visit it at lunch times to chat informally to staff, take part in activities and receive specialist support from health professionals. The youth workers take full advantage of opportunities to engage young people in discussion, quizzes and questionnaires and to identify their needs. They often contact individuals to follow up issues after a session. As a result of such support, the young people have acquired a high level of knowledge about the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

### **Lambeth – The X-it programme**

Lambeth Council and its partners have been very successful in reducing youth crime rates. A major contributor to this is the X-it programme. This is designed to help young people who are at high risk of offending to move out of gangs and to engage in more positive activities. The 36-week programme includes 10 weeks of group work, a residential course in the Lake District and training in leadership. To date, 120 young people have taken part in the programme, many of whom report a rise in self-esteem and progress to employment as a result. Some of them have gone on to train as facilitators for future programmes.

### **Moving towards independence**

10. The most successful youth work made a clear contribution to helping young people prepare for adulthood. This was particularly evident in the work with young people who had experienced limited success in their education or personal lives, had found it difficult to apply themselves to long-term commitments or who faced significant challenges, for example as young parents, young carers or because of a learning difficulty and/or disability. The support for these groups often involved specialist advice, guidance and counselling. The focus was on basic areas, such as housing, benefits, finances and health, which could present complex problems for young people and the youth workers who support them. Inspections over the last two years found a stronger focus on developing the confidence and skills of those who were not in education, employment or training. This work was particularly effective where the young people were able to see direct links to their long-term education or employment goals. The examples below show two services that have developed good practice in helping vulnerable young people move towards independence.

### **Case studies**

#### **Southwark – Beautiful Butterflies**

Beautiful Butterflies is a group for young women with moderate learning difficulties. The youth work curriculum includes preparation for

independent living by helping them develop the relevant knowledge and skills. For example, they learn about food preparation, the importance of hygiene and taking care when using knives or operating electrical equipment. During the inspector's visit, the young people cooked a healthy meal of pasta and vegetables using ingredients that they had not tried before. The youth workers provided a good mix of challenge and support, providing assistance and encouragement when an activity proved difficult. The young people were proud of what they had learnt as a result of being involved in the project.

### **North Lincolnshire – The Learning Support Unit**

The Learning Support Unit and the Youth Information and Counselling Unit work closely together to help young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or who underperform, to achieve economic well-being and independence. The young people are helped to resolve personal problems, to identify what they want to do and to gain the confidence to take responsibility for their own lives. They are encouraged to think positively and to work towards clear goals. One young person, for example, reported that his whole attitude to learning had changed while attending the project because it had enabled him to see the relevance of education. It is not surprising that this work has made a major contribution to reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training in the area.

### **Leicestershire – Dreamers**

Dreamers is a youth work project for young asylum seekers and refugees, funded through the primary care trust, the council and other sources. It provides these young people with advice, guidance and a weekly programme of social and educational activities. Those who have taken part in it describe it as a 'lifeline'. In the highly supportive environment created by the youth workers they have gained in confidence and self-esteem, and have learnt a range of skills, including how to cook on a budget; how to source halal food; and how to stay safe in the community. With the support of volunteers, they have extended their English conversation skills. They have also developed their interpersonal skills. Older participants provide strong role models for those who have recently joined.

## **Obstacles to young people's success**

11. Despite some improvement, young people's achievement through their involvement in youth work was judged by inspectors as no better than adequate in 23 and inadequate in six of the 68 youth services inspected from

2005 to 2007. Furthermore, in 2007–08, 10 out of the 32 services were judged as no better than adequate. There were several reasons for this.

12. The less effective services inspected failed to distinguish sufficiently between what could be realistically achieved in, for example, a one night per week youth club as opposed to a longer-term project. In the weak provision, inspectors encountered similar curricular objectives set for very different contexts without sufficient consideration of the time or learning resources available. By contrast, in the better examples of planning seen in youth centre work, workers concentrated quite simply on getting relationships right and achieving a constructive and amenable environment. This single, sensible objective reflected concerns about the challenging behaviour of a minority of club members. More generally, however, learning objectives seldom linked to the amount of exposure a young person had to a youth project.
13. The inadequate standards of achievement by young people in six youth services out of the 100 inspected were, in many instances, related to weaknesses in youth work practice. These included a failure to involve young people in planning activities and in evaluating their learning; insufficient depth of understanding on the part of youth workers about the purpose of accreditation to support young people's learning; failure to set boundaries for behaviour; a lack of group work skills; and limited use of ICT as a learning resource.
14. Above and beyond day-to-day youth work practice, there are obvious challenges in measuring how well youth work meets a local authority's strategic objectives. The broader findings of joint area reviews highlight on-going concerns where rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection and youth offending remain stubbornly high. The use of alcohol is a worryingly persistent feature in the lives of some teenagers. Yet youth work inspection evidence is clear that responsive programmes helped young people to identify, moderate or eradicate their potentially harmful and risky behaviours. Inspection evidence also showed that, in these cases, young people were able to develop the necessary skills and determination to make positive and lasting changes in their lives; for example, managing peer pressure. The reality is that good youth services, along with other services, often contributed to meeting strategic targets but their impact cannot be measured in isolation.

## **The role and influence of youth workers**

15. Youth workers in the services inspected were operating in an increasingly wide range of settings. In addition to youth clubs and centres, they contributed to health projects, work in schools and pupil referral units, community safety programmes and youth offending work. The quality of youth work practice in 2005–06 was judged good or outstanding in 19, adequate in 10 and inadequate in four of the 33 local authorities inspected. Furthermore, in 2007–08 it was judged good in 19 and adequate in 13 of the 32 local authorities inspected.

None was judged outstanding or inadequate. The most effective practitioners responded to young people's needs and interests in an unobtrusive manner. Their non-stigmatising approach, together with the often voluntary nature of the relationship with young people, had the potential to engage some of the most resistant and hardest to help. The positive elements of practice identified by inspection reports included workers forging strong, trusting and sustained relationships with young people; dealing with concerns as they arose spontaneously; and enabling young people to understand social boundaries and the implications of their actions. Such practitioners had the ability to create lively and constructive learning opportunities and the drive to act as advocates for young people. In 2007–08, inspections showed that youth workers were more confident and competent in using accreditation than in the recent past, with the best practice drawing on such formal systems to underpin wider learning.

16. Inspection reports often noted how well youth workers knew their communities. Where this was the case they had a thorough grasp of local cultures, young people's relationships with authority and the risks they were taking. Indeed, many staff grew up in the communities in which they work; youth work teams often reflect well the ethnic make-up of an area. As such, they brought in-depth local knowledge and often unique insights and knowledge about the young people's lives. This added value and credibility to the youth service. The better services were nurturing young people in their late teens and early twenties to take on leadership tasks and act as role models or mentors. Evidence from the inspections suggests that, when properly resourced and managed, these schemes were of great value to the mentors and younger peers. As local authorities seek to integrate youth support services, it is becoming evident that forward-looking and often more experienced workers are exercising advanced skills in relation to community development, managing inter-agency work to best effect, preparing funding bids and leading teams. The example below shows a local authority building effectively on a well-established model of delivery.

## Case study

### Hampshire youth service – the senior youth worker

The youth service had a long-standing district-based model, the success of which hinged largely on the senior youth workers, most of whom were entrepreneurial and creative in their work. They had generated good inter-agency support and negotiated joint youth projects with district councils and various other partners. These partners came to understand the role of the senior youth worker in their local area, which helped encourage a positive perception of young people in the community. Children's and young people's services district managers recognised the senior youth

workers' experience and knowledge as essential in supporting Hampshire's model of locality services.

17. In some cases, the least professionally equipped youth workers were expected to work with the most challenging young people. Examples were seen of part-time employees' time being diverted from youth work to meet data collection demands and paperwork tasks out of proportion to the hours they were employed. Less confident workers and managers sometimes struggled with implementing a service's curriculum, perceiving it as a series of tasks to deliver, as opposed to learning activities which met the interests and needs of young people. Some practice was hampered by a rigid approach which simply sought to organise activities for, rather than with, young people.

## Curriculum – a framework for learning and enjoying

18. When judging the effectiveness of the youth work curriculum, inspectors considered whether it provided young people with opportunities to engage, learn, develop and enjoy themselves, and to evaluate and articulate their learning. They also considered how far the curriculum met the needs of young people and of the locality; whether it was based on a coherent rationale; how closely it linked to the five key areas of Every Child Matters; and how well it promoted equality, inclusiveness and diversity.
19. Of the 100 services inspected, the curriculum was judged to be outstanding in 10 and inadequate in 12. The remainder were graded adequate or good in equal distribution. There was a strong link between good achievement judgements and those made about the curriculum. In the best services, all policies and practice focused clearly and consistently on helping young people to learn. There was a consensus among staff about the purpose of their work and, generally, young people experienced interesting and engaging activities which they recognised as both fun and educational. There was a clear focus on promoting equality and inclusion by giving targeted support to vulnerable groups in order to increase their life chances. The curriculum examples below illustrate the good use made of music and sport to engage young people and promote learning.

## Case studies

### Learning through music

Increasingly, youth services are using music and sound technology to good effect. Projects range from those which simply provide space for young people to practise and perform to those which enable them, through music, to explore such themes as identity or sub-cultures, or to develop the technical skills of mixing, recording and producing. In many instances, the young people at whom such projects are directed have not

fared well in mainstream education and the informal nature of youth work better suits their needs.

By learning new skills, those who wish to do so are better placed to pursue accreditation leading to music-related college courses or employment. For others, the benefits they gain relate more to their personal development; to the self-worth they derive from creating and performing music and the public recognition they receive as a result. The most effective youth workers were very effective in using these potential benefits to motivate young people through music projects.

## Learning through sport

Young people often spend time playing unsupervised sports such as basketball or table tennis, in and around a youth club or project. The opportunity to have fun and meet friends in this way is often the primary reason for their attendance. The most successful youth workers capitalise on young people's interest in sport and use it to gain their trust and to introduce them to a broader curriculum that caters for their wider needs. A good sports-based programme of activities can improve young people's health and fitness and help them develop specialist interests in new leisure-time activities, such as skateboarding and contemporary dance. The best programmes provide good progression routes, enabling participants to train as coaches and instructors, achieve nationally recognised awards and develop their leadership skills.

20. The more effective curriculum managers enthused staff and used planning and evaluation as a means of introducing new ideas and learning resources. They promoted the use of appropriate accreditation and helped workers understand where opportunities lay for differentiation and progression. Weaknesses in the management of the curriculum included an inequitable distribution of provision across a local authority area and slowness in using the potential of digital technology and social networking to engage young people. Tensions were created when centrally designed documentation and guidance took prominence over the needs and interests of the young people involved in a club or project.

## Leadership, management and accountability

21. In inspections of youth work carried out during 2005–06, the judgement for leadership and management was outstanding in one, good in 11, adequate in 15 and inadequate in six of the 33 local authorities inspected. In 2007–08, 18 services were good, 13 were adequate and only one was inadequate. None was outstanding.

## Strategy and development

22. Inspection judgements on leadership and management point to local authorities having an increased and better-informed focus on the broad spectrum of young people's services. In the most successful authorities, good work had been undertaken to integrate staff from different youth-related disciplines, such as Connexions and youth offending services, and to exploit the distinctive informal educational opportunities that youth work offers. In these areas, there was a unified strategic management group which was clear about the functions of the constituent parts of its youth support arrangements and was able to draw on a wide range of resources.
23. In the weaker authorities visited, the youth service was failing to engage sufficiently with the new strategies outlined in this report. Further weaknesses resulted from the local authority giving insufficient attention to the possible impact of new developments. For example, many children and young people's services had restructured so that youth workers formed part of locally based multidisciplinary teams, focusing on individual casework. Necessary though this work was, in some instances it diverted youth workers away from promoting informal learning and group activity. Other weaknesses in the leadership of local authorities included a lack of rigour in the performance management of services; a failure to include youth support provision in longer-term accommodation strategies; and a lack of drive in extending the capacity of services. Despite the Government's commitment to extending the commissioning role of local authorities, too few of the authorities inspected were making best use of the opportunities to extend provision through involving the community and voluntary sectors.

## Workforce

24. One of youth work's most enduring features is the eclectic nature of the workforce. It includes adult volunteers keen to provide help for young people, sessional youth support workers and a range of part-time and full-time professionally qualified staff. Inspectors judged whether the qualifications and experience of managers and youth workers were such that they were competent to undertake the work expected of them. Overall, this aspect was judged to be adequate.
25. There are undoubted challenges in supporting the needs of such a broad workforce. In the best cases, workforce development was an integral part of the day-to-day work of the service; in the worst, it consisted of no more than a series of unrelated training events. The most effective approaches focused on supporting a worker's role, be that leading an area team, running a one evening per week youth club or managing partnership arrangements. Team meetings incorporated professional development and training programmes reflected strategic priorities and local need. Good examples included integrated

youth support services providing joint training on common issues, such as making referrals, or colleagues shadowing each other to improve practice. There was a clear link between a local authority's attitude and approach to continuing professional development and the extent to which staff were motivated, committed and ready to embrace change. Where services had introduced senior youth work practitioner roles, for example, these helped retain expertise in the field, while allowing the most highly skilled and experienced workers to model best practice and coach less experienced colleagues.

26. Weaknesses in the services inspected in relation to professional development related in particular to the part-time youth support workers, too many of whom were not well enough equipped for their roles and had insufficient access to training. More generally, some training programmes had simply not kept pace with changing needs. In some instances low levels of funding constrained what could be provided and there was insufficient precision in determining professional development needs.
27. Ofsted's previous report on youth services noted that local authorities often expected more of their youth service than could be delivered by the staffing available.<sup>8</sup> Inspections since 2006 also showed that expectations were not always realistic or well matched to resources. In one authority, the time devoted to detached and outreach youth projects was as little as two hours per week. However laudable the motives for undertaking such work might be, it was clearly not possible to deliver it adequately with such minimal resources. Too few managers made a critical assessment of staffing levels in the light of expected outcomes. It was also often difficult to discern the rationale for deploying staff, for example between youth clubs catering for large numbers and short-term targeted curriculum activities designed for smaller groups. Too few managers scrutinised the working and travelling patterns of staff to ensure that the best use was made of their time and expertise.
28. The Government's integration agenda for youth support emphasises the need for improved collaboration in securing early intervention, easy referral and a more coordinated response, particularly for vulnerable young people. The extent to which this was being achieved varied. In the good services, youth service staff worked well with colleagues from other services and information about individual young people was helpfully shared across agencies. In one rural area, for example, responsibility for some of the guidance needs of a local young person not in education, employment or training had been passed from a Connexions adviser to a youth worker. This saved the time and expense of

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<sup>8</sup> *Building on the best: overview of local authority youth services 2005/06* (HMI 2706), Ofsted, 2007; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2706](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2706).

travel for the personal adviser and enabled the youth worker to establish a good relationship with the young person.

29. The presence of workers from different disciplines at youth projects and activities was not enough in itself. In the best cases, work had gone into reviewing and refining inter-agency roles such that duplication was eliminated and the skills, experiences and accountabilities of staff operating in a broader range of settings were well used.

## Resources

30. In many of the local authorities inspected there is a long and continuing history of under-investment in accommodation for youth work. Over a number of years, youth service inspections have drawn attention to poor quality buildings which, coupled with limited resources, were unattractive to young people. The fact that many buildings are only used for short periods each week also raises questions about their efficiency. Too many buildings did not allow easy access for those with mobility difficulties, despite the councils' stated policies on inclusion.
31. The more responsive local authorities had taken steps to refurbish their existing accommodation stock or, in conjunction with partners, to provide new facilities which were often shared by several services. Examples included youth club buildings that had been rejuvenated, were well staffed and that provided young people with access to music, digital technology and other attractive resources. Spare capacity was let to other youth organisations. Shared capital building programmes were on the increase, with many local permutations involving churches, colleges, extended schools, children's centres, community associations, health authorities and Connexions. Such programmes often extended to mobile provision. Joint arrangements were at their best when partners had a shared ethos about their work with young people. The case studies below show what can be achieved through good consultation with young people and well-planned investment in accommodation.

## Case studies

### The Methodist Centre – Toxteth, Liverpool

The Methodist Centre has made great strides in establishing itself as a 'centre of youth activity' in one of Liverpool's regeneration areas. It houses a comfortable café area, a games hall and a workplace-standard hair and beauty salon, where vocational courses are held in the daytime. The dance studio is rented to a commercial provider on condition that youth club members have access to the tuition provided. The high quality music studio attracts young people from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. Funding has been secured from a number of

sources, with the local authority, for example, employing some of the youth workers.

### **The eco-pod – Bradford**

The eco-pod reflects good partnership between the youth service, the YMCA, local councillors and the school where it is based. It was established in response to young people's requests for somewhere to meet. It is warm and more user-friendly than a customary youth shelter, and its innovative design provides excellent opportunities for the consideration of environmental issues.

### **Lancaster Youth Centre – Kensington and Chelsea**

The Lancaster Youth Centre is a traditional centre that has 'moved with the times' and kept pace with young people's changing needs and interests. A significant recent investment made the building accessible to wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties and allowed for a major extension of the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Most rooms include excellent audiovisual equipment and large monitors are used to good effect to show photographs of past club events and topical issues. The specialist webcam equipment was installed in partnership with Connexions and provides ready access to personal advisers located elsewhere in the borough. As well as ICT, the range of curriculum activities available is very impressive and includes physical activity, art, music and cooking, which are all pursued to a high standard. The centre has a very high number of regular members who see this very much as their own place.

32. Despite welcome developments of this type, some newer shared-use buildings, particularly those located in children's centres, did not provide for the needs of young people. Generally, local authorities' longer-term strategic accommodation plans took insufficient account of youth work provision.
33. In the services visited, low levels of core funding continue to undermine the longer-term sustainability of some youth work and to limit the capacity of services to respond to new policy initiatives. Many youth services have successfully enhanced provision through external funding. However, the short-term nature of this resource and the additional management created can stretch capacity further.

### **Partnership working**

34. In determining the effectiveness of partnerships, inspectors focused on the impact such arrangements had on young people's achievement. Most services inspected were good in this respect. In the best instances, directors of children's services had been successful in establishing the role of the local

authority as an enabler, provider and commissioner of services. At service level, there were increasing examples of work involving district or parish councils. In addition to the obvious incentive to share the costs of projects, such partnerships contributed to needs assessment through the sharing of local intelligence. Benefits included youth workers facilitating youth forums or leading community safety projects. More forward-looking primary care trusts were looking to youth work projects to provide sex and relationship education. In a few instances, social housing and regeneration organisations were drawing on the expertise of youth workers to engage young people on the estates where they live.

35. One of the key aspects of the youth support reforms, introduced in 2007, was the commissioning of youth provision from existing or alternative providers. Progress here has been generally slow, with the less effective local authorities inspected equating existing grant aid with commissioning. Some had simply set numeric targets and were failing to apply measures which evaluate the quality of the youth work. The most effective had established strong links with the voluntary youth sector at neighbourhood and local authority level and were using these to extend their capacity.

## **Performance management**

36. Given the broader scope of new integrated youth support arrangements and the clear imperative to determine impact, effective quality assurance represents one of the biggest challenges to the sector and to national policy makers. However, in most local authorities inspected, quality assurance and the application of performance indicators were at best satisfactory but too often poor, although the situation was marginally better in those that were inspected in 2007–08.
37. Self-assessment by local authorities was a requirement of the inspection programme. In the best examples, this provided an accurate picture of strengths and areas for improvement and gave prominence to local issues and service priorities. Managers ventured judgements about impact and were open and honest about challenges and difficulties. There was a clear relationship between well-considered self-assessment and effective leadership and management. However, a minority of the services inspected had done no more than engage an external consultant to write the self-assessment on their behalf, with the result that there was little ownership of it by the managers, staff or service users.
38. In 2004, national youth work policy initiatives introduced a set of national indicators designed to allow services to review progress against a number of quantitative measures, including reach and the proportion of young people actively engaged in youth work projects. Similarly, benchmarks were set for accreditation and for 'recorded outcomes'. Benchmarking against similar local

authorities has had obvious merit, and has informed value for money considerations, planning and standards. Benchmarking has helped managers identify trends and patterns in provision and enabled inspectors and others to formulate questions about impact, achievement and effectiveness. Inspectors found that local authorities and funding agencies depended too much on data alone to determine the effectiveness of services. They also found that there had been insufficient investment in the systems for gathering information, errors in its interpretation and insufficient use of it to scrutinise the effectiveness of services. The imperative, however, to be seen to meet or exceed national benchmarks has been powerful.

39. Inspectors found that much performance management gave insufficient weight to the quality of young people's experiences and to what they gained from youth work. Young people are often motivated by opportunities to gain accreditation. However, in the least effective services, managers had opted prematurely to pursue accreditation in order to meet service targets. In the better instances, accreditation was only embarked upon when the worker and young person judged it appropriate.
40. The better local authorities took an informed approach to quality assurance. As a result, staff saw the processes as useful, informative and integral aspects of their work, which led to improvements in standards. Although their specific approaches varied, they were based on several common features, including peer observation within and across services; consideration of the views of young people, including those trained as inspectors; sampling of work; thematic investigations; intelligent interpretation of data; and effective use of technology to report the findings.
41. Staff supervision and support are central features of performance management. In the better services visited, managers were striving to provide good support, with some using creative approaches such as peer supervision. At their most effective, meetings were regular, short and focused on work tasks. Records were pithy and clear. Too often, however, individual support sessions were sacrificed because of other perceived priorities or they failed to be a sufficiently challenging professional dialogue about improving practice and achievement.

## **Safeguarding**

42. Youth services, in line with other public services, have adopted a broad view of safeguarding which encompasses processes to protect young people from abuse or neglect, as well as their health and development. All the services inspected complied well with the regulations relating to outdoor, sporting and off-site activities. Risk assessments for everyday youth work activities were carried out well. However, in a few instances, staff, particularly those who worked part-time, did not always receive child protection training as quickly as they needed it. Workers who had taken up their posts before the current

legislation had not always received the required enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. In the less effective services, staff were ill-informed about e-safety and acceptable internet use policies.

## Developing an integrated response to young people's needs

43. The Every Child Matters inspection framework for children's services prompted a more holistic perspective on young people's lives, to which youth work contributes well. More recently, Local Area Agreements between Government and local authorities have sought a more focused and coordinated response by Government departments and partner agencies to the specific problems faced by teenagers. The ambitious Aiming High for Young People drive seeks to increase young people's participation in constructive leisure-time activities on the premise that it develops social and emotional skills.<sup>9</sup> A broader 14–19 offer gives greater regard to personal and social development augmenting the academic and vocational, for example, volunteering, alternative forms of accreditation and more flexible guidance. The evidence from this report is that while there is still a need to attend to deficiencies, effective youth work has the potential to contribute to all of these aims.
44. In 2005–06, Ofsted's inspection framework was primarily focused on local authority youth services that were broadly self-contained. Revisions to the framework made in 2007–08 took account of youth work being delivered in a far more diffuse context, with new integrated youth support arrangements in place, each different in design. This report has commented on the effectiveness of youth work in its own right but has also, where evidence collection has allowed, commented on the issues facing local authorities as they oversee youth support developments.
45. While some resistance to change is apparent from within services, most of the services inspected are engaging well with new integrated arrangements. Inspection evidence gathered in 2007–08 suggests that working links between youth support agencies are generally good and improving, but that there is less progress at practitioner level than strategic managers consider to be the case.
46. Inspection evidence, particularly over the same period, points to the pivotal role local authority children's services played in ensuring that youth work retained its focus on education, enjoyment and informality. Only in a minority of

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<sup>9</sup> *Aiming high for young people: a ten-year strategy for positive activities* (PU216), HM Treasury/DCSF, 2007;  
<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=PU214>.

instances have inspections shown that the integration of services risks diluting these particular strengths. At the same time, the better local authorities inspected have recognised the need for youth work to be secured within the broad spectrum of positive activities and as one of the key elements of inter-agency targeted support for vulnerable young people. Directors of children's and young people's services have also been very supportive of activities aimed at encouraging young people's involvement in decision making and in publicly celebrating their achievements. What is beginning to emerge, therefore, is the added value of a more integrated and broader approach to working with young people.

## Notes

47. In January 2004, Ofsted began a four-year programme to inspect all local authority youth services in England. In September 2005, these inspections were incorporated into joint area reviews of children's and young people's services of local authorities. Joint area reviews of local authorities that had not had a youth service inspection since 2004 were enhanced to include coverage of youth work. Evidence within this report is drawn from 100 inspection reports from youth service inspections which took place between September 2005 and September 2008.
48. Youth inspections used the following criteria:
  - Grade 4: outstanding
  - Grade 3: good
  - Grade 2: adequate
  - Grade 1: inadequate

## Annex A: inspection outcomes

**Figure 1:** Overall effectiveness  
(number of local authority youth services)

	Total	Excellent/ outstanding	Good	Adequate/ satisfactory	Inadequate
2005–06	33	1	14	11	7
2006–07	35	1	18	12	4
2007–08	32	0	20	12	0

**Figure 2:** Standards of young people's achievement

	Total	Excellent/ outstanding	Good	Adequate/ satisfactory	Inadequate
2005–06	33	1	16	13	3
2006–07	35	0	22	10	3
2007–08	32	0	22	10	0

**Figure 3:** Quality of youth work practice

	Total	Excellent/ outstanding	Good	Adequate/ satisfactory	Inadequate
2005–06	33	1	18	10	4
2006–07	35	0	21	11	3
2007–08	32	0	19	13	0

**Figure 4:** Quality of curriculum and resources

	Total	Excellent/ outstanding	Good	Adequate/ satisfactory	Inadequate
2005–06	33	2	11	13	7
2006–07	35	2	12	16	5
2007–08	32	4	13	15	0

**Figure 5:** Leadership and management

	Total	Excellent/ outstanding	Good	Adequate/ satisfactory	Inadequate
2005–06	33	1	11	15	6
2006–07	35	2	13	15	5
2007–08	32	0	18	13	1

## Annex B: youth services inspected (September 2005–September 2008)

Barnet	Havering
Bath and North East Somerset	Herefordshire
Bexley	Hertfordshire
Birmingham	Hillingdon
Blackburn with Darwen	Hounslow
Bournemouth	Isle of Wight
Bracknell Forest	Isles of Scilly
Bradford	Islington
Bristol	Kensington and Chelsea
Buckinghamshire	Kent
Calderdale	Kingston upon Thames
Camden	Kirklees
Cheshire	Knowsley
Cornwall	Leicestershire
Corporation of London	Lewisham
Coventry	Lincolnshire
Croydon	Liverpool
Devon	Luton
Doncaster	Manchester
Dudley	Medway
Durham	Milton Keynes
East Sussex	Newcastle upon Tyne
Enfield	Newham
Essex	North East Lincolnshire
Gateshead	North Lincolnshire
Gloucestershire	North Somerset
Greenwich	North Tyneside
Hackney	Northampton
Hammersmith & Fulham	Northumberland
Hampshire	Nottinghamshire
Haringey	Plymouth
Harrow	Poole

Hartlepool	Redbridge
Redcar and Cleveland	Stockton
Richmond	Stoke on Trent
Rotherham	Suffolk
Rutland	Tameside
Sandwell	Telford and Wrekin
Sefton	Thurrock
Sheffield	Wakefield
Shropshire	Wandsworth
Slough	Warrington
Solihull	West Berkshire
Somerset	Westminster
South Tyneside	Wigan
Southampton	Wiltshire
Southend	Windsor and Maidenhead
Southwark	Wirral
St Helens	Wokingham
Staffordshire	
Stockport	