



Herefordshire Youth Service Report

Herefordshire Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Herefordshire youth service provides programmes for 11 to 25 year-olds, but gives priority to young people aged 13 to 19. Youth work is delivered from nine youth and community centres and two outdoor education centres. Provision also includes a mobile unit, an information and advice service, and a small number of specialist projects. Thirty full-time equivalent staff are in post, comprising of three senior managers, 15 full-time and 22 part-time youth workers, supported by a small central administration team. The service is located in the directorate for policy and community, although a move to children's services was under consideration at the time of the inspection. The budget for youth work in the current year is £985,750, which is augmented by approximately £58,000 from external funding. An estimated 18 per cent of young people in the 13 to 19 age range is reached by the service – well below the national target of 25 per cent.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to include the inspection of the youth service. Inspectors scrutinised the service's self-assessment and met with managers and a cross-section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation and observed a sample of youth work sessions in Kington and South Wye as part of the JAR neighbourhood study, as well as work in other parts of the county.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Herefordshire council provides an adequate youth service in which there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Young people's achievement is adequate. The quality of practice is adequate overall, although standards vary across the service. There are insufficient staff and resources to provide a consistently high-quality and broad curriculum. Leadership and management are adequate and the service maintains effective partnerships to support and complement its work. The use and management of resources represent satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- Support for young people to take on new challenges and responsibilities is good.
- A good range of accreditation opportunities is provided.
- Staff are well-involved in service development.
- Training programmes are responsive.
- Partnership arrangements are effective.

Areas for development

- The involvement of young people in decision-making at county level is weak.
- Planning and evaluation of youth work are inconsistent.
- Curriculum leadership needs to be improved by provision of clear guidance for youth workers.
- Greater rigour is required in quality assurance.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	1
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	2

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users.

Grade 3: A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users.

Grade 2: A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users.

Grade 1: A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Part B: The youth service's contribution to *Every Child Matters* outcomes

4. The service makes an adequate contribution to outcomes in a number of areas. Many young people who are reached by the service engage enthusiastically in outdoor programmes and physical recreation. Youth workers provide good emotional support as well as activities that promote problem-solving, self-confidence and the ability to act independently. Young people readily seek advice and guidance in tackling the difficulties they face. Specialist projects and workshops help young people understand the consequences of their behaviour, for example in relationships and regarding the use of alcohol. Youth work provides a variety of opportunities that support achievement and the acquisition of new skills

and qualifications, for example in canoeing, music-making, first aid and baby-sitting. Provision for more vulnerable groups, such those on the edge of crime or young people at risk of dropping out of education, are more limited. Young people readily accept responsibility as volunteers and young leaders. Young people's involvement in decision making more generally is patchy.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

Key aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

5. Achievement is adequate and young people enjoy their involvement in youth work. There is effective provision where young people make good progress in their personal development and gain in self-confidence. They know where to get help and readily seek support from youth workers in making decisions about the future. Young people make regular use of the information and advice service to discuss their concerns about sexual health and contraception. At a mentoring project, young people produced curriculum vitae and identified out-of-school activities that would build on their skills and interests.

6. Standards are generally high in programmes leading to accreditation and/or nationally recognised qualifications where participants are actively involved in setting their own goals and determining the pace of learning. Young people benefit most when they try new and challenging activities. A group of young people with disabilities learned how to sail and gained a good understanding of water safety as part of a course at Bodenham outdoor education centre. In the best youth clubs, young people learn creative and performance skills through their involvement in music and art workshops. Members of youth forums have developed confidence in presenting their ideas and representing the views of others in a wider public debate.

7. More generally, young people are insufficiently involved in decision-making within their projects. When given the opportunity, they willingly take responsibility as volunteers and leaders and play an active part in shaping the programme. However, this is not the case across the service as a whole. Achievement was unsatisfactory where young people, who were left to their own devices, remained on the sidelines of activities and expected youth workers to provide activities for them.

8. The quality of youth work practice is adequate overall, but too varied across the service. Many workers are drawn from the local community and have a good understanding of the issues that affect young people. Good use is made of the service's registration system to undertake an initial assessment of needs. However, youth workers do not always build effectively on this to ensure activities provide appropriate levels of challenge and a clear focus on learning. In most settings, staff manage young people's behaviour effectively and provide satisfactory leadership. They offer sensitive support and encouragement, which helps young people make progress. On a few occasions, sexist attitudes went

unchallenged. In programmes where attendance was low or sporadic, workers did not always have effective strategies to improve participation.

9. A good range of accreditation, including the Open College Network and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, has been introduced to recognise and support young people's achievement. For instance, baby-sitting courses run in partnership with local schools are well-attended and prepare young people to take responsibility for younger children in their charge. In the best work, evaluation draws on the feedback of participants and is used to inform programme development. In too many cases, however, young people are not routinely involved in reviewing the progress they make.

Key aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. There are weaknesses in the leadership and co-ordination of the curriculum. Although most individual units provide a satisfactory range of activity, there is a lack of consistency in what is offered to young people across the county as a whole. Those in the more remote areas are less well served. A few projects have been developed to support more vulnerable groups, including those at risk of exclusion or involved in anti-social behaviour. However, these programmes are generally not widespread, nor consistently reaching those most in need. In the main, curriculum developments derive from the initiative of individual workers or the drive of voluntary sector partners. Youth forums have had mixed success in promoting citizenship and the active involvement of young people in their communities. There are strengths in outdoor education where the service has been able to invest in good specialist equipment and facilities. Insufficient priority is given to promoting equality and cultural diversity in many programmes. The current curriculum framework is not widely understood nor used by youth workers to help them plan and develop their work. The service rightly recognises that guidance is out of date and, at the time of the inspection, a new framework was being drafted in consultation with staff and young people.

11. Long-standing recruitment difficulties and/or staff absences have led to instability in projects and centres and a lack of continuity for young people in a few areas. The high expectations placed on part-time and inexperienced staff are not well-matched to their level of skill and confidence. The expanded training programme is beginning to meet the needs of the high proportion of unqualified staff that have recently joined the service. Refurbishment and external funding has improved the standard of premises used for youth work; however, further work is needed to continue to improve accessibility for young people with physical disabilities.

Key aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic leadership and management are adequate. The youth service has a clear direction and makes a good contribution to council priorities, particularly in relation to social inclusion. There is a long history of low core funding for youth work which, although improved in recent years, remains in the lowest quartile

nationally. Nevertheless, demanding targets have been set that reflect local and national priorities. The service is very thinly spread given its broad remit – which includes intensive work with targeted groups and community-based youth provision across a dispersed rural population – and its capacity to respond to the changing needs of young people is limited.

13. The service is represented well on a range of strategic groups. The future role and location of the service in relation to the new children's services directorate are yet to be finalised. The service has taken a lead role in building the foundations of a county-wide youth council; however, this work was slow to start and remains embryonic. Young people are insufficiently involved in the management and development of the youth service itself. At local level, there are pockets of good practice in youth participation that can be built upon. A mandatory training programme ensures all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection and race and disability equality. There is effective oversight of health, safety, outdoor and off-site activities.

14. Operational management is adequate. Senior managers have a good understanding of the changing context of youth work and are beginning to consider more strategically the contribution the service makes to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. Staff are involved effectively in service development and there are regular team meetings. The relatively new management structure, which includes area-based teams, is not yet embedded nor fully effective. There is currently insufficient coaching and professional guidance to help youth workers improve their day-to-day work. In addition, quality assurance is over-reliant on paper-based systems and gives too little attention to observing practice and reporting on achievement. The service's self-assessment lacks rigour and inspection findings do not concur with the overall judgments made.

15. Partnership work is effective and complements youth provision made by the council. The service is generally well regarded by the agencies and organisations it works with. In Kington, collaboration between youth workers and Connexions staff is improving support for vulnerable groups. Across the county as a whole, the potential of joint work with Connexions is not exploited.

16. The service has improved its management information systems and good records are kept. There is still some way to go to reach the target number of young people set out in the business plan. Progress in increasing the proportion of young people who gain accreditation has been good. Budgets are closely monitored by an effective central administration team, which also provides flexible support to area based staff. The service has taken steps to improve its cost effectiveness and to rationalise the use and management of its youth and community centres.