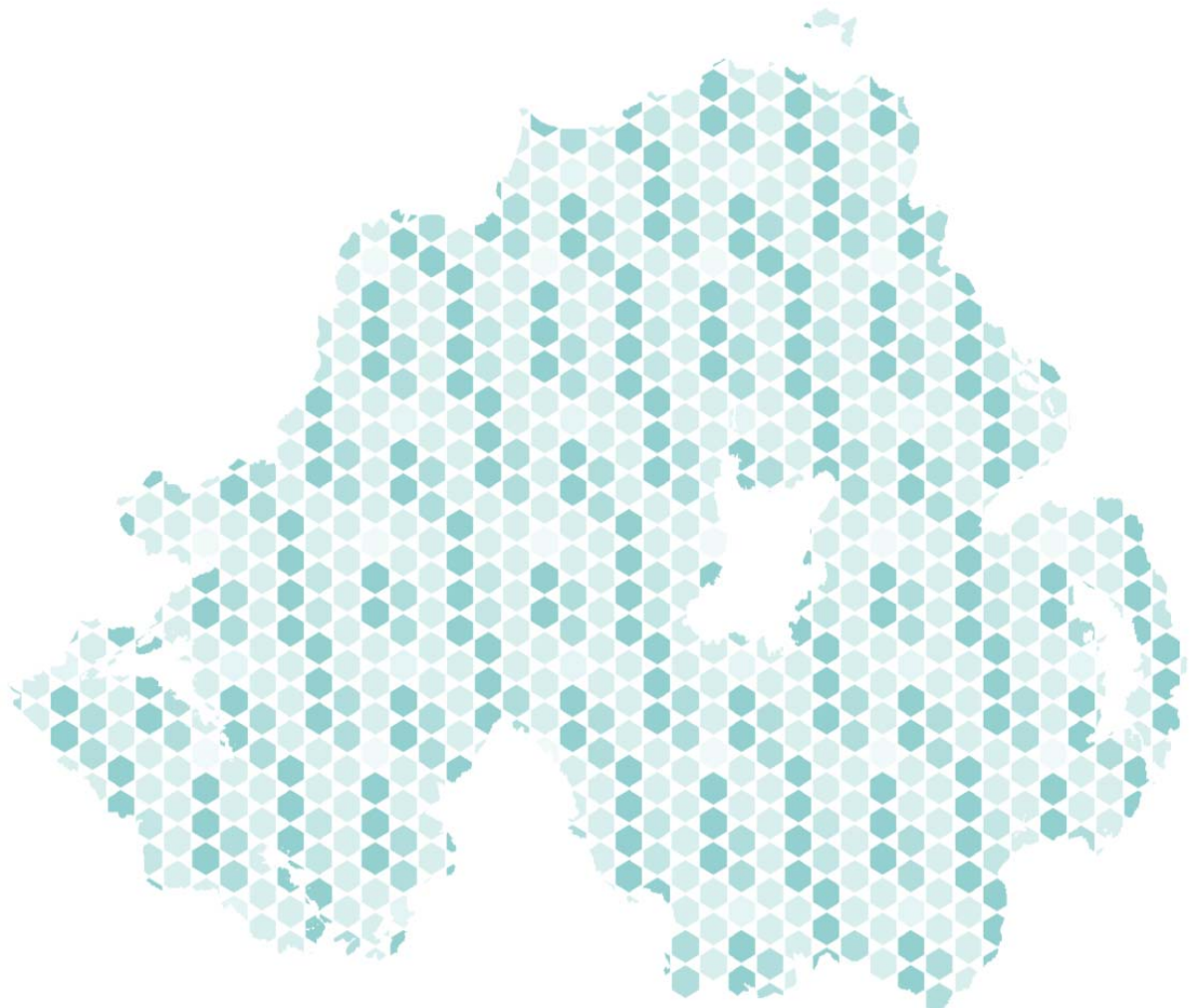


# YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Belfast Education and Library  
Board Youth Provision in the  
West Belfast Area

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2009

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

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

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## 1. CONTEXT

1.1 The west Belfast area is the largest of the youth areas in Belfast. According to the figures supplied by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) there are 51 youth groups registered in west Belfast (See Table 1). The provision includes five full-time statutory youth centres, six voluntary youth centres and two area projects.

1.2 The BELB Youth Service operates under the direction of an acting Assistant Senior Education Officer (ASEO) who has overall responsibility for management. There are four Area Youth Officers (AYOs), one is responsible for child protection and training and the other three are responsible for specific geographical areas. A Senior Youth Officer is responsible for community relations. Each full-time youth worker produces a key result area (KRA) document annually, under the headings of the five themes of the BELB corporate plan (see Appendix) and in response to the identified needs of the young people. The AYO for west Belfast has management responsibility for the statutory youth service provision, including two area projects and the monitoring of six voluntary full-time youth centres.

1.3 The area projects were established by the BELB in 1994 to raise the standards of youth work practice at local community level and within the established part-time controlled and voluntary provision. Each of the area projects has a Senior Youth Worker (SYW) as a team leader, with a staff team including area youth workers and outreach workers. These projects are directed by a steering group which is representative of the other youth providers and stakeholders within the local communities. The Shankill Area Project's steering group is well established and offers good support and challenge to the staff. The west Belfast steering group has experienced a lack of consistency in the involvement of other youth providers and stakeholders. The AYO represents the BELB on both steering groups and offers good direction and support to the staff.

1.4 According to the statistics provided by the BELB, almost 80% of the west Belfast population live in the most deprived super output areas<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland. The overall unemployment levels and levels of economic deprivation are among the highest in Northern Ireland. In 2007, 53% of school leavers aged 16 and older achieved at least five or more subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education level at Grade C and above, 25% went into higher education and 20% went into further education. These figures are considerably lower than the corresponding Northern Ireland averages. Approximately 40% of post-primary pupils are entitled to free school meals and 27% require additional support with their learning. These figures are almost twice the Northern Ireland average.

**Table 1: Number of registered units in west Belfast**

5	full-time statutory sector youth centres
6	full-time voluntary sector youth centres
2	area projects
2	part-time statutory sector youth centres
9	part-time voluntary sector youth centres
16	uniformed youth units (Scouts, Guides, Boys' and Girls' Brigades)
7	community-based youth groups
4	groups providing services to Section 75 specific groups

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<sup>1</sup> Super output areas (SOA) are used within the Noble Measures of Multiple Deprivation to enable comparative analysis of small areas across Northern Ireland. The final rank given to an individual SOA is based upon several indicative domains including: income, health, employment, education, environment, services and crime/disorder.

**Table 2: Total membership of provision over the last three years**

	Male 4-9 yrs	Female 4-9 yrs	Male 10-15 yrs	Female 10-15 yrs	Male 16-18 yrs	Female 16-18 yrs	Male 19+ yrs	Female 19+ yrs	Total
2006/07	922	841	2,902	2,177	873	539	430	193	<b>8,391</b>
2007/08	884	920	2,734	2,008	725	510	272	169	<b>8,222</b>
2008/09	1,020	1,031	2,913	2,532	1,059	972	328	237	<b>10,092</b>

1.5 According to the figures supplied by the BELB, there are 28,109 young people within the west Belfast area between the ages of 4-25 years. Of these, 10,092 young people were members of youth organisations registered with the BELB youth service during 2008-09. This represents a membership of 35.9% of the youth population, which falls below the Department of Education's (DE's) strategic objective of engaging with 43% of the age cohort by 2010. The BELB youth service and the majority of the individual centres record very limited data on the progression and achievements of the young people over time.

## **2. EVIDENCE BASE**

2.1 The inspection team observed the work of almost all of the full-time youth workers. They held discussions with the acting ASEO, the AYO, and the AYO responsible for child protection and training. Members of the team also held discussions with voluntary and statutory full-time youth workers, representatives from the part-time and registered youth groups, and the BELB Education Committee (Youth).

## **3. CHILD PROTECTION**

3.1 The BELB has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect well the guidance issued by DE. All staff employed by the BELB youth service and the voluntary youth staff have received appropriate recognised training. The Child Protection Officer has developed useful support material for display in the youth centres and has initiated a child protection poster competition to raise the awareness of the young people of this important area.

## **4. PASTORAL CARE**

4.1 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the area is very good. Members of the inspection team held discussions with over 25 young people and talked informally to other young people during observations. Almost all of the young people interviewed stated that they felt safe in the centre and during the activities. The majority of the young people spoke positively about the programmes offered by the youth service and they stated that their opinions are valued.

## 5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 In recent times the staffing levels in the BELB youth service have been reduced as a result of declining budgets. As a consequence the focus has been largely on day-to-day management and maintaining frontline services. There are limited quality assurance arrangements in place and, therefore, there is a limited focus on improving the provision. There is a need for a more strategic approach to the youth service in the BELB and how it complements other services for young people.

5.2 Through his hard work, the AYO successfully maintains good working relationships with the staff whom he manages and with other significant stakeholders in the area. He is actively involved in a range of strategic initiatives within west Belfast including Neighbourhood Renewal, the programme for Integrated Services for Children and Young People, Belfast Community Safety Partnership Anti-Social Behaviour Thematic Group and the Inter-Board Youth Information Panel.

5.3 The AYO provides monthly supervision and support for all statutory full-time youth workers and completes monitoring visits across the range of provision within the area. The records of these visits are not adequately evaluative and are often concerned with practical or administrative issues. They do not make sufficient reference to the outcomes for the young people associated with the KRAs, and therefore, lack sufficient challenge and focus on improving the outcomes for the young people.

5.4 The AYO implements an area plan, which reflects the BELB Corporate Plan. The statistical data detailed in the area plan documents the needs of the young people and the local communities. However, the area plan does not analyse sufficiently these needs and the achievements of the young people; consequently, the intended outcomes for the young people within the youth sector, and how these will be achieved and assessed are not sufficiently clear.

5.5 The inspection team met with a group of part-time and registered youth groups to discuss the quality and the range of support they receive from the BELB youth service. The BELB circulates and provides information about its support for youth groups within the area. At these meetings there were differing levels of understanding about the financial support and resources available through the BELB scheme of assistance for part-time and registered units.

5.6 The BELB has a well-established Education Committee (Youth) which provides appropriate support and challenge to the team of youth officers. The committee is made up of elected politicians and representatives appointed by DE. Members reported the difficulties associated with managing inadequate and diminishing youth resources against the rising expectations and demands from the community. The committee members expressed their support for the team of youth officers which, in their opinion, makes the best possible use of a very limited budget. The members are well aware of the issues facing the young people in west Belfast, the low educational achievements and they also recognise the need for improvement and the greater involvement of the young people in decision-making at area and city level.

## 6. QUALITY OF PROVISION

6.1 The full-time youth workers are experienced and well informed about the needs of their local area. They use the structures of the KRA document well to plan their work in response to the needs of the young people. The quality of the observed practice ranged from satisfactory to very good, with the majority being good. The impact of this practice over time is more difficult to evaluate, given the limited record keeping of the achievements of the young people.

6.2 In the very good practice observed in one youth centre, the achievements and milestones of a core group of young people are recorded systematically and demonstrate their progression over a period of four years. The young people value this record of their achievements and can identify how they have improved on their personal best and set themselves achievable targets. However, all the full-time youth workers need to develop and sustain similar good practice and plan better for the assessment of the young people's knowledge, skills and understanding.

6.3 In the majority of the practice observed, the youth workers engaged the young people in challenging learning programmes, often involving an exploration of the young people's values and beliefs. This good practice enabled the young people to identify and to develop the skills necessary to function as citizens and will serve them well as they progress to further education, training or employment.

6.4 In the best practice, the youth workers used a variety of appropriate and effective group work and individual activities to support the young people to make decisions and to solve problems. In a minority of the sessions observed, they used stimulating question and answer sessions to draw out extended responses and to support independent thinking. On a few occasions, the young people made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in a range of different situations which were well planned by the youth worker. The use of ICT was often constrained in the youth settings by a lack of computers.

6.5 Staff from the two area projects, and a full-time youth worker, provide specific programmes in three post-primary schools, including The Prince's Trust XL Award, which is accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), and the Anti-Bullying Awareness programmes. The Principals and other teaching staff, recognise the good work done by the various youth workers in providing these courses. Some of the schools had requested these courses, while others followed a suggestion from the BELB youth service. However, the provision is not yet fully integrated within the rest of the school curriculum. In the absence of a BELB strategy for the deployment of youth workers in schools, or how the statutory service and youth service complement one another, this provision is managed locally by each of the youth workers.

6.6 The outreach youth work observed in the two area projects was of a consistently high standard. The workers used a good range of recreational and issue-based programmes to meet the needs of the young people not engaged in structured youth provision. The workers demonstrated very good interpersonal and group work skills. For example, in one area project two members of staff were working with a small group of young men to explore appropriate individual and group behaviours. The level of challenge was appropriate and well-matched to the needs of the group; clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour were negotiated with the group.

## **7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

7.1 The quality of achievements and the standards reached by the young people is good. The young people participate well in the programmes planned for them and engage actively with the youth workers. They consistently demonstrate good behaviour and very good working relationships with the youth workers and with one another.

7.2 Staff in the area projects work with several groups of young people who are not engaged in any youth centres. In one of these groups, eight young teenage girls aged 13-14 years were observed discussing relationships and sexual health issues. The girls spoke with understanding and confidence about how their knowledge of their physical development has improved, and how much more aware and accepting they are of the values of others. They articulated well their personal attitudes and beliefs and were facilitated by the youth workers to make positive life choices and to work co-operatively.

7.3 One group of young people participating in a drama session developed their listening and thinking skills well and demonstrated the ability to identify imaginatively with the situations of others. These young people were encouraged to express themselves clearly and the facilitator made good use of questioning techniques to build on their existing information. The young people enjoyed the session and responded well to the praise and encouragement from the youth worker. The motivation and self-esteem of these young people was very high and they commented confidently on their personal performance and willingness to achieve their personal best.

7.4 There was good evidence of the senior members in one centre demonstrating creativity and initiative as they worked with younger members to organise all aspects of a celebration event, including, hospitality, entertainment and the awards. In this centre, there were good examples of young people and staff working together to ensure a stimulating and enjoyable programme. The young leaders accepted responsibility, developed good organisational skills and were enthusiastic in their contribution.

7.5 A group of older members with varying disabilities, attend a full-time youth centre and were observed actively engaged in planning a drama project. The process was planned effectively and took good account of the young people's talents and interests. With encouragement from the staff, the young people developed their confidence, took on areas of responsibility and demonstrated the ability to organise the project well.

7.6 Most of the young people observed in the formal group work sessions were able to state how their youth work experiences had helped to develop their personal and social skills. A group of 36 young people are participating in the 'Crossing the Bridges' programme with a similar number of young people from other parts of the city. This programme promotes tolerance, understanding and an acceptance of difference; the young people explore sensitive and sometimes contentious issues. Through their involvement they have developed trusting relationships, based on mutual respect.

7.7 At the time of the inspection there were no formal, structured opportunities for young people to meet and influence, at an area level, the BELB's youth work in west Belfast. Young people contribute actively in their individual centres or projects, yet lack good opportunities to engage in area-based youth fora which would allow them to participate actively in decision-making and thereby contribute more effectively to the management of youth services in their community.



## 8. **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

8.1 The strengths of the provision include:

- the good quality and the range of the external links that the AYO and the full-time youth workers have established and sustained with other agencies;
- the good examples in the practice observed, of the young people acquiring new skills, experiencing new opportunities and challenging their own values and beliefs to achieve their full potential;
- the good quality of the outreach and centre-based youth work which supports and promotes the personal and social development of the young people; and
- the consistently good working relationships among the young people and between the young people and the youth workers.

8.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop the capacity within the BELB to provide strategic management of the youth service and how it complements other services for young people;
- to develop more effective methods of evaluation of the youth service, including an evaluation of the outcomes for young people and action-planning processes, to promote and sustain improvement; and
- to provide formal, structured opportunities for young people participating in youth programmes in west Belfast to influence the planning and the strategic direction of the youth service.

## 9. **CONCLUSION**

9.1 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of youth provision in west Belfast provided by the BELB is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of the young people are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

**The strategic themes of the BELB Corporate Plan:**

- improving standards;
- developing people;
- meeting needs;
- strengthening partnerships; and
- optimising resources.

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