

**Providing Inspection Services for**

Department of Education

Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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Report of an Inspection Survey on...

CROSS-COMMUNITY  
PROVISION  
IN THE YOUTH SERVICE

(1999-2000)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

**Department *of* Education**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The report sets out the Inspectorate findings on the cross-community experiences of young people within the Youth Service in Northern Ireland. It follows on from a report published in 1992 titled 'The Cross-Community Dimension in the Curriculum of the Youth Service'. It also complements other recently published reports on Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) in the primary and post-primary school sectors.
- 1.2 This survey focuses primarily on cross-community provision, though many of the broader aspects of EMU are taken into account. It looks at a range of work associated with the cross-community dimension of youth provision including ethos, the quality and appropriateness of provision, the experiences and responses of the young people, and the management arrangements. The findings are based on evidence gathered from a sample of 19 youth centres and organisations visited by the Inspectorate in the first two terms of 2000, and from inspection reports which issued on youth centres during the period 1998-2000.
- 1.3 The membership of the youth centres and organisations visited usually consisted of two or more of three main groupings; children of primary school age, young people aged eleven to 16 years and those aged 17 years or more. The majority of youth club members come from within the middle age grouping; it is within the upper end of this section or in the senior grouping (17 plus) that most of the community relations activity took place.
- 1.4 In the Department of Education document 'Youth Work - A Model for Effective Practice', two of the three stated core principles are:
  - i. the promotion of acceptance and understanding of others;
  - ii. the development of appropriate values and beliefs.

The document further underlines the importance of helping young people to understand themselves better and to relate appropriately to others with whom they may differ; it states that 'whatever the setting, effective youth work helps young people to:

- ◆ manage feelings and conflict;
- ◆ recognise, understand and respect difference; and
- ◆ clarify their personal attitudes, values and beliefs'.

These objectives have much in common with the EMU objectives for schools as set out in the 1992 Statutory Order. Given that many young people in post-primary education also participate in the Youth Service curriculum, it is helpful that their experiences in both sectors should be complementary. There is much potential for schools and the Youth Service to work in a mutually beneficial manner in the best interest of the young person.

- 1.5 In the Youth Service Policy Review Report (May 1999), A Youth Service for the New Millennium, the promotion of community relations work in a divided society is accepted as a continuing priority. The report states, ‘It is important that the Youth Service adopts the development of positive community relations as a high priority at every level within the service.’ It continues by stating that ‘support and resources are of particular importance for groups and organisations working in contexts such as interface-areas where there are high levels of tension and where young people are likely to be directly affected by sectarian violence’.
- 1.6 Much of the cross-community work identified in this report takes the form of meetings of young people of the Roman Catholic or Protestant faiths in contexts aimed at promoting mutual respect. In a significant number of the centres visited, which had members of both religious persuasions, the leaders perceived cross-community work as being a normal and natural part of their activities; they did not consider it to be a special or separate event. One youth leader reported that the label of one religion or none can create a barrier, as opposed to meeting other groups of young people on the basis of a common interest or activity. In other instances, young people from different backgrounds were given opportunities to explore and discuss, more deeply, and in a spirit of mutual respect, issues concerning difference and what they share in common.
- 1.7 When it has proved possible to do so, a number of quantitative terms are used when commenting on aspects of provision. In percentages, the terms correspond broadly as follows:

almost/nearly all	more than 90%
most	75% to 90%
a majority	50% to 74%
a significant minority	30% to 49%
a minority	10% to 29%
very few/a small number	less than 10%

## 2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- 2.1 The establishment of a favourable ethos within the centres is fundamental to effective cross-community work. The quality of the ethos in a majority of the centres visited was good to excellent: the leaders are committed to promoting tolerance and an acceptance of others among the young people; the young people feel safe and show respect for one another. (3.1, 3.2)

- 2.2 The vast majority of centres visited are seen and accepted by the leaders and the young people as a neutral venue where mutual respect is fostered. Youth leaders report that the young people rarely experience sectarian incidents or sectarian reactions resulting from cross-community work. (3.3)
- 2.3 The young people and the adults benefit from the opportunity to mix with members from ethnic minorities, or those with a disability. (3.4)
- 2.4 There is, for some centres, an uncertainty and apprehension about participating in cross-community ventures. In certain areas, due to the demographic imbalance in the population and local attitudes, it is difficult to promote cross-community work. In a minority of instances, the location of clubs in areas perceived to be strongly loyalist or nationalist creates a barrier to the development of joint links. In such circumstances the sensitivity and caution shown by the leaders, as they seek appropriate opportunities for the young people to meet others of a different cultural background, are well judged. (3.6, 4.12)
- 2.5 The survey findings reflect considerable variation in the quality of provision for, and the richness of experiences of, young people in cross-community programmes. In those centres which undertake specific cross-community projects, the number of young people who participate is often relatively low; in the vast majority of cases 10% or less of the membership. In a few centres there is no planned programme of cross-community activity. (4.1, 4.4)
- 2.6 Where provision is good, the leaders are committed to developing cross-community links which are well established and accepted generally throughout the unit; there is also a structured programme which ensures continuity in the young people's experiences. (4.6)
- 2.7 For a significant minority of units visited, progress is slow in establishing a balanced and progressive cross-community links programme. In these centres weaknesses outweighed strengths in cross-community provision. Leaders often lack confidence in managing small and large group discussion on community relation issues; on occasions, there is pressure from peers and parents for the young people not to become involved in such activities. (4.11)
- 2.8 In a minority of the units, helpful and concise policies to guide cross-community work, are implemented in everyday practice. In a significant number of units, there is no structured process to ensure that stated aims and objectives relating to cross-community links are implemented effectively and consistently. (5.2, 5.4)
- 2.9 In a majority of the units, the quality of staff development related to cross-community work ranges from fair to poor. In a significant minority of units, the leaders lack confidence in developing, managing and sustaining an effective links programme. (5.5, 4.9)
- 2.10 There is generally a lack of systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating contact programmes. (5.5)

2.11 At paragraph 1.4 above comment was made on the scope for work in schools and the Youth Service to complement each other for the benefit of the young person. There are several key features which are common to both the post-primary and youth sectors:

- ◆ the need for commitment in terms of the leadership, in schools and youth clubs, for the development of EMU;
- ◆ the need for post-primary teachers and youth workers to have the necessary skills and confidence in handling discussion related to issues of conflict resolution;
- ◆ the need to improve planning arrangements for work related to EMU;
- ◆ the need, in a majority of schools and youth clubs, for further professional development for teachers and leaders respectively in developing EMU and cross-community work.

### 3. ETHOS

3.1 Establishing a favourable ethos within centres is fundamental to effective cross-community work. While some units operate in areas with difficult social and political circumstances, most of them succeed in creating an atmosphere where there are good levels of mutual respect and where young people from different backgrounds and cultures integrate well.

3.2 The quality of the ethos in a majority of the units visited was good to excellent. In these units:

- ◆ the leaders set a positive tone by their manner, commitment and interest in the young people;
- ◆ the extent of involvement in cross-community work is linked to the particular interest or enthusiasm of the leader;
- ◆ the leaders are committed to promoting tolerance among the young people and an acceptance of others;
- ◆ there are good relationships between the leaders and the young people;
- ◆ the young people are well-motivated and co-operative;
- ◆ the young people feel safe and show respect for one another;
- ◆ discipline is firm and fair, agreed rules have been established and are implemented consistently to guide behaviour; and

- ◆ there is little evidence of inappropriate language or sectarian graffiti about the premises.
- 3.3 In the vast majority of instances, the leaders and young people accept the youth centres as neutral venues where mutual respect is encouraged. Many of the young people talk readily about community tensions and differences. In the best practice, they accept and respect difference and diversity and challenge prejudice towards a group or an individual. Youth leaders report that, only rarely, do the young people experience sectarian incidents or sectarian reactions resulting from cross-community work.
- 3.4 On the few occasions observed when the young people have the opportunity to mix with members from ethnic minorities, or those with a disability, it was to the mutual benefit of all involved, adults and young people. In one uniformed unit with a small number of Chinese members, some of the activities of the group were directed towards celebrating aspects of Chinese culture. In another centre the young people included a deaf member in their discussions.
- 3.5 In a minority of units the following weaknesses were identified:
- ◆ peer pressure from other members; for example, in one club, a small number of members who volunteered to participate in a cross-community programme were subjected to verbal pressure from their peers;
  - ◆ staffing difficulties contributing to poor quality of adult supervision and fewer opportunities for leaders to forge general relationships with members;
  - ◆ insufficient encouragement for the young people to take the initiative or to develop a sense of ownership; for example, where the contribution of the leaders was too dominant and there was little expectation of the young people sharing responsibility.
- 3.6 There is, for some centres, an understandable uncertainty and apprehension about participating in cross-community ventures. In certain areas, due to the demographic imbalance in the population and local attitudes, it is difficult to promote cross-community work. In such contexts, it is appropriate that leaders, in their planning and implementation, exercise caution and sensitivity as they seek appropriate opportunities for the young people to meet others of a different cultural background.
- 3.7 In a youth club, located in an area of extreme social disadvantage and with a serious drugs problem, the generally balanced membership of Roman Catholic and Protestant young people integrated well. Even with such good practice, a major difficulty was gaining the members' acceptance of young people of families from the travelling community who had settled in the area.

## 4. PROVISION/EXPERIENCES/OUTCOMES

- 4.1 The survey findings reflect considerable variation in the quality of provision for, and the experiences of young people in, cross-community programmes. In just over one-quarter of the centres visited the quality of cross-community provision was judged to be good. In a significant minority of centres, this aspect of provision ranged from fair to poor.
- 4.2 The range of activities used by leaders to promote cross-community contact is wide and varied and includes:
- ◆ links with other youth centres in the same town or in another location;
  - ◆ sporting activities, especially soccer, but also Gaelic football, hurling, rugby and karate;
  - ◆ outdoor pursuits, including canoeing and rambling;
  - ◆ creative and expressive activities, including art and drama, Irish dancing, disco-dancing;
  - ◆ internet projects;
  - ◆ environmental projects;
  - ◆ peer education projects;
  - ◆ trips and residential;
  - ◆ cross-border links;
  - ◆ foreign visits or exchanges (Austria, America, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Japan, Malta).
- 4.3 All of these activities have the potential to contribute effectively to cross-community work. It is, however, often the quality of preparation for these events which determines the outcome. Joint residential trips were particularly productive in building relationships and fostering understanding where the young people had a series of prior contacts with the other group; suitably chosen external support to assist with discussion on controversial issues was also reported to have been helpful. Games and other sporting activities were most effective when teams were mixed judiciously to develop teamwork between groups. Shared creative and expressive activity became more productive when young people from different centres worked together with a practical end purpose in mind, for example, an exhibition of work for parents and the community, or a final product for a community event.
- 4.4 Several of the youth centres included in the survey perceived cross-community work as being integrated already into their activities because of their mixed



membership. Consequently they felt that 'all' or 'a high percentage' of their members participated. On occasions, the young people in these centres participated in mature and measured discussion of sensitive and, at times, highly controversial issues. In those centres which undertake specific cross-community projects, the number of young people who actually participate is relatively low, in a majority of cases 10% or less of the membership. In a few centres there is no planned programme of cross-community activity. This finding is disappointing given that the Inspectorate report in 1992 referred to 'the increasing numbers of young people benefiting from opportunities to meet and participate in joint activities with young people from other religious and cultural traditions'. There is, therefore, an urgent need for centres to reflect on their efforts to encourage more young people to participate in the programmes. In one club with a high level of member participation in cross-community work, the contact programme with another club is advertised effectively throughout the centre on a monthly basis; the purpose of the activities is explained to the young people, sometimes on a one to one basis, and in explanatory letters issued to the parents.

4.5 The 1992 report referred to the generally inadequate provision of cross-community activities in the uniformed organisations and church-based units. The findings of this report indicate that several of these organisations now have a stated commitment to promoting cross-community links. The implementation of this commitment on the ground has been slow.

4.6 Where provision is good, the youth clubs and units share some or many of the following features:

- ◆ the leaders are committed to developing cross-community links; the links are well established and accepted generally throughout the centre;
- ◆ clear written guidelines to direct all aspects of the programme;
- ◆ a structured programme which ensures continuity and progression in the young people's experiences;
- ◆ an appropriately varied programme which engages the young people's interests;
- ◆ parents are kept well-informed of the activities and the wider purpose of the programme;
- ◆ the members contribute to the planning of cross-community programmes;
- ◆ the leaders are developing confidence in managing group discussions which explore issues related to conflict resolution and mutual understanding.

4.7 In one well-run youth club the members are given varied opportunities over an extended period to develop interests and skills together and to get to know each other well, before travelling abroad as a group. These young people described how they had enjoyed all the experiences, had made new friends, accepted their

differences and were discussing the activities they would like to undertake the following year.

- 4.8 In another club, which operates in a mixed area of social disadvantage, the leaders organise regular sporting activities which promote teamwork between young people from different religious backgrounds.
- 4.9 In another centre, though the leaders undertake the necessary practical arrangements such as booking transport and venues, the young people contribute directly to the planning sessions and to the content of the joint programmes. In consequence, they have a sense of ownership of the programmes.
- 4.10 In a few instances, where cross-community activity is well established and leaders and members are confident in managing the programme, the need for single identity work has diminished. On occasions, the young people in these centres participated in mature and measured discussion, exploring cultural and community issues.
- 4.11 For a significant minority of the units visited, progress has been slow in establishing a balanced and progressive cross-community programme. Factors which impede progress include:
- ◆ leaders who lack confidence in developing, managing and sustaining an effective links programme. In particular, a significant minority of leaders are insecure in managing small and large group discussion on community relations issues;
  - ◆ a lack of continuity in leadership or insufficient numbers of leaders;
  - ◆ pressure from peers and parents for the young people not to become involved in cross-community activities;
  - ◆ the reluctance of boys to get involved; girls were usually more willing to participate in cross-community activity;
  - ◆ inadequate planning of cross-community projects;
  - ◆ difficulty finding a mutually convenient time for leaders to plan jointly with leaders from another club;
  - ◆ the need for the young people to understand better their own community and culture prior to engaging in discussion of more controversial issues involving other groups.
- 4.12 In a minority of instances, the location of clubs in areas perceived to be strongly loyalist or nationalist creates a barrier to the development of joint links. Several workers commented on the sensitivities in their particular localities, the constraints on certain activities and the need to move forward with caution. In such circumstances sensitivity and caution are understandable and well judged. However, several clubs countered this challenge by arranging some of the contacts

at neutral venues. For example, a small group of young people from one club used a local teachers' centre as the venue for meeting their partner group to discuss potentially sensitive issues; they were supported well in this work by Education and Library Board (ELB) personnel and encouraging progress was reported.

- 4.13 In discussion, the responses of young people who had participated in cross-community activities were encouraging. Several of their comments indicated the benefits they gained from the programmes:



- 4.14 Only a small number of clubs reported incidents of a sectarian nature linked to any of their cross-curricular activities. These incidents were dealt with appropriately by the leaders and rarely had any lasting influence on the programme. All groups are aware, however, of the need for discretion in managing cross-community work in a divided society.

## 5. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 There is a wide variation in practice in the management of cross-community development work in the youth service. In a majority of units, the quality of the management is satisfactory. In a significant minority, however, there are considerable weaknesses or the weaknesses outweigh the strengths.
- 5.2 In the best practice observed in a minority of the units:
- ♦ helpful and concise policies guide cross-community activity;
  - ♦ genuine efforts are made to implement the policies;

- ♦ the arrangements allow for the active involvement of the young people in planning the programmes;
- ♦ there is variety in the activities and planned progression in the young people's experiences in cross-community activities.

5.3 The programme for the younger members in one club included the joint planning of events at alternate centres, visits to other clubs and, as the young people mature, the programme is extended to include residentials and even foreign travel. In another instance, the stated policy of displaying proper attitudes towards visiting groups and individuals to the club set appropriately high expectations for the young people and was matched by the welcoming attitude and friendliness of the members.

5.4 In the significant number of units where weaknesses in management practice were evident, contributory factors include:

- ♦ shortages or changes in staffing; new leaders required time to settle into their roles, to establish contacts and to judge the sensitivities and needs relating to cross-community work;
- ♦ the need for a stated policy to guide cross-community work;
- ♦ the absence of a structured process to ensure that the stated aims and objectives relating to cross-community links are implemented effectively and consistently;
- ♦ significant weaknesses in planning arrangements, including the joint-planning of cross-community programmes, contribute to a lack of progression and coherence in the experiences of the young people;
- ♦ the limited involvement of the young people in the planning.

5.5 Other management issues:

#### **Staff development**

In a majority of the units visited, the quality of staff development in relation to cross-community work ranged from fair to poor, with weaknesses in practice outweighing strengths. The post-primary report on EMU also identified staff development as an area for improvement; this shared feature underlines the need in both the school and youth sectors for suitable training for teachers and youth workers in addressing more controversial issues related to cultural and religious differences. On occasions, personnel from the ELBs provide group-training sessions for youth leaders at out-centres and these are reported to have been helpful. In a few instances, the leaders provide training for other club leaders who lack experience in cross-community work; guidance is given, for example, on the centre's aims, code of behaviour and the responsibilities of leaders.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

There is, generally, a lack of systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating cross-community programmes. The best practice in monitoring and evaluating was observed in one unit where the leaders met regularly with the young people to discuss the merits of the programmes, and how they might be developed and improved.

### **Links with parents and the community**

In those instances where the leaders are well-established and have a good knowledge of the locality, links with parents and community groups are usually strong. Only in a very small number of groups was the active involvement of the parents a feature of the work.

### **Resources**

A majority of leaders report that they have a satisfactory range of resources to support cross-community programmes. In a significant minority of the units, there are inadequate materials to support the work. Some leaders reported that they preferred to use their own skills and experience rather than resort to external resources. Others commented that they can draw readily on resources available from their ELB centres. In the best practice developed in several clubs, the resourcing of cross-community activity, which included the services of dance and drama tutors, and the use of residential, are all costed prior to the commencement of the project.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 A main finding of the survey is that youth centres are generally successful in establishing a favourable ethos where good relationships between the young people are encouraged. The commitment and interest of many leaders in helping young people to have confidence in themselves and to respect others, provides a sound foundation for the promotion of cross-community objectives.

6.2 There are a number of features of provision that are in need of further development, to varying degrees, in most youth centres. These features include: planning for cross-community work to ensure breadth and progression in the experiences of the young people; strengthening the approaches at all levels of leadership to promoting, monitoring and evaluating cross-community programmes; increasing the quality and range of staff development opportunities for leaders so that they will gain the necessary skills and confidence in developing a range of cross-community activity, with a more focused emphasis on, for example, key EMU objectives such as 'understanding conflict' and 'cultural understanding' and on the core principles of the Youth Service Curriculum.

6.3 For several years, and during frequent periods of community and political unrest, youth centres have provided a stable, welcoming and supportive context for young people to meet and relax together. Such achievements by the Youth Service in difficult circumstances should not be underestimated. It is against this background that this report is written and that the above features are suggested as guidance for the further development of community relations work.

## Evidence base for DE Cross-Community Survey 1999-2000

In carrying out the survey of cross-community work in the youth service, focused visits were made to the following clubs:

Ballee High School Youth Club  
Brownlow Resource Centre Youth Club  
Carrickmore Youth Centre  
Derg Valley Youth Club  
Derrychara Youth Club, Enniskillen High School  
Fisherwick Presbyterian GB Company  
Glastry College Youth Club  
Laurelhill Youth Club, Lisburn  
Limavady Grammar School Youth Club  
Limavady High School Youth Club  
New Row GB, Coleraine  
Patrician Youth Centre, Downpatrick  
Pinnacle Youth Centre, Dromore High School  
Rosario Youth Club, Belfast  
Saintfield First Presbyterian GB  
St John Bosco Youth Centre, Newry  
St Macnissi's (Dunmaul) Youth Club, Carnlough  
St Mary's Youth Centre, Londonderry  
St Michael's Youth Club, Enniskillen  
Youth Action HQ  
Waveney Youth Club, Ballymena

Evidence was also gathered from the following recent inspection reports:

Ballymagee Youth Club, Bangor	September 1999
Banbridge Youth Centre	February 2000
Londonderry YMCA, Drumahoe	March 1999
Magnet Young Adult Centre, Newry	April 1999
Matt Talbot Youth Centre	January 1999
New Mossley Youth Centre, Newtownabbey	May 1999
PHAB Northern Ireland	1997-98
St John Vianney Youth Centre	October 1999
Strabane Youth Association	November 1999
The Boys' Brigade	1998-99
The Saints Youth Centre, Twinbrook	March 1999





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