



Title: Research into the Effectiveness of Youth Training and Diversion Schemes

Author: ECOTEC on behalf of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Date published: 2006

Funding body: ODPM

Document available to download at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/144470.pdf> (accessed July 13th 2010)

SCS topic headings: Home Safety, Community Engagement, Safety in Public Spaces (ASB), Environment Safety (ASB), Equalities and Diversity, Partnership Working

This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.

Summary of the intervention's aim

This independent report examines the effectiveness of youth training and diversion schemes in England through the range, number and types of schemes supported and/or delivered by the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). The research covered universal schemes open to all (aged 10 to 25) and more targeted provision for disadvantaged young people. The research provides a critical assessment of their effectiveness. (At the time of writing, a national strategy was under development.)

Outcomes

The research provides a systematic assessment of the different aspects of scheme management, delivery, and outcomes.

Research into the effectiveness of youth training and diversion schemes Partnership working was found to be an area of mixed effectiveness. Links with partners strengthened the expertise of Service staff and provided a joined-up approach to meeting the needs of young people in successful partnership schemes. Some of the most effective schemes offered youth training with the Fire and Rescue Service as an integrated part of a wider programme of tailored activities. Key partners in this respect included educational institutions, Youth Offending Teams and Connexions. On balance, however, most Fire and Rescue Authorities were found to give partners more limited involvement in the day-to-day running of the schemes that they offer. The majority of schemes were managed internally by the Service, with partners in a more limited 'referral' role. Stronger partnership work is essential if the Service is to engage more effectively with current policy developments.

The research identified some recurrent messages, with regard to 'what works' in managing successful schemes, including clear criteria for recruiting staff line management to take place in accordance with core Service protocols.

The overall approach to managing and staffing the schemes varied considerably. Over half of the Authorities who took part in the survey reported a core team of (less than 20) vetted staff in place for working with children and young people, often across a number of different schemes. In contrast, certain Authorities reported involvement of far larger numbers of (more than 80) personnel. This presented significant challenges for staff training and quality assurance.

The research shows a need to identify core competencies more clearly, in line with other agencies that work with young people. The Service is faced with a challenge in determining how far staff should pursue more specialised youth work-type training whilst retaining its main focus on community fire safety.

The majority of all schemes had suitable quality frameworks in place, with due attention to risk assessments, child protection, and Criminal Record Bureau checks for staff. A minority of schemes showed some gaps, including no current child protection policy. Some schemes are considerably behind other youth related agencies in this respect.

The overall response for engaging with black & minority ethnic group (BME) young people was typically 'homogenised', with few examples of schemes that engaged with BME representative organisations or tailored activities according to specific cultural needs. There are benefits to be achieved from transferring good practice from the smaller number of schemes that have been more pro-active in this area. More targeted recruitment of scheme personnel from BME communities is one way in which the needs of BME young people might be appropriately addressed.

At its best, youth training proved a viable career opportunity within the Service. Schemes were typically most effective, where they joined-up with other local services or projects and provided an opportunity for progression. Partners routinely provided the main source of expertise on training, whilst community organisations proved crucial in 'reaching' more difficult groups.

Relative strengths were found, for schemes at different levels of intervention. Shorter schemes proved effective to address higher-end risk factors, such as a threat of school exclusion. They provided an important 'thinking space' for young people, outside of their usual relationships. Schemes undertaken over a Research Summary period of weeks or months had greater benefits for introducing young people to a structured programme of activities, for example over school holiday periods.

Longer term schemes typically offered the greatest opportunities for progression and to gain accreditation. For all types of schemes, young people stressed the importance of having a support worker or mentor. The FRS was valued for offering positive role models, without the same kind of 'punitive' associations as for the police or Youth Offending Services.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

The research found that the FRS manages, delivers, and is involved as a partner in schemes that target young people across the whole spectrum of needs. The more 'universal' schemes remain the most widespread, with Young Fire-fighter Association and Duke of Edinburgh Award being greatest in number. The past five to ten years has seen an overall shift towards more 'targeted' schemes, with a growing number of higher-end interventions such as Princes Trust 'Team', LIFE, Firebreak and Phoenix. These schemes are typically shorter in duration and focus on more disadvantaged young people.

The research concludes that the current suite of universal and targeted schemes is an asset to the Service. However the range of schemes would benefit from greater coordination and sharing of good practice. In particular the relationship between different types of scheme and other local provision for young people should be reviewed to identify how the benefits experienced by young people might be sustained. This will entail greater cross-referral and networking.

How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

The authors undertook a very comprehensive approach to gathering data and the process was overseen by the ODPM with further guidance from an Advisory Group with senior level representation from the Fire and Rescue Service and other national youth related agencies.

Information was gathered through three different approaches to help support varied perspectives and thus a more insightful review of the schemes. Combining findings from a variety of sources with different forms of data (such as personal experiences from the case studies and statistical survey data) helps produce more comprehensive findings and conclusions.

A **literature review** was undertaken to establish the context for the primary research and to capture any existing evidence for the effectiveness of the different schemes. It entailed a review of documentary sources (academic, policy and media), covering activities delivered by the Fire and Rescue Service in England; those undertaken by other uniformed services, and 'good practice' in youth work.

A series of **telephone interviews** were conducted with key stakeholders for youth training and diversion schemes that involve the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in England. Five interviews were undertaken with national level representatives from the Service, the FRS Youth Support Association, Princes Trust and Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The interviews provided the strategic context for the research, and informed on potential areas of 'good practice'.

Case studies

A total of eleven schemes were short-listed as these represented a cross-section of the main types of youth training and diversion schemes, varying from those with a

universal focus, to others concentrating on more 'targeted' work with disadvantaged groups. Individual schemes were identified on the basis of showcasing aspects of (potential) good practice, such as professionalism in approach, practical innovation, and/or outcomes achieved. The criteria were informed by evidence of good practice in youth work from the literature review. A summary of each case study is in the document's annex two.

Survey

ECOTEC undertook a survey of 33 of the 47 Fire and Rescue Authorities across the country- a 70% response rate- a total of 332 schemes was identified and represented an average of ten schemes per authority. The survey obtained details on the number, type and range of youth training and diversion schemes delivered or supported by the FRS within each Authority; the young people who were participating, and examples of potential good practice.

**Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request.
Date added to the SCS website: July 2010 (RC)**