

Local Government Research Programme

Evaluation of the Dialogue Youth Programme

An evaluation of the Dialogue Youth Programme, commissioned by the Scottish Executive, took place between January and April 2005. In three case study areas (West Lothian, Shetland and North Ayrshire), stakeholders involved in the delivery of Dialogue Youth were consulted, as were members of young volunteer groups and a sample of secondary school pupils. A national survey of Dialogue Youth Co-ordinators was also conducted and existing Dialogue Youth materials were analysed via desk research. This is a summary of the findings from the Evaluation.

Main Findings

- The Dialogue Youth Programme has been well received at both local and national levels. It is seen to have generated a freshness and enthusiasm around young people's engagement.
- The Programme has addressed all five of the key national priorities (health, education, transport, crime and economy). More activity has taken place in health, education and crime than in transport and economy.
- The Evaluation found many examples of young people being represented on Community Planning Partnerships and being consulted about pertinent national and local community issues.
- Many examples were also found of young people being actively engaged in public activity through schools, youth organisations, local authorities and other forums.
- At a local level, there is typically a small core group of truly engaged young people working with Dialogue Youth staff to offer information and services to the wider, generally less engaged young person population. The engaged young people typically work through young volunteer groups, journalism initiatives and discount negotiating groups.
- In the three case study areas, all young people who had been involved in the Programme for two years or more stated that they had observed a positive change in the way that young people, and their views on local issues, had come to be regarded by local organisations and authorities.
- Local partners were extremely positive about having worked with the Programme, citing benefits to their organisations and to young people locally. Although still in the early stages of development, they consider that it can be effective in bringing together young people and local service planning partners.
- Some Dialogue Youth Units have taken measures to address issues of equalities. However, the findings from the Evaluation indicate that equalities remain an area for further development.

The Dialogue Youth Programme

The Dialogue Youth Programme is a joint initiative between young people, Young Scot (the national youth information agency), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the then Scottish Executive 21st Century Government Unit, Local Authorities and their community planning partners.

The Programme is striving to connect young people with their communities and give them the opportunity to engage, inform and influence. It is hoped that by doing so, the Programme can also make a significant contribution to specific government priorities and prepare young people of all abilities for work or training.

Supported by the Executive's Modernising Government Fund, the Programme forms an important part of the Scottish Executive's agenda to modernise the way government works at local and national levels.

Dialogue Youth Units

At a local level, a Dialogue Youth Unit (DYU) in each Local Authority area of Scotland is responsible for delivering the Dialogue Youth Programme. DYUs develop services with young people by working with a range of service providers and by supporting teams of local young people to canvass the views of others and publicise opportunities. Each DYU is managed by a local Co-ordinator.

Once fully established, each DYU will have the potential to provide a 'back shop' to support its Council, their community planning partners and young people to promote and influence the development and delivery of public services.

The position in April 2005 saw DYUs at various stages of implementation. All had a local Co-ordinator in post and the vast majority had engaged with young people and partner agencies. However, some had done more than others with regard to their bespoke web pages (known as 'local pages') and the extent to which they had added 'smartened' features to their local Young Scot card.

Aims and Objectives

The Evaluation sought to assess the extent to which national priorities are addressed and community planning is supported by Dialogue Youth. It also looked at the extent of youth engagement in public activity via Dialogue Youth and how it differs to what is available elsewhere in Scotland.

In the three case study areas, the evaluation focussed on the impact of DYUs on young people and the extent to which they perceive Dialogue Youth to be meeting their needs.

Methodology

In each case study area, the Evaluation Team surveyed a sample of secondary school pupils (707 in total), conducted interviews with Dialogue Youth Co-ordinators and partner agencies, and spoke with members of Dialogue Youth related young volunteer groups.

In addition, the Team surveyed Co-ordinators across Scotland by email and consulted with a small sample of stakeholders involved in Dialogue Youth at a national level. Desk based activity was undertaken to analyse information and material provided by the National Programme Manager.

Community Planning and National Priorities

Community Planning partners have found young people's involvement to have been beneficial to service delivery and the Community Planning 2004 report *'Making a Difference - Community Planning a Year On'* praised the Dialogue Youth Programme for its work in engaging with young people.

The Programme has addressed all five of the key national priorities (health, education, transport, crime and economy), although activity has been concentrated in health, education and crime.

Extent and Impact of Engagement

The desk research revealed many examples of young people being actively engaged in public activity through Dialogue Youth. This activity covers a broad range of issues, many of which are particularly relevant to the local areas in which the activity has taken place.

Although the numbers of young people involved in core Dialogue Youth activity are relatively small (approximately 3% of the sample were involved in young volunteer groups at the time of the Evaluation), it is not surprising given the relatively early stage of the Programme.

The survey of school pupils revealed that:

- around 65% had a Young Scot card and over 40% rated it as good or excellent

- around two thirds knew about their DYU's local pages and around 20% had visited them. Of those, 60% thought the content was of interest

Benefits of Involvement

The young people currently participating in core Dialogue Youth activity identified clear benefits of being so. These included increased self-confidence, new skills and formal training opportunities.

In addition, all of the young volunteers interviewed for the Evaluation stated that they had become more aware of, or interested in, wider community issues as a result of volunteering.

However, the Evaluation found that in the main, the young people currently involved in core activity are those already engaged. The National Programme Manager recognises this and considers that as the core expands it will be necessary to target a wider diversity of socio economic groups.

National Perspective

National partners were enthusiastic about the Programme. The three partners interviewed all felt that it was having a positive impact on young people.

In terms of the impact on partner agencies, there was mention of “*systematic and permanent change*” that was directly attributed to Dialogue Youth. The national partners were also complimentary towards the agencies and organisations that have worked with DYUs.

Differentiation

The Evaluation found that the engagement and communication activities delivered through Dialogue Youth are not unique to the Programme. The key differentiating feature is the consistent national and local network and the on-the-ground momentum generated through local Dialogue Youth Co-ordinators.

Challenges

The Evaluation suggests there are four key challenges for the Programme:

- to capture, sustain and build upon the good practice that has been achieved, including developing the Programme at both national and local levels
- to co-ordinate activities with other Programmes and structures, while maintaining a young person led approach
- to maintain the cross-cutting approach to engaging with young people, i.e. sustaining a local authority corporate approach to the Programme
- to ensure an appropriate balance between ‘core’ and ‘universal’ elements

It would be helpful if these challenges were taken into account in the development of the Dialogue Youth Strategy and Forward Plan.

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The report "Evaluation of the Dialogue Youth Programme" the research report which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications page of the Scottish Executive website at:
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