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Special Issue on Lifelong Learners

Quality Leaders Project (Youth) Initiative

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Introduction

In July 2008 the evaluators of the QLP-Y programme were commissioned to undertake a follow-up evaluation of the programme. The aims of this follow-up evaluation are to prepare an update evaluation report on outcome, progress and developments in QLP-Y since the main Evaluation Report (December 2007). Assess sustainability of staff development and service development activities based on evidence from QLs, Mentors, sponsors and young people. Evaluation activities commenced in August 2008 and will continue until October 2009. This is the interim report on the further stage of the evaluation.

Interim findings

All of the three remaining authorities have continued to deliver some activities beyond the formal end to the programme. In some cases, these were new initiatives and in others built upon previous work undertaken as part of the programme. While the two remaining staff managing the project centrally have returned to their normal university duties, they continue to offer support to the QLs in the three authorities and have encouraged the QLs to contribute to articles and other initiatives. An additional element of provision was the delivery by staff at London Metropolitan University of a module "Innovation and Development in Information Services". All participants agreed the module had been a good opportunity to meet people from other authorities and to have the time to reflect and engage in discussion.

One of the continuing challenges within the library setting is restructuring, which has impacted on all the participating authorities. There are concerns that some restructuring will impact on the work that has been built up under QLP-Y, particularly where it is not clear what place activities for teenage young people will have in future. Local authority bureaucracy continues to present a challenge for project implementation, particularly in relation to IT-based activities.

A further challenge is that in some cases young people move on and consistency can be lost. In some cases young people had dropped out. This was also a learning process for young people taking responsibility for organising activities. Nonetheless, all the projects felt that they had managed to contact and engage hard-to-reach young people.

One of the main impacts on young people as a result of their participation in QLP-Y was to show them that libraries could be fun places that had relevance for them and that they could be made to feel welcome. QLP-Y activities had also increased young people's trust in libraries. QLs were in agreement that the activities had helped to build the confidence of many participants, through developing new skills that will help them in the future, including social, leadership and IT skills. By taking ownership of specific projects and having to deal with some of the challenges involved through different local authority rules, participants had also developed administrative and negotiation skills. Feedback from young people who had attended activities was overwhelmingly positive. It was clear they had developed skills, such as graphics, editing and writing; and also the confidence to deal with adults in 'official' positions.

The QLP-Y project has also had some impact on the skills of QLs, such as strategic and leadership skills, and developing a variety of youth working skills. The individual development of QLs through taking on additional responsibilities and developing new working styles was also an important benefit of QLP-Y. The programme had helped change attitudes towards young people more widely within the participating libraries and enabled QLs to identify gaps in service, which have started to be addressed, although it was recognised that there is more to be done in this respect.

While the impact of the QLP-Y project on the wider organisation has been relatively limited, there is evidence of the ways in which QLP-Y has influenced services to young people within the participating libraries. In one authority the courses developed through QLP-Y have become part of ongoing activities for young people. In another, a youth board has been created through QLP-Y and this is continuing beyond the funding. There is also a commitment to creating a teenage zone in each library. In a third authority, a group of young people involved in developing a 'mangazine' has an allocated space they can use to meet on an ongoing basis.

The lack of funding beyond QLP-Y means that relatively few activities have been planned for the future specifically for young people who have been non-users of libraries. Without dedicated funding for these it may be difficult to secure the commitment of partner organisations. There was general agreement amongst QLs that, although QLP-Y had helped to focus attention on the issue of services to young people, more needed to be done to address their needs in future.

Overall, the benefits of QLP-Y were that it helped to emphasise an area of need and bring into libraries young people who were not traditional users; young people were involved in planning and delivering activities; and the QLs themselves had experienced personal development and a broadening of their interests and expertise. Contributing factors were that the QLP-Y project was tailored towards the needs of young people in each authority and the project also developed in the context of what was seen to be feasible for the QLs and

each authority to fit in to its organisational structures. All of the libraries worked in partnership with other departments, although the benefits of this partnership were seen more in some projects than in others.

There is a clear indication from the previous evaluation and current work that many activities are innovative, although the QLs have come across challenges to implementing these, particularly because of internal bureaucracy and a lack of IT support and systems. There remains a reluctance to hand over power to young people. More extensive, longer-term change is needed in libraries and the impetus for this may come from external initiatives independent of QLP-Y, although this project has contributed to some culture change and has helped to influence the views of staff beyond those directly involved in QLP-Y. Although responsibility for working with young people should be shared amongst staff, the reality is that some of the impetus came from the QLs within the framework of a semi-formal project, as discussed earlier. There is thus the danger, once the QLs return to their former or new library roles, that they will no longer have the time and flexibility to maintain ongoing projects set up under QLP-Y.

The full report is available at the QLP website: <http://www.seapn.org.uk/qlp/>.