

Innovation in youth services

The Quality Leaders Project (Youth) empowers young people

By

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Abstract

The paper examines the Quality Leaders Project-Youth (QLP-Y) from theoretical and practical aspects: (1) as an innovative model that deals with management development in reforming services to make them more personal and relevant so as to create better public value (2) its application in Barnet.

Public libraries face major challenges in meeting the needs of young people. The Reading Agency ¹ sees the need for “nothing less than a fundamental change in focus for libraries”. That is precisely what QLP-Y aims for. Its central tenet is “management development through service development”. It addresses “social exclusion of young people from libraries and other services, through developing partnership between library services, youth services and community groups”. ²

QLP-Y demands shifts in thinking and requires acting outside local government boxes. A key aspect of QLP-Y is the need for sustainable and sustained change at various levels - organisational, managerial, cultural, policies and practices, all of which require political support at local and national levels. Such change requires innovation. This paper examines innovation as it applies to the information sector and as developed by the QLP-Y model.

The challenges of change are not easy to meet. Historical imbalance in services to young people is compounded by a lack of strategic approach to address the imbalance. This results in what a QLP-Y participant describes as a “*youth shaped hole in most of our libraries*”. ³

Securing the Future, the UK Government’s strategy for sustainable development, refers to the “4 Es” as a way of securing change: Enable, Engage, Exemplify and Encourage, an approach which is exemplified by the QLP model. What makes QLP-Y different from many other similar initiatives, however, is the link between the development of services and the development of staff. It supports initiatives which young people themselves want and need. These are done not simply to improve

¹ The Reading Agency (2004): *Fulfilling their Potential: a national development programme for young people and libraries*. London:TRA.

² Pitcher, Jane; Eastwood-Krah, Mary and O’Neill, Maggie (2007): *Evaluation of Quality Leaders Project (Youth) initiative*. Interim report.

Available at: http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/londonmet/library/i29617_3.pdf. [Accessed: 28 April 2007].

³ Ibid.

services to young people, but also as a tool to develop key leadership skills among staff. It is the development of such skills through the development of personalised services, in partnership with a specific client group, that makes QLP such a unique model.

The paper looks at the broader policy and strategic aspects and then takes an in-depth look at the process of change in Barnet. It explains the QLP-Y approach to staff and service development for young people within the context of the national policy framework, both from library and youth services aspects. It then explores the dynamics of change in Barnet from experiences in both aspects (management and service development) from an active participant in the change process providing examples of how young people have been empowered. This is then put in Barnet's organisational context from a management and strategic perspective.

The paper concludes by assessing the Project as a model to address management development. It explains the proposed research outcomes of the project: a conference on sustainable innovation in local authorities; the publishing of the QLP Manual which will document and analyse the experience of QLP. Thus the paper moves full circle from the need for a new model and the implications therein, to personalising services, application of the management tools contained within the model, back to how to deal with the management implications in the application of the QLP model in order to achieve better public value.

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