



## Youth Ideas & Action *developments in youth service*

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*Youth Ideas & Action aims to disseminate information about staff development and service provision to young people. QLP-Y participants are encouraged to submit items for inclusion in future issues.*

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*This is a special issue of Youth Ideas & Action providing an update on QLP-Y. The next issue will carry presentations from the QLP-Y Development Day, 13 October, 2005.*

### The QLP-Y implementation stage takes off

The implementation stage of the Quality Leaders Project- Youth (QLP-Y) started with a Development Day on 13 October, 2005 at the Department of Applied Social Sciences of London Metropolitan University. Youth and library services from Barnet, Haringey, Lincolnshire, Liverpool, and Portsmouth are participating.

This two-year phase is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and the earlier 6-month project planning phase was funded by the National Youth Agency. QLP, managed by the Department of Applied Social Sciences with support from the Management Research Centre, uses the approach "management development through service development".

QLP was "highly commended" in the Organisational Change category of the Diversity Awards by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. (CILIP, 2003). The Mayor of London's Commission on African and Asian Heritage also acknowledged the contribution of QLP. (Mayor of London, 2005).

### Delayed start

The implementation phase should have started in September, 2004, but was delayed for a number of reasons. One of these was the withdrawal of some authorities after the first phase, mainly because of organisational changes and staff shortages. Re-recruitment was slow and involved much time and effort requiring the services of a consultant to help recruit. The reluctance of many public libraries to sign up indicated that they were not serious about changing their traditional services into a modern, relevant one for their young people. In other

cases, there was a genuine interest in joining but a lack of staff and on-going organisational change were the main reasons why they could not join.

QLP-Y faced further delays when Merton pulled out in May 2005. Their reasons were "to do with changed circumstances whereby the council and library have restructured and our focus and energies are being diverted into other priorities; also our ability to identify capacity at this time is also severely compromised and we do not feel we will be able to deliver". (Lackajis, 2005).

Merton's withdrawal necessitated a further round of recruitment which, this time, was more successful. A number of authorities, including Buckinghamshire, City of Wakefield MDC (Youth Service), Hampshire, Islington Library Service, Knowsley Library Service and Youth Service, Suffolk Museums Partnership, York Central Library were seriously interested in joining. The two who finally joined to replace Merton were Barnet and Lincolnshire Library and Youth Services. Many of those who could not join this time indicated their interest in joining a future strand - assuming there is one.

### Lessons to be learnt

The experience from these two rounds of recruitment provides interesting insight into the reality of library services. The most surprising aspect in the initial recruitment was the lack of interest from library authorities in a project where there was financial backing as well as a well-researched programme and support which ensured minimum input from libraries, but with substantial benefits. It was instructive that there was more interest from Youth Services than from Library Services, indicating perhaps that the Youth Service managers were more aware of the need to make substantial changes in their service, whereas libraries, with their rather weak regulatory framework, had less commitment to staff and service development.

The lesson here, perhaps, is that there is a need for a greater national regulatory framework for libraries. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 2003) introduced the "Framework for the Future" in 2003 as a "policy document [which] outlines the Government's long-term strategic vision for the role of public libraries". But this remains a rather weak policy which, some feel, will not help to bring about necessary change in the sector.<sup>1</sup>

### Voices from the field

It is important for those involved in planning the future of public libraries to learn from the lessons of recruitment to the QLP-Y project. They need to pay particular attention to the views from those who showed their enthusiasm for the project but could not participate. Some of these are summarised below:

- *We are trying to develop our services to young people as one of our priorities at the moment and we have just begun to consult young people in specific*

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<sup>1</sup> See for example "Framework for the Future - where is the leadership (and cash)?" *Library and Information Update*. March, 2003, p.9.

*areas such as the development of teen areas in new and refurbished libraries. But we know we need to do a lot more and we haven't really begun on audience development or changing the way we do things to involve young people in decision-making on a wider scale. The head of Children's and Youth Services is enthusiastic about the idea and we know that our head of service, and our Director of Recreation and Heritage, see youth as a particular priority in service development.*

- We are interested in possibly participating in the Quality Leaders Project - Youth scheme. We have recently gone through a restructuring and have identified the development of services to teenagers as one of our priorities in our business plan. The QLP scheme looks like a suitable structure in which we could do this. If I am understanding it correctly, it would develop the skills of the staff, support us in working with our Youth Service colleagues in consulting with and developing a library project with teenagers. I would like to know how it all works in more detail, what commitment there would be on our part and what resources would be available to support us.*
- Thanks very much for this update, it's a great offer. Very sadly we can't take the opportunity though as staff time is just what we are lacking to deliver and develop services to young people - would that the offer included that, so just feeding back for your info.*
- After discussion with the Museums Officer here and some additional thought, I don't think any of the museums in \_\_\_\_\_ are in a position to work on this project at the moment. Largely through issues of capacity, local government service reviews and development plans.*
- I am not sure if we are able to participate as we are suffering substantial staff shortages at present. However, services to young people are a key area for development and I am interested to know a little more about the project.*
- I would like \_\_\_\_\_ libraries to participate in the QLP - Youth project if possible. It would fit with some of our current service initiatives and it would be good to work more closely with London Met. [We] had some communication with [QLP] about this last year, but couldn't meet the timescales at that time. I was also concerned about the time commitment PHF expected of participating authorities.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ library service and youth service would be very interested in taking part, we are currently looking at how we could jointly establish quality/accessible information and advice for young people in areas of libraries through joint working.*

### Who will take the initiative?

What is clear from the QLP-Y experience is that there is a definite need for innovation and change in youth service delivery and staff development. At the same time, there is a need for a new vision and a serious commitment to achieve the new vision. This can take place only if there is a stronger national regulatory, planning and performance framework backed by stronger support in

developing service and staff. Some action plans that followed the *Framework for the Future* do provide other models of developing service to young people as well as developing leadership within libraries. But there is certainly room for more work to be done on this. The question remains: who can, and will, take the initiative to address this obvious shortcoming in staff development as well as in delivering a relevant service to young people? This is particularly important as local authority services for young are delivered by different "silos" - departments such as education, youth service, social services, and libraries, among others. While recent legislative initiative provides a better prospect for joined-up service, much ground needs to be covered in practice.

As other professions adopt and develop fast in the context of a constantly changing globalised world, the information world needs to pick up speed if it is to remain relevant. In his evidence to the Parliamentary Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Durrani (2005) referred to the need for creating a "totally new mindset":

The Committee has an important role in ensuring that public libraries emerge from the deep social sleep into which they have sunk - generally isolated from the people and communities they are expected to serve. There is a further danger of decision makers and managers living in a dream world where regular assurances are given by interested parties that all is well and that libraries are at the centre of social life. The Committee needs to give a clear guidance about the future role of public libraries and help create a totally new mindset needed if we are to save the library for a new generation.

QLP-Y is perhaps a small step in this search for new relevance. It continues to gather strength by being embedded in the Department of Applied Social Sciences where it will work closely with other projects and initiatives, such as the proposal for an MSc in youth and children's work. It has just appointed two new staff members dedicated to QLP-Y work. It publishes an irregular "Youth Ideas and Action" which provides update on the project as well as on developments in youth services. This, together with other material, is available at the QLP website at <http://www.seapn.org.uk/qlp.html>.

QLP-Y is keen to share its ideas and experience with interested individuals and organisation in all relevant fields - information, education, skills development, learning and teaching, management and community and volunteer sectors. It welcomes inquiries and co-operation with all who share its vision and commitment to a community-based approach.

We leave the final word to Percival (2005) from Portsmouth:

I believe that QLP-Youth will make a significant contribution to our library service, by increasing levels of participation by young people, empowering them by giving them the confidence to air their views, and most importantly ensure that they are taken seriously. For far too long, public libraries in Britain have been run from above, with only the views of an extant readership taken into account. QLP gives young people a real chance to affect change from below and I sincerely believe that a change in the way libraries deliver their services to young people and other socially excluded groups will help bring about the fundamental social changes in wider society that we all desire.

This is but the beginning of the two-year journey of QLP-Y. There is much to be learnt and actioned. The QLP-Y participants and the teams at Department of Applied Social Sciences and the Management Research Centre are all geared up for the coming challenges.

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