

Evaluation of the Young People's Development Programme First interim report: December 2004

**Meg Wiggins, Chris Bonell, Mary Sawtell, Helen Burchett,
Helen Austerberry and Vicki Strange**

Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

The Young People's Development Programme (YPDP) is a pilot initiative funded by the UK Department Of Health and the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (TPU) at the Department for Education and Skills. It aims for youth work providers to deliver a holistic programme of education and support to young people aged 13 to 15 who are at risk of school exclusion, drug misuse and teenage pregnancy, as a means of improving their long term outcomes relating to health, education and social issues. The YPDP model incorporates activities across the following components: education, training and employment; life skills education; arts; sports; mentoring; volunteering; sexual health education; drugs education and early intervention; and access to services. The programme aims to carry out intensive work with young people for one year, providing six to ten hours per week over 52 consecutive weeks. There are 27 pilot YPDP projects based in existing voluntary and statutory youth services across England. Funding for the programme began in April 2004 and will run for three years. The National Youth Agency (NYA) has been given the role of training and co-ordination agent, with responsibility for implementation of the YPDP programme.

Key interim findings from the YPDP evaluation: April to October 2004

- The YPDP programme is successfully underway. Despite early delays, nine months after funding commenced, all projects are offering YPDP services to young people.
- Amongst the pilot projects there is a shared vision of the programme and its aims, but this has been operationalised in diverse ways. Most projects are offering the full range of programme activity components.
- By the end of October 2004, 580 young people have been registered as YPDP participants. On the whole, the reasons for referral appear to be consistent with the original programme aims, targeting those young people most at risk of school exclusion, drug misuse or teenage pregnancy.
- A key challenge for YPDP projects has been meeting the recruitment targets for the first year of the programme. Two-thirds of the projects have not yet achieved their recruitment target. Most felt the numbers were achievable, but problems have arisen because of delays in programme implementation (notably with staff recruitment) and with referral routes.
- The other key challenge for the projects has been reaching the target of providing services to each young person for six to ten hours per week. Only eight of the 27 pilot projects have been able to achieve this level of participation with most of their young people. Those that have a higher proportion reaching target hours were more likely: to be offering more hours of organised activities; to have recruited fewer participants; to have more paid staff time; and to have begun their recruitment earlier in the year.
- The role of the NYA as training and co-ordination agent for the programme has been a dual one of supporter and 'enforcer'. This appears to have led to a greater level of consistency in implementation across the pilot projects.

Background

YPDP programme

The YPDP programme is based on models developed and used in the USA. These 'youth development programmes' (or 'life skills approach' programmes) aim to prevent young people engaging in various forms of risk-taking behaviour, such as unprotected sex and drug misuse, and to contribute to young people's positive development. These programmes aim to work by developing a sense of purpose and future among the young people via vocational, educational, volunteering, and life skills work. The UK Department of Health developed YPDP on the basis of increasing evidence emerging from the USA that highlighted the potential of these programmes as 'being particularly promising for addressing both teenage pregnancy and a range of broader risk-taking behaviours among young people'ⁱ.

YPDP is part of the government's focus on improving children and young people's lives. It links strongly with the aims of several key policies, such as 'Every Child Matters' Green Paperⁱⁱ (and subsequent Children's Act 2004) and the 'National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services'ⁱⁱⁱ. YPDP forms part of the government's commitments laid out in the 'Choosing Health' White Paper^{iv}.

The YPDP Evaluation

The evaluation of the YPDP initiative is being carried out by a team of researchers from the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, with support from consultants at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The evaluation employs mixed methods, examining the processes involved in developing and implementing the initiative, as well as exploring the possible impacts of the programme on the participants. An economic evaluation is also being carried out.

This first interim report provides an update on the early implementation of the programme, concentrating on how it is being delivered currently and key challenges in developing and implementing YPDP. It is based on information collected through a variety of methods including: monthly project monitoring forms which record project activities and participation levels for young people (includes data for the months of July 2004 – October 2004); interviews with 18 strategic and operational staff in seven case study projects; staff questionnaires returned by 44 YPDP operational staff from 23 of the 27 projects in November 2004; interviews with Department of Health and NYA staff; and observations at national and regional training events. The evaluation team will produce annual interim reports and a final report in 2007.

Early implementation of the Young People's Development Programme

What does the YPDP programme look like at this stage?

Across the YPDP projects there is a consistent, shared vision of what they are trying to achieve with the young people with whom they work. The YPDP model is seen by staff to fit well with the work that they were doing before the initiative began. Alongside this shared vision, however, there is great diversity in the operation of the 27 YPDP projects. This is unsurprising given that projects were selected on the basis of providing representation from different regions of the country, as well as diversity in settings worked (i.e. urban, rural, seaside and former coalfields), sector (statutory and voluntary) and ethnicity of target groups. In practice, this has resulted in a pool of projects where all are experienced in delivering youth work with disadvantaged young people in their local setting, but where there is great variability in terms of the structure of the host organisation, as well as the contents, methods and scope of work.

So, despite the shared vision, for some projects the YPDP model has come as an extension of work already being carried out, whereas with others, it has required major practical changes to be able to deliver the programme as specified.

Examples of operational variation within YPDP

These examples are based on information from 23 projects where staff members returned questionnaires.

- *Attendance at projects:* five projects have compulsory (statutory) attendance on the project for young people; a further nine projects have a mixture of compulsory and voluntary attendance. The remaining projects have only voluntary attendance.
- *Hours of formalised activities on offer by projects for YPDP young people:* varies between three and 33.5 hours per week. There was an average of 12.5 hours per week with nearly all the projects offering six or more hours of formalised activities per week.
- *Drop-in time:* Fourteen of the projects offer drop-in time for non-formalised activities. Ten currently do not offer this type of service. Of those who do offer drop-in, half do so at set times; the rest at any time when staff are present. This means an average of 15 hours a week of potential drop-in time (range 2 – 40 hours).
- *When services are usually offered:* Approximately two-thirds of the projects offer services on weekday mornings, weekday afternoons and weekday evenings. Only three of the 23 projects offer any services at the weekends. Different patterns exist in terms of service times: half the projects only offer services on weekday mornings and afternoons. Two projects only offer services during the evening or weekend. The remaining eight projects offer a combination of weekday daytime and evening services. Six projects offered services as a formal alternative to mainstream school.
- *Frequency of residential trips:* Three YPDP projects do not offer any residentials, but the rest do. Most plan to/do offer one or two residentials each year (14 projects); three projects will offer five or more per year.

Delivering the components of YPDP

Based on the monthly monitoring statistics returned from projects, YPDP young people have spent their time on the project in the following ways:

Time spent by young people on different YPDP activities		
YPDP component	Actual proportion of time spent by young people (July – October 2004)*	Original targets for time allocation on YPDP
Life skills work	24%	5 – 20%
Sports/ physical activities	21%	10 – 20%
Education, training and employment activities	20%	20 – 40%
Health education	10%	10 – 20%
Arts	10%	5 – 10%
Mentoring	5%	5 – 20%
Volunteering	3%	5 – 10%
Other	7%	NA

*Data from 543 young people from 25 YPDP projects

These data indicate that the young people participating in the YPDP programme are involved in the intended range of programme activities. The time spent on specific types of activities is broadly in line with the Department of Health target levels. There is, unsurprisingly, wide variation between the projects as to the degree to which they are implementing the different components.

On a project level, YPDP staff think that the least difficult components to deliver are life skills and arts. The ones considered hardest to deliver are volunteering and mentoring.

'What if they don't want to volunteer? It has to be voluntary, cannot be forced or made statutory for all young people. We can encourage [or] motivate young people but they may choose not to volunteer.' (staff questionnaire)

Staff are most confident about delivering the components about life skills and sports. They were least confident about delivering volunteering and drugs education. Nearly half of YPDP staff wanted training on delivering drugs education.

Staff views on progress to date

Nearly all project staff think their YPDP project is functioning well so far. All 27 projects have recruited young people and begun to deliver services. Staff morale is said to be good or very good by 85% of YPDP staff. Staff from three projects report low morale. All staff think that the work they are delivering is being well received by young people.

Who are the young people receiving YPDP?

In the first seven months of the programme, 580 young people have been registered with a YPDP project. By the end of October 2004, 39 of these ceased to take part in the programme, leaving a total of 541 actively involved. This compares with an overall recruitment target of 696 for the first year of the programme; therefore 77% of the target were actively involved.

- The average age of young people when they join YPDP is currently 14.5 years (range 12.2 to 16.6 years).
- Nearly 60% of those currently registered are boys.
- Just over three quarters of the YPDP young people (76%) describe their ethnicity as white (British, Irish, European); 13% as Black (Black British, Caribbean, African or other); 3% as Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other); 4% as mixed race; 2% as from another ethnic group; and 2% choose not to state their ethnicity.

Reasons for being referred

Staff give various reasons for individual young people being referred to YPDP.

- Just over half young people joining YPDP do so on a referral based, at least in part, on educational issues: for example 22% have been excluded or are not attending school; 27% are at risk of school exclusion.
- Nearly half have emotional or behavioural problems: 22% are aggressive or disruptive; 21% suffer from low self-esteem.
- Health problems are a factor in one-fifth of referrals: 10% with sexual health problems (e.g. at risk of teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections); 7% with substance misuse problems.
- Family problems or challenging community environments are also noted in one-fifth of referrals: 9% have difficult family relationships.
- Finally, 17% are referred because of youth offending behaviour.

What have been the major challenges in setting up and implementing the YPDP programme?

1. Recruitment of young people

Recruitment of young people to be part of the YPDP cohort has been the greatest challenge for many of the projects. Monitoring data indicates that two-thirds of the YPDP projects have not achieved their first-year targets by the end of October 2004, seven months into the first year of the programme. Fifteen projects have reached at least 75% of their target numbers by this time. Recruitment was ongoing.

Recruitment is being carried out through a variety of routes. Seventeen projects are receiving referrals from other agencies (including schools) for individuals. In a similar number of the projects, schools are referring whole classes of young people (rather than specific individuals). Thirteen projects have recruited from attendees of other programmes within their projects; seven have young people self-referring; five of the projects have recruited via either recommendation from friends or family or through detached youth work methods. In many cases, the recruitment routes used by the projects for YPDP have been in operation prior to the commencement of the programme, although a small number said that they have been using a mixture of old and new routes in order to bring in the appropriate young people.

Nearly 60% of staff members responding to the questionnaire said that recruitment to YPDP has been either difficult or very difficult. Two-thirds of staff members thought the number of young people they are contracted to recruit is reasonable for their project, even if they have not yet reached that number.

Those who have high recruitment levels are more likely than those with lower recruitment levels to have joiners who are referred for educational issues and fewer who are referred for youth offending. Their recruitment was also more likely to come from a school rather than project-based referral. There is no difference between these groups in terms of the age, gender or ethnicity of the young people recruited so far.

The reasons behind slow recruitment can be crudely divided into two categories:

- problems caused by early project difficulties; or
- problems caused by recruitment policies.

Project difficulties

Some recruitment problems were caused by early project difficulties. Most notably in this category, some projects experienced difficulties with staff recruitment. This delayed the development and implementation of activities, and the recruitment of young people to take part in them. For projects where staff recruitment problems were combined with YPDP being a major shift in operational design for the project, this delay in recruitment has been more acute. Delays in the issuing of contracts to the projects exacerbated these problems.

Problems with recruitment routes and policies

For some projects the recruitment routes or policies are different from those used previously. For instance, although some are using familiar referral sources, they have not previously had a target number of young people to be recruited from these sources. In these cases, most thought they needed more time to reach the targets numbers, especially when referral routes are dependent on other services to refer young people. As one staff member pointed out:

'The referring agencies have no "rush" factor.' (staff questionnaire)

Another factor slowing recruitment is competition for young people. In some areas, other programmes are also targeting at-risk youth, and this has limited the numbers available for participation in YPDP. These have included initiatives within schools and community-based interventions, e.g. Youth Inclusion Programmes. This is less likely to be a problem in areas where the host project has been established for some time.

'Schools have so many options, YPDP is just another and they haven't heard of it.'
(staff questionnaire)

'New initiative in the area need to gain respect from the education system.' (staff questionnaire)

The timetables traditionally used by projects are also a factor in slow recruitment. The start of the YPDP programme in April 2004 meant that those projects that usually recruited on a school-year basis found it difficult to get underway with recruitment until September 2004.

Those projects that are long-established and are using recruitment routes that have been in place for a long time, but are still not recruiting target numbers to the their YPDP project, are usually in a situation of having one or both of the following scenarios in place. Firstly, there are those projects that have a relatively smaller pool of young people from which to recruit. For some this is because they have to recruit within strict geographical boundaries (e.g. one housing estate) or because they have made decisions about excluding certain referral options (e.g. accessing an entire school class). Secondly, there are some projects that have taken a decision only to recruit onto the programme young people that they believe will last the course – those most likely to attend for six hours a week for a number of months. While this has made recruitment slightly slower in these areas, the projects believe that they will achieve better results in the long term. In addition to slowing recruitment, this potentially could mean that those with the more extreme difficulties are not accepted onto the programme. Other projects have had a much more open policy of recruitment, accepting those who they see to be most at risk to take part, but acknowledging that a greater number will drop out or be occasional users of their project.

Overall, project staff also cited the reluctance of some young people to commit to an initiative like YPDP. This could be because of the amount of time they are expected to attend, the type of activities on offer, and/or because they haven't yet developed a trusting relationship with staff.

2. The target attendance hours for young people

Monitoring data suggest that only eight of the YPDP projects have managed so far to achieve a consistent overall project average of at least six hours per week attendance for all of their young people. Seven projects are achieving the target hours of six or more hours per week with less than 20% of the young people using their services.

Those that have a higher proportion reaching target hours are, with a few exceptions, more likely than those with lower proportions to:

- be offering more hours of organised activities;
- have recruited a lower proportion of their target numbers for YPDP;
- have greater amount of paid staff time on YPDP; and/or
- have begun their recruitment earlier in the year.

Despite the low numbers currently achieving the target hours, nearly two-thirds of YPDP staff responding to the questionnaire felt that the target of six to ten hours per week was achievable for most of the young people they worked with on the project. The remaining third

thought that these hours were achievable for about half the young people on their project. Only one worker thought that this target was too ambitious for most of the young people with whom they worked.

'I think for (us) that's achievable quite easily because there are a number of programmes that happen throughout the week, so I think personally for our [project] I don't see that being a problem.' (YPDP worker, case study interview)

'It's fine, six hours is what a lot of young people are getting, so our aim is to up that initially, around the eight hours and then the residentials are gonna gain a lot of hours on those young people as well and hopefully allow us to build those relationships a lot quicker with them... No, it's not a problem.' (YPDP co-ordinator, case study interview)

Despite their optimism, actually reaching the target number of hours is currently a challenging issue for some and a change of practice for many staff, who said that in their previous experience young people used services for less than three hours per week. Some projects have come up with creative solutions to achieving the hours target, including using residentials as a way of increasing the average number of hours that young people use, given that their usual weekly totals come in substantially lower than the target amount. Others, although working towards the target hours, were keen to emphasise the realities of work with socially excluded youth need to be taken into consideration.

'Their expectation is there [to work with young people for ten hours a week], but actually we think we are doing a fantastic job because one person is coming for three hours a week when previous to us having YPDP stuff we wouldn't have been able to engage her at all and that's a huge leap for her. So will there be acknowledgement or recognition of the fact that this is a fantastic result?' (YPDP co-ordinator, case study interview)

3. The provision of services '52 weeks per year'

Half of project staff felt that the target of engaging with young people in the programme for 52 weeks a year is achievable for most young people in the programme. Seven projects had staff that thought that this is not achievable for most of the young people on their project. When asked what one thing they would change about YPDP if they had a choice, the greatest number of project staff said they would change the duration of time that YPDP is expected to work with young people. Most wanted this period of contact to be shorter. Some were concerned about the feasibility of running a programme 52 weeks per year, given that projects have small numbers of staff, and they need to take holidays; many suggested that 48 weeks per year is more realistic. Others suggested an alternative model with a more intensive period at the beginning for approximately 12 weeks, then a much-reduced contact thereafter. One person wanted the flexibility to work with young people on the programme for a longer period of time.

4. Accreditation

The choice by the NYA of the use of the accreditation programme 'Getting Connected' on YPDP has been a contentious issue for some projects. Most of the criticism has not been directed at the content of the programme, but at the way in which its use has been required. Many projects already had accreditation schemes in place and had expected that they would be able to use these as the means for accrediting young people's work in YPDP. They saw the implementation of 'Getting Connected' as a shift from the original understanding of what the YPDP programme included at the point when they applied. Others were concerned about budgetary issues arising from its adoption. The NYA team has attempted to defuse some of

this unhappiness by offsetting costs and negotiating with one project not to use the scheme. The NYA also offered projects the chance to suggest alternative but equivalent curricula. The 'Getting Connected' team are providing individual support to projects to show them how current project work already fits in with 'Getting Connected' units.

Having originally met with scepticism, by November 2004, questionnaire data from staff indicated that 'Getting Connected' is being viewed more positively by most projects. From the 26 projects that are planning to run components of it with their YPDP young people, 60% of project staff thought 'Getting Connected' would be useful; but 18% remained unhappy or dubious about having to implement it.

5. 'Jumping through hoops'

Through interviews, questionnaires and observational data, it was apparent that there are a small subset of projects that view the YPDP programme as just another funding source that allows them to continue with their existing work. Often, these projects did not feel that they are part of a defined programme with a shared vision. In this situation, although senior staff are very aware of the aims and practicalities of YPDP, their operational staff are often unaware of these details. In their view they are just delivering the same project that they always have done. For this small number of projects, the evaluation of YPDP and other such activities are merely annoyances to be overcome. Such staff felt the government departments funding the initiative are asking a lot for their money and that projects are being forced to 'jump through hoops'.

Within this subset of projects and generally, this feeling has been exacerbated by perceived changes in expectations of design and delivery of the programme since its inception. Criticisms of this were directed at the NYA, the Department of Health/TPU, and the evaluation team. There was, early on in the programme, a definite 'us and them' polarisation displayed by some project staff. This has been accompanied by scepticism about anyone not currently delivering 'front-line' services. Some of this criticism has dissipated as the NYA team have visited projects individually and specific concerns have been addressed.

How has the role of the training and co-ordination agent influenced the development of the YPDP programme?

The NYA is acting in the role of training and co-ordination agent for YPDP. A core team of three is carrying out the work on YPDP: a full-time programme manager; full-time programme assistant and a part-time information officer. The NYA also provides administrative and managerial support to this team. The NYA is working with three partner agencies in the provision of training: 'fpa' - formerly the Family Planning Association - (*sexual health training*), 'Youth Access' (*organisational and staff development and capacity training*), and 'Getting Connected' (*young people's accreditation scheme*). The NYA core team has made at least one visit to each YPDP project. Multiple visits have been made to projects that have been having difficulties with either programme implementation or administration. In terms of information-sharing, the NYA team distribute monthly e-newsletters to projects, and a quarterly more detailed newsletters for wider distribution, and have developed a website. Projects are required to provide annual work-plans, quarterly updates and monthly monitoring statistics (for dual use by the NYA and the evaluation team). Funding for the projects is paid via the NYA, financial forms being completed quarterly.

In practice, the NYA team have adopted a dual role in their relationship with the YPDP projects: they are both supporter and 'enforcer'. They are providing information to the projects and helping them to overcome barriers to implementation through discussions and practical support (e.g. providing funding for the purchase of computer software to enable projects to comply with monitoring systems). In the enforcer role though, the NYA is ensuring that deadlines are kept, the programme is implemented consistently and as expected and Department of Health and TPU money is being well spent. There have been times of tension between the two roles. Although, as described in the challenges above, some projects have admitted to feeling under pressure to do certain things 'just to tick the box for the NYA', most appear to have valued the support offered by the team. Over 92% of YPDP staff said that they thought that the NYA's general support for projects had been good or very good and support around financial returns was deemed positive by 97%.

Staff training and events

YPDP was launched at a national event in February 2004. In addition to this event the NYA and its partners brought together YPDP staff for two national events in the first eight months of the programme. These multi-day conferences were used to provide clarity regarding operational issues early in the programme, to allow staff from the projects to network and hear how others were implementing the programme, and to provide some substantive training sessions on mental and sexual health. Further training, on 'Getting Connected', was compulsory and organised regionally. The NYA also brought together project staff for their first regional meetings (which will be held twice annually).

The national and regional meetings were rated highly by project staff; all but one staff member rated these as 'good' or 'very good' on the staff questionnaire. Training input was also, on the whole, viewed favourably, with 86% rating training as 'good' or 'very good'. The main criticisms levelled against the various training and meetings organised for YPDP staff have been that: they take up too much staff time in an already demanding schedule; the timing of the first national event and the 'Getting Connected' training was too soon for projects that had not yet recruited their YPDP workers (necessitating the re-training of new staff and additional networking); and the level of expertise amongst staff is too varied, such that some feel the input is pitched inappropriately low for them. However, it is apparent from the content and timing of subsequent training that the NYA has tried to act on the feedback from initial events, and event evaluations and staff questionnaires indicate that later inputs have been well received.

Overall, most projects appear to be well informed about policies, systems and programme content expectations. Despite the diversity of the projects, there appears a greater cohesiveness in programme implementation than is often seen in the early implementation phases of pilot initiatives. This seems to have been influenced by both the support and enforcement aspects of the NYA's training and co-ordination role.

Issues for future consideration

1. How important is it for the intervention to be reaching young people six to ten hours per week? Early indications are that those projects that have achieved this so far have done so at the expense of full recruitment. Project staff have raised concerns about the feasibility of involving the most socially excluded young people at this weekly intensity.
2. Should the projects be focusing on working with the most socially excluded young people at the expense of meeting programme targets? There remains some concern that in an attempt to meet targets regarding recruitment and hours of delivery, a less at-risk group might be recruited. Alternatively, projects may continue to work with the most at-risk, but may be less inclined to be frank about the realities of working with this group and less inclined to return accurate monitoring data.
3. Can YPDP be run on the resources being provided by the Department of Health/TPU? Although the evaluation's economic commentary has not yet been undertaken, early indications are that projects with limited previous infrastructure are finding it difficult to maintain, within the funding provided, the expected levels of support for young people, the administration of the project, and attendance at training events. This will be a focus of future evaluation.
4. Based on training needs identified by staff and the proportion of time being spent on the various YPDP components, it would appear that the NYA and its training partners should prioritise the organisation of staff training on volunteering and education about drug-misuse. In future, the NYA should consider offering training that targets individuals with specific levels of skills on the topic (e.g. novice, intermediate, expert level) to ensure wider satisfaction.

For further information about the evaluation of YPDP, contact the team at the Social Science Research Unit: ypdp@ioe.ac.uk or on 020 7612 6099.

ⁱ Department of Health. (2004) *Young People's Development Programme Briefing*, London.

ⁱⁱ Department for Education and Skills. (2004) *Every Child Matters*, London: The Stationery Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health. (2004) *National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services*. London: The Stationery Office.

^{iv} HM Government. (2004) *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier*. London: The Stationery Office.

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Institute of Education, University of London
18 Woburn Square
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Tel: 020 7612 6367

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