



## executive summary

# the evaluation of the NYA tailored support offer to local authorities

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### Background

The youth sector in England is continuing to face extensive challenges due to ongoing economic and social changes. Positive for Youth (HM Government, 2011) sets out the government's vision for the future of youth services, which places a greater focus on efficient local commissioning as a key to maximising the impact of limited public funding. Significantly, the local authority (LA) is responsible for deciding which services to fund or deliver and to what level.

LAs require support to overcome these challenging circumstances to ensure they use their expertise, and increasingly limited resources, to best effect. In this context, the Local Government Association (LGA) provides funding to the National Youth Agency (NYA) to supply a youth support offer to LAs. The tailored support offer gives a limited number of LAs the opportunity to apply for personalised consultancy advice, training and peer



support. The offer allows LAs to apply for up to ten days of free support from an NYA associate who works as a consultant with the LA. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the first year of the NYA tailored support offer.

## Key findings

The majority of the 19 LAs received eight days' support. In most LAs the Director of Children's Services (DCS), their deputy and/or other strategic-level staff were involved in the initial decision to engage with the support.

Most areas received support with restructuring services which was often coupled with secondary areas of support such as commissioning or outcomes measurements. The application of the eight days of support differed between the LAs due to the tailoring of the support. The types of activities undertaken ranged from workshops, interviews or focus groups with partners, desk research and inspecting youth service activities. The final outputs from the support included quality assurance frameworks, options appraisal documents, tools to measure outcomes and concept papers.

LAs had a clear idea of their expectations for the support, were almost unanimously positive about the experience of receiving support and felt their expectations were met. The vast majority of LAs expected, and benefited from, the associate's relevant expertise and impartial stance. The associates often challenged the LAs to think more deeply and broadly about their youth offer, its reach and its impact.

LAs valued having a respected, external party to consult stakeholders, validate development work and, in turn, positively influence and engage staff and politicians. A number of LAs reported an increase in staff morale, due to reassurance from the associate on the LA's direction of travel and training on new quality assurance procedures.

The majority of LAs experienced some kind of barrier whilst receiving the support and generally these were internal barriers such as a lack of time, capacity and resource to engage with the consultancy. External barriers related to the amount of time used for scoping or getting the associate up to speed with the local context and the time spent by the associate travelling to the LA, which all impacted on the amount of support time the LAs received.

Suggestions for development of the offer included follow-up support to review progress and gain some external scrutiny, additional travel time for associates to maximise their contact with the LA and flexibility in the delivery of support to accommodate circumstances for individual LAs.

## Conclusions

Overall, LAs value the support provided to them through the NYA tailored support offer and are largely positive about the support received. In particular, they felt they benefited from the external expertise and critical friend role undertaken by the associate which are central to the success of the support. The matching of the associate to the LA is a crucial element of the programme as the resultant relationship has been seen to be very important to the success of the support.

It is clear to see that LAs were going through a period of change and were at very different stages of their journey when they received support from the associate. Circumstances within individual LAs can change at any given time, and associates recognised this and were flexible in their approach. However, this flexibility was not always reflected in the timescales offered to LAs for completing the work. Given that LAs were at different stages in their journey, some LAs would have welcomed ongoing support and felt that the support ended abruptly. Overall, it is evident that several positive developments have been made within the LAs involved in the tailored support offer. In light of such developments, it would be valuable to consider ways in which the lessons learnt and experiences could be shared amongst other LAs.

## Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken in three phases between December 2011 and August 2012 with each phase building on the previous phase. The first phase included baseline telephone interviews with the person responsible for the tailored support offer in each of the LAs receiving support, desk research of scoping reports and an interview with the NYA programme manager. Phase 2 included semi-structured telephone interviews with strategic and operational staff in 11 case-study areas. Phase 3 included follow-up telephone interviews with 16 of the 19 LA representatives.

## Further information

For more information about this report visit [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NYAS02](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/NYAS02) or email Kelly Kettlewell - [k.kettlewell@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:k.kettlewell@nfer.ac.uk)



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