Quality and Standards in Education and Training in Wales

A Re-inspection Report on the Quality of Youth Support Services in Blaenau Gwent July 2007 by Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorsate for Education and Training in Wales
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- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- LEAs;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of Jobcentre plus.

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Introduction

The partnership planning arrangements for youth support services in Blaenau Gwent were inspected in January 2006. In the inspection, the grade awarded for Key Question 5 ‘How effective are leadership and strategic management’ was Grade 4, some good features, but shortcomings in important areas. This means Key Question 5 fell below the quality threshold, which is set at Grade 3.

As a result of the grade for Key Questions 5 falling below the quality threshold, a re-inspection took place from 2 July 2007 to 5 July 2007. A team of inspectors from Estyn, a statutory body independent from, but funded by, the Welsh Assembly Government, undertook the inspection. The team also included an additional inspector.

The arrangements for the re-inspection of youth support services are set out in the ‘Guidance for the Inspection of Youth Support Services’, which is available on the Estyn website www.estyn.gov.uk

The re-inspection report includes an evaluation and comment on the provider’s progress in meeting the recommendations from the last inspection and a re-grading of Key Question 5.

Grade descriptors

The five-point scale used to represent all inspection judgements in this report is as follows:

- **Grade 1**  good with outstanding features
- **Grade 2**  good features and no important shortcomings
- **Grade 3**  good features outweigh shortcomings
- **Grade 4**  some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
- **Grade 5**  many important shortcomings
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Context

The area

1 Blaenau Gwent is a small local authority in the south east of Wales. It has an area of approximately 10,900 hectares. The area has an estimated population of 68,930 with 18.4% (12,878) being young people between the ages of 11-25. This is in line with the national average for Wales. Minority ethnic groups make up 0.8% of the population.

2 Blaenau Gwent covers three distinctive valleys with five main towns, the largest of which is Ebbw Vale. There are 16 wards in Blaenau Gwent. Thirteen of these sit in the top 25% of the most deprived in Wales and 10 are Communities First areas. According to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2005), 26% of Blaenau Gwent’s Lower Level Super Output Areas (LSOAs\(^1\)) fall within the 10% most deprived LSOAs in Wales. The traditional occupations for the population were in the coal and steel industries. The closure of these industries has left a legacy of high unemployment, low skills, low qualification rates and poor health. Weekly earnings are the second lowest in Wales. Transport links across the borough are poor, and car ownership is low.

3 Regeneration is one of the seven priority action areas identified in the Blaenau Gwent Community Plan. The authority recognises that partnership working between providers of key strategic services is essential to the successful implementation of the Community Plan.

Partnership arrangements for youth support services

4 In May 2007 the local authority created a new Community Services Directorate, which brought together education, leisure and social services. The Corporate Director of Community Services is the lead director for the development of the single Children and Young People’s Plan for Blaenau Gwent.

5 The partnership planning arrangements for the strategic co-ordination of youth support services are also undergoing change. The Youth Entitlement Partnership (YEP) met for the last time in June 2007. A single Children and Young People’s Partnership will meet from September 2007, and will replace both the Children and Young People’s Framework (C&YPF) and the Youth Entitlement Partnership. The role of the new partnership is to provide the main strategic drive for all children and young people’s services in Blaenau Gwent. The new partnership is one of four partnerships\(^2\), which take forward the work of the community strategy. These four partnerships will receive support from a strategic level co-ordination group made up of chief officers, lead directors and chairs of the partnerships.

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1 Lower Level Super Output Areas are part of a new geography developed by the Office for National Statistics with the aim of improving the report of statistics for small areas. LSOAs are smaller than electoral divisions and each electoral division may contain one or more LSOA.

2 The four partnerships are Local Safeguarding Young People’s Board, Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership, Children and Young People’s Partnership, and the Community Safety Partnership.
Outcomes of the re-inspection July 2007

Table of grades awarded for the re-inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Question</th>
<th>Inspection grade</th>
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<td>5 How effective are leadership and strategic management?</td>
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Summary

Leadership and management

Key Question 5: How effective is leadership and strategic management?

Grade 4: Some good features but shortcomings in important areas

6 The YEP has made slow progress in improving its leadership and management. The local authority and the local health board are working well together to develop joint commissioning of common services. However, the YEP has made little progress in gaining a clear understanding of the resources available across all the partnership. The YEP still does not know how individual youth support services use their resources to further agreed priorities. Without a clear overview, the partnership is not able to effectively co-ordinate youth support services, or work collectively to improve the spread of provision.

7 Leaders and managers have not made good use of performance management systems to link the agreed priorities of the C&YPF or the YEP to the work objectives for individual staff, teams, services and organisations. Consequently, elected members and senior managers from the local authority and its partners do not know how well the work of youth support services takes forward the agreed priorities of these important partnerships. However, this is now changing. The way in which partners monitor their progress against action plans is improving. The local authority and its partners have recently developed a useful performance management framework which links organisational objectives to service and worker targets and performance.

8 Elected members and senior managers from the local authority and its partners now have a new shared and challenging vision for children and young people’s services. This vision informs well the revised partnership structures in preparation for the single Children and Young People’s plan, which will take effect from April 2008.

Progress against the recommendations from the 2006 inspection

9 Overall the YEP has made poor progress against the recommendations from the inspection of youth support services in 2006. There has been poor progress in eight recommendations; adequate progress in six; and good progress in four recommendations.

10 The YEP established a steering group to oversee their response to these recommendation. However, the group has no clear or detailed plan for monitoring partners’ progress.

11 The following evaluation judges the progress made in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection.
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R1  Monitor young people’s progress in informal learning and collate young people’s achievements and attainments across the partnership

12 The YEP has made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. On behalf of the partnership, Careers Wales Gwent has taken the lead in developing common ways to improve the monitoring of young people’s learning. This is through Careers Wales online. The local authority youth service has improved the way it monitors young people’s achievements through its provision. However, most other youth support services do not have their own systems to collate young people’s achievements.

R2  Improve the standard of individual learning plans so that young people can manage and assess their own learning better

13 The YEP and individual providers have made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. Young people attending projects that support formal learning such as the Oasis\(^3\) and the Proteus\(^4\) projects have good detailed individual learning plans\(^5\). These young people are involved well in setting their individual learning goals, and in evaluating their learning and in planning progression.

R3  Make sure that staff challenge young people to work at an appropriate level and provide opportunities for young people to gain appropriate accreditation for their work

14 The evaluation of progress in addressing this recommendation is included with that of recommendation 6.

R4  Ensure that all staff plan sessions well, particularly in projects that support formal learning

15 Individual youth support services have made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. All young people undergo initial assessment and have good individual learning plans in the majority of projects that support formal learning. The most effective staff produce detailed term plans, weekly plans, and session plans. The best plans include clear aims for the session, an outline of the planned activities and the resources required. However, the use of and quality of session planning is not consistent across the partnership.

\(^3\) Oasis is a project for targeted support of school aged pupils, to help them improve their attendance and achievement. The project also helps develop pupils’ personal and social skills by building up their confidence and self-esteem.

\(^4\) Proteus is a new way of giving school-aged children access to their entitlement to the national curriculum through a flexible programme outside of the formal school setting.

\(^5\) Sometimes also referred to as personal education plans (PEPs)
R5 Make better use of the mapping exercise to identify gaps in provision and plan to fill these gaps, particularly in basic skills provision, work with young men over 16 in education and training, open access information services and projects to promote Welsh language and culture

16 The YEP has made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. A mapping and auditing group has been set up to take this forward. Overall, there has been an increase in provision available to young people. In particular there is more basic skills provision and services targeted at young men. The 14-19 Learning Area Network (LAN) has also improved provision for young people. However, the YEP and the LAN have not worked together effectively to better link up their joint objectives. The development of projects to promote the Welsh language and culture is poor. A strategic group has only recently convened to address this issue and an action plan is now in place to take the development forward.

R6 Ensure that young people on projects that support formal learning receive enough hours of formal education and have good access to vocational learning and appropriate GCSEs

17 Individual support services have made good progress against this recommendation and that of recommendation 3. The opportunities to gain accreditation have increased in informal education provision and in specialised projects for school-aged children. Every pupil on the SORTED project has a minimum of 10 hours taught time each week, as well as college placements and work experience placements. The Authority also makes good use of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance and extend young people’s opportunities to learn. Young people now have better access to internet based learning courses, in nine subjects, up to GCSE level.

R7 Make sure that all staff and young people are aware of the support services available across the borough

18 The YEP has made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. A one-stop shop information service is available from the Integrated Children’s Centre. This service produces a quarterly newsletter advertising current events and activities and publicises ‘good news’ stories. Young people have access to information through a well publicised ‘freephone’ telephone number and by email. The local authority has recently taken possession of a mobile information vehicle, which will soon be in service.

R8 Provide an accessible counselling service open to all young people in the area

19 The YEP has made poor progress in addressing to this recommendation. Although the C&YPF, YEP, local authority, local health board and the youth forum have all identified the provision of a counselling service as a priority, the partnership has not secured the resources necessary to provide this service.
20 The YEP has made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. The YEP set up a steering group with clear terms of reference to monitor progress against the post-inspection recommendations; however the steering group has not provided effective leadership to ensure systematic and timely progress against these recommendations. As a result, senior managers and elected members within the local authority and other partners are not well informed about the overall performance of the partnership arrangements for co-ordinating youth support services.

21 The YEP and individual youth support services have made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. They have been very slow at improving supervision practice so that it has a better focus on outcomes for young people. There has been no interim review or assessment of current supervision practice across the partnership. Supervision notes and performance reviews of many providers still focus too much on tasks with little reference to the impact of work on the young people. The link between supervision and annual reviews with the C&YPF and YEP’s priorities and plans is not consistent across the partnership. A pilot training needs analysis has only recently been undertaken, and a supervision training course is now planned for September 2007.

22 The YEP and individual youth support services have made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. There has only recently been progress in the development of arrangements to collect information about the profile of young people who currently take up youth support services. The role of the C&YPF Performance Management Officer now includes the collection and analysis of wider partnership data. As a result the YEP have just started a pilot project to design a common form for the collection and analysis of user data. Only a very few individual services regularly monitor service user data in detail.

23 Overall the YEP and its partners have made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. The profile of the voluntary sector has been raised because its representatives are now better involved with some key roles in partnerships and...
strategic working groups. Importantly, the partnership has used a Cymorth\(^6\) grant to fund the post of a co-ordinator for the voluntary sector. However, the communication of key information to voluntary sector providers is still not working effectively and the capacity for support to the voluntary sector has not increased sufficiently.

| R13 Develop consistency in monitoring and evaluation across partners and support voluntary partners to fulfil their quality assurance role |

24 The YEP and its partners have made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. The local authority and its partners have planned well a new performance management system. This new system brings together the work of the local authority, the partnership and that of member organisations into a single framework. This gives the local authority the opportunity to lead its partners effectively in working towards joint objectives. However, the objectives and performance indicators for the new Children and Young People’s Partnership are not included in the new performance management framework. Voluntary sector partners have not undertaken quality assurance activities to support improved standards of delivery for young people.

| R14 Develop performance indicators for partnership provision and SMART\(^7\) targets for all action plans |

25 The YEP has made adequate progress in addressing this recommendation. The local authority is improving the links between its corporate improvement plan, the joint risk assessment and partnership level planning. The C&YPF and the YEP use the National Service Framework (NSF)\(^8\) well to evaluate its work and to benchmark against other local authorities. As a result of this, they have begun to develop a useful suite of performance indicators. However, these performance indicators do not always focus well on outcomes for learners.

| R15 Develop a workable mechanism to ensure that provision is driven by prioritised need and that funding is realigned to meet that need |

26 The YEP has made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. The YEP still does not have an overview of the resources available for or used by all youth support services in its area. Without this overview, the partnership is not able to effectively co-ordinate youth support services, or to work collectively to improve the spread of provision. The local authority and the local health board have worked well together to develop joint commissioning of common services, by employing a joint commissioning officer with the support of a joint commissioning task group.

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\(^6\) ‘Cymorth’ is the Children and Youth Support Fund. It aims to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people within a framework of universal provision, in order to improve the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families.

\(^7\) SMART objectives are those which are specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time-bound.

\(^8\) The National Service Framework provides a systematic approach on which to tackle the agenda of improving standards and quality across health and social care provision.
R16 Develop an overall training strategy for staff across the partnership, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to meet the Extending Entitlement agenda, including bilingual skills

27 The YEP has made poor progress in addressing this recommendation. There is no overall training strategy for youth support services. The local authority youth service has developed a good training strategy for itself. This also supports its lead role for sharing training with others in the partnership. However, few other partners effectively share their training. The YEP depends too much on the local authority youth service to provide and facilitate training across youth support services.

R17 Increase ICT facilities in the community and encourage young people to use IT as a learning tool

28 The YEP and its partners have made good progress in addressing this recommendation. In partnership with Communities First, the C&YPF and the YEP have undertaken an effective audit of ICT facilities. The audit demonstrated that there was no need to increase facilities. In addition, young people on 14-19 learning pathways use ICT well to extend and enhance their learning. The Digilabs⁹ are now more effective and have appropriately trained staff in place to make the best use of the resources available.

R18 Ensure that young people’s views are taken into account when responding to the proposals for the new learning campus at Ebbw Vale and other community regeneration activities

29 The YEP and its partners have made good progress in addressing this recommendation. The youth forum is good at ensuring young people across the local authority area contribute to decision-making processes at all levels. This has led to an increased commitment by elected members and senior officers from the local authority and its partners to involving young people in consultation and decision-making. Specifically, young people are influencing the developments of the Learning Campus¹⁰ well.

⁹ Digilabs are a Welsh Assembly Government initiative to improve young people’s access to information and support through the use of high quality ICT. Canllaw and Fujitsu Siemens joined forces to take this initiative forward. Digilabs were first piloted in 3 local authorities in 2003, and then rolled out across Wales in 2004.

¹⁰ The Learning Campus is a new development on the site of the former Corus steelworks at Ebbw Vale. Once completed, it is will offer a wide range of learning opportunities for everyone from age 16 upwards together with first class leisure and arts facilities as well as business incubation space.
In order to improve the areas re-inspected, the local authority, the new Children and Young People’s Partnership and its members need to:

R1 implement effective performance management processes that enable the new partnership and its partners to monitor, evaluate and complete, in a timely manner, all planned actions; and

R2 improve the way the partnership gathers and uses data, to ensure it has complete, well focussed and up-to-date information in order to better plan for improvements and monitor the quality of the work of youth support services in Blaenau Gwent.
Response on behalf of the Youth Support Services partnership arrangements in Blaenau Gwent by Philip Hodgson, Corporate Director Community Services and Lead Director for Children and Young People, Blaenau Gwent CBC

Elected Members and Senior Officers of the Council and the Youth Entitlement Partnership (Y.E.P.) have now had the opportunity to consider the report’s findings and its accuracy. I confirm the report appropriately reflects the current position of Youth Support Services in Blaenau Gwent. The Authority and the Y.E.P. accepts and understands the implications of the report and are committed to addressing the recommendations and shortcomings identified in the following way:

• In line with Plan Rationalisation and the need to establish a Single Children and Young People’s Plan, Blaenau Gwent is restructuring its partnership arrangements and I will chair and act as ‘lead’ Director for the newly formed Children and Young People’s Partnership. I will work closely with the Council’s Deputy Leader, Councillor Nigel Daniels, who will be the ‘lead’ Elected Member for Children’s Services to drive forward an agenda of modernisation and change for Youth Support Services in the County Borough.

• The Authority has an established protocol and monthly meeting schedule with its regulators. Estyn are key partners in the protocol, and I will present a discussion paper to the next meeting advocating that a follow-up inspection of Youth Support Services takes place in the short to medium term. I am confident that any subsequent re-inspection will find significant progress is made against the report’s findings and recommendations.

• In order to raise the standards and the quality of the C.Y.P.P. in relation to Youth Support Services, the Authority will lead on formulating a robust action planning process to address the report’s recommendations.

• The recent restructuring within the Authority and the reconfiguration of the partnership arrangements, affords the opportunity to establish a dedicated young people’s participation and engagement section within the Leisure Services Division. This will ensure young people’s services are at the forefront of the Authority’s priorities.

Together with its partners, Elected Members and Senior Managers from the Local Authority are committed to a new shared and challenging vision for children and young people’s services in Blaenau Gwent. This vision is reflected in the revised partnership structures and will be the driver for informing and preparing the Single Children and Young People’s Plan.
Appendix 1

The evidence base of the re-inspection

A team of inspectors visited the Blaenau Gwent Youth Entitlement Partnership for four days in July 2007. Members of the inspection team met chief officers, elected members, voluntary sector representatives, workers employed in youth support services and young people. The inspection team scrutinised:

- the Youth Entitlement Partnership’s self-assessment report;
- documentation made available by the Partnership itself; and
- documentation made available by individual youth support services providers.
## Appendix 2

### The inspection team

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gerard E Kerslake HMI</td>
<td>Reporting Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betsan O’Connor HMI</td>
<td>Team Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judith Jenkins</td>
<td>Additional Inspector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie Cundick</td>
<td>Provider nominee</td>
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