



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
The Vale of Glamorgan Youth Service

**Civic Office
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU**

February 2024

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

Context of provision

The Vale of Glamorgan Youth Service is based in the Learning and Skills Directorate of the local authority. It is located within the Standards and Provision service area and is fully integrated within wider education services whilst retaining its unique identity and ethos. The Youth Service provides informal, non-formal and formal opportunities to young people aged 11-25 across the Vale of Glamorgan to support them in achieving their full potential. Just over 40 staff work within targeted and universal services to engage and support young people. The service provides safe environments for young people to enjoy themselves, meet others, feel valued, access information and learn new skills. This has been embedded via a range of open-access universal provision including youth clubs, youth voice and rights projects, detached work, street-based and mobile provisions. The service also provides targeted interventions supported by external funding for example projects targeted at young people who are at risk of not being in education employment or training (NEETS) and homelessness (both pre and post 16), the Youth Wellbeing Service, Seren¹ and the rights ambassadors' project. All these projects have a youth-led focus on the needs of young people in each area of the Vale of Glamorgan.

The number of young people registered and engaged with the Youth Service as a percentage of the youth population for the Vale of Glamorgan for 2022/23 was 14% compared with 15% across Wales as a whole. This represents a 7.8 percentage point increase on last year and reflects a positive trajectory during the period since the pandemic. Three thousand and fifty-seven young people engaged with the service over the last year.

According to the provider, the funding for the Youth Service is currently split between 53% grant funding and 47% core funding.

This youth work inspection was undertaken a few weeks prior to the inspection of the Vale of Glamorgan's local government education services. This enables the messages and evaluations from the youth work inspection to inform the wider local government education services inspection where relevant.

¹ Seren: The Seren Academy is a fully funded Welsh Government initiative dedicated to supporting Wales' most able state educated learners to achieve their full academic potential into leading universities and succeed on highly selective degree programmes.

Overview

By taking part in the Vale youth service activities, many young people gain the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values to support their own personal development and wellbeing. They develop a wide range of skills as well as gaining more formal accreditation through a range of local and national awards and accreditation opportunities.

In targeted school sessions, young people develop resilience and coping skills which enhance their formal learning. Many who have not enjoyed success before grow in confidence, make better relationships and consider their futures.

Young people participate enthusiastically and express their views in all the sessions we observed. Members of the Vale Youth Council articulate their views and opinions in a sophisticated and well-argued manner. These young people develop a strong understanding of the democratic process and become accomplished public speakers. Other young people express themselves through sporting activities, martial arts projects and gardening. They show an eagerness to contribute to the group dynamic.

Many young people are confident in expressing their own identities and perspectives while also learning to appreciate others. They become effective advocates for their rights, inclusion, and social justice. They challenge discrimination, promote equality and create positive change within their peer groups. A few young people use and develop their Welsh language skills well. In the safe environment of the youth service, many young people become empowered to make their voices heard and make positive change in their own lives and in their communities.

The quality of youth work is consistently high. Youth workers are very clear about the principles of youth work and reflect this in their practice. They are dedicated to their roles, communicate effectively, build positive relationships with young people and have high levels of energy and enthusiasm. They constantly seek ways to refine and improve their work. Those who work in school settings are highly regarded by school staff as equal professionals. They are valued by young people and their parents and carers.

Youth workers quickly assess the needs of young people with more complex challenges and the positive working relationships within and across the various teams and partners means that support is both prompt and efficient. They have the attitude that, whatever the barriers, they will never give up on a young person. They are trusted highly and play a significant role in supporting young people who are struggling as well as extending effective support to the wider family.

There is an appropriate blend of universal and targeted provision. Provision is adaptable and available at weekends and in school holidays. It is responsive to demand and allows the service to deploy resources effectively. Detached youth workers research and map areas of need and the service finds innovative ways to meet these needs where buildings-based clubs are not sustainable.

Open access, universal sessions are planned and staffed effectively, and offer a variety of opportunities for young people. A good variety of targeted sessions

provides interventions for vulnerable young people who need additional support in many aspects of their lives.

Where opportunities exist, young people engage usefully in the Welsh language activities but overall, access to Welsh medium activities is not equally available to young people from all parts of the Vale. In addition, the range of opportunities to support staff to improve and use their Welsh language skills are underdeveloped.

The Vale of Glamorgan youth service is strongly based on the voice of young people and on providing the support that they need to grow as confident and informed citizens. The leader of the council, councillors and the chief executive champion young people and support their positive challenge to council policies. The youth service has a clear vision which was co-written with young people.

The youth service sits in the learning and skills directorate and complements the formal education agenda. The service has chosen clear priorities based on the needs of young people, local and national priorities and the resources available.

The service uses its resources, those of partners and a wide range of other funding streams imaginatively to sustain provision. The service is solution focused and is based on very strong partnership working underpinned by robust agreements. The needs of young people are clearly put before institutional considerations and information is shared effectively. Partnerships with schools are strong. Senior school leaders understand the value of youth work and highly appreciate the positive interventions that youth workers make with young people.

Service planning, quality management and the use of data are robust. Safeguarding arrangements are appropriate. All staff are suitably qualified and registered with the Education Workforce Council. There is an ethos of continual development and reflection and a strong ongoing commitment to professional learning across the service. The service offers training opportunities to agency staff and volunteers and shares training with partner agencies. The service has a strong tradition of nurturing and training up staff who are or have been service users and several now work in the service as qualified youth workers.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the service continue to improve:

- R1 Develop opportunities for Welsh medium and bilingual youth work provision

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?

Young people make very significant progress towards achieving the aims as stated within the Principles and Purposes of Youth Work². Many achieve in all aspects of the five pillars of youth work.

Educative

Many young people gain the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values to support their own personal development and wellbeing. Young people develop a wide range of skills during a wide variety of sessions, including Bushcraft, navigation skills as well as more formal accredited learning. The youth service has a five-year accreditation plan enabling young people to recognise their achievement through a range of local and national awards and accreditation opportunities. Young people who are taking part in the Bro Radio project learn useful media and presentation skills and work towards accreditation.

In targeted school sessions, young people develop resilience and coping skills. Many grow in confidence and begin to understand how to interact more effectively with adults and other young people. They explore the impact of their actions and behaviours on others. Many come to understand the importance of developing their own interests, passions and skills. Many young people come to understand why they need to learn and develop the ability to concentrate on their academic work. Many who have not enjoyed success before learn how to set challenges for themselves and feel proud when they achieve. Through after-school clubs and community engagement, they begin to develop teamwork and leadership skills. Many young people begin to look towards their futures and consider further education courses or employment pathways.

Young people in the 16+ age group and those engaged with the Strive and Seren programmes make good progress. They gain insight into potential challenges they may face when pursuing their academic studies or desired careers and develop strategies to overcome obstacles such as personal barriers and societal expectations.

Expressive

The youth service and contracted partners provide a platform that enables young people to discover, explore and express themselves, fostering personal choice, growth and self-expression. Young people participate well and are willing to put their views forward in all sessions, including in the outdoor provision such as the Families First Bushcraft session. Members of the Vale Youth Council express their views and opinions in a sophisticated and well-argued manner. They scrutinise Council policy

² Principles of Youth Work Wales: [CWWYS](#)

effectively and this has resulted in significant improvements to issues that affect them, for example street lighting in particular urban areas.

Through these activities young people develop a strong understanding of the democratic process and hone their skills in oratory and persuasive dialogue. They elect one of their members to sit on the UK Youth Parliament thus widening the experience of that person who, in turn, shares information and new understanding with fellow members of the Vale youth council.

Young people also express themselves through sporting activities and martial arts projects such as Gloves in the Gym and DoJo. Although also attended by young women, these projects help young men, in particular, to harness their energy, learn skills and understand the challenges faced by becoming a young man in current society. Several young people take part in the Hive Guys gardening project and express themselves through growing food and nurturing the environment whilst also forging positive relationships with adults and other young people in the community.

Cameo: Gloves in the gym

'Its not just for the boys which is good'

Gloves in the gym is a physical activity-based project with the aims of increasing health and wellbeing through engaging in positive sporting activities, challenging negative behaviours, building confidence and self-esteem along with raising awareness of being an active member of their community.

The project runs 7 bespoke sessions a week across various schools and community settings in the Vale of Glamorgan. The team of staff deliver referral-based sessions in mainstream schools, through the medium of Welsh and English, to the Resource Base at Whitmore for young people with Additional Learning Needs, and a Wellbeing After-School Club and community-based open access sessions for positive leisure time in the evenings. In addition to this the Gloves in the Gym project delivers activities at all community events run by the Vale Youth Service, along with offering targeted support within the education directorate whether this is one-to-one or group-based sessions.

Participative

Young people participate enthusiastically in the projects and sessions provided by the youth service and partner organisations. At the open access provisions such as 'Youthy' at the Hub and V-Pod, young people make choices about what they want to do during the sessions. They join in a variety of activities with enthusiasm. They show an eagerness to contribute to the group dynamic. They learn the importance of taking their turn, effective communication, respect, teamwork, and problem-solving as they navigate challenges that present themselves during sessions. They find an outlet for their energy through ball games in indoor and outdoor sports areas.

Inclusive

Young people from a wide demographic attend open access sessions. Young people identifying as LGBTQ+ develop confidence and self-esteem through the I AM ME

project. Young people with additional learning needs benefit similarly from specialist activities at the Hwb Club which improves their ability to interact more successfully within society.

Cameo: Hive Guys

This is an exciting and innovative project provided by the Youth Service with sustainability and community engagement at its core. The project started as an open access provision for young people from across the Vale of Glamorgan within the 11-17 age range. The original focus was to give young people the opportunity to participate in activities related to beekeeping and fresh food production.

Hive Guys was set up as part of wider community regeneration project involving local housing providers, a local primary school and the elective home education group (EHE). Young people are supported to access accredited learning opportunities whilst being upskilled to grow and produce their own food. This is with the objective of enabling sustainable living, promoting the cooking of simple meals and enhancing basic life skills. There is a strong emphasis on recycling and re-using materials in all aspects of the project.

The project has evolved and most recently collaborated with a talented local graffiti group to create a community mural in the Barry area. Any new project activities are determined by the young people themselves. The youth service supports young people to engage in the activities.

Young people become effective advocates for their rights, inclusion, and social justice. They demonstrate awareness of issues and are able to challenge discrimination, promote equality and create positive change within their peer groups.

Many young people are confident in expressing their own identities and perspectives while also learning to appreciate others and foster a sense of belonging. They can assess their own attitude, biases and behaviours, fostering growth and a commitment to learning and self-improvement.

A few young people use and develop their Welsh language skills well in activities delivered in partnership with the Urdd, Menter Iaith Y Fro and in local Welsh and English medium schools.

Empowering

Young people express their opinions in a variety of ways, particularly at the Vale youth council meetings and play an active role in gauging young people's interests and concerns and sharing them through, for example, the UK Youth Parliament's Make Your Mark survey.

In nearly all sessions young people express their opinions confidently. In school-based sessions, many young people learn to take greater responsibility for their educational and career choices. They understand how positive choices and actions will help to shape their futures.

Young people become empowered in a positive way. For example, in the Her Voice Wales project, young women tackle gender inequality through raising awareness of the issues facing young women today.

Cameo: Her Voice Wales

This project was started by young women themselves. With the support of youth workers, they gained the skills and confidence to become champions of equality and girls' voices in their communities. As a result of this work, the young people have developed guidance to raise awareness of issues that affect them. The project is supported by the Vale of Glamorgan Council's elected members and the resources developed have been disseminated widely. The project won the 2024 National Youth Work Excellence Award in the local partnership category.

Many young people take advantage of the safe spaces and positive relationships provided by youth workers to develop their self-confidence and to make their voices heard.

What young people can expect from youth work provision

The quality of youth work is high and consistent across all aspects of the provision. Youth workers are clear about the principles of youth work and make sure that all activities adhere to them. They are dedicated to their roles and have high levels of energy and enthusiasm. They offer a wide variety of support and youth work activities, including mentorship, skills building, educational support, help with career choices, recreational activities, and a safe space for young people to socialise, have fun and express and develop themselves. They communicate skilfully and build positive relationships with young people. Youth workers reflect on their work and make adaptations to delivery as a consequence. They demonstrate flexibility and innovation, and constantly seek ways to refine and improve their offer.

All youth work staff quickly build a rapport with young people and assess their needs. Where appropriate, they signpost young people quickly to more targeted support. The positive working relationships within and across the various teams and partners means that support is both prompt and efficient.

Throughout the service, workers are committed to their professional responsibilities, frequently 'going the extra mile' and this approach has a positive impact particularly for those young people facing more complex challenges. The approach youth workers take towards young people nurtures confidence and self-reliance and promotes positive relationships between young people and their peers, as well as with other adults, for example teachers. Youth workers play a significant role in supporting young people within school settings and this work is highly valued by the young people, formal education staff and parents and carers.

Youth workers who are part of the youth engagement and progression framework activities play a significant role in supporting young people through transition periods. They encourage and enable young people to stay in formal education and work well with partner agencies such as youth justice, to provide the wide range of support that many of these young people need, including with homelessness and mental health issues. They have the attitude that, whatever the barriers, they will never give up on

a young person and with their partnership agencies have successfully achieved appropriate post-16 destinations for many young people.

Youth workers, and particularly the wellbeing team, play a significant role in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing. For example, during the recent pandemic, for many young people, youth workers were the only emotionally available adults in their lives. The well-being team continue to support young people and their families who are facing significant and often life changing challenges.

Youth workers in after-school clubs and a specialist club for young people with additional needs support and empower young people to manage their emotions, overcome fears and foster independence.

A few youth workers use Makaton well to support young people. A few youth workers are Welsh speakers but do not always feel confident to use their Welsh when interacting with young people.

Youth service staff are highly committed to the education and support of young people and this often extends to supporting other family members. Young people, their parents and carers have considerable trust in youth workers and testify to the life changing impact that youth work has on them.

The provision is varied and meets the needs of young people and the standards for youth work in Wales. There is an appropriate blend of universal and targeted provision, including open access sessions, mobile provision, school-based and project work. This breadth of provision ensures that a wide range of young people's needs can be met regardless of their initial point of contact with the service.

Open access, universal sessions play a key part in the service. The sessions are planned effectively, staffed appropriately, and offer a variety of opportunities for young people. There are many activities on offer for young people at these sessions, including sports, arts, computer games, board games, chillout space, radio broadcasting (via Bro Radio), reaction games and making healthy snacks.

Provision is timetabled across the day and evening and potentially any day of the year, with the curriculum adapting as necessary, for example during school holiday periods. The opportunities for engagement in schools, both in and out of school hours, whether by self-referral or by encouragement from the school, is a notable strength. After-school well being clubs, for example, have a strong preventative approach and successfully help young people deal with low level anxiety issues before these become too problematic. Schools clearly recognise and understand the value of youth work and actively promote youth service opportunities to pupils and parents.

Other opportunities for young people include targeted sessions that provide interventions for vulnerable young people who need additional support. In partnership with the YMCA, youth workers deliver the C Card sexual health programme, which includes discussions about healthy relationships.

The service's links with other agencies, including schools, are very strong. Youth workers have a very positive reputation with schools and are recognised as

professional educators who have a positive impact on pupils' involvement in formal education. In addition, the service's homelessness section works very effectively with the Vale housing department to link young people quickly with additional sources of support as necessary.

Detached youth workers research and map the types of youth work needed and find innovative approaches which are effective in engaging young people. Provision is responsive to demand and the needs of partners, young people and their communities and this allows the service to deploy its resources effectively.

The service maintains a universal offer by working in partnership, for example with the YMCA to provide open access clubs in the Barry area. The Hub facility hosts a broad range of youth work activities throughout the week including provision for young people of 18 years and above.

The Vale has a mixture of urban and rural communities and pop-up activities and summer events take youth work to areas where young people gather and where buildings-based clubs are not sustainable. The mobile provision, in the form of the V-POD bus, and detached youth work take provision to more rural areas to meet the need for a universal offer.

Cameo: 'Everyone Loves the Bus'

The V-Pod is the Vale of Glamorgan's mobile provision and is a positive and engaging experience for young people which allows youth workers to adapt their approach based on immediate needs and interests of the community they are visiting. The bus helps to maintain the youth service's profile across the local authority. Staff are adept at identifying and negotiating the best locations to park and at using the space on board to maximum effect. The bus carries a variety of equipment including gazebos for pop-up events, sports, arts and music equipment. The provision offers flexibility in reaching young people who may not have access to a youth club or service due to geographical, social, or economic barriers. The mobile unit ensures inclusivity and enables isolated young people to access activities. For example, one young person receiving palliative care is enabled to attend sessions with the support of her carer and the youth workers, addressing the barrier presented to participation.

Where opportunities exist, young people engage usefully in the Welsh language activities, for example in the Welsh language youth club in Barry provided through a partnership arrangement with Urdd Gobaith Cymru. However, overall, access to Welsh-medium activities is not equally available to young people from all parts of the Vale.

Leading and improving

The ethos of the Vale of Glamorgan youth service is strongly based on the voice of young people and on providing the support that they need to grow as confident and informed citizens. Young people sit on the council's learning and culture scrutiny committee offering positive challenge to council policies. Their input is valued by senior council officers and the chief executive, which means that the youth service is highly visible in overall strategies and policies. The leader of the council champions

young people and supports their contributions and scrutiny of policies. The Vale has the youngest elected councillor in Wales who developed his skills through engaging with youth work provision. He is a designated Youth Champion and continues to support and work with young people to support their representation and participation in community and civic life.

The youth service has a clear vision, which acknowledges that young people are the most valuable resource, and this complements the overall council vision for 'Strong Communities with a bright future'. The vision was co-written with young people and includes a rights-based approach to empower young people to become informed, resilient, and healthy individuals. A strong theme of young people's participation and consultation runs through the whole provision and underpins the planning and delivery of youth work.

The youth service is firmly embedded in the learning and skills directorate of the council and complements and supports the formal education agenda. The service has chosen clear priorities in line with the needs of young people, local and national priorities and the resources available. Support from the chief executive and senior leaders drives the prioritisation of youth work values and methodology, which are embedded in different aspects of support for young people in both formal education and in more traditional youth work activities.

The service is practical, agile and solution focused, adapting to need and circumstances. This is made possible by very strong, multi-faceted and collaborative partnership working with other council directorates, through formal external partnerships and with a network of wider, long-established partners. Partnerships are strong because they clearly put the needs of young people before institutional considerations. There is effective sharing of information about young people, underpinned by the council's oversight and management of information sharing arrangements. There is a 'can-do' approach to information sharing, which benefits young people, enabling support from multiple agencies with minimum delay and making sure that young people are always offered the most suitable and appropriate advice and support available. Partnerships are underpinned by robust agreements, such as contracts and service level agreements with clearly defined performance indicators, to ensure quality of delivery, establish clear safeguarding arrangements and to aid the sustainability of services and provision.

These partnerships enable the youth service to provide or facilitate youth work that meets the needs of young people and addresses national policy imperatives for youth work delivery. The service uses a wide range of funding streams to commission provision from partners, which in turn facilitates a wider range of resources and activities to support and benefit young people. In one particularly interesting and innovative arrangement, Penarth Town Council provides funding for a youth worker from the Vale Youth Service to work with young people to widen the reach of youth service activities in the community. The service is nimble and effective in maximising funding opportunities and the comprehensive and regular reports to the scrutiny committee mean that the council's senior finance officers understand youth work and its funding priorities including the need for sustainable services.

Partnerships with schools are a particular strength. Senior school leaders understand the value of youth work and highly appreciate the positive interventions that youth

workers make with young people. Youth workers are included as valuable members of school staff and often provide wider wellbeing activities, targeted well-being after-school clubs and information and training sessions within the school as well as their highly effective one to one support for young people.

There is a clear plan for the youth service, which is fully integrated within the Council's wider planning structure. Staff and managers develop clear team plans which feed into the service plan with clear objectives and targets. The youth service knows itself well at all levels and staff at all levels continually reflect on and scrutinise the effectiveness of their work, the service offer and how improvements can be made. Formal self-assessment is recorded effectively through the use of quarterly report cards, which in conjunction with the risk matrix means that issues are clearly identified, visible and subject to regular assessment. Risks are prioritised and reviewed. Appropriate youth service data is collected and recorded using council management information systems and managers analyse this to assess the impact of provision. The service is also able to access and discuss wider education data beneficially, such as attainment data and data about young people who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training.

All of the service staff are appropriately JNC qualified and registered with the Education Workforce Council. There is an ethos of continual development and reflection and a strong ongoing commitment to professional learning across the service. Many staff increase their level of professional qualification, and the service offers supervision and placements to students. It also offers training opportunities to agency staff and volunteers. Staff access corporate council training and specialist training for youth workers such as in trauma informed practices. Training is shared well with contracted partners and partner agencies. Staff are training as internal verifiers with a provider of specialist qualifications so that the Vale can deliver its own in-house accredited training.

The service has a valuable and strong 'grow your own' tradition of nurturing and training up staff who are or have been service users and several are now working in the service as qualified youth workers. Six young people are studying for the level 2 award in youth work practice and three young people are studying for the level 3 youth work qualification.

There are strong arrangements in place for supervision and appraisal, which also identify training needs. Enhanced levels of formal and informal support for staff exist, in recognition of the challenging and often distressing nature of the work they regularly carry out with young people and their families. Members of the Wellbeing and STRIVE teams benefit from regular case reviews.

Overall safeguarding arrangements are appropriate. There are strong recording systems and links with a range of partners, and the intelligence from these is regularly analysed and used to target staff training and plan engaging and safe work with young people.

Evidence base of the report

Estyn inspectors visited the Vale of Glamorgan youth service for four and a half days in February 2024.

Four inspectors and two peer inspectors visited ten youth work sessions in a variety of venues across the Vale of Glamorgan. They attended thirteen meetings with youth workers, local authority staff, senior school staff, elected members and a wide range of partners both in the local authority and from external agencies. Another inspector joined meetings online. Inspectors also scrutinised reports, documents and data provided by the Vale of Glamorgan youth service.

Inspectors observed youth work taking place and talked to youth workers, young people and parents. Inspectors also spoke with nine parents/grandparents by telephone, who wished to tell the inspectors how well youth workers had supported their young people.

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with Learning and Skills Act (2000).

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Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).