



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**YMCA Wales Community College
Cleeve House
Lambourne Crescent
Cardiff Business Park
Llanishen
Cardiff
CF14 5GP**

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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Context

YMCA Wales Community College has approximately 6,000 learners, of which 75% are male and 25% female. Many of its learners come from vulnerable groups, and many have not always been successful in their past learning experiences. The college offers learning to mostly offenders and youth workers. There is also a smaller provision offered to community learners. All college learners are part-time and they attend courses in a variety of outreach and community-based venues. The college operates a flexible delivery system, with most learners attending short courses or learning experiences. The majority of these courses are accredited.

The college is the largest provider of initial training for youth workers in Wales and of training for offender learners on unpaid orders. It delivers learning in all local authorities across Wales, works with a wide range of partners and delivers most of its work in partnership with the Wales Probation Trust and local authority and third sector youth services across Wales.

Summary

The provider's current performance	Excellent
The provider's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

This is excellent provision because of:

- the continuing excellent standard and progression achieved by learners;
- improvement in basic skills for most learners;
- the continuing excellent match between the college programme and national and local priorities for adult community learning;
- recruitment of high numbers of learners from deprived areas across Wales;
- the ways that the college works to support partners in achieving very good outcomes for learners, helping them to achieve personal and professional goals;
- the ways that learners' needs are identified and provision created that responds very well to these needs; and
- the college's very good use of data that helps it plan to keep the learner at the heart of the provision.

Prospects for improvement

The provider has excellent prospects for improvement because of:

- the consistently high achievement and attainment rates for learners;
- the college's long standing commitment to keeping the needs of its learners at the centre of its management principles and ethos;
- the passion and commitment for continuous improvement held throughout the college; and
- the governors' commitment to monitoring and reviewing the vision and work of the college.

Recommendations

The college should:

- R1 develop work to improve basic and essential skills opportunities for all learners;
- R2 help tutors identify and develop ways to embed the Welsh dimension into more activities in their delivery; and
- R3 widen engagement at a strategic level to promote the good practice at the college

What happens next?

The lead inspector will ask the college to provide good practice case studies as exemplars of excellent practice which will appear on the Estyn website

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Excellent

Standards: Excellent

All learners complete tasks and activities very well and nearly all do so to a very high standard. Currently, 57% of learners are recruited from the most deprived areas across Wales and many of these learners begin from low starting points. Overall completion, attainment and successful completion rates are excellent. Attainment and completion rates overall are at 99% and successful completion rates at 98%. Learners in the college have maintained their high standards since the last inspection.

Nearly all learners, especially in offender learning and youth work, are able to recognise their achievements and progress in their learning very well.

Offender learners beginning courses often initially resent attending learning sessions, but many of these learners soon recognise the opportunities offered by the college and many become enthusiastic learners a very short time after enrolling in courses.

Nearly all learners, especially those in offender learning and youth work, are able to develop skills that improve their abilities to live and work in their local communities. Most learners have improved their basic, key and essential skills.

Making good use of initial basic skills assessments carried out as a result of the recently established QIF¹ bid, project learners in youth work courses are able to build their skills. Many learners develop their basic skills in literacy (reading and writing) and also in speaking, listening and thinking skills. This support helps learners to progress with confidence to higher levels of learning. As a result, a minority improve their learning success at level 3.

Learners on Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) courses make very good progress in developing skills necessary to change their teaching and delivery techniques. They also have greater understanding of their own learners' learning styles and needs.

Since the last inspection, many more learners are using Welsh in their work. Over the last three years, the rate at which learners complete their work through the medium of Welsh has increased from 1.2% of learners to 2.4%. However, a very few learners say in the learner survey that staff do not always give opportunities to choose support through the language of their choice.

¹ QIF - Quality Improvement Fund. The DfES invites providers to bid for project funds to improve the quality of provision. The college successfully obtained funding to develop basic skills delivery to youth work learners.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Very positive attitudes from learners to their learning experiences are shown from the learner survey. Ninety-eight percent of learners say that they enjoy their learning very much, and feel safe and free from harassment in their place of learning. Nearly all learners strongly agree that their learning has helped them to improve their life skills.

All learners in offender learning give good attention to health and safety in their courses. Most learners in youth work and offender learning follow a good variety of healthy living courses relating to, for example, drug abuse, mental health, social wellbeing, thinking skills and anger management. Many learners in offender learning report that the opportunities they have to become learners have improved their ability to understand how to keep themselves well and healthy. Learners in youth work have a very good understanding of how to act as good role models to the young people they work with and how to keep those young people safe.

Many learners on PTLLS and youth work courses support each other very well in classes and use the opportunities well to share ideas that support the development of their own practice. In many cases, offender learners make very good use of the opportunity to revisit learning. This is very effective in helping many of these learners to develop structure and to improve insight into their lives.

A good range of learners attend focus groups, where they are able to contribute to discussions about the way that the college is run. The college has widened the membership on its Board of Governors by inviting a learner to become a governor.

Most learners said that their courses helped them to become involved in their communities. Many learners in youth work, offender learning and the PTLLS course show very good development in their ability to work in communities and help others. A majority of learners act as volunteers in wide variety of community settings.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Excellent

Learning experiences: Excellent

The college provides a very well-focussed range of courses that effectively meet the needs of learners.

The college and its partners regularly review the curriculum, taking good account of new educational and policy developments. It organises the delivery of the curriculum very well, and uses the experience of partners, such as the Wales Probation Trust, very effectively to develop an appropriate range of accredited courses. For example, the college has secured accreditation through Agored Cymru for existing courses delivered by the Wales Probation Trust. It has also developed customised accredited courses that respond very well to individual offenders' needs. As a result, the college offers a wide range of skill-based accredited units to offender learners, which enable these learners to develop new knowledge, understanding and skills, whatever their educational background. The Future Skills and the Future Skills Plus programmes also prepare offender learners to develop work and citizenship skills alongside

parenting skills and ways to manage anger. These courses are a very good addition to the curriculum offer.

Courses offered at levels 2 and 3 in youth work effectively meet the needs of the many local authorities and voluntary organisations across Wales. They prepare learners well for youth worker roles and for progression into higher education youth and community work degrees. The credits from the level 3 certificate in youth work can be transferred by learners to attract credit as part of their degree course from two universities in Wales. The PTLLS course effectively develops the skills of tutors across a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies.

The college pays good attention to the Welsh language and the Welsh dimension. Learners can access many courses through the medium of Welsh. Well written activities in course materials allow tutors the scope to introduce the Welsh dimension. The college has worked very effectively with Urdd youth workers to help over 600 young people to attain a wide range of different accredited courses through the medium of Welsh.

Overall, the college and its partners make good provision to develop learners' skills. On most programmes, learners undertake initial assessments to measure their levels of literacy. Many tutors support the development of learners' communication skills and literacy skills well and, where appropriate, they signpost them to other provision. For example, a minority of learners in offender learning continue with classes after they have completed their orders with the Wales Probation Trust.

The college contributes well to learners' understanding of (ESDGC) through raising tutors' awareness about how to embed sustainable development and global citizenship in their teaching. It contributes well to learners' understanding of the wider implications of ESDGC such as a social justice perspective and the development of citizenship.

Teaching: Excellent

The college, in partnership with its tutors, has a very good knowledge and understanding of the learners and the courses that are taught. Both have high expectations of all learners. All tutors in offender learning develop an excellent rapport with offender learners and manage the sometimes challenging life situations these learners bring to classes with empathy. Most tutors use a very wide and effective range of activities to stimulate learners' thinking and development. In many cases on the youth work courses, tutors help learners to understand which activities youth workers can use in their work by engaging the learner in the activity, and discussing the learning and the merits of the activity itself. Tutors work well together and with the college to share and add to materials and activities. Many tutors focus well on developing learners' communication and literacy skills appropriate to the level of writing required and the professional role for which some learners are training. In nearly all cases, tutors provide learners with work that challenges and extends well their thinking or skill development.

Most tutors make good use of initial assessments and individual learning plans. They regularly review learners' work and provide them with good formative feedback.

They help learners to set appropriate targets for further development. Most tutors mark learners' work regularly, and provide high quality feedback.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The college promotes health and safety very well. Its health and safety officer works well with partners to ensure that venues meet health and safety requirements. All offender learners complete a unit of work on health and safety before they start courses in workshops or in community settings. The college provides very good opportunities for offender learners to improve their understanding of health and safety issues. Youth work courses pay very good attention to developing learners' understanding of safe working as well as safeguarding issues.

Ninety-eight percent of learners say that the college provides very good information about courses and gives good support about what to do once learners have finished their courses. In particular, the college and the Wales Probation Trust work sensitively and very effectively together to provide holistic advice and support to vulnerable learners to enable them not only to gain qualifications, but also to make important choices that can change and improve their life chances.

The college provides useful written guidance to learners about what the courses involve and the progression routes available. It also provides clear guidance to learners about where they can find additional support for basic skills. The college works very well with its partners, providing finance and equipment to support learners with additional learning needs. In one innovative example, the college provides electronic translation tablets to Chinese learners so that they can express themselves clearly in English.

The college has an appropriate policy and procedures in place for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Excellent

The college has a truly inclusive ethos and the learner is at the heart of all staff activities. All college staff have a clear understanding and commitment to working for the good of learners. College staffs have a passionate commitment to providing quality courses that match the needs of, and develop, learners well. A full range of policies are in place, which staff understand very well and put into action on a daily basis. The college very effectively challenges barriers to learning and proactively addresses the needs of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. College staff work continuously to create and improve the learning environment and the learning to very good effect. Learning resources are very good. All learners have very well-presented, user friendly workbooks and clear and coherent learning materials. Nearly all accommodation is fit for purpose and within a suitable travelling distance for learners.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?
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Excellent

Leadership: Excellent

The college strategic objectives and operational plans are set out well and very effectively drive the direction of the college. The plans use good quality information and data analysis from leaders and staff of the college, and focus very well on the needs of learners and the wider community.

There are very clear lines of responsibility, and an excellent meeting structure that keeps staff very well informed. All staff use the college's intranet regularly to check data and other information, share current achievement of targets and monitor any variation in performance.

The college has clear plans for the future. All governors, leaders and staff have been meaningfully involved in the 'Future Directions' initiative. This project is a detailed and thorough review of the operation of the college. It focuses on learners and how the college needs to develop to provide more opportunities for them. This initiative is in addition to the college's usual strategic and operational planning processes.

All staff have very clear and effective job descriptions and understand their job roles very well. Both formal and informal communications throughout the college are excellent. Leaders influence and maintain the strong culture for continuous quality improvement. Staff teamwork and morale are very high and there are high levels of trust. Leaders and staff are happy to operate flexibly outside their job roles during their daily tasks, particularly when it benefits learners.

Governors are fully aware of the operation of the college and the performance of all learners. College leaders and staff keep governors very well informed. Governors come from a broad mix of backgrounds and have skills that help the college plan and monitor its provision well. They understand very well the challenges faced by the college for the future and are very committed in their contribution to the college. They provide appropriate and effective challenge and support for the head of college and other staff.

College leaders and staff respond very well with partners to meet national and local priorities. For example, through its links with youth work managers, the college has guided the development of an improved progression route for youth work training. This training programme allows, for the first time, many youth workers to begin their training at the level of awareness-raising. They then progress through induction training, to level 2 and level 3 courses. The college has established, with two Welsh universities, much improved progression routes into higher education for youth worker learners. It is now more straightforward for these learners to progress to degree level.

Improving quality: Excellent

The self-assessment report (SAR) and the quality development plan (QDP) are wide-ranging and all staff and governors are fully involved in their preparation. The SAR is clear, well presented and self-critical, and makes excellent use of data

whenever appropriate. It informs the QDP well to generate useful targeted action points. The findings contained within the SAR are the same as those of the inspection team. However, the college underestimates some of its quality and this is reflected in the judgements contained within the SAR.

The college holds very effective learner focus groups throughout the year for different sets of learners. The college pays expenses for learners who need to travel a distance to take part in these groups. Other learners are always able to comment through various online media. The governing body recently appointed a learner as a governor to bring a further insight of learners' views to the governance of the college. The college undertakes systematic observations of tutor sessions. These observations are given judgements for the quality of both learner progress and tutor performance. Results from these sessions feed effectively into monthly supervision meetings, programmes reviews and staff appraisals, and inform staff training needs well. The college judges most of its tutors as good. However, in a minority of cases, judgements in observations forms do not always match the comments made in the description of the session seen. The wording in the observation forms suggests that the judgement could have been excellent rather than good.

The college uses its intranet well to monitor its QDP. It uses the QDP action plan daily as a tool to bring about improvement for learners. All management staff make good use of this action plan to access information about standards, trends and the quality of the provision. The good use of this system over the last three years has been an essential tool in the continuous improvement and maintenance of high standards in the college.

Managers present information regularly to the curriculum and quality sub-committee of the governing body. These reports provide excellent information on quality at all levels of the college.

The college has responded very well to the recommendations from the last inspection report.

Partnership working: Excellent

The college links very well to partners in offender learning and youth work, maintaining links with over 30 organisations in both local authorities and the third sector. Many of these partnerships have been developed over many years. Partners and stakeholders are part of the strategic management processes through membership of working groups and in some cases as governors of the college. The college uses the experience and knowledge of its partners well. Partners make significant contributions to the future direction and development of the college.

The college has worked for several years with its partners to deliver learning programmes at various levels for youth workers and offender learners and in the community. It makes good use of specialist tutors from its own staff, and of tutors in partner organisations. The college also benefits from work with partners who provide placement opportunities for many learners to help them to gather evidence of the skills they are acquiring. This maintains a low cost base that allows the college to provide more programmes for more learners.

The college makes very good use of partner premises to deliver programmes. The college health and safety officer systematically checks the suitability of these premises.

Resource management: Excellent

The college manages its resources very well and uses benchmarking information well to monitor financial performance. It uses an appropriate proportion of its non-Department for Education and Skills (DfES) income to maintain a 'no-fee' policy, and to make sure that more learners can access college programmes, particularly those experiencing high levels of financial and social deprivation. Because of the college's strict control of expenditure, decreases in DfES funding do not have a negative impact on learners.

The college maintains detailed cost breakdowns for all of its programmes. This means that the college can quickly establish the viability of individual courses. It uses this information wisely to make management decisions about programme delivery. Managers make very good use of data to make appropriate decisions about the programmes they run, and are able to balance decisions about course cancellation very well. They use not only the numbers of learners attending any course to decide which courses should not run, but also the impact of course cancellation on learner motivation. This means that learner numbers are balanced well across the whole provision, and many vulnerable learners are prevented from failing to complete their learning and achieving their qualification. The college then takes action to cover the cost of the provision. Information from the benchmarking of staff costs shows that the cost of staff hours at the YMCA Wales Community College compare very well with sector averages.

The college maintains well thought-out and costed plans for maintaining the high standards of its accommodation. It also benefits greatly by working with partners and using partners' accommodation to deliver courses. There are enough well qualified and experienced staff to deliver and administer the programmes, and the college deploys staff efficiently. Managers seek ways to share staff costs with other similar institutions. Currently, the college shares a health and safety officer with the Workers Educational Association (South).

Monthly supervision meetings, session observations and annual appraisals inform the corporate staff development programme well. This staff development programme also receives high praise from staff. All college staff, through a voucher scheme, have the opportunity to develop their individual staff development needs in addition to the college staff development programme.

Overall, the college offers excellent value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

Estyn carried out a learner survey just before the inspection of the partnership. Three hundred and seventy eight learners completed questionnaires. The findings helped Estyn to have a view of learners' opinions and experience of the provision currently delivered by the college.

Nearly all learners agreed or strongly agreed that the college gives them good information when they chose their learning programmes. Nearly all learners also agreed that staff show them respect and listen to their views and concerns.

Nearly all learners say that staff provide useful feedback about their work and what learners need to do to improve.

A very few learners say that they are not given opportunities and support to learn through the medium of Welsh.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Enid Hankins	Reporting Inspector
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