



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

**A report on**  
**The Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales**

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**by**

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and Training in Wales**

**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.**

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## Context of provision

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales (BGC Wales) is a national voluntary youth work organisation. Established in 1928 within the South Wales mining communities, the organisation originated from the initiative of miners who established clubs to provide recreational spaces for young boys after long days in the mines.

BGC Wales caters to young people across Wales through traditional boys' and girls' clubs, community youth clubs, and sports and activity-based clubs. It presently has a membership of over 140 clubs dedicated to youth work and sports.

Staff and volunteers facilitate non-formal learning experiences for member clubs, offering participation in projects, informal workshops, and international youth initiatives. BGC Wales provides leaders and volunteers with access to training, including Level 2 and 3 Youth Work Qualifications, as well as offering guidance on funding, sustainability, and obtaining charitable status.

Since January 2022, the organisation has undergone significant changes, including the appointment of a new Treasurer, Chief Executive Officer, and Chair. The new leadership team has published a new strategy, to be realised on September 15, 2028, to coincide with the organisation's centenary. This strategy outlines the vision for the organisation in 2028, encompassing programmes for young people, club support systems, sporting and health initiatives, and operational processes. Additionally, the strategy highlights the role of the Lodge residential centre in supporting youth development and organisational sustainability.

## Summary

BGC Wales strives well to fulfil its mission to 'support all young people to lead healthy and happy lives, develop new skills, have fun and make a meaningful contribution to their community'. The organisation does this through working with affiliated groups and partners to provide, facilitate or support a wide range of youth work and specialist projects with partners. It champions the interests of young people in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

Young people in BGC Wales clubs and affiliated groups develop well through a wide range of challenging experiences and travel opportunities that are often life-changing for them. They make personal progress and gain a range of skills that have relevance to their daily lives and that often result in a useful qualification. Many young people learn to express themselves well and share their opinions whilst taking part in activities that are artistic, sporting and fun. Through a variety of sports clubs, and outdoor activities at the Lodge residential centre, they develop physically and understand the value of healthy lifestyles. Many young people learn to appreciate their communities and the countryside, improve their behaviour and communication, and learn important life skills.

Young people learn to understand and participate in the democratic process and realise that whatever their personal circumstances their views matter. A few progress to take part in campaigning activities. Many young people regularly express views or make decisions about what activities are available and a few contribute to writing bids for funding.

Young people, including those who are isolated or have disabilities, mix well with other young people and members of their communities. Clubs are friendly and welcoming. On visits and exchanges, young people make friends from other countries and cultures. Young people develop their self-esteem, learn to face new challenges and become more confident individuals.

Youth workers and volunteers are dedicated and enthusiastic and work effectively with young people in a variety of settings and locations. They have positive relationships with young people, listen to them and understand the young people and their communities well. Youth workers are well trained and share their skills with volunteers.

BGC Wales works with stakeholders and affiliated groups to develop provision to meet the needs of young people in their communities and for specific groups of young people. Young people access youth work in a variety of ways which are stimulating, fun and encourage wider learning and self-development. Activities range from traditional youth clubs and sport, often in isolated communities, to street-based work and specialised work with marginalised young people. International exchanges form a large and growing part of the organisation's work, and these opportunities are open to application from young people across Wales, not just traditional club members.

BGC Wales has a variety of partnership arrangements including collaboration with affiliated clubs to directly provide youth work for young people in a range of

interesting projects across Wales. The organisation also provides support for partner or affiliate clubs. Many of the traditional sport-based activities of the organisation have developed over the years into wider youth work activities and these two aspects of the work now complement each other well.

The organisation has recently undergone a reform of its management which has reinvigorated its strategic priorities and set ambitious plans for the future.

Officers and trustees are kept well informed through quarterly reports from officers and the organisation reports appropriately to fulfil the criteria of its various funding streams. Service plans have clear objectives and targets and managers assess risks and evaluate the impact of the work. However, information about staff training needs and current issues facing young people in affiliated clubs is not gathered systematically enough to help BGC Wales to tailor their support.

BGC Wales has a very strong professional learning ethos and offers a wide range of opportunities for staff to develop, reflect, and attain qualifications. These opportunities are extended to staff in affiliated groups and other partners. All core youth workers, many of whom began as youth club members, are suitably professionally qualified and registered with the Education Workforce Council.

The organisation has appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place and works positively to promote the safeguarding cultures of affiliated groups. The BGC Wales has made limited progress in implementing its Welsh language policy.

## **Recommendations**

We have made two recommendations to help the service continue to improve:

- R1 Develop systems to ensure a more systematic flow of information between affiliated clubs and BGC Wales so that they can support with key issues and training needs
- R2 Drive forward work to achieve the targets and actions of their Welsh Language policy

## **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 who take part in BGC Wales activities and those in affiliated clubs challenge themselves and gain a wide range of experiences that add to their personal development. They often decide what activities they would like to take part in and help with the design and running of projects. Through trips, foreign exchanges and residential experiences, many gain knowledge, skills and understanding of a wide range of issues. They develop self-awareness and empathy for others. Their learning experiences are often life-changing.

### Educational

Young people, who may have never travelled from their local areas before, take part in exchange trips for example to America and Germany. They gain first-hand experience, knowledge and understanding of different cultures and lifestyles. Young people on a trip to France visit tourist attractions and learn about local customs. Young people from different areas of Wales travel, for example, from rural Anglesey to South Wales. They visit the Senedd, Aberfan and places of historical interest. This expands their knowledge of Wales' history, industrial past and heritage and gives them a sense of being part of one nation.

Many young people in BGC Wales projects take part in outdoor and sporting activities. They develop physical fitness, team skills and an understanding of healthy lifestyles through a wide variety of activities including rugby, football, boxing and dodge ball. Many girls take part in these activities alongside the boys. Many young people gain trophies and recognised sports, coaching and leadership awards which are valuable in later life. Pictures of their achievements are displayed on the walls of local club premises for the community to celebrate. Importantly, they learn how to celebrate success and accept the disappointments of defeat.

Many young people who attend the Lodge outdoor residential centre, including those from specific disadvantaged groups such as those involved with social services, learn a variety of practical, team building and problem-solving skills. Those from built-up areas begin to enjoy being outdoors and appreciate the beauty of the Welsh landscape and countryside. Parents and carers report that the young people who may have social challenges make significant progress with their behaviour and confidence in a short period of time. For example, young people significantly improve their speech and communication skills through taking part in a canoeing project.

Because of their roots in the communities of Wales, clubs have a sound understanding of the educational experiences that young people need and develop informal learning opportunities around this. As a result, young people gain an understanding of healthy eating, budgeting, and energy saving. These young people often gain food hygiene certificates and other recognised formal qualifications in areas such as internet safety, computer coding, health and safety, and political skills. The young people are engaged and interested because their learning is focused on issues that directly affect them and their families.

Through engaging in BGC Wales activities and those in affiliated groups young people access youth work training ranging from junior leader awards and level 2 qualifications to degree and post graduate levels. Many progress or return to work in BGC Wales youth clubs and affiliated settings.

BGC Wales showcases young people's achievements in the colourful, published annual report and at local celebratory evenings. Young people, who may not enjoy success in school, and their parents and carers, are extremely proud of what they achieve.

### **Expressive**

Young people express themselves through the wide range of activities they carry out in youth clubs and projects. They learn to communicate well with one another and feel comfortable to share their opinions in a safe environment. Through joining in with activities with skilled youth workers and their peers, they feel confident to express themselves without embarrassment or awkwardness and have fun. Their phones and social media are often left to one side. Young people express themselves through simple activities such as basic jewellery making, board games and artwork. Whilst taking part, they chat with one another and with youth workers about issues that are affecting their lives. In specific cases, the activities result in sophisticated and more accomplished artwork projects such as the Severn Sisters Wall art project. Others express themselves through listening to music. In affiliated projects such as the Grangetown hub, young people take part in photography, art and dance. A large number of young people in BGC Wales projects express themselves well through sporting and outdoor activities.

### **Participative**

Many young people take part in the significant learner voice activities provided or facilitated by BGC Wales. Through the youth forum and political education activities, such as speaking with Senedd ministers, many young people learn about democracy and the political system in Wales and the UK. Through such activities as 'being a minister for a day', young people consider the qualities needed to hold political office and how to represent their peers. Through taking part in realistic voting activities, such as voting a young person onto the Wales youth parliament, they develop the confidence to participate in democracy and take this knowledge back into their communities. Clubs and activities are well attended and young people value highly the opportunities offered to them.

### **'Raise your voice'**

The 'Raise your voice' project works with marginalised young people who do not usually participate in any activities and particularly not in youth councils, consultative work or politics. These are young people whose voices would not normally be heard and who do not know what their entitlements are. Youth workers engaged these young people through participative and empowering approaches in residential and outdoor activities and in youth club settings.

Through the project, young people realised that their views matter and learnt how to make their voices heard. This led to the co-development of the 'Raise Your Voice' website in partnership with Swansea MAD and other third sector organisations. Through this site, young people find out information about democracy and register their own views. A few now take part in campaigning activities for young people's rights. The 'Raise Your Voice' project won a youth work excellence Wales award in 2022.

A few young people participate in the managerial activities of BGC Wales by making choices about what type of youth work projects should be included in funding bids, for example for Taith<sup>1</sup> money which enables them to take part in many overseas exchange activities.

Young people attend clubs and projects well and are keen to take part in the social and developmental activities made available to them.

### **Inclusive**

Young people in clubs and activities are friendly and welcoming. They mix well with other young people, both those from their own school or location and with other young people on visits and exchanges.

Through the police volunteer hub, young people gain a better understanding of how the police work and take advantage of opportunities to volunteer in their communities to become police volunteers. They gain an insight into community life and in turn this raises the profile and status of young people in their communities. As a result, adults often improve their view of young people and the positive contributions they make to society.

Young people can self-refer themselves to many BGC Wales activities that they see advertised. As a result, young people who live in isolated communities make friends in other areas of Wales and the world and gain social skills that they will need for work and future life.

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<sup>1</sup> Taith is funding provided by the Welsh Government to support young people undertaking activities to learn abroad.

In the New Dragons speech and language club in Mold and the project with the Royal Society for Blind, young people improve their communication skills whilst also having the opportunity to take part in other activities that young people enjoy.

### **New Dragons**

The New Dragons speech and language club provides a safe and appropriate environment for young people with a range of speech, language and communication needs, autistic spectrum disorder or other additional learning needs. Once a week, young people access a range of carefully planned and appropriately stimulating activities, including a range of expressive arts and crafts and games opportunities. Young people access social interaction and learning that they may find challenging elsewhere. As a result, they develop their communication skills and social confidence as well as forming friendships.

The youth workers at the club are highly skilled in working with this particular group of young people, supported by a wide range of professional learning. BGC Wales work well with Flintshire local authority who fund this provision. This partnership helps ensure young people who would benefit from the provision gain access. BGC Wales support staff appropriately, for example by providing staff with the opportunity to carry out preparatory visits so that they can appropriately support young people to access international exchange opportunities. Through mixing with young people from different groups in residential events and other joint activities, young people from different socio-economic backgrounds and from isolated rural communities widen their friendship groups and develop understanding and empathy for others.

### **Empowering**

Through exchanges abroad for example to America and Germany young people develop confidence and self-esteem. Young people who are isolated and have never left their local area make new friends learn about other cultures and develop self-awareness. They come to understand their emotions, face their fears and become more self-reliant. By moving out of their comfort zone, young people face challenging physical and emotional situations with the support of youth workers. Through these experiences, they become more confident individuals.

### **What young people can expect from youth work provision**

Youth workers and volunteers work very effectively with young people in the variety of clubs and projects offered by BGC Wales and its affiliated groups. Youth workers talk to young people and find out what they would like to do and provide suitable activities, including appropriate opportunities to gain qualifications. These activities range from traditional youth club activities, sporting activities, youth exchanges, residential experiences and informal and non-formal educational activities.

Youth workers are dedicated, well trained and enthusiastic. They understand young people and the communities where they live well. They use their youth work skills well to engage in positive relationships with young people. This builds trust and supports young people to develop their skills according to their personal choices and interests. Youth workers follow the principle that youth work should be young person



led and that relationships are voluntary and supportive. Volunteers are guided to adopt similar ways of working with young people.

In traditional youth clubs, youth workers and volunteers chat with young people over the pool table, whilst making simple meals, playing board games or taking part in outside sporting activities. They pick up issues that affect young people and often talk through their problems. Youth workers and volunteers forge and maintain effective, trusting and educational relationships with young people from a variety of backgrounds and settings. Young people respond well to staff and a variety of learning takes place including personal and social education that supports life-skills, and aspects that support more formal types of study. For example, young people with challenging backgrounds see improvements in their speech and communication skills as a direct consequence of participating in youth work-led activities. The availability of more structured programmes of learning, such as the Sports Leaders Award programme, provides valuable access to accreditation and contributes to young people's records of achievement.

### **International Exchange Trips**

Workers planning and taking part in exchange activities bring a wealth of experience and understanding from their learning on previous trips, which supports and mentors young people well. They prepare young people well for the eventualities of the trip, both practical and emotional, and support them through the ups and downs of being away from home, in a strange country and often with young people who were previously unknown to them. Youth workers support them to deal with their emotions, try new experiences and food, be tolerant of others and make new friends. During the trips, youth workers take the opportunity to discuss many issues with young people, sharing life experiences and helping the young people to develop and grow towards adulthood. These experiences are often life changing and broaden the horizons of young people who have previously not had opportunities to venture from their local, sometimes rural, communities.

Youth workers apply rigorous selection processes for those applying to take part in these experiences and support those who do not gain a place. They offer alternative local experiences or trips and support the unsuccessful candidates to develop the skills and mindset needed to apply for a future exchange visit.

Youth workers also gain new knowledge, skills and expertise from these trips and staff fact finding visits. They develop new ideas, especially from trips to the Boys' and Girls' clubs in American states, that help to expand and improve the work of the organisation in Wales.

BGC Wales engages stakeholders effectively to ensure that the particular needs of young people are met. This includes the development of more bespoke and specialised provision that addresses the needs of vulnerable young people, for example through the New Dragons speech and language youth club in Mold where young people with autism are supported by a skilled and dedicated team.

This provision demonstrates effective local authority partnership working and is supported by a direct funding relationship between the local authority and BGC

Wales who are therefore able to employ local practitioners. The expertise of the youth workers is recognised by the local authority with whom the project shares staff.

Much affiliated provision is located in areas of deprivation and works effectively with BGC Wales to ensure that poverty-related needs are met, including the provision of food for young people and their families and the qualifications necessary for staff to provide food safely.

In the democracy projects, youth workers help young people to understand how local and national democracy works, giving them the confidence to raise their own issues in their communities and to encourage their peers to vote in elections in Wales.

BGC Wales works together with its affiliated groups to co-deliver aspects of youth work, providing a national infrastructure for many youth work projects across Wales. It supports the work of individual groups who are separately constituted and delivers significant amounts of open access and targeted youth work in its own right. There is a strong emphasis on the provision of open access youth work and in more targeted cases, engagement with young people is always on a voluntary basis.

The accessibility of youth work to young people is a key consideration for BGC Wales and local bodies who work well together to ensure the quality and scope of the curriculum offer is broad and attractive to young people less able to access wider educational experiences by other means. This blend of activities is particularly effective in providing opportunities for young people who might not otherwise be engaged in youth work. In this way the organisation helps to prevent social and educational isolation, especially in rural and remote valley areas. The provision enables young people to access wider educational experiences that are attractive to them.

BGC of Wales has a variety of different approaches to partnership working with both voluntary and statutory bodies. For example, it works with the South Wales Police youth volunteering hubs, to provide activities for young people, delivered under the governance of a multiple partnership arrangement. BGC Wales has facilitated the development of what was a recruitment activity to the police cadets, into a challenging and fun project that adds to community life.

Young people can access youth work in a variety of ways, including through street-based, detached youth work. Where this takes place, youth workers share information with local partner organisations to help develop provision and support for young people.

The overall provision includes activity that is both fun and stimulates broader learning. For example, the indoor bowling activity in Briton Ferry introduced jointly by BGC Wales and the local youth club promotes the development of physical skills and coordination, team communication skills, and tactical planning. It also challenges preconceptions around age-relevant activity. The young people develop skills indoors then develop to playing in an outdoor bowling environment. This not only develops young peoples' bowling skills but also provides opportunities for positive engagement with adults.

In the case of youth clubs that are co-located with sports clubs, in many instances, sports leaders work with youth workers to expand the overall offer to young people. In addition, sports leaders are encouraged to undertake youth work training, the provision of which is facilitated by BGC Wales. Aberkenfig Boys and Girls' club successfully blends the worlds of youth work and sport in this way, promoting the inclusion of young people in both means of engagement, often at the same time.

### **Leading and improving**

BGC Wales' mission is to 'support all young people to lead healthy and happy lives, develop new skills, have fun and make a meaningful contribution to their community'. The organisation realises this mission through supporting and contributing to the provision in their affiliated youth clubs and through bespoke projects which provide access to activities and experiences which would otherwise be beyond the reach of individual clubs. Through these approaches, BGC Wales champions the interests of young people in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

The voice of young people plays an important part in identifying and developing the strategic priorities of the BGC Wales. Young people are involved and encouraged to participate in activities and to learn and understand their roles, for example in the democratic processes. Quarterly reports from officers provide trustees with the information and assurances of the work being done to meet the aspirations of their strategic priorities. Local member groups also play an active and useful role in the work of the sub-groups which oversee the strategic priorities.

Since 2022, BGC Wales has been going through a significant and ambitious change process. This included changing its status to becoming a charitable incorporated organisation as well as changes to key personnel, its direction and governance structure.

The chair of the trustees, ably supported by an experienced group of trustees, has been influential in developing the new strategic direction. The chief executive officer provides strong, highly energetic, and engaging leadership, and is supported well by an enthusiastic and skilled team of youth workers and support staff.

The focus areas of BGC Wales' provision are developed by the leadership and management group and informed by stakeholders, affiliated clubs, youth workers and the voice of young people. The priority areas inform the service plans which have clear objectives and targets, although in some instances, these lack detail. Managers evaluate the impact of their work through a range of feedback mechanisms, which include information collected by their youth workers from their engagements with their affiliated clubs. However, information on the quality of direct provision, or the staff development needs and emerging issues for young people within their direct and affiliated provision is not gathered systematically enough to help inform priorities, training and support.

Other aspects of the provision are dictated by specific funding streams which have their own reporting and accountability requirements. In these cases, the organisation works appropriately to satisfy these criteria. BGC Wales is reactive and agile in how they respond to potential funding streams as they become available. They are looking increasingly at how it can secure other sources of funding through links with

the private sector to deliver its strategic priorities. BGC Wales has established very strong links with national bodies, local authorities and other partner organisations. Together, these connections make a significant contribution to the range of opportunities and projects that it is able to deliver.

BGC Wales routinely undertake appropriate risk assessments prior to undertaking trips and activities with young people. Also, organisationally, the senior team have identified the key strategic risks, and actions to mitigate these risks. These include securing long-term funding sources, succession planning and recruiting and retaining youth workers and volunteers.

BGC Wales are acutely aware of the impact of poverty on young people and their communities. They make sure that that young people from low-income families are able to participate fully in all their activities by subsidising their excursions and overseas visits. BGC Wales ensures that activities are within reach of all young people, irrespective of their backgrounds. The approaches and practices of BGC of Wales demonstrate that the poverty agenda is foremost in their thinking and supports how they work and prioritise their resources.

Professional learning and workforce development is a particular strength, and BGC Wales offer a wide range of opportunities to further the professional qualifications of their staff. There is an ethos of continual development and reflection, and a strong ongoing commitment to professional learning. They offer to partly fund the post-graduate diploma in youth work for employees who have worked in the organisation for a year or more, and currently one youth worker is studying on this programme. Currently, four youth workers have level 6 qualifications, and all other youth workers have level 2 and 3 qualifications. This emphasis on developing individuals helps to attract and retain a professionally qualified youth workforce. As a result, all the central youth workers are appropriately JNC qualified and registered with the Education Workforce Council. Many of these youth workers started as club members and progressed to fully qualified youth worker status. The organisation also provides essential work placement and supervision opportunities for students on youth work courses.

BGC Wales has an appropriate safeguarding culture underpinned by clear processes and procedures. Staff understand the expectations of them and their responsibilities. Affiliated clubs have their own governance arrangements, but access useful support and guidance from BGC Wales when needed.

All centrally employed youth workers have DBS checks which are updated every three years. The safeguarding policy is reviewed annually by the executive board. BGC Wales helps to facilitate and promote a safeguarding culture in their affiliates by providing them with DBS checking free of charge and providing access to professional learning modules around safeguarding practices for the staff running the affiliated clubs. Central staff also undertake regular update training on safeguarding practices and risk management. Recently, they hosted a safeguarding conference funded by Erasmus + attended by 28 youth workers which included representatives from Spain, Germany and Croatia. The conference enabled the delegates to share a range of resources and gain insights into practice and approaches through their interactions with partners.

BGC Wales recognise that it has made limited progress in realising the aspirations of its Welsh language policy and have not mapped out how they intend to deliver on these aspirations over time. The chief executive is a member of the youth work Welsh language Implementation Participation Board, facilitated by the Welsh Government, and sees this involvement as a step towards developing this aspect of their work.

## **Evidence base of the report**

Estyn inspectors visited BGC Wales for three and a half days in March 2024. They also visited some affiliated settings to observe practice during the week prior to the inspection.

- Three inspectors and one peer inspector visited youth work sessions in a variety of venues across Wales, including observing some work remotely online. They also met with youth workers, managers, young people, trustees and staff from a range of partners and affiliated settings.
- Inspectors also scrutinised reports, documents and data provided by BGC Wales.
- Inspectors also analysed feedback provided through surveys for young people, staff and partners.

## 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 school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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