Dros ddysgwyr, dros Gymru
For learners, for Wales

A report on

Gwynedd Youth

Cyngor Gwynedd
Council Offices
Shirehall Street
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH

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by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

Context of provision

This inspection of youth work was conducted a few weeks before the inspection of local government education services in the authority. This enables the messages and evaluations from the youth work inspection to inform the inspection of wider local government education services, where relevant.

Overview

Young people in Gwynedd benefit from trusting relationships with youth workers who listen to them and offer support without judgement. These relationships help them to gain confidence, make friends and develop skills for day-to-day life. Young people feel safe when they use the service and are comfortable approaching workers for advice.

Through activities in schools and communities, young people learn practical skills, volunteer and gain qualifications. Personal support for those who face difficulties helps to prepare them for education, training or employment. Working with special schools and the authority's Derwen team enables young people with disabilities or additional learning needs to take part in a variety of experiences.

Use of the Welsh language is a natural part of a much of the provision and young people are able to engage in their chosen language.

Young people help to choose and plan activities. Through Our Voice, they also contribute to the council's wider discussions and decision-making. However, work to include a wider range of young people and show them what has changed as a result of their opinions is still developing.

Leaders support staff to learn and develop their practice. Links with partners expand the support available and the service adapts its offer to respond to travel challenges and the dispersed nature of communities in Gwynedd.

However, leaders do not have a complete enough picture of who benefits from provision and who it fails to reach. This limits leaders' ability to plan provision strategically for different groups of young people and communities.

Some parts of provision measure young people's progress usefully. However, the way in which leaders analyse and use this information is not consistent enough to provide a secure picture of the effect of the service over time. Improvement priorities and measures

of success are also not always incisive enough to focus work on the most important improvements and evaluate their effect.

What you can expect from Gwynedd Youth Service

- Youth workers who listen to you, treat you with respect and offer support without judgement. Young people feel safe with them and know whom to approach for help.
- Opportunities to take part in activities in schools and communities, including art, cooking, outdoor activities, volunteering and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- Support to gain confidence, make friends, learn new skills and become more independent.
- Personal support for young people who face difficulties, including with their well-being, preparing them for college or work, or housing problems. Workers put young people in contact with other services, when necessary.
- Activities and support adapted for young people with disabilities or additional learning needs, and specific opportunities for young people who are LGBTQ+.
- Opportunities to use Welsh or English when participating and receiving support.
- An opportunity to say which activities you would like to do and to help to plan them. Through Our Voice, young people also contribute to the council's wider decision-making.

What is less well developed

- The service does not know clearly enough which groups of young people or communities it does not reach. This limits how it plans activities and support across Gwynedd.
- The service does not use information about young people's progress consistently enough to understand the difference its work does over time and to determine what is most important to improve.

Recommendations

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

R1 Strengthen the incisiveness of self-evaluation and planning for improvement so that leaders evaluate the effect of the service's work and prioritises improvements clearly

R2 Strengthen leaders' understanding of how effectively provision reaches different groups of young people and communities, and use this information to plan provision strategically

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?

Educative

Many young people who engage with youth work in Gwynedd benefit educationally and personally from the activities that are available to them. Under the skilful guidance of youth workers, they develop the knowledge and resilience necessary to help them to fulfil their potential as young adults. Young people take advantage of a range of valuable learning experiences that develop their skills, knowledge and confidence effectively. Many young people improve their resilience, well-being and engagement with education by taking part in youth work within schools, through the 16 – 25 team and in community youth clubs.

There are beneficial opportunities for young people to gain qualifications and accreditations that support their progress. Young people who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education receive useful support that is targeted for their specific needs. They are given work experience opportunities, prepare a CV, receive support to gain qualification and to prepare for college or employment.

The 11 – 19 team provides targeted opportunities to support young people to develop their personal skills and their understanding of current affairs. For example, in one school, sessions on managing emotions help them to understand how they respond both physically and emotionally to their personal challenges and support them in developing their resilience. Young people who are at risk of becoming homeless are given opportunities to learn about important subjects such as prudent use of money, financial planning and the importance of participation. This has a positive influence on their attitudes and commitment to their education.

Young people take advantage of beneficial opportunities to develop their communication and socialising skills in their chosen language. In the sessions observed, they learn useful practical skills through purposeful activities, such as opportunities to cook, garden and take part in outdoor activities.

There is specific valuable provision for young people with additional learning needs. This includes purposeful community clubs and opportunities for them to complete the bronze, silver and gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. Through these activities, young people with additional learning needs develop their communication skills and social skills effectively.

Expressive

Young people are given valuable opportunities to develop confidence when expressing their opinions and their ideas in safe and supportive environments. Structured conversations between young people and their youth workers in group and one-to-one sessions support the development of their emotional literacy and confidence. In school sessions, youth workers offer training on managing emotions, where young people practice breath control strategies and use stress balls while playing a competitive card game. Within these sessions, young people take turns in an orderly manner and follow the rules of the game fairly.

Increasingly, young people take advantage of more formal opportunities to express their opinions about the work of the youth service and the local authority through the ‘Our Voice’ project. Through this, young people are given purposeful opportunities to voice an opinion, present ideas and work together. Young people induct other members into the forum, sharing their ideas and thinking about how the project will develop in the future.

Through art, music and drama, young people are given valuable opportunities to develop their creative skills and increase their self-confidence. For example, young people increased their confidence to perform through the *Fa'ma* project with a local theatre company.

Participative

Young people participate well in the range of activities offered by the service. In nearly all the sessions that were observed in schools and the community, pupils enjoy their experiences and demonstrate infectious enthusiasm. Many young people say that they enjoy taking part.

There are strong examples of active participation. In community clubs, young people contribute to planning programmes and influence which activities are delivered. Others volunteer, run a snack shop, cook, plan trips or activities and undertake leadership roles. The service's officers facilitate voluntary work by organising experiences and encouraging young people to complete awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Young people are also beginning to undertake work with the Gwynedd Young Volunteer Academy, by volunteering their time and receiving vouchers in exchange to go on trips.

Through the work of 'Our Voice', young people take responsibility for chairing meetings, setting the agenda and contributing to discussions about policies and decisions. They also contribute to interview panels and work to develop services. Members of these forums are beginning to seek the views of other young people through questionnaires that they have designed.

Inclusive

The youth service demonstrates a strong commitment towards being inclusive, particularly when providing for young people with additional learning needs. These young people participate enthusiastically in activities, including programmes that have been adapted to complete the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Through effective partnership working with Derwen and special schools, the youth service provides specific community clubs in Caernarfon and Penrhyndeudraeth. These Friendly Clubs provide a variety of sessions for young people to enjoy socialising and to take part in activities such as cooking, art and yoga. As a result, they gain increasing confidence, show enjoyment and satisfaction, and

interact happily with their peers and staff. There are individual cases where this has supported individuals to transfer to a community youth club.

Young people from one special school complete bronze, silver and gold Duke of Edinburgh Awards with the support of a youth officer. Adapted activities are organised for them so that they are able to participate in cycling and kayaking sessions and a variety of expeditions. They also volunteer their time to the community and are given opportunities in some cases to forge links with their peers in mainstream schools.

Young people who are LGBTQ+ enjoy attending purposeful clubs and are given beneficial opportunities to develop their social and creative skills through activities such as producing magazines. Young people who are at risk of homelessness are given valuable support through work that is targeted specifically. Following the establishment of a pupil referral unit recently, the service is beginning to work with those young people.

Empowering

Many young people feel that they are empowered through the work of the youth service. They often describe how they have gained confidence, made new friends, overcome shyness and become more comfortable speaking with adults. They are given opportunities to discuss contemporary topics and develop an understanding of issues such as challenging stereotypes and prejudices. Young people influence the content of sessions, lead projects and help to shape decisions that influence provision. In sessions, they are comfortable talking to adults, feel that adults listen to them and are confident in expressing their views and needs. They are also welcoming when they greet visitors to their sessions and clubs.

Volunteering, leading activities, travelling, taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and contributing to ‘Our Voice’ provide young people with meaningful opportunities to develop independence, responsibility and leadership skills. In some cases, these opportunities have highlighted potential careers paths for a young person. We heard from individuals that their volunteering experiences in youth clubs or primary school clubs have inspired them to consider a career in these areas.

Many say that they are encouraged to take part in experiences that they would not otherwise have had. For example, a group of young people went to Croatia to explore how the voices of young people are represented there and to identify what could be done to

develop the voice of young people in Gwynedd. Young people at Hafod Lon are given opportunities to go on skiing trips with the support of the youth service.

The service uses personal plans and one-to-one support with young people aged 16-25 who are socially isolated, lack confidence or who are neurodivergent, by helping them to re-connect with education, training and local authority services. Individual examples show that some young people have made significant progress in terms of their independence and aspirations.

What young people can expect from youth work provision

The quality of youth work across the service is consistently strong. Youth workers are skilful and committed practitioners who forge positive and constructive relationships with young people and, in general, have a good knowledge of their needs.

Young people value the fact that staff are approachable and offer support in a non-judgemental way. Nearly all young people who responded to the inspection questionnaire and met with us during the inspection said that they felt safe in the provision and that they are treated with respect.

In general, activities are purposeful and offer a suitable balance between enjoyment and challenge across the five pillars of the principles and purposes of youth work in Wales. Youth workers know the young people they support well, using their knowledge to adapt their approaches, providing appropriate support and encouraging them to participate fully.

Youth workers provide valuable opportunities for young people to gain confidence, resilience and independence, and to develop practical and social skills. They encourage young people to express their views and, in many settings, involve them appropriately in deciding which activities are offered. For example, young people in community-based provision contribute to termly planning and are able to identify ways in which their views have influenced the programme.

There are useful examples of workers maintaining relationships with young people across school and community settings, providing continuity of support at different stages of their lives.

The service holds valuable awards evenings for each area – Dwyfor, Meirionnydd and Arfon – in Portmeirion. These evenings recognise young people’s participation in awards and volunteering activities.

The service provides a wide range of youth work opportunities through schools, community clubs, mobile and detached provision, evening activities and targeted projects. This diverse approach is particularly important in Gwynedd, where geography, transport and the dispersed nature of communities create significant barriers to participation. Developing mobile and detached provision is a sensible response to these challenges and extends opportunities beyond fixed youth centres, although leaders have not yet evaluated the effect of this approach on the overall quality and equity of provision.

The service also adapts provision in response to local circumstances, including taking travel patterns into account when deciding where to hold activities. This helps to create a diverse general offer which, on the whole, responds appropriately to young people's interests and circumstances. For example, evening community provision in Pwllheli has transitioned from being a mobile service into permanent provision in response to demand and high levels of participation by young people.

Provision for young people aged 16-25 is flexible and is well-tailored to individual needs. Staff have long-standing professional relationships and links with a range of local agencies, included Careers Wales and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. These links help to identify young people who need support and refer them to the appropriate services. Internal referrals from the 11-19 team also help to identify young people who may need ongoing support beyond the age of 16. Staff make good use of information about young people who are not in education, employment or training, or who are at risk of becoming so, to contact them and their families and offer support. This includes the recent development of using a digital platform for young people who find it difficult to interact face-to-face.

Suitable provision is available for young people who are affected by substance misuse or who are experiencing homelessness. For example, one young person was supported to develop the confidence to travel independently on public transport, which subsequently enabled them to volunteer with a local animal charity. Another young person was supported to gain his basic CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] card and to progress to a work placement with a local housing association.

The service provides a useful range of targeted support for young people who may be vulnerable or who face barriers to participation. This includes young people with additional learning needs, young people who are LGBTQ+, those who are experiencing mental health difficulties or who struggle to manage their emotions, young people affected by substance misuse and those who are at risk of homelessness or disengaging from education. Arrangements such as a Year 11 leavers' panel, links with housing

associations and in-school support provide established pathways for staff to identify young people who may be at risk and refer them to appropriate support.

Spotlights: A specific focus on provision for young people with disabilities or additional learning needs

A full-time youth worker works with the county's special school provision and in partnership with Derwen, namely the local authority's team for children with disabilities. The purposeful aim of this provision is to increase equity and opportunities for young people who might otherwise be excluded. It enables them to benefit from outdoor learning, take part in community activities and volunteering, and gain qualifications through opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Young people have the choice to use Welsh or English when they engage with the service and when they interact with the staff and their friends during sessions. Staff are good language models in both languages.

However, the service does not have a comprehensive understanding of how effectively its youth work provision reaches all groups of vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, or the difference it makes to them in the longer term. Although the service's data indicates positive outcomes for many young people who receive intensive support, weaknesses in the consistency and comparability of the information limit leaders' ability to evaluate impact robustly, track the destinations and progress of young people after they leave the support and understand the experiences of young people who do not engage or who leave the support. The service has also identified that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are under-represented in the provision in areas such as Bangor and has commissioned further work to understand the barriers that may prevent them from engaging.

Leading and improving

The Youth Service Manager provides stable and supportive leadership and communicates a clear and coherent vision for youth work in Gwynedd. On the whole, staff have a good understanding of their roles and the strategic direction and feel that they are supported well. Locating the service within the Education Department has strengthened its strategic position and its links with schools and other services. The structure, which includes 11-19, 16-25 and community teams, provides a logical basis for responding to the diverse needs of young people. In general, the quality of youth work provided across the service is consistently strong. Senior leaders and elected members provide the service with appropriate support and demonstrate a commitment to maintaining and developing it.

Scrutiny arrangements provide leaders with meaningful challenge, including in relation to the reach of provision, the use of resources and how the service responds to the needs of young people across Gwynedd.

The voice of young people has an increasingly important place in the leadership and governance of the service. Through 'Our Voice', young people have an increasing influence on the activities provided for them and contribute to developing policies, strategies and the authority's wider decision-making. Leaders place an increasing emphasis on broadening representation across different groups and areas and on making it clearer to young people how their views have influenced decisions. Although these aspects are in their early stages, there are promising examples of how the service is expanding opportunities for young people to express their views and influence decisions that matter to them.

The service works effectively with a wide range of statutory and voluntary partners. Partners value the service as being accessible, flexible and responsive. Joint planning and sharing of expertise help to reduce duplication, expand the offer and provide young people with more purposeful support.

Leaders are aware of the challenges that arise from the geography of Gwynedd and the capacity of the workforce, including difficulties in recruiting part-time staff. They have developed flexible approaches to address this, including detached provision with extends youth work opportunities to areas where access to fixed provision is more limited. However, leaders do not yet evaluate robustly enough how effectively this provision reaches the young people and communities most likely to benefit, nor the difference it makes to them. This limits their ability to use information about reach and impact when mapping and planning provision strategically.

Leaders and staff gather an appropriate range of information to support their understanding of the service. There are some strong examples of probing self-evaluation and professional reflection, which lead to adapting support for young people. However, the quality of this work varies and the way in which information is analysed and used does not always provide a clear enough picture of the service's impact. In some instances, activity, the number of ways of responding to demand, or achievements, are interpreted as evidence of impact, without sufficiently robust evidence to support this.

Measuring outcomes is more well-developed in some part of the service. For example, the 16-25 team uses well-being measures before and after intervention to help to evaluate the difference the work makes. However, the quality and range of data, and the depth of

analysis, are not consistent enough across the service. This limits leaders' ability to track young people's journeys systematically, understand fully which groups are being reached or not being reached, target resources and demonstrate impact over time effectively enough.

At a general level, leaders usually identify the needs of the service appropriately and respond by changing or developing provision. For example, recent developments include the expansion of 'Our Voice', developing provision for neurodivergent young people, developing data systems and new methods of reaching young people. Responsibilities and actions are identified clearly in a number of areas and leaders allocate responsibilities for undertaking the work in a sensible manner. However, the wide range of priorities make it challenging to achieve the improvement plan in full within a year. Measures of success are also not always incisive enough to enable leaders to evaluate progress and impact in sufficient detail.

Leaders have established a supportive culture of professional learning and pay purposeful attention to developing the workforce across the service. Staff have a good range of training and development opportunities, including youth work qualifications, role-specific training and opportunities to observe and share effective practice. Leaders use supervision, management discussions and staff feedback to identify development needs. Links with other youth work services also expand opportunities for staff to learn from practice outside Gwynedd. For example, staff have had training from Cardiff Youth Service on digital youth work and have taken advantage of international learning opportunities, including a visit to Helsinki. The service also shares its expertise and provides training opportunities for staff in partner organisations that work alongside it.

Leaders promote a positive culture of safeguarding. There are clear procedures for identifying, recording and referring concerns, and staff complete relevant mandatory safeguarding training. The arrangements meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. Young people feel safe and know whom to approach for support.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the young people questionnaires and consider the views of young people, staff, and partners where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal youth officer/chief executive, board of trustees, senior and middle managers, individual youth work staff, and volunteers to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet young people to discuss their provision, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of youth work sessions, including youth clubs, street based detached work and school-based activities across the provision, where appropriate
- observe and speak to young people during provision sessions
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner participation and outcomes, staff meeting records, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of young people, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. *'most young people…'* or *'very few young people…'*. 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/)

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