

POE131 The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Bil arfaethedig – Bil Addysg Awyr Agored (Cymru) | Proposed Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel, | Evidence from The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel,

Are you (your organisation) currently a provider of outdoor education?: Yes

Your opinion

How important is outdoor education to children and young people's overall education and development?

Very important

What are the main benefits to children and young people from having a residential outdoor education experience?

Provides 'real world' learning opportunities to both support the curriculum and personal development; broadens young people's horizons raising aspirations and greater awareness of place and others; has a positive impact on health and wellbeing in terms of the environment it takes place in and the people you engage with. The value of strong connections to nature not only have positive impacts in terms of health and well-being but in developing pro-environmental behaviours. This not only develops a better understanding of the natural world and how to protect it but when this time is spent immersed in the Welsh countryside a growing sense of value and belonging of such a valuable and special environment. See: <https://www.learningaway.org.uk/>

It is also worth noting that recent research has shown that pupils engaged in learning in natural environments have higher achievement in academic subjects, a situation that can be readily enhanced through the curriculum for Wales. There is no substitute for exploring and experiencing Wales and its landscapes first hand, developing a sense of cynefin.

Should children and young people have a guaranteed opportunity to participate in a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years, if they wish to?

Yes

Should an opportunity to participate in a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years, be free of charge on one occasion to pupils?

Yes

What are the main barriers which you believe currently exist to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education experiences?

Financial constraints; Confidence and Competence of school staff to organise and support residential experiences.;

Equality Considerations: Could the proposed Bill have any positive impacts on some children and young people in particular? If so, who and why?

The benefits of outdoor education, as outlined in the consultation paper and taken from High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales, are well recognised. This is increasingly supported by a growing body of evidence. The very nature of the Bill is rightly focused on the costs of such experiences which immediately begins to address the issue of financial access to these residential. This has always been an issue on the past and the recent economic squeeze has exacerbated the situation further. The Bill will take a big step towards ensuring that such experiences are not exclusive but inclusive and that those children and young people from our more vulnerable communities will benefit more than most.

In fact, it is these very communities that are often the most ethnically diverse or on lower incomes that are the most likely to be experiencing health inequalities and learning inequalities.

These are the same households who are least likely to have opportunities to benefit from nature, data from England goes to show that:

- 61% of children in the most deprived areas of England spent time outside every week, compared to 81% in the most affluent areas.⁴
- 56% of children from ethnically diverse backgrounds spent time outdoors every week, compared to 70% of white children.⁴

Covid pandemic and financial crisis are widening health and learning inequalities¹⁰

This Bill will take a big step towards addressing these issues in terms of access to residential.

The outdoor sector is also experienced at dealing with a wide range of pupil needs including physical, mental, gender and cultural, the approach has always endeavoured to be inclusive and continues to work on improving access.

Finally, looking forward in the development of young people there will be benefits in supporting those young people who may want to pursue an interest or career in environmental or 'green' jobs, or have their horizons expanded to include the possibility of such a career or study path. This is especially true if they come from a family or cultural background with little tradition of "green jobs".

Equality Considerations: Could the proposed Bill have any negative impacts on some children and young people in particular. If so, who and why? What could this Bill do to mitigate any negative impacts?

There will always be some young people who, for various reasons, would find it difficult and challenging attending an outdoor education residential experience. The Bill is clear that such experiences will not be 'forced' on individuals. In fact, if the experience is part of a progressive and integrated curriculum within the life of a school it would be hoped that such situations would be reduced. In addition, the sector has a good track record of adapting what is offered to be inclusive to those with a range of needs. The health and wellbeing of learners of residential and fieldtrips is an area of growing academic research – and highlighting the key factors that make it a positive experience that enhances wellbeing. Incorporating the latest thinking into what the sector can offer schools would help to reduce any negative impacts.

What age do you believe is most suitable for children and young people to be offered an opportunity to undertake a residential outdoor education experience?

Year 6 (age 10-11)

Should be part of progressive programmes from KS1 to older

Is four nights/five days the best length for a residential outdoor experience?

Yes

Please explain your answer and highlight any possible implications from having a standard approach of four night/five day experiences (whether positive or negative).

This really depends on your desired outcomes and where the experience fits within a progressive programme of residential and outdoor learning experiences, linked to the curriculum. Shorter overnight stays will be of value in the earlier years of education building up to the potential for multi-week experiences and expeditions later on. It will be important to see these experiences as part of an overall developmental programme in the outdoors that is closely linked and supports the delivery of the curriculum. At some point on this continuum a 5 day residential will be extremely valuable

Do you agree there is a need for legislation to ensure all children and young people are given an opportunity to access a residential outdoor education experience, at some stage during their school years?

Strongly disagree

Is there anything else you would like to say about this proposal?

Developing these experiences as part of an 'entitlement' is where they should sit within the overall learning experiences of young people while in formal education. This Bill would provide schools with the opportunity and incentive to really bring their curriculum alive, an opportunity not to be missed when linked to the new curriculum in Wales. The timing is right.

The consultation paper correctly identifies the contribution that outdoor education can make in supporting a 'whole school approach' to physical mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. This is needed more now than ever before, especially when we consider that a vast majority of residential outdoor education experiences take place in the natural environment. A recent Natural England Evidence briefing stated:

'There is a substantial body of evidence supporting a positive association between engagement with the natural environment and a diverse range of learning processes and outcomes, including educational, social, developmental and health outcomes.'

The importance of seeing outdoor residential learning experiences as part of a whole school approach has received further supported through another recent paper produced by the Council for Outdoor Learning. In their recent Evidence Note on 'Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments', that 'longer term, whole school and 'progressive' experiences tend to result in the greatest benefits, and students with lower predicted achievement tend to make the greatest progress'.

It will be vital that these residential are seen as both progressive and linked to the curriculum to make them meaningful and relevant to learners and schools, not 'one-off' events. This will entail broader support work in relation to Teacher Training and CPD.

To reflect the broader curriculum needs of schools and individual the needs of pupils it will be essential that these residential experiences provide for a range of outcomes, delivery methods and activities. There is no doubt that the environment in Wales provides a superb opportunity for children and young people to experience a range of adventurous activities that can support both physical, mental and social development. However, the natural environment and cultural landscape of Wales will also support a broad range of curriculum learning on top of this providing an unrivalled opportunity for educators.

We would highly recommend this proposal and would be willing to support its development in any way we are able.