

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

[Bil arfaethedig – Bil Addysg Awyr Agored \(Cymru\)](#) | [Proposed Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

Ymateb gan Field Studies Council, | Evidence from Field Studies Council,

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

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## Your opinion

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

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Very important

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

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Academic

An outdoor learning residential is the perfect way in which to pull together the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, its cross cutting themes, and the individual subjects. There isn't a single Area of Learning and Experience or individual subject within them that cannot be enhanced by outdoor learning.

There is no substitute for exploring and experiencing Wales and its landscapes first hand and developing a sense of cynefin. It deepens knowledge and understanding of individual subjects by engaging all of the senses, and it puts classroom knowledge into context. Residential provide uninterrupted study time, thinking time and time for designing and redesigning experiments or investigations. They can stretch the higher achieving pupils. Residential provide experiential learning that creates lasting memories. These are fun to look back on but serve a particular purpose in enhancing retention and recall. This has a positive impact back in the classroom but also during exams, helping to boost grades.

Outdoor learning residential provide opportunities to develop practical and technical skills by having a go with equipment and kit not always easily available in schools. For older learners, residential can broaden their career or future study horizons because they see a range of possible outdoor, green or conservation career paths being demonstrated that they may not have considered before. A residential also gives pupils opportunities to study subjects that are often classroom based in the outdoors instead, such as media, arts, and photography.

Personal and Social

A residential allows learners to connect with peers and with teachers. Outside of the usual classroom hierarchy and busyness, quieter learners gain confidence, louder ones learn to listen. Sitting round a fire, sharing living space, mealtimes, and team activities provides time for those who wouldn't normally mix to socialise. Learners see teachers in a different way and teachers have the time to get to know their students better and change their teaching style to be more effective when back in the classroom. Outdoor learning provides challenges that can't be replicated in the school or classroom setting. When these challenges are overcome, often with the support of team mates and peers, it builds confidence but also supplies vital memories for that learner of how they were able to overcome their worries about tackling a new situation.

Results from the Winter of Wellbeing (WoW) package to support children and young people to recover from the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, recommends retaining the focus on fun and play.

#### Nature Connection

Connection to nature, especially high quality green and blue spaces has great health and wellbeing benefits. Empowering learners at an early stage in their education to know how to safely access the outdoors, feel that they belong in the Welsh countryside and develop their “countryside capital” can set them up for a lifetime of enjoyment and health benefits. Developing healthy, confident individuals is one of the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales.

A residential allows opportunities to see nature at different time of the day, dusk, evening and night-time. Some of Wales’ favourite wildlife is nocturnal. Such a different range of light levels provides a number of experiences for those studying art, media, or photography and all in a safe, supported environment – something that may not so readily available via independent study or research.

Developing nature connection also has other benefits. It is highly unlikely that anyone will value something that they have not experienced. In order to develop both ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the world, an understanding of the natural world and how to protect it are vital to developing those aims.

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?

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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?

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Yes

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

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Financial constraints;Health reasons;Disabilities;Additional Learning Needs;Paternal anxiety / uncertainty;Child anxiety / uncertainty;• The timetable pressures faced by schools and the cost of staff to cover for those who would be out of school should not be underestimated. • The financial constraints include transport which in some cases can be more expensive than the residential itself. •

The concerns of both parents and children in venturing into what for some will be the unknown should not be underestimated, or the time that they need to settle and orientate themselves when away from home. Our charity provides a number of learning resources that help prepare learners and parents in advance and shows them what to expect and what the learning environment will be like. • The levels of confidence among staff to teach outdoors and / or to teach about the environment is frequently mentioned as a barrier – often because teachers now coming through the education system have had little experience of outdoor learning as part of their own education. •Lack of teacher training and therefore confidence in teaching outdoors. ;

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

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This bill could have a positive impact on children and young people from an economically disadvantaged background who would otherwise miss out on such an experience and an opportunity to achieve higher grades. Time away from home, exploring and discovering a new landscape, travel, and being able to access

high quality blue and green spaces are often opportunities that are not easily available to those from a disadvantaged background. Whilst their better off peers can sometimes experience these things through family holidays, clubs, societies and after school activities, these opportunities are not so easy for those from a disadvantaged background to access. Despite many Welsh children and young people living in relatively close proximity to some incredible natural landscapes, it is not safe to assume that they can easily access them. Barriers include the lack of transport or even the basic clothing and equipment needed.

A Welsh Government review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome from 2021 found that socio-economic deprivation is linked to worse educational outcomes in children, as well as negative impacts on physical, emotional, and mental health. It also found that working households in Wales represent 56 per cent of people living in poverty, compared to 39 per cent measured 20 years ago, and most children living in poverty in Wales live in working households. Therefore this will be a significant barrier for a large number of Welsh families to take part in outdoor learning if the costs were not met by this bill.

Another group of children and young people who could benefit are those who struggle in a classroom environment but thrive when learning in the outdoors. Behaviour improves and pupils can develop learning strategies to take back to the classroom. Away from the usual classroom hierarchy and in an environment that provides space and time in which to connect with both peers and teachers has been seen to reconnect children with learning once again. It can develop increased confidence in their own learning, and they go back to school with a different outlook.

A third group are those children and young people that 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". Wales will need people with the skills and knowledge to combat climate change and biodiversity loss, but our charity has curated a number of courses especially for young people who feel that their education so far has lacked the technical and practical skills needed. This bill could ensure the opportunity to firstly see for themselves (rather than hear it at a careers talk) the kind of outdoor or green jobs that are available and experience first-hand what a career in conservation or ecology could involve along with the additional challenges of studying and working in the unpredictable real world outside the laboratory.

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?

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This is where parental and teaching expertise is essential to ensure that any experience is a positive one rather than a stressful experience that could put learners off outdoor experiences for life. For some learners it would just be too much although the sector has a good track record of adapting what is offered be inclusive to those with special needs or those who are worried about the unknown. The health and wellbeing of learners on residential and fieldtrips is an area of growing academic research and the key factors that make it a positive experience that enhances wellbeing are being identified. Incorporating the latest thinking into what the sector can offer schools would help to reduce 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?

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Older (please state below)

There is no one definitive answer. Primary and secondary learners can both benefit hugely from a residential because an outdoor learning can enhance any subject at any stage of learning

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

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

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A charity whose business is largely focussed on providing residential might be expected to suggest the longest time possible. However the length of the stay really depends on the age of the learners and also the specific outcomes desired by the school. Quality of learning can reduce towards the end of the week as pupils become tired and unable to focus. Five days in particular is a long time for primary pupils. A degree of flexibility and input from teachers and parents is essential here. It is important that the theoretical best does not become the enemy of the pragmatic good.

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?

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Strongly agree

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

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This proposal is an excellent fit with many of the overarching policy aims of Wales including the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act and it's specific Wellbeing goals of a more equal Wales and a globally responsible Wales.

The proposal provides schools with an opportunity to demonstrate to the Schools Inspectorate the following from the inspection framework:

“the school develops their curriculum to fully reflect the nature of their context, including designing learning activities that reflect the cultural, linguistic and diverse nature of Wales and the wider world”

and

“the school plans and delivers learning outside the classroom that links directly to the planned curriculum, for example maximising the use of outdoor spaces and using visits to support the development of pupils’ understanding of a specific skill or area of learning”

There are few people who would argue against the ideas behind the proposal. However the buy in of schools, teachers and parents is essential to help this proposal be seen as a hugely positive step forward and not simply another thing to add to the ever lengthening list of things to do. Active collaboration with teachers could help the sector put together programmes that specifically meet their school’s learning needs and develop some of the teaching materials.

One way to do this would be to set out directly links between the proposal and all aspects of the new Curriculum for Wales. The proposal has quite a focus on outdoor activities and their health and wellbeing benefits. Much more could be made to set out how outdoor learning, not just outdoor activities, can deliver on the four purposes, the three cross cutting priorities (literacy, numeracy and digital competence), the AoLEs and their individual subjects and the cross cutting themes between them. Outdoor learning residential have the advantage of being able to deliver two for one – learning and adventure.

An experience that is able to cover many areas of learning in one trip is ideal. Providing a pressured teacher or school with a comprehensive menu of outdoor learning options from which they could pick

whatever is most needed for their particular class could help get their support for this proposal. Showing that there is a fun, outdoor based option for every subject or cross curricular theme could more firmly embed this proposal and allow teaching staff to use the opportunity to perhaps provide a much needed boost in areas of learning where a class may be struggling.

Outdoor learning can offer “hidden learning”. For example, if a class needs more support with specific subject such maths, trigonometry can be used to measure the heights of trees, a low ropes course to understand angles. It’s a way to see maths in action, showing it has a purpose in the real world. New experiences can expand vocabulary. There are opportunities to do real world science where the natural world can be less predictable than in a laboratory environment and the resulting data can be messier. Learners can see for themselves how a landscape has shaped the history, politics, literature and industry and art of a particular part of Wales. Collecting data from outdoor experiments via digital devices can develop digital competence. All these could be part of a residential offer.

Some classes may be in need of some fun. The recent results of Wales’ Winter of Wellbeing funded project has once again shown the importance of fun activities. Using that residential experience in a way that the teachers feel would be of most benefit can also ensure that outdoor learning in this way is a planned, integrated part of their education.

This proposal might mean a rethink of how the traditional end of year 6 trip might be re-purposed eg used in the following year as learners adjust to being in secondary school and need to find a way to connect to the cohort of classmates with whom they will be studying alongside for several years.

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