

POE140 Comisiynydd y Gymraeg

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Ymateb gan Comisiynydd y Gymraeg | Evidence from Welsh Language Commissioner

This document provides a translation of correspondence received in Welsh.

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?

The consultation document and the explanatory memorandum outline the range of benefits that outdoor education can offer to children and young people. From a linguistic point of view, outdoor education can offer important opportunities for children and young people to hear and use the Welsh language outside the classroom and in informal and fun situations. The Urdd's residential courses, for example, offer significant opportunities for pupils across Wales to experience a range of outdoor activities while also being immersed in the Welsh language and Welsh culture. Outdoor education therefore has the potential to contribute significantly to the goal of ensuring that more children and young people develop into confident Welsh speakers. There are also advantages as children become familiar with the environment around them and the Welsh language as a result of an understanding of place names, most of which are in Welsh throughout Wales.

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?

Don't know

What are the main barriers which you believe currently exist to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education 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 Bill has the potential to have a positive impact on pupils generally. As our response to the second question indicates, the Bill could have offered the opportunity for more Welsh children to have a Welsh-medium or bilingual residential education experience. This would be a positive development for children across Wales, especially for those who are educated mainly through the medium of English and who perhaps do not have as many opportunities to hear and use the Welsh language. It should also be noted that the Bill could have offered opportunities to children from disadvantaged backgrounds who would not otherwise have obvious opportunities to travel to other parts of Wales, to learn about the culture of those areas, and to have a Welsh-medium experience. However, as it stands, the Bill does not offer anything specific to ensure the above. It should therefore be strengthened to ensure that it can have a positive effect on the Welsh language.

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?

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?

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

Don't know

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

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?

Neither agree nor disagree

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

As our responses to consultation questions 2 and 6 indicate, this Bill has the potential to have a positive effect on increasing opportunities for children and young people to hear and use the Welsh language. To realise this potential, we believe that the Bill needs to offer something more specific from with regard to the Welsh language, contributing directly to the Welsh language policy agenda in education. The Bill needs to consider options for encouraging local authorities and schools to ensure that more pupils receive a Welsh-medium or bilingual residential education experience as part of ensuring the new curriculum contributes to achieving the targets of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. We outline ideas for how this could be done below.

1. A robust research base and statistics: a more robust research base is needed to better understand the implications of the Bill for the Welsh language. For example, it would be useful to understand more about capacity in the outdoor sector, especially the sector's capacity for Welsh-medium or bilingual provision. If there is statistical evidence to suggest that this Bill could lead to a significant growth in the number of those having a Welsh-medium/bilingual outdoor residential education experience, then this needs to be shown. For example, what effect would the proposal have on Urdd provision, and does the sector have the capacity to offer Welsh-medium/bilingual opportunities to more schools and pupils?

2. Opportunities to work with the Urdd at a national level: the Urdd is probably the largest single provider in Wales. Consideration should be given to ways of making the most of this national provision and offering pupils a Welsh-medium/bilingual outdoor residential education experience. For example, is there potential to draw up a national contract with such providers, which would also perhaps offer better value for money?

3. Linking the proposal to other Welsh Government strategies and policies: the Bill should be more clearly linked to other Government policies and strategies in the area of Welsh language education, including Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs), the Siarter Iaith, and the requirements of the new curriculum from the perspective of the Welsh language. For example, the WESPs contain specific requirements to discuss plans for offering more opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts. Local authorities and schools should therefore be encouraged to consider any outdoor residential course as a way of fulfilling other relevant commitments with regard to the Welsh language.

4. Accreditation and approval criteria for providers: If the Government is to spend £13-£18 million (according to different estimates) a year on residential courses for pupils, then a mechanism will probably have to be put in place to ensure the quality and the content of these residential experiences. There is an opportunity here to ensure that any criteria or accreditation framework pays due attention to the Welsh language. For example, residential course providers could be subject to specific requirements to offer Welsh/bilingual elements. High-level criteria could be set that would shape the nature of the residential offer, with the Welsh language, along with issues relating to culture, identity and the Welsh language, being a prominent part of this. Providers could also be encouraged or required to commit to offering Welsh language training to staff.

In conclusion, for the Bill to fully achieve its potential benefits, specific provisions must be included with the aim of ensuring that the Bill will lead to increasing opportunities for children and young people to use the Welsh language.
