

Children, Young People and Education Committee – evidence from Urdd Gobaith Cymru.

1. Who are we?

- 1.1 Urdd Gobaith Cymru aims to ensure opportunities and experiences, through the medium of Welsh, for all the young people of Wales to develop into fully confident citizens. We are an ambitious organisation that innovates to extend our offer to everyone. We have developed generations of young people to be proud of their country, open to the world and embodiments of our language and culture, as well as possessing the worldwide values that are respected in Wales. The Urdd is vital to the future of the Welsh language and for Wales.
- 1.2 Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Wales' largest youth organisation was founded in 1922. We are a unique organisation where the Welsh language is central to our service and which responds to the needs of children and young people today. It is unique in the world and we are recognised internationally as a leading example of successful youth provision through a minority language. The experiences we offer range from sporting opportunities, youth work, arts, residential, humanitarian, outdoor activities, international, apprenticeships, training and volunteering. The impact of our work ensures that children and young people can contribute positively to their communities and to society, broaden their horizons and increase their self-confidence.

2. Urdd residential centres

- 2.1 The Urdd residential centres are vibrant places that nurture individuals' development, creating a dynamic environment where the children of Wales can thrive. There are Urdd residential centres across Wales;
 - Llangrannog in Ceredigion (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/llangrannog/>)
 - Cardiff residential centre (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/cardiff/>)
 - Glan-Ilyn and Glan-Ilyn Isa' in Gwynedd (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/glan-llyn/> and the Glan-Ilyn Isa' website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/glan-llyn-isa/>)
 - Pentre Ifan in Pembrokeshire (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/pentre-ifan/>)
- 2.2 The residential centres provide a unique combination of educational and recreational activities, offering a holistic approach to learning. With first-class facilities and a focus on promoting the Welsh language and its culture, the residential centres play a central role in shaping well-rounded individuals. From outdoor adventures to cultural immersion, the Urdd's

residential centres create lasting memories and foster a sense of community, making them an invaluable asset for young Welsh learners.

3. Our audience

- 3.1 The centres provide accommodation for 103,000 visitors a year, and offer over 800 courses across the five centres.
- 3.2 52 per cent of Welsh schools visit the centres.
- 3.3 39 per cent of our visitors come from Welsh-medium schools, with 61 per cent coming from English-medium schools but seen as Welsh learners.
- 3.4 26 per cent of the schools that visited the centres come from the 20 per cent most deprived wards in Wales.

4. Individuals' development

- 4.1 The aim of the Urdd centres is to create be places that offer opportunities for residential children and youth to learn and socialise in a safe and welcoming Welsh-speaking environment. The centres develop children and young people by giving them the experience of being independent away from home and broadening the children and young people's horizons by offering activities outside of their normal experience. By meeting these challenges, children and young people will learn to adapt and compromise, thereby gaining the confidence that is absolutely key to developing into a well-rounded individual.
- 4.2 A survey looking at the wellbeing of children and young people who had visited the centres found that:
 - 83 per cent have seen an increase in their pupils' language use.
 - 76 per cent of pupils have increased their use of physical exercise in general.
 - 96 per cent see an improvement in their self-confidence.
 - 64 per cent have continued with the activities experienced for the first time in Llangrannog.
 - 97 per cent made a new friend.

5. Citizenship and the Welsh language

- 5.1 The Urdd residential centres operate on the ethos of Learning Through Activity, and we strongly believe that this ethos has proven effective in assisting the development and self-confidence of individuals.
- 5.2 At the Urdd residential centres, we create a safe and happy environment for all children and young people who attend. Our hope is to create relevant and memorable experiences for the young people so that they will enjoy the present and, at the same time, develop into independent balanced individuals, and kind, responsible citizens.
- 5.3 Quotes from teachers and parents:

“It was great to hear Welsh being used bilingually and during a range of activities. It made us, as teachers, give a great deal of thought of how we can improve our use of everyday Welsh within our own educational setting.”

“The trip enhances children’s understanding of the Welsh culture and ‘cynefin’. Visting the Senedd for example, highlighted the decision-making process for Wales. Seeing a large Welsh city also highlighted aspects of Wales that some children might not see.”

"This is an extremely valuable experience, from the point of view of the children, the sixth form prefects that come to help them, and the teachers. The fact that they hear young staff speaking Welsh is an eye opener for them and they also have to adjust their ears to a different way of speaking and dialect. The sixth form group, having been in Glan-llyn, take pride in their Welshness, and use the language without having to be encouraged to do so. This in turn has an impact on how the younger children are then more willing to use language and take pride in it."

“She absolutely loved her visits to you, thanks. She came with Pentyrch Primary in 2022 and with Radyr Comp in 2022 or 2023.. She is on the autistic spectrum and you were incredible with her. Her experiences at Llangrannog contributed to her increased sense of well-being, improved belief in her self, encouraged her level of confidence, and have enriched her enormous adventurous spirit. Llangrannog helped her to grow!!”

“The children had been taught some Welsh before coming. Hearing Welsh speakers gave them the confidence to try using it. The visit to the Senedd was fantastic and gave them a much deeper understanding of democracy.”

"The trip is beneficial for socialising and Welshness and developing independence"

6. Fund for All

- 6.1 Fund for All is a scheme that has been established by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, where individuals, companies and organisations fund children to attend the Urdd's summer courses.
- 6.2 The purpose of Fund for All is to ensure that every child in Wales has the opportunity to enjoy summer holidays, whatever their background or financial circumstances. Over 100 children and young people visited the Urdd's residential centres over the summer.
- 6.3 This year, the Urdd received a record 110 applications for the scheme, which was established in 2019. 18 per cent of the children and young people on the Urdd's summer courses were funded through the scheme.

- 6.4 The Fund for All is a scheme that offers children and young people living in poverty or challenging circumstances the opportunity to attend one of the residential centres in Glan-llyn, Llangrannog or Cardiff. 81 per cent of those who were offered a place receive free school meals.
- 6.5 Following the course, parents were asked if their children enjoyed the course. 100 per cent responded positively, and 96 per cent believed that their children had gained confidence since attending one of the courses.

7. Outdoor Activity Service

- 7.1 The service offers outdoor adventure experiences for children and young people across Wales. The activities are tailored for each course and include mountain biking, climbing, river walking, coastering, canoeing, paddle boarding, orienteering and much more. These courses are offered within our communities or as a residential centre experience. The Outdoor Activity Service also offers unique courses to highlight the benefits of the outdoors for mental health and specialises in providing Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.
- 7.2 The Outdoor Activity Service plays a vital role in fostering positive mental health and wellbeing among young participants. Participating in outdoor activities has shown its positive impact on health and wellbeing, which is supported by a wealth of evidence. Numerous studies have consistently shown that exposure to nature, along with physical activity, contributes significantly to stress reduction, improved mood, and general mental wellbeing.
- 7.3 In addition, the challenges presented during outdoor expeditions are an opportunity to build character and develop soft skills such as resilience, teamwork and problem solving. These experiences go beyond the traditional setting of the classroom, offering complete and holistic opportunities for personal growth that encompass both mental and emotional aspects. The programme's emphasis on outdoor learning fits seamlessly with the wider aim of nurturing resilient, well-rounded individuals with valuable life skills.
- 7.4 During the 22/23 financial year, the Outdoor Activity Service has worked with over 5000 children and young people. 3000 young people have taken part in the health and wellbeing program, with over 1000 young people completing an outdoor expedition over several nights.