

**Submission of written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee
by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel Cymru, represented by Clare Adams (OEAP
Cymru Chair) and Mike Rosser (OEAP Member, North Wales)**

Introduction

The Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) is the leading body for guidance, advice and training in all aspects of outdoor learning and educational visits in England and Wales. The OEAP is the professional association supporting Outdoor Education Advisers and Educational Visits Advisers in their work with schools (and FE colleges in Wales), as well as other services to children and young people, such as youth services and social services.

The OEAP's aim is to ensure that every child in every school should have access to a comprehensive programme of high-quality outdoor learning, educational visits and adventurous activities as an integral part of their school curriculum.

The OEAP provides 'National Guidance': [National Guidance | \(oeapng.info\)](http://oeapng.info), an internationally recognised management tool for the organisation of high-quality outdoor learning, educational visits and adventurous activities. Welsh Government (WG) endorses OEAP National Guidance as the primary source of information and guidance in this field: [Educational visits and outdoor learning | GOV.WALES](http://gov.wales)

OEAP Cymru is the Welsh arm of OEAP, specifically supporting schools, FE colleges and other establishments for the benefit of children and young people in Wales [OEAP Cymru | \(oeapng.info\)](http://oeapng.info). OEAP Cymru members meet regularly with WG education advisers to discuss support for schools and FE colleges across Wales.

OEAP Cymru members support the proposed Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill as it seeks to provide high quality learning experiences for the children and young people of Wales as part of a broad and balanced curriculum in Wales, which is in line with the organisation's aim.

At the heart of the proposed Bill are the core values of fairness, equality and social justice.

Particularly during this period of economic uncertainty, the proposed bill seeks to ensure that the social and economic gap does not widen. Currently, we appear to be moving towards a situation where only the children of families that can afford it will be able to experience the wide-ranging benefits of participating in a residential outdoor education visit.

Under the Education Act 1996, schools are unable to charge for educational visits and may only ask for a contribution. Educational visits are only able to go ahead if there are enough contributions to make them viable, creating a disincentive for schools organising visits.

Whilst some local authorities provide subsidies to those on low incomes, the levels of subsidy vary across local authority areas. The OEAP survey conducted in 2022 on behalf of the Bill, showed that 23% of schools do not provide any subsidy to those who cannot afford to pay the contribution. The survey also showed that a third of primary schools (400 schools) are not offering any residential outdoor education provision. In over a third of those schools offering residential, only 75% of children take up the opportunity to participate, with the primary barriers being cited as finance and either parent or child anxiety.

Furthermore, across our local authority areas we are seeing a significant increase in mental health issues and children accessing local authority support for additional needs. Over the past few months, we have seen a rise in families asking schools and local authorities for additional financial help for a range of educational visits, including residential.

Outdoor Education Centre provision in Wales and England

Our residential outdoor education centres have seen a drop in the numbers of children attending from the schools who do offer residential outdoor education opportunities. For example, Conwy's Nant BH and Pentrellyncwmr Outdoor Centres have experienced an overall decrease of 12.05% at Nant since September 2021 and a total decrease of 6.56% at Pentre over the same period. Average numbers of learners have dropped from approximately 35 to approximately 27. 22 schools cancelled bookings at Nant as they could not meet the minimum number of 12 learners. Gilwern Outdoor Adventure Centre based in Monmouthshire also reported a pronounced drop in attendance figures over the past year as well as enquiries tapering off.

A similar pattern is emerging in England with reports from OEAP colleagues suggesting that although numbers of school bookings remain relatively stable in some areas, the duration for many has reduced from 5 to 3 days and the number of learners attending has also reduced. Anecdotally, non-attendance is primarily due finance and either parent or child anxiety and mental health issues. Where learners do attend, many are increasingly not staying overnight. The rising cost of transport is also a concern.

Impact of residential outdoor education opportunities on children and young people

The impact that a residential outdoor education visit can have on a child is often profound, with many children and adults recalling a residential outdoor education visit as being the most positively memorable experience of their primary school career.

The Curriculum for Wales 2022 sets out a vision for learners to become independent, confident, creative, problem-solving, critical thinking individuals who challenge themselves and are resilient to be able to live a full and active life.

Participation in high quality residential outdoor education experiences provides the opportunity to develop all these qualities as well as many other physical and mental skills for life as part of a pedagogy of outdoor learning embedded in schools throughout Wales.

WG guidance for delivering a broad and balanced curriculum state that 'schools should maximise the time learners spend outdoors' and that 'they should consider a wide range of pedagogical approaches that effectively use school and out-of-school learning to empower learners'.

In 2018, Wales Council for Outdoor Learning and OEAP Cymru produced the document 'High-Quality Outdoor Learning', which empowers schools to help develop children to meet these 10 key characteristics:

- Enjoyment
- Confidence & character
- Health and well being
- Social and emotional awareness
- Environmental awareness
- Activity skills
- Personal qualities
- Skills for life
- Motivation for learning
- Broadened horizons

The 'Learning Away' strategy, produced by the Paul Hamlyn foundation between 2008 and 2015 showed that by participating in a residential visit, there is a unique interplay between the natural environment, challenge and staying away from home that brings about pro-environmental behaviours, as well as enhancing learning, achievement and well-being of children and young people.

Research conducted by the Association of Heads of Outdoor Centres (AHOEC) in the UK suggested that the impact of a residential outdoor education experience has demonstrated outcomes related to: challenge and resilience, teamwork and supportive relationships with peers, communication skills, independence skills and recognising their own abilities, and positive relationships with teachers.

Summary

The Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill:

- will ensure equity across Wales for the opportunity for all children to be able to access residential outdoor education provision
- will support schools to enhance the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum
- may help reduce mental health issues
- will help value the outdoor education industry and contribute to its sustainability