

ROE 06

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Genedlaethol y Prifathrawon (NAHT) Cymru

Response from: National Association of Head Teachers Union (NAHT) Cymru

Consultation questions

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

- Very important
- Quite important
- Don't know
- Not very important
- Not at all important

2. What are the main benefits to children and young people from having a residential outdoor education experience? Please list your top three benefits:

Residential outdoor education gives young people the opportunity to develop independence and learn new creative skills through teamwork and through pushing themselves.

There are many benefits which will vary depending on the individual child, so for a suggested top three, I propose:

- Learning independence and resilience creatively in a new and fun but challenging environment.
- Developing practical teamworking skills and broadening awareness of other children's backgrounds and culture in real time.
- Learning more about themselves as individuals, developing a sense of identity and how to face challenges and taking risk within a safe, controlled environment.

3. 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
- No
- Don't know

4. 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
- No
- Don't know

5. What are the main barriers which you believe currently exist to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education experiences? (please tick all that apply)

- Financial constraints
- Health reasons
- Disabilities
- Additional Learning Needs
- Parental anxiety/uncertainty
- Child anxiety/uncertainty
- Other (Please state)
- None

6. Equalities considerations:

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

If new, earmarked funding were available to support a guaranteed outdoor experience to young people, they would be able to benefit from the developmental opportunities and richly rewarding group activities available to them.

That outdoor education would offer benefits to the vast majority of young people is not the issue. It is the opportunity cost that providing a fully-funded week of outdoor education to every child in Wales once in their school career, when overall education funding is scarce and is so desperately needed in the school system to ensure that schools are able to provide sufficient, qualified staff to teach those children and to provide sufficient classroom equipment and resources.

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?

The Bill's potential negative impact is that it could divert scarce funding away from where it is desperately needed in other areas of education and be required to be spent exclusively on a dedicated area, in this case outdoor education. This limits flexibility and could lead to an inefficient allocation of scarce resources.

7. 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)
- Younger (please state)
- Older (please state)

- Not at any age

We believe that children in the 7-11 age group receive the greatest benefit from outdoor education.

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

- Yes
- No
- 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).

The right answer will of course vary from child to child and may be different for different age groups. What constitutes "best length" also depends on how you are choosing to define it, and what other constraints are in play, such as funding but also the time away from home, family and other friendship groups and from more formal schooling.

9. 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 agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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

There are clear benefits to young people from taking part in outdoor education and we welcome the intention behind and spirit of the proposal to extend those benefits to all children of school age in Wales during their school career.

The concern that we have relates to the costs of the proposal – both direct and indirect – and the opportunity cost that choosing to fund outdoor education would have for the many competing demands on the finite and limited budget available to schools in Wales.

Firstly, fully funding the cost of five day / four night guaranteed outdoor education for every child in Wales will have a considerable cost implication. The Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill puts the direct cost just of providing education to all Year 6 pupils in Wales each year as in the region of £9.9m to £13.6m. The Explanatory Memorandum says that this funding would come from savings to spending on other (unspecified) public services.

Requiring outdoor education to be provided, rather than promoting the option of it happening, without a dedicated and ringfenced pot of "new" money for the task would by definition then drain resources out of classrooms and reduce the ability of schools to pay for dedicated teaching staff, equipment and other resources. There may also be some children for whom outdoor education may not be desirable nor the best use of limited funding, so making it a requirement would be wasteful.

In addition, there are significant cost implications relating to teaching staff. Each class of young people on an outdoor education experience will need to be accompanied by fully qualified staff members, and in greater number since the staff to pupil ratio will need to be higher, and assuming overtime is not paid to the staff who usually teach those children in the classroom.

There will also be some children who, for whatever reason, whether because the outdoor education is not suitable or appropriate to their needs, or because the children or their parents are unwilling, are not able to attend the outdoor education experience but who will still be attending school. So there would be cost implications for the additional cover staff required to provide education and care to those children.

There is potentially a twofold deficit – the loss of funding from schools to pay for the guaranteed outdoor education opportunity, and the additional cost to schools of having to provide additional staff to accompany pupils on outdoor education, as well as to provide cover for those children who have remained on the school site.

So, while we are in favour of the many benefits that outdoor education might bring, we cannot support the proposal as the ringfenced funding for it would then not be flowing through to the school system where it is so desperately needed.