

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Bil Addysg Awyr Agored Breswyl \(Cymru\)](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Residential Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

ROE 05

Ymateb gan: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Response from: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

1. PRINCIPLES

1.1 Firstly, we would like to acknowledge that we agree with the thinking at the heart of the Bill. We do not doubt for a minute that outdoor education can enrich learning and that pupils benefit from spending time learning outdoors. The benefits of such activities have been noted – mental and physical well-being, improving basic skills, increasing confidence, to name but a few.

1.2 Likewise, we applaud the desire to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils. This ambition is admirable and we as a union would support and applaud it. No pupil should be deprived of opportunities because of their family's financial situation.

1.3 It also appears that the new Curriculum for Wales is a golden opportunity to include outdoor education as part of the school curriculum. There is quite a bit more flexibility within the new curriculum for Wales and the emphasis on 'cynefin' means that outdoor activities will perfectly suit the requirements of the new curriculum.

1.4 Looking at the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, it is evident that residential outdoor education can contribute to achieving those purposes. It would be a different approach and an opportunity for those that have difficulties within a formal learning environment to excel within a completely different atmosphere and context.

2. IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

2.1 Schools in Wales have a strong tradition of going to residential centres eg Urdd centres, outdoor centres within counties etc, enjoying outdoor activities, which enrich the curriculum. The biggest change that this Bill would introduce would be to make statutory something that is currently optional. This change to being a statutory duty would be a big step. Currently, schools, local authorities, staff, parents and pupils have the choice whether they want to arrange and provide residential outdoor education opportunities for pupils. Often the decision as to whether they

offer such opportunities is dependent on staffing capacity, how accessible residential outdoor centres are and the cost of the activities.

2.2 If residential outdoor activities were to be made statutory, some schools would have to provide such activities. As the Bill doesn't specify a particular age, who will decide which schools will undertake these activities? If a pupil went to Primary School A and Secondary School B, one of those schools would have to provide the residential outdoor activities. Another pupil at Secondary School B could have gone to Primary School C where residential outdoor activities were arranged, and then another pupil within the same year at Secondary School B could have attended Primary School D where they had the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor activity for two nights. That pupil would need residential provision for two nights at Secondary School B. It seems that there could be quite a bit of complexity to ensure provision for all and to ensure that no pupil slips through the net.

2.3 There is benefit in other activities too, e.g. trips abroad. Why is priority given to making residential outdoor education statutory? Ideally, we would like to see all pupils having the opportunity to go on a trip abroad. There is a danger in making certain educational elements compulsory.

3. CAPACITY AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

3.1 When making an opportunity for residential outdoor activities statutory for all pupils, the question must be asked: is there enough capacity within our outdoor centres? Certain times of the year will surely be more popular than others and a problem may be foreseen when trying to find the appropriate number of places within residential centres. Sharing a cohort of pupils, within the same school year, would involve additional costs for schools, as sufficient staff would be needed in the school and in the residential centre.

3.2 It is true that the Bill states that pupils will not be forced to participate, but what about our school staff? It was noted that around 2 out of every 3 schools arranged such a course in Key Stage 2 but only half of our secondary schools arranged similar activities. Do our schools have the capacity? How many teachers can go away for four nights and shoulder the responsibility of looking after pupils for that period? This means that they will be away from their families for quite a long period and it also means that they will effectively be 'on duty' for five days and four nights. Will they be paid extra for their work? Traditionally, teachers have taken part voluntarily in residential courses but due to the increasing demands on teachers, it is becoming more and more difficult to get staff who are ready to 'volunteer' for these courses. We realise that there will be specialist teachers at the centres that can supervise the activities, but there is still a lot of responsibility on the teachers/assistants that go on these courses with their pupils. In paragraph 63 of the Explanatory Memorandum 24 November 2023, when talking about 'outcomes for teachers', the benefits for teachers are stated but there is no mention of the additional requirements. I wonder

if the person who drafted the Bill has thought about these challenges? Teachers are already under a lot of pressure and many are feeling the strain. This will further add to their workload.

4. COSTS

4.1 We have a real concern that funding for this Bill will be taken from core school budgets. We feel that there are so many things that need funding at the moment, and local authority budgets are being cut. There is a real danger that this could lead to the loss of staff, and as a teaching union we would be totally opposed to that. There are so many changes happening in our schools at the moment, so I wonder if it is timely to put extra pressure on teachers and schools at this point?

4.2 In paragraph 265 of the Explanatory Memorandum 24 November 2023, the areas to which costs will be associated are listed. There is no mention of support staff costs. Staffing needs costs need to be looked at anew. Such a trip shouldn't put additional pressures on the staff that will attend the residential centres nor on those remaining at the school. Consideration must be given to how much it will cost to pay overtime to those supervising, and also to find supply staff.

4.3 It is important to ensure that there is provision for all pupils regardless of their condition, e.g. who is responsible for looking after pupils with special conditions – will there be financial provision for such needs?

4.4 When thinking about the costs tied in with this Bill, we remember what was stated in the draft budget published on 19 December:

'For the second year in a row, our funding settlement is not sufficient to respond to the extraordinary pressures Wales faces, including persistently high inflation, the cost-of-living pressures people and businesses continue to experience, unfunded public sector pay rises or to recognise rising demand for services... This is the final year in the three-year Spending Review period; a final year in which there was less funding available to meet all our statutory commitments, let alone our priorities and ambitious Programme for Government... In making this Draft Budget, we have had to take incredibly difficult decisions – the starkest and most painful since devolution. This has not been a typical year, where we have had an abundance of positive choices to make about where we can target increased and additional investment.'

4.5 When discussing the manner in which 'school funding' was safeguarded and protected, we note the words 'as far as possible' and also the following sentence 'it has not been possible to avoid all impacts on young people, then it is must be asked: is there money available to invest in such an ambitious and costly plan? We are concerned that funding such a scheme would mean cutting funding elsewhere. School budgets are tight at the moment. It is difficult to fund what is already being provided, let alone considering funding new initiatives.

5. EQUIPMENT

5.1 It is noted that not all pupils take advantage of the opportunities currently offered to them. It is very possible that the reason why some pupils do not attend the courses are their cost. However, the costs of such courses are not limited to the cost of the course itself and transport to the course. In order to ensure that disadvantaged pupils can access the residential activities, it will be necessary to ensure that they do not need to buy specific equipment for the activities. Buying an extra pair of shoes, a raincoat or a sleeping bag is going to be a burden for some families.

6. THE NATURE OF ACTIVITIES

6.1 What exactly is meant by outdoor activities? It must be remembered that there is considerable variety, e.g. not only are there 'adventure' activities, such as climbing, abseiling etc, but do outdoor art workshops, orienteering activities etc count? Do activities somewhere like the Urdd Centre at Llangrannog count?

7. THE WELSH LANGUAGE

7.1 We welcome the attention given to the Welsh language and mandatory Welsh provision, but we do not welcome the conditions 'be provided in Welsh, subject to availability, where requested by a school'. It should be ensured that such provision is available in Welsh for all, and English medium schools should be encouraged to combine outdoor education with opportunities to do so through the medium of Welsh. It should be used as an opportunity to learn about the culture and context of various areas in Wales. The new Curriculum for Wales offers great opportunities for these elements.

8. TRACKING

8.1 In order to ensure that all pupils have had the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor course, and a robust tracking system and a great deal of co-operation between local authorities and schools will be required. It appears that the process could be complex and that individuals could slip through the net. Has consideration been given to the cost of an effective system and also the additional bureaucratic workload?

9. ALN

9.1 It will be important to ensure that ALN pupils have the same opportunities to access residential outdoor education as all other pupils. Paragraph 78 of the Explanatory Memorandum (24 November 2023) states that there are some specialist providers for ALN pupils. Has consideration been given to specialist Welsh medium provision?

9.2 When thinking about providing activities such as these for everyone, there is a range of needs that will have to be addressed. Physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health challenges, and health conditions of all kinds will have to be covered.

10. REFERRAL UNITS

10.1 The Bill states that the right to receive residential outdoor education only applies to pupils in maintained schools and therefore does not include pupils that receive education other than at school, for example at pupil referral units. I wonder if depriving them of such opportunities would create more problems?

11. LOCATION

11.1 Who will decide which centre a school will attend? Will the distance of the centre from the school have an impact on costs? Will schools have to attend the nearest centre? If so, will there be equality of opportunity for pupils in this regard?

11.2 We remember that the Bill states 'costs that are reasonable to incur are provided for including, but not limited to, the cost of board and lodging and transport'. Shouldn't it be more specific? Will pupils have the right to travel wherever they wish within Wales or outside Wales? This will have a significant impact on the cost of the trip.

11.3 Will the activities have to take place in Wales? We feel that it should be ensured that every visit has a Welsh element attached to it.

12. QUALITY

12.1 It is stated that guidelines will 'Set requirements that must be satisfied before a person is permitted to provide residential outdoor education'. Safety is crucial when it comes to such activities. Who will be accountable for quality and safety assurance at these centres?

13. IN SUMMARY

Although we believe that there are many commendable and principled elements of this Bill, we do not feel that enough attention has been paid to the details or to the costs. If the state of budgets were healthy, then we would welcome the Bill, but the current economic climate leads to considerable doubts as to the practicality of the plans.