

ROE 13

Ymateb gan: Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Response from: Welsh Language Commissioner

17/01/2024

Dear Committee,

Consultation: Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation above. We responded to the consultation held by Sam Rowlands MS on the proposed Bill in March and to a further request by Mr Rowlands for comments in September 2023.

When responding to the requests above, we expressed our opinion that outdoor education is very important to the education and overall development of children and young people. We believe that children and young people should have an opportunity to participate in residential outdoor education at some point during their time at school. In the context of the Welsh language, we made the following points:

- Outdoor education can offer important opportunities for children and young people to hear and use the Welsh language outside of class and in informal and fun settings.
- Outdoor education, therefore, has the potential to contribute substantially to the aim of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy of ensuring that more children and young people become confident Welsh speakers.

We will elaborate below on the importance of the Welsh language in the outdoor education sector.

The Bill places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance in respect of residential outdoor education. As part of this, the guidance –

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“must provide that residential outdoor education be provided in Welsh, subject to availability, where requested by a school” (1(3)(3)(d))

“may provide that residential outdoor education promotes an understanding of Welsh language and culture” (1(3)(3)(e))

We are glad to see consideration for the Welsh language in the Bill. However, we urged Mr Rowlands to strengthen the clauses relating to the Welsh language in order to realise the Bill’s potential to help more children and young people to become confident Welsh speakers. At present, the clauses above offer no certainty that outdoor education provision will be available in Welsh to those schools that desire it. Nor do they maximise the potential of such residential courses to contribute to providing opportunities for all pupils to hear and use the Welsh language.

We have recommended that the clauses quoted above should be adapted, as follows:

“must provide that all residential outdoor education providers be able to provide through the medium of Welsh” (1(3)(3)(d))

“in line with the requirements of the curriculum for Wales, must provide that residential outdoor education offers opportunities for all pupils to learn and have experiences through the medium of Welsh” (1(3)(3)(e))

“must provide that residential outdoor education promotes an understanding of Welsh language and culture” (1(3)(3)(f))

These clauses would place specific requirements on residential course providers to offer Welsh language elements as well as culture and identity as part of their provision. By making these elements an integral part of the provision, rather than something that a school must ask for, depending on the whim of the provider to receive it, a significant change could be introduced to outdoor education which would make an important contribution in the context of the Government’s other policies and strategies regarding education and the Welsh language. As a result, the Bill would support the local authorities’ Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, which are intended to increase the number of children receiving Welsh-medium education across Wales. It would also support schools to fulfil curriculum requirements from a Welsh language perspective, as well as the schools’ Welsh Language Charter, which aims to increase the social use of Welsh by children and young people.

In an evidence session held by the Committee on 6 December 2023 Mr Rowlands said that there is not enough Welsh-medium provision in Wales at present and that the Bill offers a challenge to the sector and the Government to expand that provision. We do not agree that the Bill poses such a challenge to the sector and the Government, and there is much more that could be done to ensure that every child in Wales has the opportunity to receive an outdoor education within Wales, with the Welsh language and Welsh culture a vital part of that education. Setting that goal clearly would be a means of encouraging the development of Welsh-medium provision and creating jobs in the sector for Welsh speakers in rural areas where there are currently fewer employment opportunities.

Related to the above points, we have identified the need for a more robust research base to better understand the implications of the Bill for the Welsh language. It would be useful to understand more about the capacity of the outdoor education sector to provide through the medium of Welsh or bilingually to more schools and pupils. The Urdd's residential courses provide significant opportunities for pupils across Wales to experience a range of outdoor activities, whilst also being immersed in the Welsh language and Welsh culture. The Urdd is probably the largest single provider in Wales. In another evidence session held by the Committee on 6 December 2023 Ceren Roberts, Director of the Urdd's Residential Centre in Cardiff, said that it would be very difficult for the organisation to accommodate all the demands that would arise if there was an increase in visitor numbers to the Urdd's residential centres from English-medium schools. She also said that the Urdd is prepared to share expertise and good practice. Consideration should be given to the means of making the most of this national provision, and the Urdd's willingness to share its expertise, in order to offer children and young people in Wales a Welsh-medium or bilingual residential outdoor education experience.

We hope that the comments above will be helpful as you discuss the proposed Bill.

Yours sincerely,



Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner



**Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
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