

Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Engagement findings

January 2024

As part of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill, the Citizen Engagement Team proposed a series of focus groups to gather the views of parents and carers on the proposals. This paper communicates the findings of this engagement.

1. Engagement

1. The Citizen Engagement Team held 2 focus groups and 3 interviews between 6th and 20th December with a number of parents in different areas of Wales. One individual also provided comments via email.
2. The tight timeframe for engagement before the Christmas break resulted in a challenging recruitment exercise, so interviews were offered to those who were unable to attend a scheduled focus group.

Participants

3. During the consultation on the development of the Bill, professionals, individuals and children and young people were given the opportunity to respond to a survey on the proposals. The Senedd's Youth Engagement team also engaged with young people during sessions already arranged at the Senedd.



4. However, only a small number of respondents to the consultation identified as parents/carers. The Citizen Engagement Team therefore focused on gathering the views of parents and carers on the Bill.
5. Participants were sourced through organisations supporting families, and parents and carers in particular. A number of participants from the [Disabled Children's Access](#) inquiry were also asked if they'd like to contribute to this inquiry based on the relevance of the comments they had provided.
6. 20 parents took part in total. 6 participants have children with additional learning needs or a disability and 14 participants are members of a group supporting disadvantaged diverse ethnic communities.
7. Participants contributed from 6 local authority areas across north and south Wales.
8. The Citizen Engagement Team would like to thank all those who contributed to the programme of engagement.

Methodology

9. The Citizen Engagement Team's work touched on the following terms of reference for the inquiry:
 - *The general principles of the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention;*
 - *Whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill;*
 - *Any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and whether the Bill and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum and Regularly Impact Assessment takes account of them (including commencement and the United Kingdom Internal Market Act);*

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. How important is residential outdoor education to children and young people's development?
2. What are the main benefits to children and young people from experiencing an outdoor education residential?

3. What are the main barriers to children and young people attending a residential outdoor education visit?
 4. Should children and young people have the opportunity to undertake an outdoor education residential and, if so, should it be free of charge to all?
 5. If residential outdoor education was free for all children, is there anything else that would prevent you from sending your child on the visit? For example, the cost of clothing or footwear.
 6. Consultations on the draft Bill found that after financial constraints, the biggest barriers to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education is both children's and parent's anxiety and uncertainty. Is this something that you'd agree with? If so, could you elaborate on your concerns and is there anything that could be done to alleviate them?
 7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?
- 10.** The format of engagement was largely comparable across the interviews and focus groups, but varied slightly to respond to the views, experiences and ideas shared by contributors.

2. Engagement findings: importance of residential outdoor education to children and young people's development

Positive

- 11.** Overall, participants agreed that the opportunity of residential outdoor education would contribute positively to children and young people's development.

"I do think it's a really good thing for children, I think it's really positive."

Disability

- 12.** A number of participants felt that the opportunity was even more important for those with additional needs or disabilities, as they are perhaps limited in their opportunities in comparison to other children and young people.

"More so, I would say for children with special needs and the reason...they already have limited access to the world."

"The opportunities are really not there when you look at how much a disabled child loses out in comparison to a neurotypical child."

Cultural differences

- 13.** Participants in one group felt that going on trips would offer benefits but they also valued travel opportunities as a family and that *"family time"* was highly important to them culturally.
- 14.** As a result, most participants in this group appeared to favour being able to travel more as a family that sending their children on school residentials and one participant talked about a scheme in Amsterdam where the government give the family €500 to go on a trip together over the summer.

3. Engagement findings: main benefits to children and young people from experiencing an outdoor education residential

Independence

15. All participants talked about the benefits of developing some independence during an outdoor education residential and *"learning how to be away from home"*.
16. Participants felt it could be a good opportunity to help children learn life skills and being *"out of their comfort zone"* would give the children independence.

"In school you are just with people you're familiar with, which is great for continuity. But my child has got learn to survive in this world as well."

Social skills

17. Most participants talked about the benefit of the opportunity to socialise outside of school and that this can support developing relationships.
18. One participant talked about the benefits to children's social development from the opportunity to *"experience things other than the everyday at school and at home"*.
19. A number of participants said that this type of trip was one of the only opportunities disabled children get to be away from their parents and mix with their peers.

"My son came home and he'd made a friend and he got invited to tea, and he's still friends with him now, 6 years later. And that person's become a real advocate for him."

Nature

20. One participant talked about the importance of helping to develop an interest for the outdoors and to nurture a generation who are committed to preserving it.
21. She talked about developing young people who *"are at one with nature"* and giving the opportunity to develop survival skills.

Mental health

- 22.** One participant talked about the benefits of a trip like this to children’s mental health. She felt that being given the opportunity to be outside and encouraging more activity like this, could support positive mental health for young people.

4. Engagement findings: main barriers to children and young people attending a residential outdoor education visit

Costs

23. Participants felt the costs of residential trips were currently a barrier to most families, especially for those with more than one child. Most participants therefore supported the Bill's proposals that costs would be covered.

"I do think the cost is a massive, massive thing for people."

"Twins – well they are double the cost."

Accessibility

24. Participants felt there was a need to ensure the chosen facility would cater for any disabilities or additional needs and that planning and communication with parents was key. It was felt that many sites used currently are not fully accessible.

"They've got to assess the place properly and they've got to co-produce it with parents."

"There really needs to be somewhere in this act that says that schools have to choose places that have enough choice and options and do not segregate on ability."

25. Further to that point, it was noted that the activities themselves should also be accessible, not just the facility itself.

"...for most children, they would want to participate in some way, and I think it's awful for them to just sit there and want to be part of it and not able to."

26. One participant made the point that her child's school had worked with a disabled charity who make sure the activities are inclusive. So although not all the children attending the trip were disabled, the charity were able to cater for everyone from the start, instead of working out what additional support was needed for some of the group.

Sufficient support

27. Ratios of teachers or TAs to children were seen as a barrier as more would be needed when considering disabled children in the group. It was felt that the opportunities would need to be sufficiently financed in order to overcome these barriers.

28. Another participant suggested creating a pool of assistants locally to be used as a source of support, based in the local authority perhaps. As there was recognition that it was already hard on the school with so many children to look after.

"I wouldn't want to put any extra pressure on the on the school."

29. Some parents of disabled children were being approached to accompany their children to make sure their needs could be met. Participants felt this wasn't a fair opportunity as learners should be offered the chance to be away from parents, like their peers, in order to be offered an equal opportunity. They again felt that this came down to costs and sufficiently staffing the visit.

"Parents of children should not solve the support need as going away on a residential on equal basis would mean that all the other children would have their parents in tow – part of the experience is that parent free time!"

30. Further to this, one participant raised the barriers they had experienced from the teachers and the school in their understanding of equality. They felt the school had discriminated against their child in not fully providing the opportunity to attend a residential.

"One of the biggest barriers is teachers and schools and understanding about equality and equity. It took me a long time to get over it and that's what they don't realise. The discrimination really hurts."

Cultural sensitivities

31. Many participants felt that residential would need to be culturally sensitive. This would include planning for the correct food and designing appropriate activities.

"I sent my son on a trip recently and he had nothing to eat because there was no halal meat and he was only offered vegetables and he wouldn't eat them."

32. Some participants were concerned about the management of behaviour.

33. They also felt that it was important to ensure routine was upheld.

34. A number of participants expressed concerns about *"girls and boys mixing"*.

Lenth of residential

35. One member of the group felt the length of time could become a barrier. For example, should a trip last the full 4 nights and 5 days, it is likely her child would not last the full trip and they'd then be seen as different to the other children.

5. Engagement findings: the opportunity to undertake an outdoor education residential and whether it should be free of charge to all

Agreement

36. The majority of participants were in agreement that young people should have the opportunity to attend and that it should be free to all. A small group of participants said they supported the idea, should the barriers discussed during their session be addressed.

Against

37. One participant was completely against the proposal.

Opportunities for those with disabilities

38. Some participants felt strongly that children should have the opportunity to undertake a residential like this, and more so for those children with disabilities.

39. A number of participants felt that legislation could help ensure their children were offered the same opportunities as the rest of their peers, as long as there was guidance to support schools and providers in how to present these opportunities.

"For me it's about my disabled son, who doesn't have access to the typical stuff that other children do, so this opportunity should come as priority to those who don't have your breakfast club, after school club and extracurricular activities due to his disability....I think it's more of a priority than my daughter."

"They deserve to have as much fun as anyone else."

"There needs to be no excuses for inclusion and fully supported with time to plan for and resources to enable good coproduction with families."

"The social model of disability needs to be written into this law, as does the UNCRDP."

6. Engagement findings: additional barriers to sending children on an outdoor education residential

Participants were asked if residential outdoor education was free for all children, is there anything else that would prevent you from sending your child on the visit? For example, the cost of clothing or footwear.

Additional costs

40. Participants felt there needed to be careful consideration of what exactly is covered in terms of costs, as additional items could mean some families would still be unable to go.

"They need to be really conscious about what their expectations are of parents, because even though they're saying it's free, if they're expecting so much from parents for them to provide, it's not realistic for some."

"I worry about the true costs."

41. Equally, some appreciated that additional costs could be a barrier, but felt that the overall benefits outweighed the barriers.

"So getting extra boots and things like that, it's minimal in the scheme of things as to what your child will benefit from during this opportunity."

"We can't expect too much of the government."

42. A number of participants made suggestions to address these additional costs. For example, that equipment such as sleeping bags could be bought and used on rotation if the trips were staggered, in order to alleviate the costs to the families.

43. Another suggestion was that additional costs could be income based or that direct payments could be used to help fund the additional support some young people might need to ensure it was fully inclusive.

7. Engagement findings: anxiety and uncertainty

Consultations on the draft Bill found that after financial constraints, the biggest barriers to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education is both children's and parent's anxiety and uncertainty. Participants were asked if this was something they agreed with, and if so, what were their concerns and suggestions to alleviate them.

Anxiety

44. Several participants said they felt they would be anxious if their children were away from them for several nights:

"I wouldn't be able to sleep if they were away overnight."

"I would struggle to let them go as we are always as a family. We go on trips but we go together as a family."

45. Some participants expressed that they think their children may initially be anxious but *"once they are there, I doubt they would miss us! But they might need support to be happy to go away overnight."*

Confidence in the opportunity

46. The majority of participants agreed that both young people and parents could feel anxious about a trip like this. However, most felt that with confidence in the school and with trusted people involved in the planning, the benefits outweighed any potential anxiety.

47. Participants agreed that there was heightened anxiety for parents of disabled children or those with additional needs as they needed to be assured their children would be given the care they need.

48. One participant had really positive experiences with 3 of her children attending residentials and it had come down to good communication with the school before and during the trip.

49. Another participant's child has been at the school since he was 3 and so she feels they have a good understanding of his needs and what would need to be put in place for a trip like this. She therefore felt anxiety wouldn't be a big issue and the confidence she had in the

school and the understanding they have for her child's needs meant she was very comfortable with the prospect of a residential trip.

"What helped was having lots of meetings like from the school like that needs to be put in that parents are fully aware of what is going on."

50. Many participants felt if the confidence for the family as a whole was lifted, anxiety wouldn't be such a barrier.

"My school wouldn't allow our kids to have their phones, which actually raised our anxiety through the roof because, unless they were putting something on Twitter, we had no idea what our kids were doing."

"Our children don't get the same opportunities to go away from the family, as the parents can be afraid of taking the step of letting them go away – parents need knowledge and information to make them feel reassured."

"My daughter is 15 and she's never had a night away from me. There's not enough information to give parents the confidence of letting their children go away overnight."

51. Another participant said a risk assessment beforehand for their child would have been helpful, and knowing what the school would do in certain scenarios.

52. One participant's son had recently attended an overnight trip where he hadn't eaten or drunk anything. Although it was a short trip, this had of course caused some anxiety and had this been a longer trip, would have been a big problem. She felt that having more support staff would have helped with this anxiety. She will also be having a meeting with the school the next time he goes away to make sure the necessary things are put in place to support him.

"I feel comfortable with the school, but I think there is still further work to be done."

"I just think it's a shame that you have to have that extra stress on you as a parent when you're already worried about them going anyway."

53. One participant felt if there was a cultural connection this would really help to support the families.