

OE-028 - Natural Resources Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Bil arfaethedig – Bil Addysg Awyr Agored (Cymru) | Proposed Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan Natural Resources Wales | Evidence from Natural Resources Wales

Are you (your organisation) currently a provider of outdoor education?: Yes

Proposed Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Consultation: Response form

Name: Sue Williams, on behalf of Natural Resources Wales

Are you submitting this response in a professional or personal capacity?:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional capacity (including on behalf of an organisation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal capacity
Are you responding on behalf of an organisation? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Age: <input type="checkbox"/> I am under 13 years old <input type="checkbox"/> I am aged 13 to 17 <input type="checkbox"/> I am aged 18 or over and wish my contribution to be anonymised <input type="checkbox"/> I am aged 18 or over and happy for my name to be published with my contribution
Are you (your organisation) currently a provider of outdoor education? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	In what capacity are you responding? <input type="checkbox"/> Child / Young person <input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Carer <input type="checkbox"/> Other

If professional, or a provider of outdoor education, your role and the name of organisation for which you are responding:

Sue Williams - Team Leader – Health, Education and Natural Resources Team.



Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is Welsh Government's principal advisor on the sustainable management of natural resources.

We provide professional learning, resources, and networks to support the education sector.

Through our health and education workstreams, NRW shares good practice and influences policy development, highlighting the many benefits of outdoor learning and its contribution to the development of ethical and informed citizens of future generations.

Natural Resources Wales strives to raise the profile of learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment to foster greater understanding and appreciation of its value and its vital contribution to health, and education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

More information can be found on our **Education and Learning** webpages.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Wales Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill consultation and is happy to work with the Senedd to ensure the role of learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment, particularly in mitigating the dual threats of the climate and nature emergencies, improving physical health, mental well-being, and attainment, is highlighted throughout teaching and learning in Wales.

NRW provides advice and guidance on high quality outdoor teaching and learning, offering expertise in policy areas ranging from health improvement (Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales, Daily Active Offer, Healthy Schools Review, Ministerial Play Review), to Curriculum for Wales development and support, Initial Teacher Education, STEM professional learning partnership with Techniquist and curriculum support.

Please note, NRW recognises outdoor education/learning as covering an extensive array of activity from use of our school grounds, local parks, woodlands and beaches, field studies, environmental education, recognised accredited approaches to teaching like forest school and coastal school, residential stays and adventure education.

Please do contact us at education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk for further clarification or information.

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:

In the face of the single biggest threat known to humanity, i.e., the climate and nature emergencies, NRW strongly recommends that the Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill is broadened from the narrow focus on residential and adventure education entitlement, to a wider vision for outdoor education/learning and environmental education in Wales, that encompasses the inclusion of a whole school approach to learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment.

We advise a new recognition of the importance of teaching about the climate and nature emergencies, as teachers in Wales are a primary influencer in encouraging the early embedding of life long pro-environmental behaviours.

Evidence of the benefits of learning in the natural environment can be seen on the NRW [website](#) in terms of:

- physical activity
- mental well-being
- boosting health
- attainment

Whilst acknowledging the benefits associated with a residential stay, NRW strongly recommends that the benefits of learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment are not limited to residential outdoor education experiences, and have concerns that the Bill could undermine the full entitlement of learners to a vast range of wider outdoor learning experiences.

While NRW fully supports good quality residential outdoor education experiences as most valuable to learners' health, well-being, and attainment, NRW recognises outdoor learning as covering a wide range of activity from use of our school grounds, local parks, woodlands and beaches, field studies, environmental education, recognised accredited approaches to teaching like forest school and coastal school, as well as the adventure/outdoor elements of residential stays and adventure education.

If the Bill continues in its current guise, there is a significant danger that outdoor education/learning could become a tick box, annual experience, rather than a daily entitlement, reducing the opportunities for meaningful connection to nature and pro-environmental behaviours, reducing daily physical activity and teacher development. This could also have financial implications for the wider outdoor learning sector such as the Outdoor Learning Training Network Wales members whose livelihoods depend on offering professional learning experiences to educators, and also landowners who provide venues for self-led outdoor education/learning experiences.

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)
 - Reduced capacity – few residential centres left in Wales.
 - Would require a substantial investment to open additional residential centres in Wales, to meet entitlement need and geographical accessibility demands.
 - Postcode lottery of where residential centres are and ease of access for schools and settings.

- Would require a substantial investment to ensure activity leaders are adequately trained in both ensuring the suitability of learning activities and reducing the impacts on the natural environment.
 - Reputational risk in the face of a cost of living crisis.
 - Further pressure on school staff to facilitate stays and oversee group travel and safety. This could require substantial investment re school staff time costs, stress management and training.
 - Lack of sustainable travel options as most residential centres will be at a distance to most schools and settings.
 - Increased carbon footprint for schools and settings due to travel.
 - Substantial, ongoing costs re transport to and from residential centres.
 - Equality of residential experience. Learners would need to have access to a similar standard of experience and facilities wherever they are.
 - Equality of offer for all learners whether in state school, independent settings, home educated, etc.
 - Increased pressure on the natural environment in specific area where residential centres are located, due to recurrent influxes of learners undertaking activities which will have an impact on natural resources.
 - Most schools can and do access daily outdoor learning opportunities in their community and surrounding area so may not feel the need to travel elsewhere.
 - Perceived teaching time away from implementing the Curriculum for Wales, although this can be rectified via training on the cross curricular benefits
 - Cost to parents re suitable outdoor clothing and residential kit.
 - Investment in awareness raising of benefits to support parents and carers in buying in to the proposal.
- 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?

Outdoor learning and educational experiences offer a plethora of positive impacts on learners health, well-being and attainment. Evidence of the benefits of learning in the natural environment can be seen on the NRW website in terms of:

- physical activity
- mental well-being
- boosting health
- attainment

NRW strongly advises that there needs to be a consideration of the wider outdoor learning picture. A residential visit should be part of the wider picture of use of our

school grounds, local parks, woodlands and beaches, field studies, environmental education, recognised accredited approaches to teaching like forest school and coastal school, residential stays and adventure education. Any Bill must make it clear that a residential stay is only one way to realise the wider benefits of outdoor learning.

NRW suggests that at a minimum the Bill should be renamed – Outdoor Residential Education Wales Bill – to reflect the focus of the Bill and mitigate negative impacts on the much more extensive outdoor education/learning agenda.

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?

Please see the answer to Q1. NRW has serious concerns that the Bill's focus on residential outdoor educational experiences only, rather than a whole school approach to outdoor learning, will have lifelong negative impacts on learners' daily access to outdoor learning and in a time pressured teaching and learning landscape, downgrade vital learning about the climate and nature emergencies, connection to nature, negating the development of pro-environmental and pro-health behaviours.

NRW suggests that at a minimum the Bill should be renamed – Outdoor Residential Education Wales Bill – to reflect the focus of the Bill and mitigate negative impacts on the much more extensive outdoor education/learning agenda.

Learners and their parents and guardians should be offered a flexible approach with the option to refuse the experience.

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

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).

Any offer must be flexible depending on age, ability, health, well-being and independence.

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?

As principal advisor to the Welsh Government on the natural environment, NRW appreciates the detailed work that has been undertaken to date and the opportunity to raise the role of outdoor learning this Bill proposal has instigated. We also appreciate the additional financial commitments the implementation of such a Bill would require.

With that in mind and with the declared climate and nature emergencies, NRW strongly advises that the Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill should be broadened to encompass outdoor learning in its entirety, as a pedagogical approach and entitlement to all learners, and not caveated to residential stays. All learners must have daily access to the full breadth of outdoor education, possibly through a whole school approach to outdoor learning and the natural environment.

NRW advises that at a minimum the Bill should be renamed – Outdoor Residential Education Wales Bill – to reflect the focus of the Bill and mitigate negative impacts on the much more extensive outdoor education/learning and environmental education agenda.

NRW strongly recommends that in the face of the climate and nature emergencies, there should be explicit reference to learning about climate change, biodiversity issues, and the sustainable management of our natural resources. While adventure based activities, often delivered as part of residential outdoor learning experiences, offer huge amounts of holistic learner development, the draft Bill does not currently explore the nuances and complexities of outdoor learning in the round.

NRW would like to see every setting with at least one appropriately trained and qualified member of staff who fully understands outdoor learning pedagogy and the

climate and nature emergencies, and can implement interventions and actions to gain the multiple benefits for staff and learners that the natural environment can realise. Agored Cymru have a range of certificates and awards in outdoor learning pedagogy. This would be a cost-effective method of ensuring both pupil development and local environmental gains.

NRW advises that outdoor learning pedagogy should be embedded within Initial Teacher Education and Professional Learning to support educators to develop high quality teaching practice. Good practice examples in some ITE courses, where outdoor learning accredited courses are woven into the course can be shared, but these are not consistent across Wales.

NRW would warmly welcome any opportunities to work in partnership to develop this work further.