

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Ymateb gan Comisiynydd Plant Cymru | Evidence from Children's Commissioner for Wales



Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

Date / Dyddiad: 17/03/2023

Subject / Pwnc: Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Background information about the Children's Commissioner for Wales

The Children's Commissioner for Wales' principal aim is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. In exercising their functions, the Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Commissioner's remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the Senedd that affect children's rights and welfare.

The UNCRC is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18. The Welsh Government has adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and young people and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on Welsh Ministers, in exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC.

This response is not confidential.

I welcome the individual Senedd Members' legislative proposal to introduce the Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill to make outdoor residential education mandatory and free to all children and young people in Wales.

The benefits of outdoor education to children and young people are well recognised and researched. It improves the physical health and wellbeing of children, builds confidence and develops essential skills, boosts creativity and imagination, as well as connecting children with their local areas and develops connection to nature and understanding of environment and places ¹. Also, the proposed Bill seeks to utilise the new Curriculum for Wales to enhance and enrich the education experiences of children and young people. Children's human rights as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and underpin the four purposes² of the new Curriculum. Indeed, the new curriculum places a duty on schools to promote children's human rights under the UNCRC This offers a range of opportunities to experience outdoor learning through the lens of children's human rights.

Outdoor learning opportunities underpin and contribute to the realisation of children's human rights through a range of rights in the UNCRC. These rights include (but are not limited to):

The right not to be discriminated against (Article 2)

The right to be heard (Article 12)

The right to education (Article 28, 29)

The right to play (Article 31).

For example, Article 29, which sets out what the aims of a child's education should be, makes reference to the importance of the curriculum

¹ Friedman, S. et al. (2021). Understanding changes to children's connection to nature during the COVID-19 pandemic and implications for child wellbeing. Available: <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pan3.10270>

² Welsh Government (Hwb website), [Curriculum for Wales](#)

to develop a child's personality, talents and abilities holistically, as well as develop respect for the natural environment³. Outdoor education offers the opportunity for the curriculum to be broad and balanced and enable children, individually and collectively, to develop essential life skills such as confidence, social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and other abilities to live a full and satisfying life within society, as well as the importance of looking after and protecting the natural environment.

It would also be welcome if the proposed Bill enabled wider opportunities for outdoor learning to be explored in the drafting process which are not limited to residential outdoor education. We know outdoor education can take numerous forms, some of which are provided within the school setting and local community, and also offer valuable learning experiences to children and young people. I would suggest working with schools who have well established outdoor learning opportunities, including community organisations delivering sustainable education programmes to enhance and enrich children's learning experiences in line with the new Curriculum for Wales. Examples of these include Cae Tan in Swansea and Cynon Valley Organic Adventures.

Equally, residential and school provided outdoor learning provision should be accessible to all children and not discriminate against children with special educational needs, disability, ethnicity, sex, culture or religion. It should also not discriminate on the basis of the ability of families to afford these opportunities. Considering a holistic approach to outdoor learning would empower schools to utilise wider outdoor learning spaces (within school and beyond), to support and enrich the everyday learning of all children and young people in Wales.

I am unsure as to why a children and young person friendly version of the consultation document and survey has not been published. The General

³ file:///C:/Users/Gerli/Desktop/General%20comment%20no%201%20Article%2029%20UNCRC.pdf

Comment No.12 provided by the UN Committee on The Rights of the Child posits that the views of the child should be considered alongside education articles when decision are made about children`s education.⁴ The General Comment No.12 provided by the UN Committee on The Rights of the Child posits that children`s views are `fundamental to the realisation of the right to education`⁵. Children and young people should be consulted directly on this proposal so that their views are taken properly into account in plans for introducing the Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rocio Cifuentes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Rocio Cifuentes MBE
Children`s Commissioner for Wales

⁴ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard (2009), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae562c52.html> [accessed 16th October 2022]

⁵ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard (2009), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae562c52.html> [accessed 16th October 2022], par 105.