

Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Consultation on the draft Bill: Response from ADEW (Carmarthenshire)

Adrodd i TRA / Report for DMT (Departmental Management Team)

Residential Outdoor (Wales) Bill

Context

The rationale behind the new law – the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – is to move residential outdoor education from being an **enrichment**, to being an **entitlement**.

The aim of the Bill is to establish a statutory duty to ensure that all children/young people receiving maintained education are provided with the opportunity to experience residential outdoor education, for at least one week, at some stage during their school years. The Bill will also establish a statutory obligation for providers of maintained education to be allocated funding to enable them to do this.

A draft Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill has been developed and published, and a targeted consultation on the detail of that draft Bill has been completed.

Sam Rowlands, MS Member of the Welsh Parliament for North Wales, has until 26 November 2023 to finalise the drafting and to formally introduce the Bill before the Welsh Parliament. Ms Rowlands is inviting ADEW (Association of Directors of Education Wales) to present views and comments back to her by 15 September 2023.

Consultation

A consultation on the Bill has been undertaken which ran from 31 January to 17 March 2023. Responses were received from 175 organisations and individuals.

In considering the consultation responses, it is found that there is a significant level of support for the principles behind the proposal:

- Everyone responding agrees that outdoor education is important to children and young people's overall education and development (94% saying Very Important).
- The vast majority believe there should be a guaranteed opportunity to participate in residential outdoor education (only 3% said No).
- A large majority (85%) believe this guaranteed opportunity should be free of charge at least once (6% said No, 9% said Don't Know).
- 84% agree with the need for the Bill (9% disagree, 7% are neutral). 11 of the 175 responses (6%) disagreed with the principles behind the proposal. 7 of these were head teachers, while another was the union, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

Those in disagreement predominantly gave the following reasons (section 5 of this briefing summarises these more fully):

- Concern that funding will be diverted away from schools' core budgets, which they believe should be the priority for any available spending on education.
- Staffing implications if this is made statutory – having sufficient numbers of school staff to accompany pupils and the impact and pressure on those that are willing to go.
- Fears that schools will not receive funding for the full costs of the staffing requirements – either paying overtime to those supervising visits or sourcing supply cover during their absence.

The most commonly identified benefits of residential outdoor experience were *increased confidence, independence and team-work skills; improved health and well-being; and positive connections to, and understanding of, the natural environment.*

The most commonly identified barrier at present to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education was *financial constraints.*

Other frequently identified barriers were *parental and child anxiety/uncertainty.*

While around half of responses agreed with the preference given in the question to Year 6 being the most suitable age, there was quite a strong indication that there is no optimum age, that it depends on several factors, and it is probably best not to prescribe an age.

Similarly, while around half of responses agreed with the preference given in the question to four nights/five days, there was quite a strong indication that the most suitable duration depends on several factors, and it might be best not to prescribe how long experiences should last.

Asked to identify which groups of children might particularly benefit from the proposal, respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring quality and access by all. They particularly identified children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) or disabilities, ethnic minorities and those who struggle in a traditional classroom environment.

Asked to identify which groups of children might be negatively affected by the proposal, respondents most commonly identified *children with anxiety*. This also extended to children whose parents may have anxiety about their child attending a residential visit. Appropriate support measures, which may include extra staff to support children, were highlighted as essential to help children with anxiety. Nevertheless, the right of parents and children to opt out of residential outdoor education is seen as important.

As well as children with anxiety, pupils with ALN or disabilities were identified as possibly negatively affected, either if inclusivity is not embedded into the visits they do go on, inappropriate support measures during their visit or from alienation if they do not go.

While broadly supportive of the principles behind the proposal, there were many observations of matters respondents believe require further consideration. These include:

- Staffing implications if this is made a statutory requirement.
- Whether this should be a universal free entitlement or whether resources should instead be targeted at those who face specific barriers such as low-income households.
- Seeing residential outdoor education not just a one-off but something that is consolidated with lead-up and follow-up activities and learning.
- The quality of provision and how appropriate standards will be ensured.
- The capacity of the sector and the arrangements in place (including governance and funding) between the Welsh Government, local government and providers.
- The range and diversity of outdoor education provided, recognising that children and young people have diverse needs and interests.
- The practicalities and importance of meeting some pupils' complex needs, for example those with medical, emotional or learning needs, or disabilities.
- Whether outdoor education necessarily needs to be residential and how it can also be embedded within school and community life.
- How the proposed Bill can complement the promotion of the Welsh language and culture, including increasing opportunities for children and young people to hear and speak Welsh. Summary of consultation on the proposed Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill.

Implications for Carmarthenshire

'Residential'

The understanding of what constitutes a 'residential' needs to be fully explored to be able to offer schools a range of choices for pupils. This could assist in making the residential experience more manageable/affordable and accessible. A link to an OEAP guidance on trips and visits is included for reference - oeapng.info.

It is important to note that a residential can take a number of forms ranging from a five-night stay with a provider/centre, undertaking adventurous activities, being self-sufficient on a Duke of Edinburgh Award expedition, camping, or a "sleepover" in school camping under tables or on the school grounds.

Residential experiences need to be tailored to meet the needs within the group and provide an age-appropriate level of challenge in a safe environment.

Strengths from a Carmarthenshire Perspective

Many schools in the county are already in the habit of arranging residential visits for pupils at secondary and primary levels.

Schools already know that they need to upload risk assessments on to Evolve for LA sign off.

The county has a tremendous and varied outdoor offer in terms of natural resources.

The Youth Support Service is recruiting a part-time Education Visits Advisor post, and this role will support this development.

The Bill aligns very well with the Curriculum for Wales.

Things to consider

The future of the current Pendine residential resource and what is planned for that.

What other useful venues and resources has the Council got access to that would serve this purpose well?

Not all schools are making use of Evolve in terms of risk management planning to trips and visits, and there are risks associated with this failure.

Not all schools currently offer residential opportunities.

Not all pupils have access to residential opportunities currently; some are excluded from attending due to challenging behaviour.

Inclusion issues need to be considered earlier in the process so that appropriate planning and risk management measures are in place that will enable this entitlement.

Schools may have concerns and reservations about education funding being re-directed; staffing resources being diverted; however, many schools are already providing residential in any event.

How do schools ensure equity and accessibility for all pupils?

Will outdoor education providers see this as a way of maximising income?

Provision of additional top-up training and advice to schools on planning residential can be offered via YSS (Youth Support Service).

The link between the YSS Education Visits Advisor role and schools/Behaviour support will be critical in terms of inclusion.

There could be potential growth of the Duke of Edinburgh programme requiring additional input from the YSS Duke of Edinburgh Co-ordinator role. This is currently a part-time position.

Case Studies demonstrating good practice in terms of barrier removal

Good Practice (inclusion)

A pupil returned payment and consent to attend a geography field trip the day before it was due to happen. This pupil is severely visually impaired. Within the daily school routine, they choose not to leave the Hafan during break times and lunch times, are supported by a 1-1 and are brought to school by parents as they do not have the confidence or support to access the bus. They do not participate in extra-curricular activities or any field trips.

The sight loss has been rapid, and school did not have a risk assessment for this pupil to attend the field trip. School is currently working with RNIB to get resources available in braille.

School was aware that they needed to be inclusive and could not refuse the pupil the opportunity to attend. Reasonable adjustments were made to the specific risk assessment for the activity that ensured that the pupil was empowered to:

- be able to fully participate at their own level, safely
- have an appropriate level of challenge
- experience a field trip with their peers for the first time
- travel on a bus with their peers for the first time
- contribute effectively to a whole-year project
- not feel excluded by being treated differently
- learn and develop essential life skills & effective communication skills
- realise that they were more capable than they thought they were

The pupil thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and even plucked up the courage to go for a paddle in the water with their 1-1. The following day a phone call was received from the parents to thank the school for providing the opportunity for their child to undertake the field trip and for including them. As a direct result of their experiences on the field trip, the pupil is now more confident, has increased self-esteem and belief and is looking forward to being more involved in school life. The school now have a template for reasonable adjustments for inclusion within their risk assessments and are more confident in addressing inclusion issues in relation to educational visits moving forward.

Good Practice (identifying potential cost issues at initial stages)

A headteacher had received a request for a potential visit to Iceland that would be open to all pupils Yr 9 upwards. The visit would take place during the weekend and would run into the school week. School was aware that cost may be an issue and

sought guidance in relation to allocating places to pupils for whom cost may be an issue. School also required clarification on whether they would need to cover costs should a pupil be unable to afford the visit and whether the visit counted as curricular or extracurricular. Having been identified early, advice was issued in line with National Guidance and school governors were able to make an informed decision in relation to the visit.

Conclusions and recommendations from a Carmarthenshire Perspective

- This Bill is seen as a positive step which fits well with the Curriculum for Wales.
- Many schools are already routinely offering residential; other schools will need to prepare to do so.
- There is a need to maximise use of local and affordable residential experiences.
- Schools will need assurances from Welsh Government about the resourcing support that they will receive to offer the residential experience as an entitlement, so that they 'buy in' to the concept.
- The proposals will help to embed outdoor learning and learning outside the classroom at all key stages within education at primary school level.
- The Bill has the potential to create a more learner lead holistic learning experience enabling those who struggle with a more traditional learning environment to thrive.
- Inclusion and person-centred planning needs to be the foundation of effective risk management processes to ensure the entitlement for all pupils.
- Consideration needs to be given to those for whom a large scale residential is not suitable and how this will then be resourced especially within a mainstream setting (given that the intention is for it to become an entitlement).