

Submission of evidence to the Children, Young People and Education committee regarding the proposed Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill, made on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning by Graham French, North Wales regional chair.

1. This evidence is presented on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) which is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference to others. Members have a shared vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development education and employment in UK society.
2. As an organisation, our mission is to increase participation in outdoor learning in the UK and to recognise and improve the quality of outdoor learning provision. To do this, we have regional committees with members and elected chairs across the UK so the organisation can be locally responsive whilst having a national voice. The chair of the North Wales committee is presenting this evidence on behalf of the IOL.
3. This evidence will follow four main themes which are in alignment with our mission and consider the information already in the public domain concerning outdoor learning and the proposed bill. Each source of published evidence will be cited with a footnote to indicate the source.
4. These four themes are: finance; education; the moral imperative; practical considerations.
5. The IOL supports the introduction of the Outdoor Education (Wales) bill (hereafter 'the bill') proposed by Sam Rowlands, MS. The aims set out in the initial explanatory memorandum and subsequent debate in the plenary session of Senedd Cymru on 26th October 2022 are in alignment with the aims of the IOL set out above.

Finance

6. The explanatory memorandum of 2022 set out an expected cost of implementing the bill as being in the region of £14 million per year. Whilst it is unclear whether this includes the cost of transport and supply cover, this is clearly a significant expenditure that would be required from the Welsh Government, but the IOL believes that this would be money well spent and the investment would have significant benefits for both the children and young people and the economy of Wales.
7. Research using the Social Return On Investment (SROI) methodology, commissioned by Natural England¹, has demonstrated that learning in natural environments (of which the residential work outlined in the bill represents one aspect) has the potential to return anywhere between £2 and £7 per £1 invested. This return comes in the form of savings over a short-term and includes savings in health care through the NHS, mental health care through local authority Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS), improved school attendance, and the development of social capital leading to greater career opportunities for the young people of Wales.
8. A study utilising the same methodology (SROI), commissioned by the Outdoor Partnership² to investigate the impact of programmes of outdoor education in North Wales concluded that a £7 return was made for every £1 invested.

¹ [Council for Learning Outside the Classroom Evidence Note, 2022](#)

² Social Value Cymru, [Opening Doors to the Outdoors](#)

9. Research commissioned by the Pembrokeshire Coastal forum, and the Wales Adventure Tourism Organisation³ and funded through Welsh Government's coastal capacity building challenge fund determined that the outdoor activity sector in Wales (of which outdoor education residential for children and young people form a significant part) brought £26.54 million of value to the mental health sector.
10. The same research concluded that a 10% increase in participation could bring about an increase in social value of £187 million spread across physical and mental health, mental wellbeing, individual development and social capital.
11. The research also identified a net economic impact of the sector as a whole as £272.87 million, of which £205 million is retained in Wales.
12. Based in these data, the IOL concludes that there are clear and tangible financial benefits of the bill which significantly outweigh its perceived initial cost.

Education

13. The IOL welcomed the publication of the draft Curriculum for Wales in January 2020 and contributed to the public consultation. The institute supports the Curriculum for Wales 2022⁴ as both its holistic foundation (the four purposes) and its specific direction to engage with outdoor learning are in alignment with the aims of the institute set out in paragraph 2, above.
14. The organisation of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 allows teachers to design curricula that are locally responsive whilst still ensuring equity in the curriculum through the statements of What Matters in each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). This means more teachers can utilise an outdoor learning pedagogy across more topics than under the previous curriculum, and this aligns with the aims of the institute.
15. However, the access to outdoor education is inconsistent and of varying quality⁵. In 2018 the IOL supported the publication of 'High-quality outdoor learning for Wales'⁶. The IOL support legislative change to eradicate inconsistency in provision and support the offer of high-quality outdoor learning for every child and young person in Wales attending school. In previous editions of the Curriculum for Wales some aspects of outdoor education were a component of the physical education curriculum area under the heading 'adventurous activities'. This curriculum presence was not enough to ensure equity in provision as highlighted in a survey carried out by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) in the previous 12 months.
16. IOL members have a shared vision of the positive development education that can be attained through outdoor education and submit that this goes beyond the 'activities' nature in the previous curriculum descriptors. This vision aligns with the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales 2022⁴ and is a welcome change compared to other UK curricula which appear to focus on outcomes such as exam grades rather than the more holistic civic outcomes stated in the Curriculum for Wales 2022.
17. To achieve equity in provision of outdoor education and to allow children and young people to achieve the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales, the IOL agrees with the need for specific legislation to guarantee this provision. Whilst curriculum is enshrined in law, educational policy, such as that concerning educational visits like outdoor education residential visits, can change with party policy and in relation to local politics. This inconsistent approach (applied to the current date) has led to the inequity in provision, and therefore legislation is required to address this.

³ Miller Research Evaluation Consulting, [Economic and Social Evaluation of the Outdoor Activity Sector in Wales](#) (2023)

⁴ Welsh Government (Hwb website), [Curriculum for Wales](#)

⁵ The Sutton Trust, [Life lessons: Improving essential life skills for young people](#) (2017)

⁶ Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, [High quality outdoor learning for Wales](#) (2018)

18. If the vision of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 is to be realised, outdoor education needs to move from being a ‘nice-to-have’ enrichment activity, to being a core curriculum entitlement. This requires both legislation and funding from the Welsh Government.

The moral imperative

19. A national survey by the OEAP⁷ highlighted that the main barrier to participation in outdoor education residential visits was the cost to participants. Whilst some children and their families were able to access financial support to enable them to attend residential outdoor education visits, these were often the poorest in the school. Those just above the levels of income required to be eligible for this support, often referred to as ‘the working poor’ are unable to access these visits due to cost. Even those not in this category have found educational visits hard to fund as the cost-of-living crisis means their priorities are elsewhere.
20. The OEAP survey⁷ also found that in some cases visits are not offered to some children to avoid the social stigma of not being able to afford to attend, and this also encompasses whole schools in some of the most deprived areas (as defined by the Welsh index of multiple deprivation) who do not offer outdoor education residential visits at all, as they are aware very few of their families will be able to afford to attend.
21. There is much research which concludes the significant physical and mental health benefits of outdoor education residential⁸, yet these benefits are exclusively available to those in certain schools and with certain household incomes. This is inequitable and counter to the Welsh Government’s Child poverty strategy⁹.
22. This inequity in provision of education provides a further reason why the IOL believes that legislation and funding are necessary to support the well-being of children and young people, as set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) act of 2015.
23. The IOL welcomed the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) act (2015)¹⁰ and submits that the proposed bill would provide an obvious and tangible support for this landmark legislation already enacted by Senedd Cymru.
24. The IOL submits that the proposed bill will contribute to a prosperous Wales (see paras. 7, 8 and 9 above), a resilient Wales (see paras. 10 and 16 above), a more equal Wales (this section), a healthier Wales (see paras. 7 and 10 above), a Wales of cohesive communities (see paras. 7, 9 and 10 above), a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language (paras. 11, 13 and 14 above) and a globally responsive Wales (paras. 7, 14 and 16 above). It thus contributes to each of the seven wellbeing goals¹⁰.
25. These wellbeing goals also demonstrate how the proposed bill supports several UN sustainable development goals: 3. Good health and well-being; 4. Quality education; 10. Reduced inequalities; 11. Sustainable cities and communities¹¹. These are also goals supported by the IOL.

Practical considerations

⁷ Reported in Sam Rowlands MS, [Statistical Paper: Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill \(October 2022\)](#). OEAP Cymru issued the survey in October 2022 to the Outdoor Education Adviser at each of the local authorities in Wales which use its EVOLVE system to manage educational visits. They, in turn, circulated the online survey to maintained schools for completion and submission. OEAP Cymru also sent the online survey to the Outdoor Education Adviser at an additional local authority, which does not use the OEAP Cymru system. The survey was therefore shared with all but two local authorities in Wales (Pembrokeshire County Council and Torfaen County Borough Council) who do not currently have an OEAP adviser in post.

⁸ Kendall, S. and Rodger, J. (2015) [Evaluation of Learning Away: final report](#). London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

⁹ Welsh Government, [Child poverty strategy: 2022 progress report](#)

¹⁰ Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)

¹¹ Welsh Government, [National Indicators: mapping to Well-being and UN Sustainable Development Goals \(interactive tool\)](#)

26. In the explanatory memorandum presented to Senedd Cymru in Autumn of 2022, and subsequent details given during the phases of public consultation on the bill, it is clear that there is a degree of flexibility in the practical arrangements that the bill requires.
27. These allow local authorities to formulate and integrate how they deliver the requirements of the bill, in line with current operation of schools by directors of education in each local authority. This principle aligns with current practice in how directors of education in local authorities enact educational policy in their authority. The proposed bill does not alter this position, but will require some consideration on the part of those directors of education.
28. It is likely that should the bill be passed, these directors of education will need guidance from specialist outdoor education advisers on how they may most effectively implement the bill. These advisers are already in place in many cases, either employed specifically as such (the OEAP) and/or through teacher education partnerships with Welsh universities and regional consortia.
29. Directors of education may also want to consult with professional bodies that represent residential outdoor education centres (the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres, AHOEC), and outdoor learning professionals (the IOL) alongside the OEAP members employed by local authorities.
30. Despite the concerns and necessity for the bill raised in the previous section around equitable access, there are schools that do engage in residential outdoor education visits. These local authorities, school leaders and education professionals need to be consulted to share their effective practice in how they overcome some of the logistical issues that are encountered when organising and running an outdoor education residential, such as staff cover, gaining consent and ensuring the children have suitable equipment for the activities (although much is provided by the residential centres themselves).
31. The IOL has many members who are teachers organising these sorts of visits across the whole of the UK and can offer support and advice, and practical examples of how visits are run to individuals, schools and school leaders in dealing with some of these practical issues.
32. We accept that a one-size fits all model is not appropriate to reflect the different communities served by the range of schools in Wales. The bill does not appear to suggest that, but there will be consultation required by each local authority as to how to most effectively and efficiently implement the bill should it be passed.
33. AHOEC has members who are the providers of these residentials, and can also provide case studies of how outdoor education residentials are managed effectively to further share effective practice.

Summary

34. The IOL supports the proposed bill as it aligns with our mission and vision.
35. It appears that in its current format, the bill allows sufficient flexibility to allow each local authority to implement the bill in the most appropriate way for its context and communities.
36. There are many examples of how schools and school leaders have overcome some of the practical challenges to organising and running outdoor education residentials. As the bill does not call for wholly new practices, these existing effective solutions will need to be shared should the bill be passed so that practical and logistical considerations can be fully accommodated without diluting the principles at the heart of the bill: equity and inclusion.
37. The bill supports and enhances the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and its four purposes.
38. The inequitable situation in regard to access and provision of outdoor education residentials currently found in Wales requires legislative change to remedy the situation and bring equity.
39. There are significant financial benefits that will result from the implementation of the bill.
40. The bill tangibly supports the Well-being of future generations (Wales) act of 2015.