

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Residential Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

ROE 17

Ymateb gan: Bendrigg

Response from: Bendrigg

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## Background

Nick Liley is the Centre Director of Bendrigg.

Bendrigg is a registered charity and specialist outdoor education centre in Cumbria, England. It works with a broad range of people with different disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As well as its 64-bed centre in Cumbria, Bendrigg also provides specialist training and consultancy to other outdoor activity and leisure providers.

Please see: [Residential Activity Centre For Disabled People \(bendrigg.org.uk\)](http://bendrigg.org.uk)

## Response to questionnaire

***If residential outdoor education was free for all children, are there any other barriers that might prevent children attending?***

Potential barriers that might prevent children from attending an outdoor residential experience could be as follows:

- Low confidence or a perception that the child cannot participate in outdoor activities. This could be the child themselves, or their parent or guardian.
- Concerns over health and safety and whether there is increased risk to the child with a disability.
- Low confidence in the provider/staff that they are able to adequately cater for any additional needs or adaptations.
- A nervousness to spend the night away from home. This has been particular observed since the pandemic and is more likely with disabled children.
- Possible physical barriers if the child has a disability and the activity provider is unable to cater for them.
- Lack of suitable/accessible transport for the child to get to the activity provider, or when the child is on their residential stay.
- Whilst the cost of the residential might be free, if children need additional care support, those fees would need to be factored in to any costs. For example, the costs of providing a carer with accommodation and food at the residential centre, as well as paying the salary costs of the carer for the duration of the trip.
- Whether there are care/support staff available and willing to attend a residential trip themselves (if this is above and beyond their normal duties).
- The residential trip require significant planning, risk assessments and administration ahead of the trip. Often the time available for teachers or head teachers to do this is a barrier to the residential trips taking place.
- Concerns from teachers/head teachers over potential liability of taking children away.

***The Bill doesn't cover the costs of clothing or footwear for children attending residential visits. Is a lack of appropriate clothing an issue you've come across? If so, what can be done and by who to address this?***

This is not something we often see. Children generally come with their own clothing (as they

would for school), however, Bendrigg would provide any supplementary clothing and equipment required for the activities. Bendrigg also has some additional 'standard' clothing items in stock that may be used by individuals as required.

Most outdoor activity centres provide suitable clothing for the outdoors, including, waterproof clothing, fleeces, suitable footwear. Some 'day' activity providers may not provide such equipment.

***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 recognise and, if so, what could be done to address these concerns?***

Yes. Possible solutions could be:

- Improved literature, images, films, showing disabled and non-disabled people participating in outdoor activities alongside each other. This helps to 'normalise' the experience for everyone.
- Clear website of the activity provider with lots of information so that families can see where they are going and understand what they will be doing.
- Activity providers can produce online activity stories, in both paper or film format which will help reduce anxiety prior to any visit. Please see this as an example: [Communication Aids & Resources | Bendrigg Trust](#)
- Offering variations in length of stay, ranging from a full week to one night.
- Training for centre staff is important. They will be able to offer reassurance to families if they have any concerns. Ensuring that outdoor activity providers have the knowledge, skills, confidence and infrastructure to cater for people with different disabilities would provide more reassurance to children and their families.
- Offering a pre visit meeting online, or in person, so that activity centre staff can talk to parents and school staff to put them at ease. Centre staff can also take items of equipment during these sessions, to show people the equipment they will be using. This can be very helpful, particularly for autistic people.
- Once outdoor education is embedded within the education system, over time, it normalises the experience. Older pupils go back to school and feedback to younger children that it was a good experience and it is one that they should look forward to.
- Ensure there is a clear itinerary, so that people know what they can expect, with a clear plan for communicating any changes.
- Provide adequate school staffing to children ratios, to give confidence to parents and ensure that any issues during the visit can be dealt with and do not jeopardise the safety and care of the other children.
- Allow children and/or parents to stay locally to the activity provider, in different accommodation, so that the child can attend the day and evenings. This can be a good 'stepping stone' to a more independent residential in future years.

***How can the needs of all children be met so they can fully participate in residential outdoor education? In particular children with physical disabilities, mental health issues including anxiety, and those children with additional learning needs?***

- Please see all responses to previous answers.
- Some activity providers may require disability awareness training to give their staff more knowledge, confidence and skills to work with disabled children. (Bendrigg can provide this training and additional consultancy to help build sector capability.).
- Over time, activity providers may require infrastructure developments to ensure their facilities can cater for a wider range of disabled people. (Bendrigg can provide advice on this if required).
- Develop the activities to ensure they can be more inclusive for disabled people. (Bendrigg can provide advice on this if required).
- Flexibility is key. Activity providers need to be able to provide a bespoke programme to certain groups of young people and they need to be adjustable, throughout the course.
- Activity providers need to allow more time for the activities to take place. For example, some standard outdoor centres may allow two hours for a canoe session, where at a specialist outdoor centre, a half day or full day may be allocated for the activity.
- Activity providers must be able to cater for additional people on the trip, such as carers, signers or learning support.
- Outdoor providers may require some financial support to purchase specialist disability equipment, such as hoists, specialist climbing harnesses or canoe seating.

***There aren't any providers in Wales who offer specialised provision for children with more complex needs. If the Bill passes, this leaves a serious gap in ensuring equity of provision in Wales. What needs to be done, and by who, to ensure that all children regardless of their needs can access the offer of residential outdoor education in Wales?***

All children should be given the opportunity of an outdoor residential. Possibly solutions could be:

- Training and consultancy for existing activity providers. At Bendrigg, we believe that many outdoor activity providers can do much more than they currently do in providing inclusive and accessible outdoor activity courses. Training will challenge perceptions, change attitudes, and give people the skills, knowledge and confidence to work with disabled people. We believe that this is a key solution to this issue.
- Provide financial support to outdoor providers for specialist disability equipment, such as hoists, specialist climbing harnesses or canoe seating.
- There are a number of specialist activity providers in England, Bendrigg is just one. The specialist providers could play an important role in providing outdoor activities to disabled children in Wales. However, this should be seen as a short to mid-term solution as Welsh centres should be working to become more inclusive for everyone.

***The Bill's Regulatory Impact Assessment assumes that the costs for pupils with severe learning difficulties are approximately double those charged for pupils not requiring additional support. Is this an accurate assumption?***

Whilst it is difficult to find a direct comparison of service and fees, we have found that specialist provider fees are significantly higher than those of a standard provider. Furthermore, at Bendrigg, we do not pass on the full cost of the fees, because it would result in the residential being unaffordable to the disabled person. It is no coincidence that all the specialist providers have charity status and require additional funding to offset the loss from course fees. Higher instructional staffing ratios, specialist equipment and infrastructure and increased

administration costs all contribute to these higher fees. As an example, where a mainstream outdoor centre might use one or two activity staff to deliver a climbing session for a group of twelve non-disabled people, a specialist provider may need to deploy three or four staff to deliver the same session to a group of disabled people.

The Welsh Government also needs to consider the costs of disabled children attending the residential with care staff. Whilst this adds additional costs to the activity provider, school or individual for the 'bed and board' of the carer, the disabled person also has to factor in the costs of paying the care staff to attend the residential trip. For some people with more complex disabilities, this can be between one and three additional people. It is worth noting however, that 'groups' of disabled people will often share the care staff and therefore, the care, per person, is reduced.

In summary and to answer the question directly, yes, it is a fair assumption that the cost to a disabled person could be double than that of a non-disabled person.

Please note, I have answered this question in relation to people with any disability, not just people with '**learning difficulties**' as the question has suggested.

***The Bill provides that a course of residential outdoor education doesn't need to be provided on one visit. Do you think that this is the right approach or would you like to see a requirement for the course to always be the full four nights and five days?***

I believe there is evidence to show that the benefit of an outdoor activity residentials are significantly increased when:

- a. It is for a longer duration (i.e. 4 nights rather than 2).
- b. There are multiple visits.

If multiple visits were an option (which would certainly be more beneficial), then clearly the cost of this would need to be considered.

We observe at Bendrigg more benefit for the young person with a longer, four night residential than a shorter two night stay. It allows time for children to settle into the routine of the centre, bond with their peers and teachers, and it opens up more opportunities for learning. However, I would argue that a two-night residential is better than no residential at all. It is worth noting however that the shorter the residential, the more costly it is per person, per night, for the provider to deliver. Therefore, the 'value for money' of each residential is reduced.

As explained in a previous response, some of our visitors prefer to have a one or two night stay, as some children (or their families) find it difficult to commit to anything longer. At Bendrigg, we have deliberately maintained this flexibility, because it is what some of our groups ask for.

***What is your view on setting a minimum level of requirements for providers of residential outdoor education to meet before they provide visits for schools? What would be the benefits and drawbacks from your perspectives?***

- Hold an AALA Licence and adhere to all other legislation relating to the delivery of outdoor activities.
- A quality badge such as 'learning outside the classroom' 'AHOEC Gold standard' or similar could be beneficial.

- Be able to provide suitable outdoor activity clothing and equipment to all participants.
- Be able to provide accommodation for children and teachers and to cater for a gender mix.
- Have access to suitable outdoor spaces.
- Have an 'accessibility statement' which describes their level of accessibility and who they can cater for. All activity providers should be working towards being able to provide their service for as wide a variety of people as possible.
- All providers 'should' be able to provide services for mainstream schools, which will likely include some young people with disabilities. In my view, this should be a reasonable expectation that these individuals can attend the residential with their peers. It is unacceptable that one disabled child within a mainstream setting should be left out, due to their disability. Where there is a special education needs department or specialist school, with multiple children with disabilities, then it may be more appropriate for them to attend a specialist outdoor centre.