

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

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Ymateb gan: Eryri-Bywiol

Response from: Snowdonia-Active



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Evidence presented to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Residential Outdoor Education Bill.

Snowdonia-Active

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This evidence is presented on behalf of Snowdonia-Active, a not for profit organisation delivering projects linked to outdoor recreation, tourism and conservation in Wales and beyond.

Snowdonia-Active are unequivocally supportive of the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill.

Fair and universal access to outdoor learning experiences for every child in Wales would bring about economical, social and environmental benefits.

Times of economic uncertainty can widen the social-economic gap leading to greater health inequalities. With schools unable to charge for educational visits, only being able to ask for a contribution, increasingly, only the children of families that can afford it, experience the wide-ranging benefits of participating in a residential outdoor education visit. Children living in Wales' most affluent areas are twice as likely to take part in a residential Outdoor Education visit that those living in areas with high levels of deprivation.

Throughout Wales there is significant increase in mental health issues and children accessing local authority support for additional needs. The rates of childhood obesity in Wales are the highest in the UK, with about 35 per cent of children (under 16 years old) being overweight or obese in 2011. This includes around 19 per cent of children classified as obese, 23 per cent of boys and 16 per cent of girls. It is predicted that the childhood obesity rate in Wales will continue to rise in forthcoming years. Children in Wales are the world's least fit, according to research which looked at 60 countries.

Encouraging a health lifestyle by being more active outdoors should be both embedded more widely throughout school life and every child in Wales should be given the opportunity to go on an outdoor residential visit.

Evidence towards the value of outdoor learning

Education in its broadest sense is not just about delivering a curriculum. It is about giving children and adults the chance to extend their life skills and confidence, fostering resilience, and sense of responsibility. Outdoor opportunities and activities can expand horizons beyond the traditional

learning environments. There is no doubt that outdoor learning experiences can have a positive

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impact on attainment; Wales' next generation is tomorrow's workforce.

In 2018, Wales Council for Outdoor Learning and OEAP Cymru produced the document 'High-Quality Outdoor Learning' which focuses on ten key outcomes which outdoor learning can support:

- Enjoyment
- Confidence & character
- Health and well being
- Social and emotional awareness
- Environmental awareness
- Activity skills
- Personal qualities
- Skills for life
- Motivation for learning
- Broadened horizons

Whilst our call is for a more natural curriculum which sees children every school day spending more time outdoors, learning, we recognise the huge benefits for outdoor learning residential trips for you young people and the transformation which can take place as a result.

Evidence towards the value of residential trips

Evaluation of Learning Away (2015) found that quality residential learning: has a strong, positive impact on academic achievement and provides a wide range of student-level outcomes; can transform the learning experience of students; can help to transform schools; and does not need to be expensive. Specifically:

- Relationships: residential can foster deeper student-teacher/adult and student-student relationships that can be sustained back in schools and result in improved learner engagement and progress/achievement;
- Resilience, Self-confidence and Wellbeing: residential can significantly improve students' resilience, self-confidence, and sense of wellbeing;
- Engagement with Learning: residential can significantly improve students' engagement with their learning, leading to improved school attendance and behaviour;
- Achievement: residential can boost attainment in SATs and GCSE/National 4 and 5 qualifications (previously Standard Grades in Scotland) in the core subjects of English, maths and science;
- Knowledge, Skills and Understanding: residential can significantly improve student knowledge, understanding and skills in a wide range of curriculum areas at the primary and secondary phase;
- Cohesion: residential can significantly boost cohesion, interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging across schools/communities;
- Leadership, Co-design and Facilitation: residential can offer rich opportunities for student leadership, co-design and facilitation of learning that can be extended and sustained back in school to positive effect;
- Transition: residential can significantly improve students' transition experiences;
- Pedagogical Skills: residential can enable teachers in primary and secondary schools to widen and develop their pedagogical skills in ways that support learner engagement and progress/attainment.

Evidence towards the value of early years outdoors and life long learning

Whilst we hugely support the bill which ask for an outdoor residential experience for every child in Wales. We want the bill to recognise the value of outdoor learning/play/activity from the very earliest in a child's life - conception.

What happens during our early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well- being; from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status.

Time spent outside is one vital contributor to a baby's development, with positive benefits to the way they learn. Simply being outside is thought to stimulate a baby and sleeping outside has positive benefits too. Additionally, the public health challenge of vitamin D deficiency in babies could be combatted with greater time spent outdoors.

Time spent outside during the foundational years appears to be decreasing. The Welsh Government Childcare, Play and Early Years division found that families with children under five were particularly vulnerable to impact by the pandemic, and that family support interventions are required to encourage all children and adults to play in the outdoors and natural environments. Consequently, interventions to encourage parents and babies to spend time outside are needed to promote better health and to support the development of the child.

Shockingly, 1 in 4 children are obese when they start school which continues to increase throughout childhood. Fear, time, space and technology are all barriers to spending time outdoors. Yet the issues associated with increased screen time and decreased green time are rapidly worsening. The rise of Nature Deficit Disorder which describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.

Snowdonia-Active in collaboration with Bangor University have conducted research on their Babi Actif project which helps parents to be outdoors and active with their babies during baby's first 1000 days (conception to age 2) to support parental health and aid baby development. This research suggests that whilst there are an abundance of benefits for parents to be outdoors and active, there are profound benefits for their babies. 83% of parents agreed that their baby's health and/or wellbeing improved by attending Babi Actif outdoor nature play sessions.

The 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's 2nd birthday offer a unique window of opportunity to build healthier and more prosperous futures. More specifically the benefits of early years outdoors:

- Being outdoors can be an exciting sensory experience in the early years which can help babies learn and gain experience through all their senses, thus improving cognitive development.
- Being outdoors helps develop motor skills. Young children need the opportunity to use their whole body and develop their gross motor skills. It's only when they have mastered these that they will be able to control their fine motor skills, such as using a knife and fork or holding a pencil, for instance.
- Being physically active contributes to a healthy weight and enhances bone and muscular development.
- Taking part in group activities supports the learning of social skills.
- Babies sleep better at night if they've had some fresh air and sunshine during the day.
- Being outdoors helps to develop risk awareness.
- Being outdoors helps to develop independence.
- Children who gain a knowledge and appreciation of nature are more likely to become adults with a greater sense of environmental awareness.
- Being physically active gives babies the best chance of reaching their developmental outcomes at age 2

- In the long term, encouraging a culture of physically active families will help deliver a generational change towards fewer children exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

There is a growing body of international evidence that a greater prioritisation of our resources in the very early years would bring both additional lifelong benefits and a better return on investment for society and public services. However, there is proportionally less financial investment currently made in the early years than across the rest of the life course.

“Two is too late! We spend billions on challenges in society from lack of school readiness to bullying to poor mental health to addictions and criminality; and further billions on conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and congenital heart disease. Yet, the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down in the period from conception to the age of two and we don’t give this critical period the focus it deserves. Prevention isn’t only kinder, but it’s also much cheaper than cure – what happens to an infant in the 1,001 critical days is all about prevention, and a strong, supportive policy framework in this area can truly change our society for the better, while saving billions for taxpayers.” Chairman’s introduction – Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, The Best Start for Life, A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days, The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report (2001)

“Science tells us that a child’s experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today, will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially and psychologically vital to a prosperous society.”

– Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020.

Early experiences influence a baby’s brain, and in particular their social and emotional development. This early development plays an important role in how well a child will go on to achieve many of the key outcomes that parents, the public, professionals and policymakers care about. For example, babies who have had good early relationships start school best equipped to be able to make friends and learn. This increases the chances that they will achieve their potential in later life and contribute to society and the economy.

Spending time learning and playing outdoor in the early years builds the foundation of physical and socially rounded children entering school. This should then be followed by high quality outdoor learning throughout their school life through a natural curriculum.

I am happy for my name/organisation to be published alongside our evidence.

The Committee does not need to treat any or all of our written evidence as confidential.