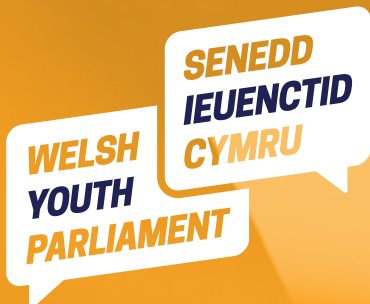


MY SCHOOL DAY

WELSH YOUTH PARLIAMENT
EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL
CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

November 2023



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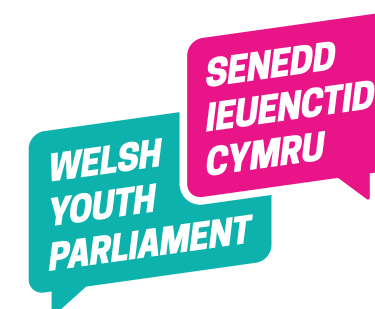
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INTRODUCTION

We are a group of 24 Welsh Youth Parliament Members (WYPMs) who have come together to form the Education and the School Curriculum Committee. As we approach the end of the second Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP) term, we are pleased to share our Committee's Report, the third and final Welsh Youth Parliament report of this term.

When we first met as a Committee, we discussed what the focus of our work should be. The education that young people receive in school is more important now than ever, especially given the challenges faced during, and coming out of the lockdowns caused by the pandemic, with more learners struggling with their mental health and attendance at school.

'Education is something that every young person requires, it shapes and poses as one of the largest influences on a young person's life.'
(Bartosz Pawel Firmanty, Welsh Youth Parliament Member, Wrexham)

The Curriculum for Wales will play an important role in young people's development, but we felt it was too early to explore its impact and effectiveness at this stage. Instead we decided to focus on options which the Welsh Government explored to help learners catch up on the social, academic and wellbeing opportunities they missed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, specifically, exploring whether reconsidering the length of the school day could help improve young people's wellbeing and confidence; the support provided to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (for example, from poorer areas) to achieve at their place of learning; and young people's social and personal skills.

In its [Co-operation Agreement](#) with Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Government has committed to explore options to reform the rhythm of the school day to create space for more wide-ranging, culturally-accessible activities and opportunities.

During the 2021/22 academic year, the Welsh Government held trials on 'Additional Enrichment Sessions' in primary schools, secondary schools and in further education institutions. These trials included adding five hours to a school week for a period of ten weeks. In the majority of cases, this meant adding an hour immediately at the end of each day, although in some settings the five hours were spread over longer periods on three or four days of the week. The 'Additional Enrichment Sessions' were used to provide outdoor adventure activities, physical activities, sessions to improve wellbeing, and other experiences some young people may not have previously been able to access, at the school. These trials [have been evaluated](#) with all who participated. One of the recommendations from this evaluation is to continue to deliver these 'Additional Enrichment Activities' long-term. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language [said in July 2023](#) that the Welsh Government is considering the findings in terms of wider education policies and reforms.

Our consultation focused on understanding how young people from across Wales felt about the idea, and if they felt there could be other ways to achieve the same outcomes.

'Extending the length of the school day would have a huge impact on the lives of young people, and it is crucial that their views are considered before any changes are made.'
(Finn Sinclair, Welsh Youth Parliament Member, Preseli Pembrokeshire)

'The changes will be experienced by the young people themselves, so it is vital that their views are taken into account.'
(Lloyd Warburton, Welsh Youth Parliament Member, Ceredigion)

Over the last few months, we've engaged with over 1,500 young people who responded to our survey, took part in our focus groups, or engaged with us at events like Flintshire School Pride and the All Wales Young Carers Festival 2023. 260 adults including various of education professionals, parents and guardians that completed our survey also had their say.

We heard from young people from every local authority area, those with caring responsibilities, young people with disabilities, and those from different ethnic backgrounds. The majority of the young people who we engaged with (82%) were aged between 11 and 16 years old, and 46% identified the area in which they lived as very rural or quite rural. The findings in our report reflect the views of self-selecting respondents who chose to participate in the survey, and those who were

USE OF ADDITIONAL TIME



USE OF ADDITIONAL TIME

The majority of the young people and adults surveyed did not agree with the idea of extending the length of the school day. Of those young people who were in support of the idea, 54% felt it should increase by less than five hours a week, whereas 39% felt that five hours was the right amount. Of the adults surveyed who were in agreement with increasing the hours, 63% felt that a five hours increase was just right, and 28% thought the increase should be less than five hours.

There was extremely strong support for making 'Additional Enrichment Activities' free at the point of access, with 89% of young people and 83% of adults expressing this view. Over two thirds of young people and adults with whom we engaged told us that participating in these activities shouldn't be compulsory.

'If you force it, people will want to rebel. If you just create an environment where it's so beneficial to do it that people want to take part, then that's far better, plus young people want to feel that they have choices.' (Young person)

'People have things to do and also if you add compulsory activities there's a higher chance of burn out.' (Young person)

If five hours were added to the school week, our survey results reflect that both young people and adults would want to see a variety of activities provided. By far the most popular response was for outdoor sport or physical activity with 51% of young people and 63% of adults selecting this option. Arts and crafts (including drama and music), and cookery and nutrition were also very popular choices. There was some marginal support for using this time for extra lessons to help with school work (17% of young people and 13% of adults), but most felt this time should focus more on 'life skills' (such as physical activity, sex and relationships education, financial literacy, and mental health and wellbeing).

Young people's and adults' preference was for the time to be added either after lessons finish in the afternoon (34% of young people, and 44% of adults), or for a mixture throughout the week (39% of young people, and 39% of adults). There was very little support for this time to be added before the start of the current school day or during lunchtime (while allowing time to eat lunch of course).

Both young people and adults expressed concerns that introducing these additional hours would make it more difficult to attend activities like sports clubs or music lessons outside places of learning, with 57% of young people, and 47% of adults thinking this would be challenging.

Some of the young people questioned how all young people would be able to afford the time for these opportunities, in particular those who have caring responsibilities, and they suggested that places of learning should look to provide such opportunities and activities during the time young people are currently receiving education.

'Some people have stuff to do at home like taking care of loved ones, homework, extracurricular.' (Young person)

'What if you have responsibilities at home? The extra hours will merely increase stress levels in young people.' (Young person)

'Some people have a lot of activities out of the school, and if they were forced to do the activities in school, they might have to give up doing activities out of the school that they really enjoy.' (Young person)

'Many schools already provide (to some extent) many of the activities suggested, via voluntary clubs.' (Young person)

'This should already be done during the school day. Extending the school day could cause more welfare problems and more tired children.' (Young person)

Some young people felt that extending the amount of time they were required to be in the place of learning would reduce the time they had available to do their homework, and subsequently cause them more stress.

'The amount of homework set in secondary school is astronomical and so taking five hours a week away from this would impact upon students' stress levels, their mental health.' (Young person)

CONCLUSIONS

It's extremely important to help young people achieve their potential, and the pandemic has undoubtedly affected many young people's progress in a variety of ways. We applaud the Welsh Government for exploring ways that can help those impacted to catch up on the opportunities they missed during this period, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. It is clear to us however that there is a significant amount of scepticism towards the idea of increasing the length of the school day, a point we will return to later in this report.

The 'Additional Enrichment Sessions' trials, run by the Welsh Government, saw young people take part in a wide range of activities like sport, arts and crafts, and cookery. From the discussions we've had with young people in our schools, colleges, youth groups, in the focus groups events our Committee has run, and from the responses to this survey, a consistent message we've heard loudly and clearly is that young people want consistent, effective provision of these type of activities and other life skills.

We believe that the new Curriculum for Wales provides an opportunity to achieve some of the objectives connected to these trials, and that the priority in the short to medium term should be to effectively embed it, including providing the type of activities included within the 'Additional Enrichment Activities' during the time they currently spend in school without the need to increase the number of hours. While we do not support the introduction of these additional hours, if the length of the school week were to increase, participation for young people should not be compulsory.

'I think that there are much bigger issues to do with the curriculum that need to be dealt with before adding extra hours of school on top.'
(Young person)

'A reshaping for secondary education, more like key stage 2, is needed to improve confidence, resilience and wellbeing, with a reduced focus on preparing for exams and focus to a greater extent on the outdoors, sports and the creative subjects, via a whole school approach to health, wellbeing, PSE and RSE. Therefore, these should be available throughout the day via cross curricular teaching especially in key stage 3, becoming more specialised in key stage 4, and NOT via extra hours.'
(Adult)

'I would advocate exploring ways to make the existing time more effective. As an experienced teacher it is clear that the current schooling model does not fit all well.' (Adult)

We agree with those who responded to our survey, who overwhelmingly supported the call for these activities to be free at the point of access. Young people should be at the heart of decisions in terms of the type of activities provided and how they are delivered.

'There should be an element for the children to select what the activities are and this should be based on what they want to do rather than group them into what they should like.' (Adult)

WE CALL FOR

- Consistent, effective delivery of physical activity, outdoor adventure activities, arts and crafts, cookery and nutrition, and other life skills through the new Curriculum for Wales, delivered within existing school hours.
- Young people should be at the heart of decisions in terms of which activities are provided, and they should be free at the point of entry.
- The Welsh Government should review the need to increase school hours subsequent to providing sufficient time to places of learning to attempt to deliver these type of activities within the current school day.

IMPACT



IMPACT

In our survey we asked a range of questions to understand what impact people felt delivering these 'Additional Enrichment Activities' at places of learning, during extended periods in the week would bring.

Those engaged stated they would benefit from spending more time socialising with friends in person (44% of young people, and 48% of adults). A large proportion of adults (63%) felt that bringing in these changes would give young people access to activities that they wouldn't usually be able to get involved in due to factors such as cost, or distance of travel, but young people responding to our survey were less sure about this, with 39% in agreement, and 40% disagreeing with that view.

The majority of respondents (40% of young people, and 57% of adults) felt that more disadvantaged groups of young people and those from poorer backgrounds would significantly benefit from taking part in the types of sessions included within the 'Additional Enrichment Sessions', like outdoor adventure activities, physical activities, and sessions to improve wellbeing.

'With these new hours in the school day, they would be able to enjoy the same privileges as their peers, without having to worry about cost.' (Young person)

'It would help level the field. And give those in disadvantaged areas an opportunity to take part.' (Adult)

'If the additional time is used for really high quality activities then yes, I agree. My children have missed out on a lot during Covid-19 and this would be a way to help them make up for lost learning, build confidence and social skills and develop resilience.' (Adult)

However, 57% of young people and 55% of adults we engaged with didn't think that implementing these changes would improve performance and attendance at school, with concerns raised around learners' mental health and wellbeing. 61% of young people told us that it wouldn't improve their mental health and wellbeing, and 46% didn't think it would improve their confidence. Some young people expressed a need to get out of the school setting, and that for some, spending additional time in that environment would be detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing.

'It's nice to get away from the school atmosphere as it can be very stressful for many people.' (Young person)

'Some children really struggle with school for various reasons, including bullying, and cannot wait to get away.' (Adult)

'Because people may have other activities planned for out of school time and need that down time away from a school environment.' (Young person)

Many raised concerns about young people's capacity to engage for more time than they currently do within a school day. The majority of those we engaged with were young people of secondary school age who spoke of the need to retain so much information in existing lessons, and noted exam stress as also being a significant factor, and that adding to the length of the school day could lead to burnout.

'Five hours of learning every day is already a lot to ask of them. Schools are fast paced and we ask students to jump from one subject to another. Adding more to their day will not help them to learn. It will cause burnout and more disengagement. As a teacher I already see the difference in behaviour / attitude and retention to information between morning lessons and those at the end of the day.' (Adult)

'It's nice to relax after a long day of school because its tiring ... I feel adding an extra five hours to the school week will make me very tired.' (Young person)

'Having experience of working with families in disadvantaged backgrounds, I don't think a longer school day is the answer to supporting them. Children need time to rest and follow their interests at their own pace.' (Adult)

'Neurodivergent children have enough trouble making it through a school day without being forced to do this for longer. I strongly disagree with this proposal for this reason.' (Adult)

'Lengthening the school day needs proper consultation with disability and ALN groups.' (Adult)

A number of inadvertent consequences were suggested to us as a result of extending the school day to accommodate these activities. Some told us that it

would see more pressure on existing activities delivered by places of learning outside of set school time, while others raised concerns about how it could negatively impact attendance at other afterschool clubs.

'As someone who relies on access to pupils after school to rehearse GCSE and A level Drama pracs as well as whole school musicals (with casts of up to 200 pupils) I am less likely to get pupils to rehearse from 16:30 to 18:30 than I am 15:30 to 17:30. This could be ruinous for a school's artistic output if pupils have to sign up to certain activities.' (Adult)

'Some children and young people will be part of clubs / groups that parents pay for, it would be a detriment to those groups.' (Adult)

'The closure of other childcare providers due to free competition.' (Adult)

Across the other categories we inquired about, such as impact on young people's physical health, and their numeracy and literacy skills, both young people's and adults' responses did not reflect a strong opinion for or against.

Young people in our survey expressed a preference (41%) for 'Additional Enrichment Activities' to be delivered by a combination of staff at places of learning, external providers and youth workers. This view was shared by the adults who responded to our survey.

Many of those we engaged with raised questions about how delivering these activities during additional hours would be possible financially, given the pressures places of learning and education professionals already face.

'Schools have no money to do extracurricular stuff so you need to give them more money.' (Young person)

'You can't even resource your classrooms with sufficient funding so that effective teaching and learning can take place. You are exhausting your staff members and I will choose to leave the teaching profession if another activity is introduced.' (Adult)

'School transport is already a lottery, who's going to pay for additional services?' (Adult)

Another logistical concern raised with us was around how a longer school day would impact young people's travel from their place of learning, and the impact that would have on their parents or guardians.

'Some people struggle to get to and from school due to parental work commitments, public transport timings etc.' (Young person)

'Balancing pick up times of multiple children with different needs / activities would pose a problem.' (Adult)

'People with disadvantaged backgrounds won't be able to participate because of lack of transport home afterwards due to poor bus services fuel costs etc.' (Young person)

CONCLUSIONS

As we concluded in the previous section, we fully support the need for the delivery of 'Additional Enrichment Activities', and other life skills to help young people achieve their potential and to prepare them for the future. We agree with those who responded to our survey that this would help more disadvantaged young people, and we would like to see these types of activities delivered consistently to give young people from all backgrounds access to unique activities regardless of their financial situation.

We share the concerns raised by the young people with whom we engaged, regarding how increasing the time they spend in places of learning could impact on their mental health and wellbeing. We know that different young people have very different experiences at school, and for some spending more time there will have the opposite effect to the objective - causing additional stress and anxiety to young people, because they're spending more time around bullies, they have less time to do their homework, less opportunity to relax and unwind away from an environment that a lot of young people associate with learning, not relaxation and fun. As a Committee, we also question if young people have the ability to focus and the energy to fully engage for an additional five hours a week, and this could have a greater effect on young people with additional learning needs. We'd be concerned that this could lead to an even lower level of attendance and performance at school.

'For some people, school is a negative place, so forcing them to stay there longer to 'help with their health and wellbeing' doesn't make sense.' (Young person)

Likewise, we're very aware of how much pressure our teachers and other education professionals are already under, and how difficult the financial situation is for education institutions. We share the fears raised, that introducing additional hours to the day will both put even further financial pressure on schools and other places of learning, and will add even more to the workload of educators who are already stretched.

'Diversion of funding from schools, headteacher and staff workload, damage to school premises, disciplinary issues, increased pressure in staff retention.' (Adult)

'Ensure schools have the finances to do the activities in the school day. We lost a fantastic drama teacher who covered Planning, Preparation and Assessment sessions due to budget constrictions. Sometimes I cannot do some activities because we don't have the resources.' (Adult)

As we've mentioned previously, we do not agree with the proposal of extending the length of the school day. A number of other issues would need to be addressed before we can fully understand if it is practical. For example, funding, changes to transport from places of learning, and how it would affect existing clubs and activities that are held outside of school hours.

While we agree with the concept of providing further opportunities for young people, in particular those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, we don't feel that extending the length of the school day is the way to deliver it. This should be possible within current set school hours.

WE CALL FOR

- Any future trials should seek to address barriers such as transport from school, cost of delivery, and impact on education professionals' capacity and wellbeing.
- Further research to understand the extent of the capacity of young people to engage in these types of activities during additional hours, if the provision should be uniform across age groups, and the benefit this would bring. Particular focus should be given to young people with additional learning needs.



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a Committee we agree with the Welsh Government that improving young people's wellbeing and confidence, their social and personal skills, and enhancing the support provided to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is a major priority, especially to counteract the issues young people have experienced due to the pandemic.

The young people surveyed were unconvinced that extending the length of the school day to accommodate these 'Additional Enrichment Activities' is the best way to achieve this. 69% thought that increasing the amount of time young people spend in their place of learning by five hours a week was a bad idea. 58% of young people felt that on the whole, adding five hours to the school week would have a negative impact on them, and the majority of adults who responded to our survey (45%) felt it would be detrimental for them as parents, guardians or education professionals.

'I do not believe that an extra five hours of school time a week is a good idea. Not only does it give students less time with their families, but also limits other extracurricular activities, and means teachers will go home to their families later in the day, therefore seeing them less. For those who do not like school, it would only worsen their mental health, therefore defeating the objective.' (Young person)

'Many children do enough anyway - universalism isn't always the answer.' (Adult)

We agree with them, and have significant concerns that implementing these changes may have the opposite results to what is hoped, not just on young learners, but also on school staff. Young people and adults alike felt that there are other ways to achieve these aims by prioritising resources to allow for smaller class sizes, improve support available within places of learning, and for better access to specialist services to aid young people with their mental health and wellbeing. This has been the focus of some of our colleagues in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee, who in their report [Young Minds Matter](#) outlined a range of recommendations to improve the support young people receive in their place of learning.

'Improving mental health services like counsellors and access to them.' (Young person)

'I think the answer to children's well-being and support for disadvantaged families would be to fund schools and social care properly rather than put an extra burden on schools that will be a sticking plaster again.' (Adult)

'I think that well-being services in schools should be provided or improved, such as counselling and safe spaces to address personal issues. Lessons should be set aside in our timetables for wellbeing lessons in which we actually learn important life skills and lessons such as sex education, finance etc.' (Young person)

We want to see the new Curriculum for Wales deliver these activities within the time young people currently spend at school, as we agree that taking part in activities like sport, physical activities, outdoor adventure activities, arts and music, cooking and nutrition, and other life skills should be a big part of our learning experience at school.

Cost is a huge barrier to accessing these kinds of activities and trips, as things stand. We support the call from the WYP Climate and Environment Committee, who called for free public transport for young people in their recent report [Sustainable Ways](#). We know from our own experience that some of the opportunities provided to young people in their places of learning put significant financial pressure on families, which inevitably leads to those young people from lower income families missing out.

It's important to acknowledge that time away from the school environment is important for young people, and that there is a benefit in young people taking part in these types of activities outside of that setting. Youth groups and organisations play a key role in delivering these types of activities, and they need to be supported effectively to provide support in the community, experiences and opportunities for young people.

'Better access to services in the community would be a better investment eg. Workshops to upskill parents, parent support workshops, swimming pools, youth clubs, cycling programmes and guidance on food nutrition.' (Adult)

'Youth services, funding youth groups, allowing current youth groups (theatre groups and sports teams) to make applications for funded places for those pupils who are most disadvantaged.' (Adult)

'Invest in youth services, expand on existing and reopen statutory youth clubs, not only would this be far more inexpensive than paying to keep everyone in school for more time, Youth Club workers are better placed to offer services young people will want to access better than simply putting extra pressure on school staff.' (Adult)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consistent, effective delivery of physical activity, outdoor adventure activities, arts and crafts, cookery and nutrition, and other life skills through the new Curriculum for Wales, delivered within existing school hours.
- Young people should be at the heart of decisions in terms of which activities are provided, and they should be free at the point of entry.
- The Welsh Government should review the need to increase school hours subsequent to providing sufficient time to places of learning to attempt to deliver these type of activities within the current school day.
- Any future trials should seek to address barriers such as transport from school, cost of delivery, and impact on education professionals' capacity and wellbeing.
- Further research required to understand how much capacity young people have to engage in these types of activities during additional hours, if the provision should be uniform across age groups, and the benefit this would bring. Particular focus on young people with additional learning needs.
- Provide youth groups and organisations with the resources to enable increased provision of these types of activities for young people in communities across Wales.



