

Draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales

Consultation response form

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Responses should be returned by **15 December 2014** to

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Welsh Government
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CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

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**Cyfoeth
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Natural
Resources
Wales**

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the largest Welsh Government public sponsored body with just under 2000 staff, an operating budget of £17 million and manages 7% of the land in Wales. Our purpose is to ensure that the environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and in the future.

Natural Resources Wales aims:

"..... to play a central role in delivering sustainable development for Wales. This means bringing the management of our natural resources and environment together in a balanced and integrated way, to deliver benefits for the people, environment and economy"

Natural Resources Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation. Our aim is to highlight the importance of natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages.

The questions below relate to proposals and recommendations set out in the *Draft 10-year plan for the early years, childcare and play workforce*. The page numbers indicated after each question refer to that document.

1. Leadership

Recommendation 4 of the Foundation Phase Stocktake stated that there should be:

compulsory training for leaders' across the sector including strategic leaders in the Country, consortia, primary head teachers, advisory staff, leaders of funded non-maintained settings and services to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The training should be bespoke to the audience taking into account their history and previous experiences and include research showing how effective implementation of the Foundation Phase can support standards and impact on social and economic growth generally.

Question 1 – Do you agree that there should be compulsory training for leaders to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase? (p.21)

Agree

√

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales agrees that there should be compulsory training for leaders to support their understanding of the principles and practices of the Foundation Phase. The principles and practices should include a clear understanding of learning outside the classroom in the natural environment and outdoor play, both integral aspects of the Foundation Phase pedagogy.

It is important to foster an interest and appreciation of the natural environment from a young age. Amongst the many benefits, evidence shows that learning outside the classroom has a positive impact on those who do not perform well in a classroom setting and help can lead to a healthier lifestyle in the future.

Despite the early training through Module 6 of the Foundation Phase National Training Pack and the issue of document number 0022/2007 – Out of Classroom Learning, there is currently a lack of practical and outdoor experience amongst some educational practitioners, particularly those new into the profession. It is essential that leaders have outdoor learning knowledge and experience in order to support their staff in this important aspect and that this should be updated through regular training.

Natural Resources Wales would be pleased to assist in any such training through the provision of resources (activities and ideas), safe and accessible land and trained education staff.

Question 2 – Do you agree that the learning hub model as set out in the draft 10-year plan would encourage greater collaboration in the early years, childcare and play sector and help to support a self-improving network? (p.24)

Agree



Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales recognises the value of collaboration and the role that networks can play in facilitating CPD and self-improvement.

We would like to draw your attention to the Outdoor Learning Wales Network as an example of local groups attuned to local needs supporting practitioners and providers to promote the benefits of outdoor learning for all ages

www.outdoorlearningwales.org

Many individual and organisation members (third sector, independent providers, public sector bodies, NGO's, local authorities) will be able contribute to the proposed learning hubs, through skills and experience related to outdoor learning, real world learning, subject knowledge, site based knowledge and/or specific aspects of pedagogy (e.g. ESDGC).

Natural Resources Wales therefore suggests collaborative working and mentoring across sectors.

Question 3 – Please consider Recommendations 15 and 16 of the Graham Review.

Recommendation 15: We recommend that Welsh Government ensures that regulations are revised to require appropriate Level 5 qualifications for leaders of all newly registered settings from 2018, and all settings from 2020.

Recommendation 16: We recommend that Welsh Government introduce regulations that require larger settings (registered for 20 children or more) to have a supernumerary manager should also require that manager to hold an appropriate Level 5 qualification (with specific leadership modules) by 2020 and a Level 6 qualification by 2024.

Do you agree with these recommendations? (p.26)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

✓

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but wishes to highlight the important of including reference to natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages within any agreed qualification.

Outdoor Learning should be an integral component of any qualification gained by an early years settings manager

Question 4 – Do you agree that the proposed Level 6 qualification would equip practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead and deliver high-quality practice? (p.26)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

✓

Supporting comments

As per question 3, Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but again wishes to highlight that any modifications to ITT, practitioner CPD or Higher Level qualifications should recognise and include Out of Classroom Learning and Outdoor Play as integral parts of Foundation Phase education. The skills and knowledge required to enable outdoor learning and operate in outdoor settings should be an essential part of all ITT, CPD and higher level courses and qualifications.

2. Attracting high-quality new entrants

Question 5a – Do you agree that it would be beneficial for pre-entry information sessions to be extended to cover the requirements and opportunities of working in all types of settings in the early years, childcare and play sector? (p.32)

Agree



Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales agrees that it would be beneficial for pre-entry information sessions to be extended to cover the requirements and opportunities of working in all types of settings in the early years, childcare and play sector and that this should include a range of different outdoor settings.

Question 5b – If you agree, please provide information as to how these sessions could most effectively be extended and delivered. (p.33)

Supporting comments

Sessions could be effectively extended and delivered through improved connections and collaborative working with organisations and individuals.

For example within the environmental sector there are many organisations which have education departments regularly working in the natural environment with children of all ages and this can provide opportunities for work experience at all levels. Natural Resources Wales regularly hosts up to 80 young people a year across the business and would be happy to offer opportunities to early year practitioner trainees.

Natural Resources Wales can also offer links to others within the environmental education sector through the Outdoor Learning Wales Network Groups which can support collaborative working, the sharing of good practice and provide opportunities for delivering CPD skill sharing events.

Question 6 – Do you agree that a structured induction process should be the first stage in a personal development plan for all new entrants to the sector and that completion of this should be recorded in a continuous professional development (CPD) portfolio? (p.33)

Agree



Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales agrees that a structured induction process should be the first stage in a personal development plan for all new entrants to the sector and that completion of this should be recorded in a continuous professional development (CPD) portfolio. This process is followed by our own staff.

Natural Resources Wales would like to see the development of the skills required to enable Out of Classroom Learning as an integral part of any induction process with CPD in this area included within the continuous development plan.

Question 7 – Do you agree that any future Level 6 qualification should be complemented by a Graduate Level Certificate in Leadership in Childhood Practice to enable graduates to gain a competency qualification at an appropriate level and to practice in the sector on completion of their degree? (p.33)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

✓

Supporting comments

As per question 3, Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but again wishes to highlight that if introduced the qualification needs to reference to natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages. Any higher level qualification should include study of the beneficial role of Out of Classroom Learning and Outdoor Play in childhood development and future life choices.

Question 8a – Do you support the ambition to see Level 3 in a relevant qualification become the acceptable standard for all practitioners in the sector over time? (p.34)

Yes

✓

No

Unsure

Supporting comments

As per question 3, Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but supports the ambition. We again wish to highlight that if introduced the qualification needs to reference to natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages. Any higher level qualification should include an understanding of the beneficial role of Out of Classroom Learning and Outdoor Play in childhood development and future life choices.

We would like to draw your attention to recently approved Agored Cymru units at L1, 2 and 3

Level 1 – Introduction to outdoor play, learning and development

Core Level 2 – Supporting learning, play and development in the outdoors

Core Level 2 – Sustainable use of natural resources

Core Level 2 – Outdoor Practical Skills

Optional Level 2 – Outdoor Play Practitioner

Optional Level 2 – Outdoor Learning Practitioner

Optional Level 2 – Assist at Coastal School

Optional Level 2 – Assist at Forest School

Core Level 3 – Observation and evaluation of Outdoor Learning

Core Level 3 – Supporting learning, play and development in the outdoors

Core Level 3 – Sustainable use of natural resources

Optional Level 3 – Coastal School Leader

Optional Level 3 – Forest School Leader

Optional Level 3 – Outdoor Curriculum Co-ordinator

Optional Level 3 – Delivering Outdoor Practical Skills

The units provide a mixture of practical skills and classroom based study with the core units providing a solid foundation to move into any one of 3 sections, outdoor practitioner, forest school or coastal school.

The suite of units have been developed by the Outdoor Training Network, facilitated by Natural Resources Wales. More information can be provided on request.

Question 8b – Do you agree with the phased introduction of this requirement, in two stages over a 10-year period? (p.34)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

✓

Supporting comments

From information provide, this would appear a sensible approach

Question 9 – In your view, is it appropriate for childminders to achieve a relevant Level 3 qualification within three years of their initial registration? (p.34)

Yes No Unsure

Supporting comments

As per question 3, Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but again wishes to highlight that any qualification introduced needs to reference natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages. An understanding of the beneficial role of Out of Classroom Learning and Outdoor Play in childhood development and future life choices is essential.

3. Raising skills and standards across the existing workforce

Question 10 – Do you agree that the workforce would benefit from a set of overarching CPD principles and individual online portfolios to record learning and development? (p.41)

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

If introduced, Natural Resources Wales would wish to see any overarching CPD principles make reference to natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages.

Any process introduced should be as streamlined as possible to minimise administrative burden.

Question 11a – In your view, should there be a system of professional registration for the non-maintained sector? (p.41)

Yes No Unsure

Supporting comments

A system of professional registration for the non-maintained sector will make moving between jobs roles easier and will also help maintain standards of delivery across the sector

Natural Resources Wales would like to see any annual registration, reflecting the current position in Scotland, where all practitioners are required to provide evidence of their ability to teach in an outdoor setting. This should be across the maintained and non-maintained sectors.

Question 11b – If yes, how could this system be monitored? (p.41)

Supporting comments

No comment

Question 12a – Please consider Recommendation 12 of the Foundation Phase Stocktake, which called the Welsh Government to:

Develop training that ensures all staff understand the research on the effects of disadvantage and poverty and the possible ways to close the achievement gap. Sharing good practice from those maintained schools and funded non-maintained settings where this is working well should be part of the training and so should research on supporting the home learning environment (HLE). Maintained schools could be asked to devote some of their Pupil Deprivation Grant (or similar) to support staff development here.

Would training on the effects of disadvantage be of benefit to practitioners and teachers in the Foundation Phase? (p.44)

Yes

✓

No

Unsure

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales agrees that training on the effects of disadvantage would be of benefit to practitioners and teachers in the Foundation Phase and that this should include those disadvantaged due to lack of experience

Research into the value and benefits of Out of Classroom Learning, Outdoor Play and be included in any training and the provision of quality Out of Classroom Learning/Outdoor Play should be identified as a positive use of Pupil Deprivation Grants.

Question 12b – Who would be best placed to develop and deliver this training?
(p.44)

Supporting comments

Having helped write (as Forestry Commission Wales) Module 6 of the Foundation Phase National Training Pack, helped roll out the training programme and provided case studies for document number 0022/2007 – Out of Classroom Learning, Natural Resources Wales would be happy to help support the development and delivery of any training relating to outdoor learning and play and the sustainable use of our natural resources.

Question 13 – Do you agree that that the proposed ‘stepped approach’ to up-skilling could potentially help to address the appetite within the early years, childcare and play workforce to further learning and development? (p.44)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree ✓

Supporting comments

No comment

Question 14 – Please consider Recommendation 18 of the Foundation Phase Stocktake, which stated that the Welsh Government should:

Review the current adult to child ratio in reception classes. Currently it is 1:8, primary schools’ staff, advisors and inspectors agreed that it could be increased to 1:10 without affecting quality. However, some schools may need to apply for an exception where, for example, they are situated in very rural areas or where they have a considerable number of children with additional needs such as SEN or E/WAL as it would not be practical to increase the ratio.

Do you agree with this recommendation to change adult to child ratios in reception classes in schools? (p.46)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree ✓

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales believes that when making any changes to adult to pupil ratio recommendations, the impact on early years settings ability to provide outdoor opportunities for learning should be considered. 1:8 has always been the preferred ratio for practices such as Forest School where the use of small tools and fire may be involved. However with good training using units as listed in question 8 leading to an increase in confidence, skills and the ability to teach in an outdoor setting, a slight increase in ratio should not be an issue to the delivery of standard outdoor learning.

Natural Resources Wales would not want to see an increased pupil to practitioner ratio used as an excuse to decrease the amount outdoor learning and play opportunities provided

Question 15a – Do you agree that a Grade C GCSE, or equivalent, is the appropriate minimum level of essential skills for those working within the early years, childcare and play workforce? (p.47)

Agree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree

Supporting comments

As per question 3, Natural Resources Wales does not wish to comment on the actual level of qualification required but again wishes to highlight that any qualification level, needs to reference natural resource management, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning for all key stages. An understanding of the beneficial role of Out of Classroom Learning and Outdoor Play in childhood development and future life choices is essential.

Question 15b – Should these skill levels be a requirement on entry to the sector (rather than achieved while working, within a fixed time period)? (p.47)

Yes No Unsure

Supporting comments

No comment

Question 16 – Do you agree that the Welsh language support as set out in this draft plan would help to promote greater use of the Welsh language in schools/settings? (p.47)

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree



Supporting comments

No comment

Question 17 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Please enter here:

Natural Resources Wales would like to highlight the fact that outdoor play and Out of Classroom Learning are not specifically referred to in this document. Both however are key components of early years pedagogy and should be explicitly included in all professional training schemes and qualifications.

Overall we support the intention to increase professionalism in the sector and would like to see developing environmental education skills form part of the CPD that all practitioners should undertake. All practitioners need to be competent and appropriately trained to facilitate the process of outdoor learning, and must themselves be confident interacting in a natural space in order for children to benefit fully from the experience. There is significant evidence to suggest that spending time learning in a natural setting has a positive impact on children's emotional wellbeing, physical and cognitive development and that it promotes care, appreciation and stewardship of the natural environment in later life. Positive experience of the outdoors at a young age increases physical activity and can also have a positive effect on future life style choices, leading to a healthier lifestyle. As this is a 10 year plan, there is a need to be explicit about this, as the children this will affect will most likely be facing significant environmental issues in later life related to degradation of ecosystem services and the pressures on the sustainable use and management of our natural resources. This fact increases the importance of connecting young children with nature and their local natural environment as early as possible.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: