



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Additional Enrichment Sessions Trial Evaluation: summary

Additional Enrichment Sessions were held in 14 settings during the academic year 2021/22. The evaluation sets out how the Trial was implemented and outcomes for beneficiaries.

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Introduction

In October 2021, the Welsh Government announced a Winter of Wellbeing funding package to help families, children and young people recover from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As part of this, up to £2m was made available for a Trial of Additional Enrichment Sessions to deliver activities and experiences to support children and young people's learning, skills development, and physical and mental wellbeing across volunteer learning settings (hereinafter 'settings') during the 2021/22 academic year.

The Additional Enrichment Sessions Trial aimed to test the extent to which adding one hour to the school day would help learners to catch up on the social, academic and wellbeing opportunities they had missed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Main findings

Fourteen settings took part in the Trial. The main reasons for settings not taking part were local authority leads not sharing information about the Trial with them to avoid overwhelming them, as pressures from the coronavirus pandemic were already affecting staff capacity.

The settings that were interested in taking part in the Trial filled out an Expression of Interest (EoI), and all those that applied were awarded the funding. Settings were informed by Welsh Government that they had been selected to receive funding and were supported by the Trial Advisor throughout planning and implementation.

One of the key motivations for settings to take part in the Trial was to give learners experiences and opportunities they would not otherwise have had

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access to, given the context of social and economic disadvantage amongst participating settings. Other motivations included to improve children/young people's perceptions and experiences of school, to re-engage learners with school and encourage attendance, and to create opportunities for learners to socialise with their peers.

All settings targeted a particular set of year groups, typically transition years, and offered the activities to all children/young people within the selected year group(s). However, in some cases it was challenging to make the provision fully inclusive for children/young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) or the most vulnerable. Settings used a mix of staff and external providers to run the Trial activities.

Settings strongly valued the flexibility the Trial offered to plan and deliver activities depending on local availability of providers/staff, available resources and the specific interests and needs of learners. This was reflected in the diversity of activities, venues and timings of activities offered.

The Trial delivered an extremely broad range of activities, including many sports and physical activities, creative activities, games, outdoor activities, and trips. Settings gave learners the option to choose which activities they wanted to take part in.

Sign-up to and attendance at the enrichment sessions was consistently high. Some settings initially offered incentives for participation (e.g. cinema trips) but usually realised this was not necessary as children and young people wanted to take part.

The main reasons the Trial was successful overall were staff engagement and willingness to deliver activities, the flexibility to use funding to provide transport and food, and parents/carers' ability to pick up children after the activities. The key barriers for settings were tight timelines and the resurgence of coronavirus, while the main barriers keeping children/young people from attending were the

lack of transport home after the activities, or parents' inability to accommodate different pick-up times for multiple children.

Setting staff and Trial setting leads (i.e. the person organising Trial activities in settings) expressed concerns that delivering enrichment activities over a limited number of weeks would raise expectations among children/young people and families that would not be met in the long-term, potentially leading to disappointment. However, given the success of the activities among learners, many settings had started exploring opportunities to extend the activities beyond the duration of the Trial.

The vast majority (91%) of children and young people who completed the post-Trial survey reported that they had fun, and 84% said the Trial helped them to socialise with their peers. Participants also reported that the Trial introduced them to new activities and gave them the opportunity to develop new skills.

Parent/carers of children/young people who took part in the Trial were very positive about the opportunity for their children to participate. Parents appreciated the wide range of free activities and that their children could choose what they wanted to do. They also mentioned that the Trial gave their children the opportunity to try activities they would not have otherwise been able to do, mainly due to financial barriers.

Learners, providers and parents reported that the main outcomes for learners who took part in the Trial were socialisation with peers and improved wellbeing, developing new skills, being physically active; and improvements in behaviour, school attendance and engagement in the classroom.

Parents/carers (particularly those in work) highlighted the importance of having a safe place for their children to be after school, where they were able to engage in constructive activities. Parents/carers also stressed the importance of the activities being free at the point of access.

Main recommendations from the evaluation

Continue delivering the additional enrichment activities long-term. Children and young would like to see the activities offered on a long-term basis and extended to other year groups in their settings.

Longer lead-in time for planning and set-up to enable more settings to take part in additional enrichment activities. More time between announcing funding and programme launch would support effective planning. More time to design and plan delivery would provide more opportunities to co-produce the programme with learners.

Continue offering flexibility in design and delivery. The support provided by the Trial Advisor should continue to be offered in future programmes. Settings valued the flexibility to provide transport, food, and to purchase equipment.

Strengthen support for settings. Future delivery of similar programmes would benefit from bringing in an additional resource to manage the procurement and coordination processes.

Enhance reach and inclusivity. Co-producing the programme with children/young people might increase their involvement and engagement, as it would highlight some of the barriers to attendance at planning stage, and offer the opportunity to overcome them.

Data limitations

The majority of data collection took place between May and July 2022, after the end of the Trial. The delay reduced the research team's ability to reach research participants and increased the chance of recall inaccuracies.

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The children/young people baseline survey was designed and administered before Ecorys was appointed as the evaluator. Therefore, only a small number of questions allowed for pre/post comparison between baseline and post-Trial surveys.

Fewer interviews with setting staff/providers and parents/carers were carried out than originally planned. This was partly due to the delay in contacting settings, and partly due to the request by the Welsh Government that research participants enter their contact details in a secure form to achieve a more unbiased sample. Some research participants were selected by setting leads. The sample of parents interviewed was small (5) and there is likely to be self-selection bias.

Due to intervention timescales, it was not possible to collect information about the equalities characteristics of learners who took part in trial activities. Whilst all participating learning settings were in areas of social and economic disadvantage, it is therefore not possible to determine whether there were difference in participation rates or perceived benefits between more and less advantaged learners

All non-participating LAs were contacted about an interview, and the 6 interviews completed were with those who agreed to take part, therefore there is likely to be self-selection bias. Non-participating settings were not interviewed due to the limited timescale and the challenge obtaining contact details.

Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily

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