



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

IMPACT ASSESSMENT, DOCUMENT

The Structure of the School Year: impact assessment

How changing school term dates will effect teaching and learning.

First published: 16 November 2023

Last updated: 16 November 2023

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Section 1: what action is the welsh government considering and why?

Exploring the Structure of the School Year

The Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement include a commitment to look at school term dates for maintained schools, in order to bring them more in line with contemporary patterns of family life and employment. Maintained schools are schools that are wholly owned and maintained by Local Authorities, such as: nursery schools; primary, middle and secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

In considering the pattern of the school year, the priority is to achieve a more equitable, modern calendar focusing on:

- Supporting learner and workforce well-being.
- Improving progression and educational outcomes.
- Mitigating the effects of disadvantage.
- Aligning with modern and future life.

We live and work in a very different world to the one 150 years ago when the pattern of the school year was set. We have seen many changes to our education system in that time. Children and young people now stay in education and learning until 16 years of age, external examinations are the norm with more young people than ever going on to study at university and corporal punishment is long gone. We've seen huge innovations in the use of technology in education, changes to the curriculum to embrace a broader landscape of learning opportunities and positive steps towards creating an inclusive and diverse learning environment. However, despite all of this, the school calendar has remained mostly unchanged.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019) “today’s innovations often become tomorrow’s commonplace” (OECD, 2019).

“Humans navigate through uncertainty by being adaptable learners. When placed in a novel circumstance – such as a new country, new school or new workplace – people learn the new structure in the environment and adapt or replace old structures or beliefs that are no longer relevant”.

(OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 OECD Learning Compass 2030 A Series of Concept Notes [online]. [Accessed 22 December 2022])

When considering the school year currently, the most important aspect must be how the 39 weeks (Equivalent to 380 sessions) of provision each year can achieve the very best educational outcomes for our children and young people. We know that better educational attainment equals improved life prospects and if the school calendar can be structured to better support learner progression and attainment, this must be explored. This is particularly important in relation to support for those learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds and those facing additional barriers to their learning.

However, whilst it is essential that the structure of the school year is built around and prioritises learner progression and attainment, we recognise that school holidays are important to ensure sufficient time for recreation and rest. No matter your age, childhood is a time when children should be able to play, explore and engage in the world around them outside of formal learning settings. Families also need time together to create positive and formative experiences. Balancing those requirements across the school year means the options under consideration do not change the overall number of school holiday weeks, though they do consider different patterns. Neither do they consider a summer break any shorter than four weeks in length, recognising the need for a longer holiday period at a time of year when the weather best allows for those all-important childhood and family experiences.

Policy Position

This consultation is complementary to the many recent changes and progressive improvements we have made to education in Wales. We have a new Curriculum for Wales, there is greater emphasis on professional learning for teachers, we have new ways of supporting learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and in the coming years, we will be introducing 'Made-for-Wales' qualifications aligned with the ambitions of the new Curriculum for Wales.

The consultation sets out a number of proposals reflecting the following principles, developed following research and engagement activities and with reference to wider government policies on education, equity, attainment and tackling disadvantage:

Broadly aligned term length

- Terms made up of broadly the same number of weeks. For example, While completely equal term lengths would be preferable, it may not be possible if we are to maintain a Christmas break at Christmas time, even with the proposed Phase 1 and Phase 2 changes.
- Similarly, structured terms promote a more stable rhythm for continuous learning over the year and supports teachers to plan.
- Planning teaching and learning around consistent blocks of time also provides flexibility for schools about when that teaching happens over the year.
- Consistent term lengths could support well-being and reduce fatigue.
- Terms that are structured into broadly even blocks, could be more effective for learner progression and attainment than terms and breaks with half weeks.

Re-distribution of holiday periods

- A shorter summer break could help to mitigate against learning loss and support disadvantaged learners (in particular). Up to two weeks could be redistributed from the summer to elsewhere.
- A re-distributed holiday week to the autumn term to extend October half-term, could support well-being and reduce fatigue during the longest term.
- Additional breaks throughout the year could support well-being and reduce fatigue.

These areas will be explored without changes to

- The amount of learning: 190 days/380 sessions of learning a year to be maintained.
- The recognised provision staff training days to be maintained (currently 5 days).
- No change to the 13 weeks of school holidays.
- The summer break will be no shorter than four weeks.
- All public holidays will apply.

We are also working on the non-negotiables of

- The academic year must start on or after 1 September.
- The Christmas break must align with the festival.
- Spring term must not begin before 1 January.
- Not changing the recognised school day or week length or structure.
- At least a 12-month lead period in from the announcement of any changes to their implementation.

Inconsistent term lengths can have a negative impact on learners and the

education workforce. When half-terms are very short, teachers have less time to deliver curriculum content and learners have less time for curriculum exploration which could impact the quality of teaching and learning. On the other hand, when terms are too long, fatigue can impact the amount of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Similarly, fatigue can exacerbate various issues which can have a negative impact on learning and well-being in the classroom, for example, low-level classroom disruption and lack of engagement.

We recognise that the summer break, in particular, presents certain challenges. Learning loss (learners falling behind academically during school breaks) is more prevalent during the summer break compared to other breaks due to its length. The length of the summer break and overall school calendar structure also creates disadvantages for some learners more than others, for example, those with ALN and socially and economically disadvantaged learners.

This is an opportunity to look at the system as a whole, to consider whether we can design a more equitable, modern calendar that mitigates the effects of disadvantage, improves learner progression and attainment, supports the well-being of learners and the education workforce and better aligns with patterns of contemporary life, all things that our wider educational reforms are seeking to achieve.

Learners and the education workforce rightly remain at the forefront of exploring the pattern of the school year. However, we recognise any amendments to the structure may impact other sectors beyond education, including tourism and hospitality, transport, childcare and play, the voluntary and public sectors, as well as groups with protected characteristics. Comprehensive engagement has already been undertaken with representatives from these groups to establish concerns and implications of any changes to the school calendar. This engagement will continue throughout the consultation.

Suggested Changes

To achieve a more equitable school calendar that is designed to support educational outcomes for all, learner and workforce well-being and fit with the patterns of contemporary life, we propose a new school calendar for all maintained schools in Wales. All options retain the flexibility or sometimes require the use of half-weeks to ensure 190 days of provision are met.

We are asking for views on three matters:

- (a) The principle of modifying the school year.
- (b) Options for implementing any modification of the school year including some changes being made in 2025 to 2026.
- (c) Suggested term dates for 2025 to 2026 school year implementation.

Option 1: The existing school calendar (Status Quo)

This option would see us maintain the existing school calendar. The current school year structure consists of a one-week break in October, two-week Christmas break, one-week break in February, two-week break for Easter, one-week break in May and a six-week summer break.

Option 1	Autumn Term				End of Term 1	Spring Term			End of Term 2	Summer Term				End of Term 3
Breaks		1			2		1		2		1			6
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug		

Autumn Term (September to December)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in October/November)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in December/January)

Spring Term (January to March/April)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in February)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in March/April at the same time as the Easter public holiday)

Summer term (April to July)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in May/June)
- End of term break: 6 weeks (in July/August)

Option 2: A new school calendar (“New Option”) from 2025 to 2026

In this option, we propose a new school calendar with a two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from the Easter public holiday, and a five-week summer break to be introduced from the 2025 to 2026 school year.

The February, Christmas and May breaks would not change in this option.

Option 2 (from 2025/26)	Autumn Term				End of Term 1	Spring Term			End of Term 2	Summer Term			End of Term 3
	Breaks		2			2		1			2		
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	

Option 2 changes

Autumn Term (September to December)

- Half-term break: 2 weeks (in October/November)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in December/January)

Spring Term (January to March/April)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in February)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in March/April which could be de-coupled from the Easter public holiday)

Summer Term (April to July)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in May/June)
- End of term break: 5 weeks (in July/August)

Option 3: A New School Calendar (“New Option Plus”) in the future

This option for a new school calendar would be rolled out in two phases.

Option 3 Phase 1

Phase 1 would be implemented from the 2025 to 2026 school year and would be the same as Option 2. In this phase, we propose a school calendar with a two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from Easter public holiday, and a five-week summer break.

Option 3 Phase 1	Autumn Term				End of Term 1	Spring Term			End of Term 2	Summer Term				End of Term 3
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec		Jan	Feb	Mar		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	
Breaks		2			2		1		2		1			5

Autumn Term (September to December)

- Half-term break: 2 weeks (in October/November)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in December/January)

Spring Term (January to March/April)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in February)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in March/April which could be de-coupled from Easter)

Summer Term (April to July)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in May/June)
- End of term break: 5 weeks (in July/August)

Option 3 Phase 2

In addition to the changes in Phase 1, we propose additional changes to the school calendar following implementation of Phase 1 changes. These additional changes include moving to a two-week May break and a four-week summer break. Further changes could also include AS/A level and GCSE results days held in the same week.

The February and Christmas breaks would not change in either phase of this option.

Option 3 Phase 2	Autumn Term				End of Term 1	Spring Term			End of Term 2	Summer Term				End of Term 3
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec		Jan	Feb	Mar		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	
Breaks		2			2		1		2		2			4

	Option 3 phase 1 changes (the same as Option 2)
	Option 3 phase 2 changes

Autumn Term (September to December)

- Half-term break: 2 weeks (in October/November)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in December/January)

Spring Term (January to March/April)

- Half-term break: 1 week (in February)
- End of term break: 2 weeks (in March/April which could be de-coupled from the Easter public holiday)

Summer Term (April to July)

- Half-term break: 2 weeks (in May/June)
- End of term break: 4 weeks (in July/August)

Proposed implementation dates for Options 2 and 3: Term dates for the 2025 to 2026 school year

Should Option 2 or 3 of the above be supported and in line with the commitment to provide at least a 12-month lead period in from the announcement of any changes to their implementation, we propose the following term dates for the 2025 to 2026 school year.

- Autumn Term 2025 – Monday 1st September to Friday 19th December
- Autumn Half Term 2025 – Monday 20th October to Friday 31st October
- Spring Term 2026 – Monday 5th January to Thursday 2nd April (Good Friday, 3rd April)
- Spring Half Term 2026 – Monday 16th February to Friday 20th February
- Summer Term 2026 – Monday 20th April to Wednesday 29th July
- Summer Half Term 2026 – Monday 25th May to Friday 29th May

These term days achieve a school calendar with:

- 190 learning days (five days of the above option will be used as INSET days to be decided by Relevant Bodies at a local level).
- A two-week October break with an associated five-week summer break.
- A spring break that is de-coupled from Easter to achieve more equal term lengths.
- All other breaks remain at the same point and the length as the current system.

Considerations

We recognise that the principle of the understood school summer holiday is deeply embedded in society. Many families use this time to take longer breaks, visiting extended family and enjoying a range of experiences at home, in their local area and beyond. It is an important time for children to play, explore and learn outside of structured education, gaining new skills.

It is also an important period for tourism, businesses and attractions in Wales. August is the busiest month for the tourism sector in Wales and February the quietest. However, according to Cadw admissions data for July and August 2022, the 28 and 29 August, the bank holiday weekend, saw the most visitors across Cadw sites. Following this, weekends in July and August were the most popular dates. This should be considered when exploring the structure of the school year. The economic well-being section of the IIA assesses the impact of the structure of the school year on the Welsh tourism and attractions sector.

Consideration also needs to be given to the weather in Wales, particularly for those seeking to undertake outdoor activities or visit outside attractions. For example, 'Good weather' ratings are given to months between June and September.

To help us develop an extensive Wales-specific evidence base and as part of wider policy development and stakeholder engagement, we commissioned external research partners to gather perceptions around the current school year, including views on how potential changes might support learning and affect families, communities, employers and workers, and other groups, which are outlined as follows:

Published in January 2022

- [Effects of changes to the school year and alternative school calendars: review of evidence](#)

A rapid evidence assessment literature review was conducted in 2021 to examine international evidence on the impact of changes to the school year on learner attainment, health and well-being, as well as exploring any impacts on the provision of wraparound care, family life and any other societal impacts.

Some key findings included limited evidence that indicated that year-round education delivered small positive effects upon children's health outcomes, although many of these effects did not persist over the school year. Overall, the research identified limited, mixed and inconclusive international evidence and, therefore the report recommended that any proposed programme of school calendar change in Wales should incorporate high quality and thorough evidence gathering.

Published in June 2022

- [Exploring reform of the school year Beaufort Research report: attitudes towards school year reform in Wales](#)

Beaufort Research were commissioned to carry out research in order to understand perceptions relating to the school year. The report involved engaging a broad range of 13,000 audience members (including parents, learners, business owners, school practitioners and the general public) through quantitative surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews. Participants were asked questions about their perceptions of the school calendar, whether they were interested in changing the current school calendar and their opinions of alternative school calendar structures that were presented to them.

Key findings included that participants were reasonably content with the current school year, but there was some openness to considering change. The report recommended that further engagement was needed to ensure the perceptions of different groups were sufficiently represented, such as learners with ALN and their parents or carers.

Published in October 2023

- **Research exploring perceptions and experiences of the current school calendar in Wales**

Miller Research were commissioned to take forward research looking at learner, parent or carer and school practitioner experiences and perceptions of the current school calendar and the impact on progression, attainment, learner behaviour, fatigue, well-being and secondary school transition, as recommended by Beaufort Research. This work further supports the development of the evidence base by providing individual perceptions and opinions of the current school calendar.

Overall, findings suggest that there is a correlation between the structure of the school calendar and the well-being of learners and school practitioners. Additionally, in terms of progression and attainment, those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more affected, along with learners with ALN.

Published in October 2023

- **Effects of changes to the school year and alternative school calendars: qualitative research and an updated review of the evidence**

This report sets out the findings from an updated review of the evidence base looking at changes to the school calendar, as well as including findings from

interviews with stakeholders in local authorities (two from England and seven from Scotland) where changes to the calendar have been made.

Key findings show that there is evidence of concern that the current school calendar can have a detrimental effect on student attendance and can result in short-term learning loss. In particular, the long summer break might contribute towards a widened disadvantage gap. Additionally, interviewees felt that an extended October half-term contributed positively to both staff and student well-being.

Consideration of the Five Ways of Working in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Thinking for the Long term

The structure of the school calendar will be beneficial in the long term, as fatigue for both the learners and the teachers will be reduced, due to more even lengths of terms. In addition, standardising term lengths (and breaks) and re-distributing holidays, could better support sustainable learner progression and readiness to learn, whilst also supporting curriculum delivery, particularly for disadvantaged learners.

Prevention

Consideration will be given to the practical issues associated with any changes to the school calendar.

Integration, Collaboration & Involvement

As shown above, research has been conducted by both Beaufort Research and

Miller Research, which has collaborated and involved many different stakeholders and the conclusions integrated within this IIA.

Section 8: conclusion

8.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it

We have engaged with stakeholders formally and informally as part of the policy development. This has included: Local Authorities; Headteachers; Teachers and other school staff; education workforce Unions; College Principals; early years childcare and play fora; Commissioners; children and families; the Welsh Youth Parliament and Children in Wales. Plus, representatives, groups and organisations from the following sectors: hospitality; tourism and visitor economy; Faith; Social Care; justice; transport and business organisations.

A full list of these stakeholders can be provided and the means of consultation upon request, if required.

To formally understand impacts of changes to the school calendar, a full 12-week public consultation will launch in November 2023.

We are asking for views on three matters:

- (a) The principle of modifying the school year.
- (b) Options for implementing any modification of the school year including some changes being made in 2025 to 2026.
- (c) Suggested term dates for 2025 to 2026 school year implementation.

Responses from the consultation and from focus groups and interviews as part of the consultation, will be included (when received) in this IIA. This includes 25

focus groups made up of:

- At least six focus groups with teaching professionals including leaders, teachers, Teaching Assistants (TAs) and support staff. Focus groups will include both primary and secondary schools and English and Welsh medium settings.
- At least six focus groups with parents and carers including parents or carers of children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) attending mainstream settings and Pupil Referral Units (PRU). Focus groups will include parents or carers from both primary and secondary schools and English and Welsh medium settings.
- At least six focus groups with learners. Focus groups will include both primary and secondary schools' learners and learners attending both English and Welsh medium settings.
- A further seven focus groups will be held with representatives from Governing Bodies, youth workers, early years, hospitality and tourism.
- Interviews will be held as part of the consultation including interviews with faith and belief groups and Transport for Wales.

Previous Research

Beaufort Research

Children and their representatives

In 2021, Beaufort Research engaged with a wide number of children and young people which included 3,131 responses to a bilingual online survey for learners aged 7 to 18 years in education in Wales. The survey sample included: 1,031 learners aged 7 to 11; 1,045 learners aged 12 to 15; 651 learners aged 16 to 18 and 404 learners who did not provide their age.

As well as the online survey, three focus groups were held: one with year six learners (eight participants); one with year 10 learners (five participants); and one with year 12 learners (nine participants, Welsh language), 22 participants in total. The focus groups included a mix of female (12 participants), male (nine participants) and non-binary (one participant) learners, socio-economic grouping, and regions (Bridgend, Cardiff, Ceredigion, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Vale of Glamorgan, Wrexham, and Ynys Môn). The sample included three participants from minority ethnic backgrounds, two from faith schools and seven from schools with above Local Authority average for free school meals.

People with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010

As part of the research conducted by Beaufort Research, there was engagement with a number of individuals with protected characteristics including: parents or carers from ethnic minorities (2); individuals who follow a faith (6); individuals who have children with ALN (3) and with children at schools with above Local Authority average for free school meals (6).

Welsh speakers and Welsh language specialist groups

Beaufort Research engaged with a wide number of children and young people including Welsh speakers through three focus groups. This included dedicated Welsh Medium focus groups for learners (9 participants) and parents and carers of learners at Welsh Medium schools (11 participants).

Other people who may be affected by the proposal

Beaufort Research engaged with a wide number of sector representatives during their qualitative research. As part of this, there were 8,696 responses to a bilingual online survey all of whom worked in the education sector in Wales. The

sample included: 1,125 head teachers and deputy head teachers; 1,120 heads of department; 3,337 teachers; 2,018 teaching assistants and 1,096 other education workers (including administrative staff, education officers, governors, technicians, catering staff and those in a variety of other roles).

Three focus groups were also held, each with a mix of primary and secondary school staff, and a mix of men and women, 23 participants in total: one with school support staff; one with teachers (Welsh language group); one with headteachers, including 12 participants who work with children with ALN (12); 11 schools with above Local Authority average for free school meals (11); one PRU (1) and one faith school. There was a mix of regions covering Caerphilly, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea, Vale of Glamorgan.

As well as the education workforce specific workshops and engagement, two engagement sessions were held for 98 key stakeholders. Attendees included: broad representation from the education sector (primary, secondary, Further Education, Local Authorities, qualifications, regulation, training); business (finance, leisure, tourism, transport, childcare); children and young people services; faith organisations; public bodies and third sector organisations supporting young people. Additionally, 10 online in-depth interviews were held including organisations concerned with academia, business, education, faith, health, and supporting young people.

In addition to the above, specific fieldwork was undertaken regarding businesses. The bilingual online survey had 314 responses from business owners or senior decision makers or line managers or supervisors. There were also two focus group with representatives from tourism (hotel, B&B, holiday cottage, travel agent), childcare (nurseries), hospitality (catering), manufacturing (plastics related), professional services (business support service), and retail (shop, hairdresser) from a mix of regions, 14 participants in total.

Miller Research

Children and their representatives

In 2022, Miller Research in partnership with Children in Wales, conducted primary research with ten classes across eight schools that they had identified through an opportunity sample (two were Welsh-medium, six English medium, and one special school). Classes covered years 6,7,8,9,10,11, and 12. In total, 73 learners participated, of whom 34 were male, 34 female, two non-binary and three had unrecorded gender. Nineteen of the 73, attended a Welsh-medium or bilingual school and eight self-identified as able to speak Welsh. A questionnaire was also shared with the 60 members of the Welsh Youth Parliament, engaging learners with a geographic spread across Wales, spanning a range of age groups. This was designed by Miller Research and circulated via Children in Wales.

People with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010

Further to the above research, of the 73 learners Miller Research engaged with, 23 learners were Black, Asian, minority ethnic, or gypsy, Roma, traveller. As well as this, 24 of the 73 learners involved were eligible for FSM, 16 of the 73 had an ALN, and five of the 73 had English or Welsh as an Additional Language (EAL/WAL). From staff focus groups, four schools represented faith schools, two focus groups represented parents and carers of learners who attended special schools, and one focus group was held for parents and carers of learners with ALN who attended mainstream schools.

Welsh speakers and Welsh language specialist groups

Miller Research engaged with 19 learners from Welsh medium or bilingual schools. Additionally, a total of 11 focus groups were held with parents or carers, four of which were exclusively in Wales. Staff from three Welsh-medium primary and five Welsh medium secondary schools were also included.

Other people who may be affected by the proposal

Miller Research engaged specifically with learners, parents or carers and the education workforce to understand perceptions of the current school calendar.

This consisted of:

- 10 focus groups with learners (73 learners).
- 11 focus groups with parents and carers (62 parents and carers).
- 28 focus groups with school practitioners (split by primary or secondary or special school or PRU, language medium and staff role).
- Two focus groups with youth workers.

8.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative

The most significant direct impacts of changes to the school year would be on learners in maintained settings, their parents and families and the education workforce, as the school calendar would be structured differently to the Status Quo. Maintained schools are those schools which are wholly funded by a Local Authority. This includes nursery, primary and secondary schools and PRUs. However, there may also be impacts, both positive and negative, on other groups including tourism and hospitality, transport, childcare and play, the

voluntary and public sectors, as well as the wider public.

Positives aspects of school year changes include educational benefits. Instilling more equal term lengths offer two important benefits to learners' progression. This structure may support learners to make more sustained progress, allowing them to better consolidate and build on learning over time. Additionally, this structure may offer schools more opportunity to plan progression that is more consistent across the school year and utilise all terms fully. Specific reasons for exploring changes to the school year include:

- Reason 1: A changed school calendar to better support the needs of disadvantaged learners and their families.
- Reason 2: A changed school calendar to better support the well-being of learners and teachers and reduce fatigue.
- Reason 3: A changed school calendar to better support learning and teaching.
- Reason 4: A changed school calendar to better support modern patterns of living and working.

Further benefits include:

- Similarly structured terms and longer half term breaks to promote more stable rhythm for continuous learning over the year, with regular down time and returns
- More consistent and predictable term lengths to help teachers with advanced planning
- Planning teaching and learning around consistent blocks of time also provides flexibility for schools about when that teaching happens over the year
- A fixed amount of time in the lead up to external examinations offers an 'even playing field' for learners, ensuring they are not disadvantaged by shorter lead in time
- A longer half-term break during the longest term (autumn) will benefit

learners and the education workforce in terms of well-being

- A shortened summer break may realise potential benefits for learners in Welsh medium schools who have limited access to Welsh outside of school
- Potential benefits for ALN learners who may appreciate consistency and structure

Additional positive aspects of school year changes may be found regarding family use of childcare and shortening the summer break. While redistributing holiday weeks does not remove the need for childcare for 13 weeks of the year, more evenly distributed holidays could allow for an easier way for families to budget for the cost of blocks of childcare.

Many families rely on a number of different arrangements to ensure that their child is appropriately cared for. This can include informal childcare, provided through family and friends or more formal care delivered by childcare providers such as out of school clubs, childminders or afterschool clubs provided by nurseries. In addition, parents might use unregulated clubs such as sporting or organised clubs to allow them to work longer hours, as well as offering enrichment activity to their children.

These mechanisms often work well during the school term and provide a relatively affordable way of parents maximising their working hours. However, during school holidays, families are often under pressure to find and fund longer provision of care to allow them to continue in their work or study.

The Child Poverty Action Group and Parentkind (2022) found that 56% of participants were in favour of a more evenly spread school year and shorter summer break. This was further supported by families who reported struggles. Additionally, Beaufort Research (2022) found a lack of routine during the summer break leading to learner boredom towards the end of the break as well as challenges from a parenting perspective including “organising and paying for childcare and having to take a family holiday at the most expensive time of year” were negative aspects of the current school calendar.

The above are intended positive outcomes of changes to the school year, however, it is recognised that not everyone will perceive a positive impact from the proposed changes. Education workforce Unions have made clear their concerns around considering any amendment to the school calendar with feedback suggesting a preference of maintaining the 'Status Quo'. Their particular concerns include the timing and rationale for the proposed changes.

Any amendments to the school year could affect many sectors or individuals, as many aspects of society are intertwined with the structure of the school calendar. The tourism sector, in particular, have voiced concerns regarding the policy. Some members of the tourism sector are concerned about shortening the summer break and the placement of any re-distributed weeks. There are also concerns relating to Wales potentially having different holiday periods to England.

Therefore, in order to capture both concerns and positive comments to the re-structure of the current school year, this document is being published in draft form, so that the full 12-week public consultation launching in November 2023, will provide stakeholders and organisations an opportunity to relay any concerns or impacts that they may have. These, will then be considered following the consultation when it closes in February 2024.

8.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- **Maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals and/or,**
- **Avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

Well-being encompasses physical, mental and emotional health and according to the Welsh Government publication “[Well-being of Wales, 2022](#)” there are seven well-being goals.

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

“The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales” (Welsh Government, 2021). Of particular importance in education settings, is the well-being goal.

Promoting well-being within schools is fundamental to learning and engagement. According to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) “students need to develop good physical and emotional well-being if they are to learn effectively” (OECD, 2019).

Additionally, in 2023, more emphasis is placed on well-being in schools than ever before:

“Whereas student learning outcomes and academic achievements traditionally define the effectiveness and the quality of their school experience, student well-being and students’ learning experiences – the quality of “learning processes” – have risen in value and expanded the focus beyond “outcomes”.

(OECD (2019) [OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 OECD Learning Compass 2030 A Series of Concept Notes \[online\]](#) [Accessed 22 December 2022])

We are asking:

- Could the well-being of learners and education workforce be better supported or improved with an alternative school year structure?
- Could shortening the number of learning weeks in the autumn term by adding an additional break week to October support well-being and reduce fatigue in the longest term?
- Is the current structure (with uneven terms lengths and distribution of breaks) the right structure to promote well-being and reduce fatigue?
- Is the current structure, designed 150 years ago, appropriate for modern living, learning and working?

More standardised term lengths (and breaks) and re-distributed holidays, could better support sustainable learner progression and readiness to learn, whilst also supporting curriculum delivery.

Amending the school year could contribute to each of the seven well-being goals. Considerations are below:

Prosperous

We are interested in how altering the school year with more standardised term lengths (and breaks) could better support learner progression with more regular

downtime and returns. Ultimately this could support learners to achieve more highly to become more prosperous.

Resilient

We are interested in how more even term lengths could help to develop learner resilience.

Healthier

We are interested in how the structure of the school calendar, including the distribution of holiday periods and consistency of term lengths, could be considered as an avenue to improve learner and education workforce mental health and well-being.

More Equal

We are interested in exploring more equitable and consistent term dates, where most half-terms would be between six and seven weeks rather than the current structure of half-terms of between five and eight weeks, could help to create equity as learners are afforded the same number of learning weeks each term year on year.

Culture and Welsh Language

We believe that a different distribution of school holidays would support the Welsh language by reducing the summer break and the 'block' of time learners at Welsh Medium schools spend away from the Welsh language, particularly for learners with different levels of access to Welsh outside of school.

Globally Responsible: What action can the Welsh Government take to avoid, reduce or mitigate a negative impact

To avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impact of changes to the school year, including to wider groups such as businesses, tourism, childcare and play, we have engaged extensively with representatives from these sectors to identify concerns. A consistent message from stakeholders has been the desire for at least a 12-month implementation period from announcement to implementation of changes to allow sectors to prepare.

We are therefore working on the trajectory of announcing any changes in April 2024 for implementation in September 2025 at the earliest (a 16-month implementation period) to support stakeholders.

8.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes

Following implementation of any changes to the school year, an evaluation of changes could be completed after one or two years to assess the various impacts ahead of any further changes. This evaluation could include impacts on:

- Learner progression and attainment
- Learner and education workforce levels of fatigue and well-being
- Learner and education workforce attendance and absence
- Mitigating the impacts of disadvantage
- Equity in education
- Family life and employment
- Economic impacts
- Other unintended consequences

In addition, this consultation is complementary to the many recent changes and progressive improvements we have made to education in Wales. We have a new Curriculum for Wales, there is greater emphasis on professional learning for teachers, we have new ways of supporting learners with ALN and in the coming years, we will be introducing 'Made-for-Wales' qualifications aligned with the ambitions of the new Curriculum for Wales.

Inconsistent term lengths can have a negative impact on learners and the education workforce. When half-terms are very short, teachers have less time to deliver curriculum content and learners have less time for curriculum exploration which could impact the quality of teaching and learning. On the other hand, when terms are too long, fatigue can impact the amount of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Similarly, fatigue can exacerbate various issues which can have a negative impact on learning and well-being in the classroom, for example, low-level classroom disruption and lack of engagement.

We recognise that the summer break, in particular, presents certain challenges. Learning loss (learners falling behind academically during school breaks) is more prevalent during the summer break compared to other breaks due to the summer being a longer break.

The length of the summer break and overall school calendar structure also creates disadvantages for some learners more than others, for example, those with ALN and socially and economically disadvantaged learners.

Therefore, this is an opportunity to look at the system as a whole, in order to consider whether we can design a more equitable, modern calendar that:

- Mitigates the effects of disadvantage.
- Improves learner progression and attainment.
- Supports the well-being of learners and the education workforce.
- Better aligns with modern life.

All things, that our wider educational reforms are seeking to achieve.

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