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

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

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Glossary

Glossary text

Acronym/Key word	Definition
EAL	English as an additional language
ALN	Additional Learning Need
FSM	Free School Meals
LA	Local Authority
MAT	More Able and Talented
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SLT	Senior leadership team

# 1. Introduction and background

## Reform of the school year

1.1 The Welsh Government, through its Programme for Government-and Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, has committed to explore reform of the school year.<sup>1</sup> The primary driver for this is to consider current and potential alternative arrangements to ensure the provision of a school calendar that can best help mitigate the impacts of disadvantage, narrow educational inequalities, support learner and staff wellbeing and ensure the calendar is in line with contemporary patterns of family life and employment.

1.2 The Welsh Government is currently introducing reforms to the curriculum in Wales, along with the delivery of targeted policies to improve the quality of education and increase parent and community involvement. The way the school calendar is structured is seen by Welsh Government to have the potential to support and enable these reforms. Similarly, it is a Welsh Government priority to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged learners. Every policy considered by the Welsh Government is seen through a lens of whether it helps tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

## The school calendar

1.3 The current school (or academic) year structure in Wales:

- begins in early September and ends in mid-July.
- provides 190 school days, each approximately 6.5 hours long.
- is divided into three terms: autumn from September to December, spring from January to March or April<sup>2</sup>, and summer from April to July.

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<sup>1</sup> [Programme for government](#)  
[The Co-operation Agreement](#)

<sup>2</sup> The end of the spring term is based on the location of Easter which can fall on any date between 22<sup>nd</sup> March and 25<sup>th</sup> April.

- has variable term lengths whereby Autumn is typically the longest term. The length of the Spring and Summer terms change depending on the date of Easter.
- splits terms with a one-week break. The half-terms are also of varied length, typically between four and seven weeks although sometimes longer. Full terms are separated by two-week breaks, and academic years by a six-week break over the summer. (see figure 1.1 below)
- has 13-weeks of non-teaching time (including six-weeks holiday between each year) and approximately one week (five days) in staff training<sup>3</sup> (also known as inset days).
- term dates across the UK and within Wales are not aligned. In Wales, Local Authorities (LAs) and Governing Bodies (GBs) known together as “Relevant Bodies” are responsible for determining term dates for maintained schools and as a result term dates are similar across Wales but not always identical.

**Figure 1.1: Current school year structure in Wales**

Term 1	1	Term 1	2	Term 2	1	Term 2	2	Term 3	1	Term 3	6
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug

### Research rationale

1.4 This report follows on from previous studies for the Welsh Government (Hughes:2022)<sup>4</sup>, (Beaufort Research, Cazbah:2022).<sup>5</sup> Ongoing stakeholder feedback to Welsh Government supports the case for exploring the impacts of the school calendar and alternative structures. Overall, the previous research published by Welsh Government has included views that:

- Learner progression (at least for some learners) slows down or stalls with the wind down to summer and the six-week summer break.

<sup>3</sup> When learners are off school but teachers are in school.

<sup>4</sup> [Effects of changes to the school year and alternative school calendars: review of evidence | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Exploring reform of the school year Beaufort Research report: attitudes towards school year reform in Wales | GOV.WALES](#)

- The current calendar has additional negative impacts on some groups, such as learners where the language medium of the school is different to the language spoken at home, as well as vulnerable and disadvantaged learners including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).
- Uneven term lengths can impact on learner and staff wellbeing and are unlikely to be the best conditions for effective management of workload; fatigue can be high in the long autumn term, and covering curriculum content comprehensively can be challenging in shorter half-terms.
- More consistent (and fixed) length terms may help schools and teachers with planning, manage workload and support learners, particularly those in transition and external examination years.

1.5 The main research aim for this commission was to explore the experiences and perception of learners, their families and school practitioners of the current school calendar. The findings documented in this report will support Welsh Government to make decisions about the school year in pursuit of an equitable, modern school calendar that helps tackle disadvantage, improve learner progression and attainment, support learner and staff wellbeing and align with modern life.

1.6 As such the purpose of the research was to capture insight into the status quo school calendar and not to explore attitudes towards any specific alternative structures for the school year.

### **Report structure**

1.7 This report is the main output from the research. The report is centred around the research aims and questions as set out by Welsh Government in the original research specification and is structured as follows.

- Section 2 outlines the methodology used for the research.
- Section 3 sets out the findings under the themes of:
  - Progression and attainment



- Fatigue and wellbeing
  - Learner behaviour
  - Primary to secondary school transition.
- Section 4 presents the conclusions.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The research followed a mixed-method sequential approach to capture as comprehensive a picture as possible on the key areas of interest, namely the relationship between the current school year and:

- progression and attainment
- fatigue and wellbeing
- learner behaviour
- primary to secondary school transition.

2.2 The research has gathered predominantly qualitative information. No attempt has been made to engage a quantitatively representative sample or to attain a quantitative evidence base. A quantitative based approach would have shown which views are the most prevalent across Wales. Although useful to some extent, this would have been at the expense of understanding the breadth of views, with a risk that important contexts that are a minority would have been diminished or excluded.

2.3 Instead, the focus has been on gathering views from different contexts to ensure the breadth of opinions is obtained. As such, responses have not been weighted or quantified based on frequency, and where differences of opinion are reported the context is provided. A benefit of this approach is greater inclusivity of a wide number of contexts and stakeholders. This is essential in providing answers to the research questions which explore relationships between the school year and key themes, and how these relationships vary across different contextual factors.

2.4 Evidence was gathered in three phases. This included an initial scoping phase, a desk-based review of existing data, and a main fieldwork phase to gather primary qualitative information.

### Scoping Phase

2.5 The purpose of the scoping phase was to identify themes to inform the main fieldwork phase and increase understanding of the context

of the current structure of the academic year. This phase involved an initial review of existing datasets and 15 interviews carried out with representatives from:

- Welsh Government
- National Academy for Educational Leadership
- WJEC exam board (formerly Welsh Joint Education Committee Cyd-bwyllgor Addysg Cymru)
- ESTYN
- two unions representing school practitioners
- one special school leadership practitioner
- one secondary schoolteacher
- one secondary faith school leadership practitioner
- one Welsh medium primary headteacher
- Welsh Local Government Association.

2.6 Based on the scoping findings, a research framework was developed that set out what was already known about the effects of the school year, what gaps there were in the evidence base, and suitable data sources to address these gaps. The original research questions can be found in Annex A.

#### Review of existing data

2.7 A full review of existing data included:

- Pupil Level Annual School Census (also known as PLASC)
- learner attendance data across all Wales from September 2014, with a gap in 2019/2020 data due to Covid-19
- staff absence data by LA and calendar year
- term dates
- learner exclusion across all Wales by school year
- GCSE grade results from school year 2008/9 until 2021/2 and grade boundaries<sup>6</sup> for individual GCSEs between 2016/7 and 2021/2.

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<sup>6</sup> I.e.: the marks needed to attain each grade.

- 2.8 In general, this data was useful but lacked sufficient granularity to provide insight for specific contexts, such as geographic location, setting type, and setting medium. In terms of data on staff absence prior to 2020/2021, only the average number of days lost per teacher over the whole year (by local authority) is available, so it was not possible to look at whether there is a year-on-year trend<sup>7</sup> in absence being particularly higher at certain times of the year.
- 2.9 Learner exclusion data is also of limited use in the context of this research; the only available data is on overall number of exclusions (permanent and fixed term) within each local authority over the entire year, preventing a more granular investigation into whether there are times of the year when exclusions are typically higher. Learner attendance data was also only available annually until September 2020, thus preventing exploration of times of the year when attendance is lowest. Since September 2020, attendance data is available for each school day at learner, school, and local authority level. This provided too small a sample for this study but may be useful for research in the future.

#### Fieldwork phase

- 2.10 A comprehensive sampling framework was developed for engagement with learners, parents/carers, and school staff. For all groups factors included:
- age of learners
  - socioeconomic status of learners and families
  - rural/urban context
  - language medium of learner (i.e.: the language they speak at home<sup>8</sup>) and language medium of their school<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Using data for just 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 would not allow for a review of trends over multiple years.

<sup>8</sup> Learners in all groups were asked what language(s) they primarily speak at home.

<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this research, schools that are Welsh-medium and schools that are bilingual have been conflated to ensure sufficient representation of schools where Welsh is spoken. The same approach is taken in school census data. When Welsh-medium is referred to in this report it includes Welsh-medium and bilingual schools.

- ALN status of learners.

2.11 For learners, 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<sup>10</sup>. In total 73 learners participated in this way, of whom 34 were male, 34 female, two non-binary and three had unrecorded gender. Nineteen of the 73 attend a Welsh-medium or bilingual school and eight self-identified as able to speak Welsh. Twenty-three learners were Black, Asian, minority ethnic, or gypsy, Roma, traveller. Twenty-four of the 73 are eligible for FSM, 16 of the 73 have an ALN, and five of the 73 have EAL. 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.

2.12 Parents were selected from a population that had previously agreed to take part in research activities. A total of 11 focus groups were held with parents of learners in Wales, involving a total of 62 parents. Parents were placed into groups using a series of screening questions that determined age of their child/children, language medium of the school their child/children attended, language used at home, parents' socioeconomic status (using the NRS Social Grade<sup>11</sup>), and whether or not their child/children had ALN. The groups included four exclusively for parents of learners in English medium settings (two primary age and two secondary age), four exclusively for parents of learners in Welsh-medium settings (two primary age and two secondary age), two for parents of learners who attend special schools, and one for parents of learners with ALN in mainstream schools (all ages).

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<sup>10</sup> I.e.: learners doing A Levels or equivalent in a school Sixth Form.

<sup>11</sup> [National Readership Survey Social Grade | nrs.co.uk](https://www.nrs.co.uk)

- 2.13 School practitioners were contacted through their schools. Data was gathered on all schools in Wales for setting type (primary, secondary, 3-16, special and PRU) language medium (English, and Welsh or bilingual) location (by local authority), rurality, percentage of learners registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM learners) (high FSM equal to or greater than 32 percent, medium FSM between 14 – 31.9 percent inclusive, low FSM equal to or less than 13.9 percent) percentage of learners of English as an additional language (EAL learners) (above or below average of 5.61 percent for primary and 3.58 percent for secondary), and percentage of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic learners. 192 primary schools were invited to participate by email, selected at random from categories based on the sorted data. All secondary and 3-16 schools in Wales were invited to participate by email. Publicly available email addresses were used for initial contacts. Participants were noted against which setting categories they met.
- 2.14 A total of 28 focus groups were held with school practitioners. Of those, 19 were split by learner age (i.e.: practitioners of either primary or secondary), school language medium, and staff roles including:
- leadership including headteachers and members of senior leadership teams (SLT)
  - teachers including Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)
  - support staff including teaching assistants, Learning Support Assistants, administrative staff and site managers.
- 2.15 Five groups were mixed across staff roles, in instances where recruitment to engage in the study/staff availability could not allow for exclusive groups.
- 2.16 Two groups were held with staff of special schools and two groups with staff of pupil referral units (PRUs).
- 2.17 Two additional focus groups were held with youth workers to gain their experiences of safeguarding and general behaviour of learners during both termtime and school holidays. Youth workers were invited

to share their understandings of the experiences that learners have outside of term time and during the school holidays. Opportunities for youth workers to engage in the research were circulated through the Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group and the Council for Wales Youth Voluntary Service.

### Limitations and challenges

- 2.18 Due to the voluntary nature of participation, there are some considerations that should be noted. Of the 24 primary schools with staff who attended focus groups, three are Welsh-medium. Of the 26 secondary schools with staff who attended focus groups five are Welsh-medium. One further primary school and two secondary schools are considered English medium with significant Welsh.<sup>12</sup> Welsh-medium schools are therefore underrepresented (16 per cent of participating schools) compared to the total population (29.9 per cent of schools).<sup>13</sup> The findings from Welsh-medium schools did not contradict those from English medium schools and in most cases they aligned. Where findings are unique to Welsh-medium schools this indicated in the report.
- 2.19 Schools with a religious character are also underrepresented in the participating schools. Eight per cent (four schools) of schools with staff who attended focus groups are faith schools compared to 14.9 per cent of all schools in Wales.
- 2.20 Details on gender, school language medium, learners' self-identified ability to speak Welsh, ethnicity, FSM, ALN, and EAL for learners engaged as members of the Welsh Youth Parliament are unknown.

### Analysis

- 2.21 Prior to fieldwork beginning, topic guides were developed through a research framework that assigned specific questions to be used in the topic guides that linked through to the research questions and overall themes. Copies of the topic guides used with school staff, youth workers, parents, and learners can be found in Annex B.
- 2.22 Data was recorded by hand during the focus groups and anonymised within the topic guide. Each topic guide was assigned a code to reflect the makeup of the participants in the focus group or the questionnaire

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<sup>12</sup> As given in school details here [Address list of schools | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Schools' census results: February 2022 | GOV.WALES](#) Welsh medium schools also tend to be smaller, with 23% of learners educated in Welsh medium schools.



being used. This allowed data to be analysed anonymously whilst also ensuring insights could be traced back to the relevant characteristics of participant groups - for example, ensuring statements could be attributed to school leaders, teaching practitioners, or support staff in an English or Welsh-medium school, as relevant. A deductive thematic analysis approach was used. The data was analysed by topic guide question and gathered together in mind maps organised by the predetermined research questions and themes. Data sources (i.e., key characteristics of participant groups expressing a given view, such as job roles, school language medium, school type, and rurality) were noted, and trends were grouped together. This method allowed the original context of each data point to be identified without compromising the anonymity of any individual participant.

### 3. Findings

#### **Progression and attainment**

##### The effect of the school calendar on learner progression and attainment

- 3.1 Opinions on the effects of the school calendar on learner progression<sup>14</sup> and attainment were mixed.
- 3.2 The focus of comments from practitioners, parents and learners on the negative effects concentrated on the summer break causing learning loss. It was widely felt that learners in September are behind where they were academically in July. This was reported by staff across all school types and ages – although particularly amongst younger learners. Secondary teachers of learners completing GCSEs reported that it was expected that progress in some topics will have been lost over the summer break and the challenge was not knowing in advance what areas they would have to repeat.
- 3.3 In the view of parents in higher socio-economic groups, a six-week summer break is too long a disruption of routine and too much time away from learning.
- 3.4 Learners themselves admitted to forgetting some of their schoolwork during the summer break. Learning loss was highlighted around recalling individual pieces of information such as maths equations, and language skills in languages other than the language(s) spoken at home.
- 3.5 There appears to be minimal lasting impact from learning loss over the summer. Learners reported quickly recovering in subjects in September, and parents of all ages stated that their children are not concerned about learning loss. Staff across all school types noted that attainment quickly rebounded with no lasting effect.

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<sup>14</sup> Specifically, progression from primary to secondary school. Transition from secondary to college or university was not in the scope of the research, given that the research only focused on maintained schools; for the same reason, independent schools were not included in the research.

- 3.6 All groups of parents viewed the time spent in catch-up at the start of the year as 'lost time' from a learning perspective. Similarly, the last weeks of term are viewed as a time of winding down where little meaningful learning is done. This was the view across all terms, with an emphasis on the first weeks of autumn, and last weeks of autumn and summer terms, as the least valued. Themed activities in the lead up to Christmas, such as nativity plays, or events at the end of the school year, such as sports days, were viewed as unimportant by some parents in all groups.
- 3.7 School practitioners stated that as staff plan their work in term blocks, it is a struggle to cover content in shorter terms (five weeks or fewer). The consistently long autumn term is considered by staff across all settings as the time when most content is covered by teachers. This is noticeable to learners themselves who said that it increased levels of fatigue (see below). For staff working with learners in GCSE years the major reported strength of the autumn term is that it has the fewest interruptions from breaks, bank holidays, exams, or outside school events (until December and the immediate lead up to Christmas).
- 3.8 Learners noted that they feel under more pressure from workload in the autumn term. This is combined with September being seen as the most difficult time for learning, due to the learning loss described above. One learner stated they felt like their "brain had stopped working" after the summer break. Other times when learners said they felt it was difficult to learn were the end of (all) terms, due to feeling tired, and over the summer term as warm weather and lighter evenings affect sleep and concentration in class.
- 3.9 There are positive effects associated with the current school year structure. From the perspective of secondary school leaders, the summer is a crucial break for learners in exam years (year 10+) as the pace of learning is unsustainable otherwise. Without this break it was felt that the rate of progress across the rest of the year would be slower.

3.10 Parents in the lower socioeconomic group with children in Welsh-medium primary schools stressed the importance of the extended break as it allowed “kids to be kids” and have time away from the classroom.

Learners that are most affected

3.11 Staff and parents highlighted that learners with ALN are the most affected by the current school calendar. This is because any negative effects (such as learning loss, additional wellbeing impacts) can be magnified by types of ALN (such as developmental disabilities and learning disabilities) and because of challenges unique to learners with ALN.

3.12 Learning loss for learners with ALN compared to those without is more noticeable to staff and parents in mainstream settings. Parents of learners with ALN were more concerned about regression due to learning loss than parents of learners without ALN and reported that their children are also more likely to be concerned about learning loss themselves.

3.13 It was recognised by both parents and staff that this effect is increased because learners with ALN are more likely to struggle with all breaks from school and have a faster rate of learning loss. This was attributed to the disruption to routines, which ALN learners are more susceptible to, alongside limited access to specialised equipment and support outside of a school setting. Parents noted that recovery from learning loss associated with breaks<sup>15</sup> from school is slower for learners with ALN; they expected that learners with ALN may take more time for attainment to rebound too compared with their peers.

3.14 Staff in all school types claimed to expect and be prepared for the higher levels of learning loss. They highlighted that the quality of

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<sup>15</sup> This was reported in relation to all breaks from school/school holidays. Some parents of learners with ALN reported having noticed learning loss in their child even after a half-term break.

support and nature of specific ALN are more important factors in addressing the learning loss than the school calendar.

- 3.15 Another specific group affected more than their peers are those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> Parents of secondary age learners in lower socioeconomic groups, said they struggle to maintain learning momentum during the summer break.
- 3.16 Staff reported greater learning loss being more likely across all age groups when working parents are not at home during the summer, particularly in the case of learners from more deprived backgrounds, where dedicated holiday clubs or other enrichment activities are less likely to be accessed, because of the cost involved.
- 3.17 Parents and staff were aware that not all learners have the same support with their learning (and general wellbeing) outside of school. Primary SLT staff highlighted that in their experience the parents who do not support learning out of term time also do not provide support during term time, but that during term time learners do benefit from having access to the support of the school staff.

#### Effects on learners in different language mediums

- 3.18 From a staff perspective, there is a loss of language skills for all who learn through a different language medium to the main language spoken at home. This is seen as similar to the learning loss of other skills and was not highlighted as area of specific concern.
- 3.19 It was noted that time in September is lost for other areas of learning when language skills need to be reacquired, given that this must take precedence. Welsh-medium primary schools felt that there was less time for covering the curriculum than in their English medium equivalents, due to the time spent re-familiarising with the language at the start of term. SLT staff within Welsh-medium schools stated that staff are also often unused to using English after breaks, which

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<sup>16</sup> Learners from families in NRS social grades C2,D,and E; learners who are eligible for FSM (excluding uFSM); learners in more deprived neighbourhoods as based on indicators in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. School practitioners also identified learners in single parent households.

heightens the gap in communication between learners and school staff.

- 3.20 English medium schools in North Wales report similar experiences with English language skills for learners who are from Welsh speaking homes. Welsh-medium schools in areas with high levels of Welsh speakers in the community also saw a drop in the ability to use English when learners returned after the summer break.

#### Effects of moving Easter break

- 3.21 Easter Sunday can fall on any date between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> which causes the last day of Spring term to fall on any date between 13<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> April inclusive and the first day of Summer term to fall on any date between 30<sup>th</sup> March and 3<sup>rd</sup> May inclusive. In practice, staff said that they are teaching the subject content in the same number of weeks regardless of the date of Easter and the half term break. However, some staff and leaders in secondary schools felt the inconsistency of term lengths had a particular impact in the period preceding exams relating to revision and the feeling of preparedness for exams.
- 3.22 Secondary English Medium SLT reported inconsistency in the support offered to learners during the Easter break within settings. It is heavily dependent on the approach of individual teachers' and their willingness to give up holiday time to offer revision sessions and other support; this was considered unfair to learners as not all would receive the same opportunities. Staff in other roles suggested that it is the responsibility of a good teacher to support learners up to the exam period, setting out clearly what is going to happen up to that point, which can help learners with revision, regardless of the placement of breaks.
- 3.23 More generally, practitioners, particularly SLT staff from English medium secondary schools, felt that "having holidays in the middle of exams is ridiculous" and not strategically planned. Staff recognised

that for many GCSE learners the summer half-term break is not really a holiday as it is taken up by exam preparation and revision.

- 3.24 Although there were some exceptions, most learners reported that they prefer to revise and prepare for exams in school with the support of their teachers, as opposed to at home during holiday periods.
- 3.25 Finally, teachers reported that there tends to be a split between those who are predicted to do well in examinations, who then revise more at home, and those who are not predicted to perform as well in exams, who are less likely to revise at home. Thus, the latter group are better served when in school immediately prior to exams and are at a disadvantage when the Easter break is later. There were also comments from teachers that more able and talented learners' wellbeing is better supported by school-based revision immediately before exams.
- 3.26 There was no indication that a shorter amount of teaching time in summer term disproportionately impacts any particular group of learners for other year groups. There was some connection made by all staff types on the links between high levels of deprivation, or the amount of support for learning available at home, and the amount of time learners spent on schoolwork during the Easter break. Lower levels of deprivation and greater amount of support at home was linked with greater amounts of schoolwork completed during the Easter break.

## **Fatigue and wellbeing**

### Fatigue and learners

- 3.27 There was an obvious connection for learners, staff, and parents between the school calendar and fatigue. Fatigue is higher in certain parts of the year than others.

- 3.28 Fatigue is recurrent at specific points. Learners reported generally feeling tired at the end of every term. Parents said that all children are noticeably more tired as the end of term approaches.
- 3.29 For learners, autumn and summer terms feel long, and feelings of fatigue are greater during these terms. Learners stated that their teachers play an important role in contributing to feelings of fatigue in the autumn term associated with the length of the term, due to the greater amount of teaching content covered in autumn. Learners reported feeling overloaded in the autumn term, particularly in subjects like maths and science. Hotter weather, and difficulty sleeping during summer months were said to contribute to feelings of fatigue in the summer term. Learners also commented that they feel less supported in summer as teachers appear more distracted.
- 3.30 Staff in general reported that fatigue impedes learning by the end of the autumn term. This was especially noticed by primary SLT staff for learners in wraparound care, who may experience “longer days” than other children. For primary English medium SLT staff, the six-week summer break was considered sufficient for learners to recover from fatigue at the end of the school year over the warmer months.
- 3.31 Teachers in secondary schools and special schools reported fatigue having an effect around six weeks into the school term. This was considered particularly notable for neurodiverse learners and those who travel longer distances to school, for example learners living in rural areas or those who must travel further to reach special schools. Parents of learners with ALN can “dread” the autumn term due to its length. One parent gave an example of the concern they feel around autumn term because fatigue is a trigger of seizures for their child with epilepsy.

#### Fatigue and practitioners

- 3.32 All staff reported that the current structure of the school year is a reason for fatigue which leads to burnout with fixed short breaks unevenly spread. The summer break is often the only real chance



they have to stop working, and some staff – including SLT members and staff responsible for exams – in practice continue to work for at least part of the summer break. Similarly, some support staff either are contracted over the breaks as site managers or work other jobs as well, such as in holiday clubs.

- 3.33 In general (and noted most strongly by staff in PRUs), fatigue in staff is linked to the levels of fatigue in learners. As learners become fatigued staff see an increase in social and behavioural issues, which increases the demand for staff themselves to be even more available, supportive, and resilient. This increases the pressure of the workday and leads to higher feelings of fatigue in staff. At times when staff fatigue is increased it was stated that the demands in work can become more intense.
- 3.34 The autumn term was identified across all setting types as too long. In comparison, other times of the year such as the summer term can feel “slack” for staff in primary schools with a lessened workload. In comparison teachers in secondary schools reported that fatigue is still high towards the end of the summer term due to additional workload associated with exams.
- 3.35 Teachers in all secondary schools described Easter as the “best” break for dealing with fatigue, with time enough to “catch up” on work and still have some time away from work. Frequent illness (see below) at the beginning of every break was highlighted by many as preventing shorter breaks from addressing levels of fatigue.
- 3.36 Staff across all school types, including SLT and support staff reported that inflexibility in the teaching profession and the lack of opportunities to take holiday during term-time is an issue that contributes to fatigue. This inflexibility was also seen as contributing to wellbeing issues among the teaching workforce, as discussed below.

#### Learner wellbeing

- 3.37 There was widespread concern amongst staff and parents of all groups for disadvantaged learners. Specific groups of learners

highlighted were those socially and economically disadvantaged, those from abusive families, and households where learners lack consistent meals and structure. SLT staff in secondary and primary schools were clear that a six-week summer break does not support learner wellbeing in those circumstances. It was also recognised however, that having disadvantaged learners in school all year round whilst their peers were not would be stigmatising and negatively affect wellbeing. Broadly, staff felt that all holiday periods throughout the year were likely to pose challenges to learner wellbeing in low-income households with these challenges increasing during longer breaks.

3.38 Staff considered it difficult for learners to readjust to school routine in September after a six-week period without the structure of school (or longer for learners with GCSE and AS Level exams). Parents of secondary age learners in lower socioeconomic groups reflected this, noting that maintaining routines and providing structure (e.g.: through mealtimes) can be difficult. Sleep routines can also be affected over the summer due to a lack of structure, with a connection being made between sleep and wellbeing.

3.39 Boredom amongst learners was a concern amongst parents who stated they cannot afford to provide meaningful activities for their children over holidays. This was highlighted by lower socioeconomic primary and secondary age group parents, and parents of ALN learners in all settings. Childcare costs were the main factor attributed to this. Even for parents in higher socioeconomic groups, the price increase of holidays places limits what they do during breaks. For lower socioeconomic groups, family holidays during school breaks were not seen as possible due to costs. Parents of younger learners felt there is a lack of things to do for younger learners. For parents with children with ALN it was felt that there are too few opportunities for their children to attend activities which effectively cater to their particular needs. Where activities for children with ALN are provided these can involve high financial and transport costs. In addition, children with ALN are often travelling further to attend special schools

or mainstream schools with sufficient ALN provision, which means they have fewer local friends available to socialise with during the summer break. For parents who speak Welsh, or have children in Welsh-medium schools, there is a disparity between the fewer number of activities available in Welsh-medium compared to those offered in English.

- 3.40 Parents reported that the wellbeing of their children was affected by parents' feelings of stress, and as that increases over holidays there is a negative effect on the parent/child relationship. A common factor highlighted by all parents was the difficulty of lining up parental leave from work during school breaks. The difference between the amount of time out of school for learners (13 weeks) compared with annual leave for working parents (typically five weeks) was reported to be making parents reliant on childcare, which resulted in little financial gain from remaining in work for those times.
- 3.41 Some parents commented that in good weather during the summer they can spend time outdoors with their children. Others also commented that their children's energy levels were generally good over the six-week summer break.
- 3.42 Youth workers said they do not see increased safeguarding issues outside of school term time, but wellbeing was a concern during school breaks due to decreased access to services for young people and their families. This is because schools are often used as hubs for services, or because staff in these services also work to term time only contracts.
- 3.43 Parents of learners with ALN highlighted that disruption to learner routine has a large negative impact on the wellbeing of the learner and their families. This was particularly emphasised in the case of neurodiverse learners. It was noted that any change in routine (including one-week half term breaks), had a negative impact. The disruption to routines, and the negative impact on wellbeing, occurs

twice with each break; once at the start, and then again at the end of the break when the learners return to school.

- 3.44 Although not attributed to the school calendar itself but to the general time of the year (i.e.: winter), all parents noted more illnesses in learners in the lead up to the Christmas break.
- 3.45 In the view of teachers, the calendar may have more impact on EAL learners who visit families overseas. Some said it was common for these learners to stretch the summer break by leaving before the end of summer term or returning after the start of the autumn term. Parents who visit families overseas noted that summer is not the best time to do so due to weather conditions in destination countries.
- 3.46 When asked about how they feel about specific parts of the school year most learners responded that the summer term was the most preferred. The prevalence of outdoor activities during this term and more relaxed uniform guidelines contributed to this. For learners in exam years, however, the summer term is a period of greater stress and pressure. The autumn term is also viewed favourably given the feeling of a fresh start during September and the anticipation of Christmas in the latter half. It was noted that the start of the school year can feel difficult until learners settle into a routine again. Spring term was generally the least preferred, but some positives were identified such as the Eisteddfod.
- 3.47 Factors that impact learners' opinions of different terms are the typical weather expected during those terms, in school and out of school activities, their workload, and the length of term. Learners focused on upcoming events, activities, and holidays to make the school term more exciting.
- 3.48 Parents highlighted that there is reduced social interaction for learners during the summer break, and that this was more pronounced for EAL learners and those who live in rural areas. For parents and learners, the start of autumn term was seen as a positive, increasing socialisation with peers.

- 3.49 Learners also reported that what their teachers say and do can impact on feelings of wellbeing. Time pressures, such as saying there is not much time to cover subject material was identified as having a specifically negative impact.
- 3.50 Teachers reported that More Able and Talented learners (MAT) tend to need more support with anxiety, as they are more aware of exam pressures. MAT learners are more likely to revise at home but still need the support of staff in school to direct them to be effective and to alleviate feelings of anxiety. Learners in general said they prefer learning and revision in school, especially after the experience of extended home learning during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Practitioner wellbeing

- 3.51 There is a clear link for practitioners between the school calendar and their own wellbeing.
- 3.52 There was widespread acceptance amongst all staff that the beginning of any holiday period will see them suffer with an illness. During longer half-terms there is increased instances of staff illness, who then stay ill for longer, with this contributing to levels of stress felt by staff. It was noted by SLT staff in primary schools that during the autumn term as Christmas approaches, there is a greater level of illness amongst staff as well as learners. Some staff pointed out that the general increase in illness in society during that time of the year may play a factor here, as does colleagues “pushing through” illness and staying in school, or parents sending unwell children to school.
- 3.53 For some staff in secondary and special schools there was no obvious pattern between term lengths and staff absences. For others there was a clear pattern. PRUs reported staff attendance as better at the beginning of term, and some secondary SLT staff explained that school budgets spent on supply staff to cover illness is highest from the start of November until the end of February.
- 3.54 Levels of stress related to workload also increases with staff absence. Points were made by SLT staff in primary and secondary schools that

even having very few members of staff off work due to stress can have a significant impact on the capacity and workload of the staff remaining in school.

- 3.55 Teachers in secondary schools who work with learners with ALN reported that their job becomes much more difficult after around six weeks into the school term, which negatively affects their wellbeing. The cause of this was said to be the increased fatigue in learners which begins to make an impact at this point.
- 3.56 The workload of school staff is also a source of pressure. According to statements by SLT, a third of teachers are leaving the profession within five years, due to the workload and lack of time off for breaks.<sup>17</sup> Secondary school teachers stated that two-week breaks helped balance workload better than one-week, and that one-week breaks became increasingly more difficult as staff get older.
- 3.57 Some staff, in one focus group of school practitioners made up of a mix of roles, including support staff, long serving teachers, and leaders who are on a second career, expressed they would consider leaving the sector if the summer break was shortened. Reasons for this included the belief that the summer break was necessary to be an effective teacher the rest of the year, and that existing workload demands during the summer would mean any time reduced from the summer break would even further decrease time when teachers are genuinely 'on holiday'.
- 3.58 The school calendar can affect the pay of some staff. Due to differences in contracts, some teaching assistants and other support staff do not get paid during long breaks.<sup>18</sup> SLT staff within primary schools described that supply staff are increasingly making up more

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<sup>17</sup> [Between 2017-2021 20.64% of all staff leaving teaching did so in the first 5 years. Of those staff who did not take on non-teaching roles in education or early retire, 30.73% left in the first 5 years.](#)

<sup>18</sup> Teaching contracts typically pro-rata salary and pay it in 12 instalments per year, so teachers receive pay every month. Support staff may have similar arrangements, but it was stated in focus groups that it is more usual to only receive pay for hours worked in a month. This leads to fluctuations in pay amount each month and receiving no pay from the role for August.

of the workforce, including leadership positions; supply staff are also not paid over the holidays. Therefore, during the school holidays, there are multiple groups of school staff who are not earning. Staff in all roles stated that the summer break is a long period of time for this to be the case.

3.59 The structure of the school calendar is generally positive when breaks align between school staff and their school-aged children who are in different schools. However, it can be difficult for staff when training days or school holidays do not align across Wales. This was also a noted problem affecting staff near the border with England. There are also sometimes difficulties, noted by support staff, when their family members who work outside of schools cannot take annual leave during the school holidays due to their own employer's annual leave policies which was said to impact wellbeing.

3.60 The six-week summer break was highlighted as a time when school staff can spend time focused on their own children and families. The level of workload was felt to prevent this during other breaks. In practice the six-week summer break is often shorter for those in leadership and some support roles (including school office staff and site managers) resulting in as little as two weeks' time spent away from work.

Effects of fatigue on learners' ability, attitude to learning, wellbeing, and attendance

3.61 Fatigue was highlighted by learners as the main factor affecting learning. Greater levels of fatigue were said to contribute to boredom, lack of concentration, and being more easily distracted by others.

3.62 From a learner perspective, the most obvious time for absences is in the autumn term. Illness rates are known to be higher, and learners also shared that they were more likely to "not bother" attending school close to Christmas. It was noted that it is common for some learners to go on family holidays during summer term or early autumn term due to reduced prices. Parents and staff were also very aware of this.

Parents and staff explained that the cost savings for families far outweighed any penalty fine for unauthorised absences.

- 3.63 Attendance issues not related to illness were noted by all parents to be highest just before Christmas and during the latter end of the summer term. Factors causing this are said to be the cost of holidays (i.e.: cheaper before the school holidays), and perceived lower value of teaching and learning during these weeks (see above). This, along with visible signs of fatigue in their children, leads to parents being more likely to be sympathetic to their children not wanting to go to school (e.g.: in December). When the end of autumn term is extremely close to Christmas Day, unauthorised absences are seen to rise as families who travel for the holiday will leave early.
- 3.64 Youth workers highlighted the immediate post-Christmas period is a time for high numbers of safeguarding issues, which are lessened if schools return quickly after Christmas Day.
- 3.65 Parents of primary school learners in higher socioeconomic groups expressed a strong dislike of attendance awards or overemphasizing the importance of attendance. It was felt that such a focus fails to take into consideration the health of the learner and encourages learners to feel guilty if they fall ill. Wider evidence strongly points to the relationship between levels of attendance and individual attainment, with lower attendance leading to lower attainment.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.66 Parents of learners with ALN who attend mainstream schools said they feel that the school year structure is not supportive of absences which are directly related to their children's ALN. In some cases, school staff are not aware of circumstances and processes and are marking the learners as absent rather than at medical appointments. In other cases, too much freedom was felt to be given by the school to parents to take their child out of class, which creates the impression that staff do not care about the attainment of learners with ALN and the lessons they have missed.

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<sup>19</sup> [Why is school attendance so important and what are the risks of missing a day?](#)



### Fatigue, wellbeing and NQTs

- 3.67 The summer break is widely seen by SLT and teachers as a vital benefit to drive recruitment into the education sector. During the workshops staff widely viewed the six-week summer break as an important incentive, providing an extended, consecutive holiday period which is unmatched by other employment sectors. This is despite the near universal description by staff in all roles that the summer break is rarely a six-week break in practice. The advantage of the six-week holiday matching familial needs (syncing up to enable teachers to look after their own children) was noted, however in most cases staff concluded that this would equally be the case if holiday dates and lengths were different. The attraction of the six-week summer break was often discussed in relation to wider concerns surrounding recruitment. Recruitment generally was noted as being increasingly difficult, even for schools with several perceived factors in their favour, such as location, exam results, and favourable Estyn inspection reports.
- 3.68 It was often expressed by SLT and teachers that in practice the frequent breaks are not holidays and are in fact used by teachers for catching up with admin. The impact of this on the wellbeing of NQTs was not seen by existing staff to be different from the impact it has on the wellbeing of other staff members. However, according to members of SLT it is a factor in the number of staff who leave the profession early and can play a negative role in the retention of NQTs.
- 3.69 Factors other than the school calendar are more widely viewed to be more important to recruitment and retention. High workload was described as an important factor by English and Welsh-medium staff. According to secondary teachers in English medium schools, abuse from learners and parents, and negative stories of the education sector reported in the press, put people off joining the profession and push existing staff out.

## **Learner behaviour**

- 3.70 As fatigue increases, incidences of disruptive behaviour also increase, according to staff in all schools. SLT staff in English medium secondary schools reported that this is true for every term and not specific to any part of the year. All parent groups agreed, underscoring that there is a noticeable difference in their children's behaviour at the end of terms. Learners themselves notice it as well, with symptoms including difficulties concentrating and increased talking with friends in class.
- 3.71 Behaviour was observed by teachers in all school sectors<sup>20</sup> to be generally poor in September, until learners are back in the routine of being in class. Conversely, some secondary school leaders reported a "honeymoon" period after other breaks, with better behaviour for the first two weeks compared to the rest of the term.
- 3.72 Primary school teachers reported that some learners struggle with behaviour in the lead up to or after every break, including half terms, bank holidays, or even weekends. This is particularly noticeable in, but not exclusive to, learners from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 3.73 In terms of the summer holiday, youth workers did not feel there were any noticeable or abnormal behaviour issues in that period. Youth workers did emphasise however, the importance of schools as an avenue for flagging and reporting safeguarding concerns. In this sense, a lack of recorded or known incidents can also be problematic. Some concerns surrounding the increased vulnerability of learners who are without structure and appropriate supervision for extended periods of time were also reported by school staff.
- 3.74 Behaviour concerns that involve youth workers spike in October and March, which they saw as a seasonal phenomenon connected to the start and end of winter. The Christmas period was cited as particularly problematic, as this accentuates inequity for learners in low-income

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<sup>20</sup> I.e.: primary, secondary and Special schools.

households, especially in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. In these cases, learners are observed by youth workers to have increased anxiety and draw greater comparisons between themselves and their peers.

- 3.75 It is also widely acknowledged by youth workers who participated in the research that incidents of domestic abuse spike immediately after the Christmas period, increasing learner's experiences of trauma and disruption – which can lead to complex changes in behaviour.

Factors affecting behaviour throughout the year

- 3.76 Factors contributing to behaviour issues include disruption to routines according to staff and parents, fatigue according to parents and learners, boredom according to parents – linked with views of 'lost' teaching and learning time above – quality of homelife according to staff and weather and seasons according to staff and learners.
- 3.77 Other factors contributing to disruptive behaviour include major events which cause heightened stress for staff and learners, such as exams, and events for which staff and learners get excited, including Christmas. Religious primary school staff highlighted this as a particular issue as they believe people should not be celebrating Christmas before the religious holiday itself.
- 3.78 Views on the length of terms were more mixed. PRU staff and some secondary teachers reported behaviour issues escalating during longer terms. Staff in other schools report the same increase in disruptive behaviour in every term.
- 3.79 Other important factors contributing to learner behaviour unrelated to the school calendar were also cited, particularly socioeconomic dynamics and the quality of homelife, as described by secondary school leaders. These were repeatedly seen by all staff as the most important factors. Staff from all settings described witnessing learners getting upset as all breaks approached, and in the most extreme cases even at weekends, because of safeguarding issues, absence of parental support, other emotional issues outside of school, and

absence of the basics of wellbeing (especially food). Free meals at school were repeatedly reported as the only consistent mealtimes for some learners.

### **Primary to secondary school transitions**

#### Perception of the summer break on transition

- 3.80 SLT staff in both secondary and primary schools viewed the summer holidays as a chance for learners to gain maturity and to experience a well-defined break between major stages of education. This view was echoed by primary school teachers and some parents.
- 3.81 Secondary leaders identified risks of transitioning learners (learners moving between education phases, namely from primary to secondary school) losing familiarity with their new secondary schools between transition activities held at the end of primary school – for example, taster visits – and the start of September. Some primary teachers felt that a six-week break is a long time for those with anxiety about the transition, indicating that the holiday period could worsen this experience for certain learners. Some parents in lower socioeconomic groups reported that their children seemed ready for transition at the end of the summer term, but that over the course of the summer holiday they became more anxious about the idea of starting at a new school.
- 3.82 Parents highlighted that for learners with ALN, the transition from primary to secondary school could be particularly difficult. This is due to the combination of anxiety and challenges around transition, in addition to the other challenges the summer break poses for learners with ALN, including the time and effort it takes to transition in and out of routine and the length of the summer break in general. Issues around transition and other challenges associated with the summer break for learners with ALN compound each other. However special school staff felt that they had greater flexibility to modify pupil transitions based on their individual needs through providing

additional support or even delaying pupil transition where needed to ensure their wellbeing.

- 3.83 The transition support provided to learners in Year 6 and 7 was seen as more important than the structure of the school year by all staff and parents. Parents highlighted that the way individual school clusters manage the transition between Year 6 and Year 7 was vital but inconsistent. Some staff across all types of settings felt strongly that the calendar does not have any impact on transition.
- 3.84 Parents of learners across all school types were critical of transition support and the variation in practices between schools. They highlighted the summer break did not serve to alleviate the issues they have, often around learner anxiety, and lack of basic information until very late, just before the start of term.

Learner perceptions of the summer break on transition

- 3.85 Learners did not express any opinion of the summer break in relation to transition from primary to secondary school. Many had transition experiences affected by Covid-19 and were aware they had an unusual experience with online activities.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 This research has sought to capture evidence of the perceived effects of the current school year structure across a variety of domains, including disadvantage, learner progression and attainment, learner behaviour, primary to secondary transition, and wellbeing and fatigue.
- 4.2 Concerns around wellbeing and fatigue were raised by all stakeholders (learners, parents and school practitioners) when asked directly about the current school calendar. The majority of comments centred on this issue, with a mix of views expressed. Although some people felt that the six-week summer break had a positive impact, most comments raised concerns about the negative impacts of the current school year calendar on wellbeing and fatigue. The wellbeing and fatigue of learners and school practitioners were universally and proactively identified by stakeholders (learners, parents and school practitioners) as the element most negatively impacted by the current school year calendar.
- 4.3 Inconsistent term lengths – in particular a comparatively long autumn term – means that learners and staff become more run down and less resilient (physically and mentally) resulting in higher levels of sickness absence and deteriorating learner behaviour. Whilst the autumn term is when most content is covered by teachers, this is felt by learners to increase levels of fatigue. Teachers reported that this in turn has an effect on progression and attainment; learners also reported they have difficulty concentrating and become more easily distracted when fatigued and stated this issue was more apparent in the autumn term.
- 4.4 A late Easter means that the spring term is adversely long, resulting in increased fatigue for learners and teaching staff. Furthermore, some teachers suggested that having a longer lead-up time in school between the end of the Easter holiday and the start of the external examination period is beneficial to all learners, but particularly those who come from homes with less support to revise at home.

- 4.5 The summer holiday has both strengths and weaknesses. Whilst its current six-week length was thought to have very little, if any impact on primary to secondary transition, it does have a detrimental effect on progression for learners of all ages – particularly younger children – as knowledge and skills are lost over the six-week summer break and have to be ‘relearned’ in September. This detrimental effect is seen to be magnified for learners with ALN. Teachers in both English and Welsh-medium schools reported that they see a regression in language skill over the summer holidays in learners who speak a different language or languages at home – whether English, Welsh or another language but that this was not considered any different from other skills.
- 4.6 Nonetheless, for learners in exam years (essentially Year 10 and older) the six-week summer break was considered vital for them to recover from the intense period of work leading up to and during the exams.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the six-week summer break remains a key attraction of the teaching profession.
- 4.7 For teachers there are important advantages of the summer holiday. It is seen as an essential period for rest and recovery from the pressures of teaching. It is also a time when many, particularly SLT staff, catch-up on administrative tasks.
- 4.8 Learners with ALN are the most affected by the school year structure. In addition to being more affected by learning loss, they experience greater detrimental effects to their wellbeing on the grounds that they are less resilient to changes in routine and find the switch from term-time to holiday-time (and back) especially challenging.
- 4.9 Learners from lower socio-economic groups and those where there are safeguarding concerns are also more negatively affected by the summer holidays in particular – but holidays and even weekends in

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<sup>21</sup> Noting that for learners in exam years the break can be longer than 6 weeks in practice as exams tend to finish before the end of term.

general – due to the lack of access to stimulation, attention and even food, in some cases.

- 4.10 The research has highlighted that in the experiences and perceptions of learners, parents, and school practitioners the structure of the school calendar does have an important role in learner and staff wellbeing. In turn behaviour, and learner attainment and progression are impacted. Inconsistent term lengths increase levels of fatigue at specific points of the year and affect the engagement with learning at key points such as the end of the autumn and summer terms. All learners benefit, in terms of wellbeing, attainment and progression, from the support offered by school throughout the year, with the most benefit seen in learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and learners with ALN. The summer break highlights the inequitable access to activities and support during holiday times, with those in lower income families or with ALN typically disadvantaged. Short term learning loss is linked to the summer break more than any other break. The shortest breaks are seen to have little effect in addressing levels of fatigue and wellbeing with two weeks being seen as more beneficial than one. These findings suggest that alterations to the school calendar could improve levels of wellbeing and fatigue in learners and staff, help tackle disadvantage, and support learner attainment and progression.



## **Annex A Research Questions**

### **Progression and attainment**

- Does the school calendar affect learner progression and attainment, and the rate of learner progression?
- How does the school calendar affect the progression and attainment of specific groups of learners? In particular, learners who are socially and economically disadvantaged, those with additional learning needs, and those in other protected characteristics or groups?
- Does the school calendar impact the progression and attainment of Welsh medium learners? Particularly learners from homes that are not Welsh speaking.
- Is there any relationship between exam results and the amount of teaching time in the summer term that leads to the exam period?
- Does a shorter amount of teaching time in the summer term have a greater impact on specific groups of learners compared to their peers?

### **Fatigue and wellbeing**

- Is there a relationship between the school calendar and feelings of learner and teacher fatigue?
- Is there a relationship between the school calendar and wellbeing concerns for learners and teachers?
- What effects does any fatigue amongst practitioners, that relates to the school calendar, have upon their work and wellbeing?'
- How does any fatigue (relating to the school calendar) impact learners' ability and attitude to learning and their wellbeing? And does this relate to their attendance?

- Is there a relationship between the school calendar and fatigue and wellbeing concerns for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)? And does this impact on decisions to leave the profession?
- How do teachers (including NQTs) think fatigue affects their teaching?

### **Learner behaviour**

- What are teacher perceptions of whether the school calendar affects learner behaviour (e.g. disruption) in the classroom?
- Are there any factors that contribute to learner behaviour (e.g. disruption) throughout the school year?

### **Primary to secondary school transition**

- What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of the summer holidays on the transition from primary to secondary school?
- What are learners' perceptions of the impact of the summer holidays on the transition from primary to secondary school?

## Annex B Topic Guides

### School Year Structure Research

#### Main Fieldwork - Topic Guide (School Staff)

Interviewer:	
Interviewee:	
Interviewee Role and Setting:	
Interviewee Email:	
Date:	

#### Background to the research

As you may be aware, Welsh Government, through its **Programme for Government**, has committed to explore reform of the school year. The primary driver for this commitment is to consider both the **current school year structure, as well as alternative arrangements for the school calendar**, in the interests of having a school calendar that can best help mitigate any impacts of disadvantage, narrow educational inequalities and support improved learner and staff well-being.

Miller Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to explore learner and school practitioner experiences and perceptions of the **current** school calendar and the impact it has on progression, attainment, learner behaviour, fatigue, wellbeing and secondary school transition. The term 'school calendar' refers to the current structure of the school (or academic) year, including **term lengths** and the **distribution** of holiday periods across the year.

In considering the school calendar, we are therefore also interested in the school holidays and the effect that extended periods of time out of school may have on learners and/or school practitioners.

The research will consider the relative advantages and disadvantages associated with the inconsistency of term lengths at present. Welsh Government have committed to the position that days in school, number of staff training days, and the overall number of holiday weeks **will not change** should any recommendations to alter the school calendar be taken forward. All bank holidays will also still apply and the Summer holiday period will **not be** less than four weeks.

As such, the purpose of this research is to capture insight into the status quo and **not** to explore attitudes towards any specific, alternative models for the school year. The research will inform formal consultation on the school year structure later in 2023.

As part of this research, we are gathering the views of key stakeholders, including parents, school staff, and children and young people – in workshops such as this one.

Thank you for participating in this research. Your contribution will be anonymised through the analysis process and your contact details will only be used for internal record keeping.

1	Introduction	Notes
1a	Would you please introduce yourself and your role, including (for teaching staff) what year(s) you teach and how long you have been working in education for?	
2	General attitudes towards the current school calendar	
2a	What would you consider to be the main <b>strengths</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g., could mention the distribution of holidays throughout the year, length of terms and holiday periods</li> </ul>	
2b	<b>Why</b> do you consider these elements of the school year to be strengths – <b>who benefits</b> from them? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I.e., specific groups of learners, their families, teachers, other staff and stakeholders</li> <li>• Do certain groups of learners/ practitioners / members of the school community benefit more than others?</li> </ul>	
2c	What would you consider to be the main <b>shortcomings</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are certain groups of learners/ practitioners / members of the school community negatively impacted more than others?</li> </ul>	
3	Impacts on School Staff (Fatigue and Wellbeing)	

3a	<p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar affect levels of <b><u>fatigue amongst school practitioners</u></b>? (If applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your level of fatigue change over the course of a term? If so, how?</li> <li>• Are you more fatigued during one term than another? If so, which one?</li> <li>• Do you return from holiday periods feeling refreshed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Does this depend on the length of the holiday / the length of the preceding term, or is the calendar unrelated to your levels of fatigue and motivation?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
3b	<p>What effect does the school calendar have on <b><u>different groups</u></b> of school practitioners in terms of fatigue and wellbeing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the school calendar impact <b><u>Newly Qualified Teachers</u></b> differently than it impacts more senior teachers?</li> <li>• Does the calendar impact TAs and support staff differently than teachers?</li> <li>• To what extent is this due to differences in contracts (e.g. those paid hourly vs salaried employees)?</li> <li>• What about school leadership?</li> </ul>	
3c	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and fatigue and wellbeing amongst school practitioners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would more even term lengths help reduce fatigue and improve wellbeing?</li> </ul>	
4	<p><b>Impacts on learners – Fatigue, wellbeing, and attendance</b></p>	
4a	<p>To what extent, if at all, is there a relationship between the school calendar and <b><u>learner fatigue</u></b>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you tell? Does learner fatigue impact motivation, behaviour, attendance, etc?</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(If applicable) What <b><u>effect does this have on learners / the wider school community?</u></b> <i>Probe for any effects on specific groups of learners.</i></li> </ul>	
4b	<p>How (if at all) does the placement of holiday periods throughout the year and the length of term and holiday periods affect <b><u>learner wellbeing?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How about learners' attitudes toward learning and motivation to learn – does this change with the school calendar?</li> <li><i>Probe for any effects on specific groups of learners.</i></li> </ul>	
4c	<p>In your experience, does learner <b><u>attendance</u></b> change in relation to the school calendar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are students absent more often just before / just after holiday periods?</li> <li>Does this depend the length of the holiday period / the term?</li> <li>To what extent are student absences associated with the issues we have discussed so far (fatigue, wellbeing, etc.)</li> </ul>	
4d	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and fatigue and wellbeing amongst learners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would more even term lengths help reduce fatigue and improve wellbeing?</li> </ul>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Learner behaviour</b>	
5a	<p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar impact <b><u>disruptive learner behaviour?</u></b> Is disruptive behaviour a problem at a particular point in the year? Why do you think this is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(If applicable) Are there specific groups of learners whose behaviour is more affected by the structure of the school year?</li> </ul>	
5b	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and learner behaviour?</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would modifying the structure of the school year help reduce disruptive behaviour?</li> </ul>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Progression and attainment</b>	
6a	<p>How, if at all, does the school calendar affect <b>learner progression and attainment</b>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you notice a difference in progression and attainment just before holiday periods? Just after holiday periods?</li> <li>• If you do notice that learner progression changes at different points in the year, why do you think this is?</li> </ul>	-
6b	<p>How does the current calendar affect <b>different groups</b> of learners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example, socio-economic status, MAT, language, ALN, etc?</li> <li>• Why do you think this is?</li> </ul>	
6c	<p>[For Welsh medium schools]: How, if at all, does the school calendar affect the progression and attainment of <b>Welsh medium learners</b>, in particular learners who have different levels of exposure to Welsh outside school?</p>	
6d	<p>[For secondary schools]: Do you notice any correlation between <b>exam results and the amount of teaching time in the summer term</b> preceding the exam period? <i>Probe for any specific details.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do students perform better on exams when they have a longer summer term? Is this equally true for all groups of students?</li> <li>• Do you notice a difference in student attitudes/ anxiety levels when they have a shorter summer term preceding exams?</li> <li>• Is there any learning provision in school for revision during easter/study leave?</li> </ul>	
6e	<p>[For secondary schools]: Are you aware of any particular <b>groups of learners</b> who are more affected by a shorter amount of teaching time in the summer term preceding the exam period? <i>Probe for any specific details.</i></p>	

6f	What, if anything, could be done to address any detrimental effects of the school calendar on learner progression and attainment?	
<b>7</b>	<b>Primary to secondary school transition</b>	
7a	<p>[For school leadership and staff in last year of primary, first year of secondary]</p> <p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar <b>affect learners' transitions</b> from primary to secondary school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your experience, how does the long summer break impact learners' wellbeing and attitude toward the transition to secondary school? How about their readiness to learn and progression once entering secondary school?</li> <li>• (If applicable) Are there any specific groups of learners for whom this is more of an issue?</li> </ul>	
7b *	Considering the current school calendar, what do you think (if anything) has the biggest negative impact and why?	
<b>8</b>	<b>For secondary schools</b>	
	Based on this year/ recent years would your school be able to run on site examination results days in the third week of August for both GCE (A-level) and GCSE (if applicable)?	
	Would there be any benefits or disadvantages for staff in having GCE and GCSE results in the same week rather than subsequent weeks?	
	What issues (if any) may arise by having GCE and GCSE results days in the same week?	
	If applicable, approximately how many of your learners complete non WJEC qualifications on site for both GCSE and GCE?	
<b>9</b>	<b>Closing</b>	



9a	<p>Given everything we have discussed today, how much of an impact do you think the structure of the school calendar has on learners overall?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If 0 means the calendar has no impact at all on learners and 10 means the calendar is hugely influential, how would you rate the impact of the school year structure on learners?</li> <li>• How much of an impact does it have on practitioners overall?</li> </ul>	
9b	<p>If you could change one thing about the school calendar in order to mitigate any negative impacts it has on learners, what would you change?</p>	
9c	<p>Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding the school calendar in Wales?</p>	

## School Year Structure Research

### Main Fieldwork - Interview Topic Guide (Youth Workers)

<b>Interviewer:</b>	
<b>Interviewee:</b>	
<b>Interviewee Role and Setting:</b>	
<b>Interviewee Email:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

### Background to the research

As you may be aware, Welsh Government, through its **Programme for Government**, has committed to explore reform of the school year. The primary driver for this commitment is to consider both the **current school year structure, as well as alternative arrangements for the school calendar**, in the interests of having a school calendar that can best help mitigate any impacts of disadvantage, narrow educational inequalities and support improved learner and staff well-being.

Miller Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to explore learner and school practitioner experiences and perceptions of the **current** school calendar and the impact it has on progression, attainment, learner behaviour, fatigue, wellbeing and secondary school transition. The term 'school calendar' refers to the current structure of the school (or academic) year, including **term lengths** and the **distribution** of holiday periods across the year.

In considering the school calendar, we are therefore also interested in the school holidays and the effect that extended periods of time out of school may have on learners and/or school practitioners.

The research will consider the relative advantages and disadvantages associated with the inconsistency of term lengths at present. Welsh Government have committed to the position that days in school, number of staff training days, and the overall number of holiday weeks **will not change** should any recommendations to alter the school calendar be taken forward. All bank holidays will also still apply and the Summer holiday period will **not be** less than four weeks.

As such, the purpose of this research is to capture insight into the status quo and **not** to explore attitudes towards any specific, alternative models for the school year. The research will inform formal consultation on the school year structure later in 2023.

As part of this research, we are gathering the views of key stakeholders, including parents, school staff, and children and young people – in workshops such as this one.

Thank you for participating in this research. Your contribution will be anonymised through the analysis process and your contact details will only be used for internal record keeping.

1	Introduction	Notes
1a	Would you please introduce yourself and your role, (which locations in Wales do you primarily work in, and with what age ranges?)	
2	General attitudes towards the current school calendar	
2a	What would you consider to be the main <b>strengths</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do young people feel about the holiday periods?</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g., could mention the distribution of holidays throughout the year, length of terms and holiday periods</li> </ul>	
2b	<p><b>Why</b> do you consider these elements of the school year to be strengths – <b>who benefits</b> from them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I.e., specific groups of learners, their families, teachers, other staff and stakeholders</li> <li>Do certain groups of learners/ practitioners / members of the school community benefit more than others?</li> </ul>	
2c	<p>What would you consider to be the main <b>shortcomings</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are certain groups of learners/ practitioners / members of the school community negatively impacted more than others?</li> </ul>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Impacts on Youth Work</b>	
3a	<p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar affect the work that you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what way? Which periods are the most demanding for you? How has the nature of your work changed and adapted in recent years?</li> </ul>	
3b	<p>What effect does the school calendar have on the different types of services that support young people <b>outside of the school environment</b>?</p>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Impacts on Young People – Fatigue, wellbeing, and attendance</b>	
4a	<p><b>What connection (if any), is there between mental health and wellbeing impacts for different groups of learners, and the structure of the school year?</b></p>	
4b	<p>How (if at all) does the placement of holiday periods throughout the year and the length of term and holiday periods affect <b>young people’s wellbeing</b>?</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How about learners' attitudes toward learning and motivation to learn – does this change with the school calendar?</li> <li>• <i>Probe for any effects on specific groups of learners.</i></li> </ul>	
4c	<p>What are some of the social issues (challenges) that should be considered in relation to young people, and the school holiday periods?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do these relate to the <b>length of time spent outside of school</b>?</li> <li>• In your experience, are these issues likely to be exacerbated by the lack of a structured (school) routine?</li> </ul>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Young People &amp; behaviour</b>	
5a	<p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar impact <b><u>disruptive behaviour</u></b>? Is disruptive behaviour a problem at a particular point in the year? Why do you think this is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (If applicable) Are there specific groups of learners whose behaviour is more affected by the structure of the school year?</li> </ul>	
5b	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and behaviour?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would modifying the structure of the school year help reduce disruptive behaviour?</li> <li>• Do you notice any particular patterns in behaviours of young people, when comparing the start of the 6-week break and the end?</li> </ul>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Experiences outside of school</b>	
6a	<p>How, if at all, does the length of school holiday periods impact learners outside of school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are some groups of learners influenced more than others?</li> <li>• Do you have any evidence that may help to support our understanding of this? (Number of incidents reported, referrals made?)</li> </ul>	

6b	<p>Specifically, what are the impacts of a 6-week holiday period for learners who may have a difficult home life (for a variety of reasons) – including those in food insecure households, or those who move around frequently in the holidays?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is altering the length of holiday periods likely to have any positive impact on addressing these issues?</li> </ul>	
6c	<p>What are the impacts of altering school holiday periods for families who have custody arrangements which differentiate between holiday and term time?</p>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Closing</b>	
9a	<p>Given everything we have discussed today, how much of an impact do you think the structure of the school calendar has on learners overall?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If 0 means the calendar has no impact at all on learners and 10 means the calendar is hugely influential, how would you rate the impact of the school year structure on learners?</li> <li>• How much of an impact does it have on practitioners overall?</li> </ul>	
9b	<p>If you could change one thing about the school calendar in order to mitigate any negative impacts it has on learners, what would you change?</p>	
9c	<p>Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding the school calendar in Wales?</p>	

## School Year Structure Research

### Main Fieldwork - Topic Guide (Parents)

Interviewer:	
Interviewee:	
Interviewee Role and Setting:	
Interviewee Email:	
Date:	

#### Background to the research

As you may be aware, Welsh Government, through its **Programme for Government**, has committed to explore reform of the school year. The primary driver for this commitment is to consider both the **current school year structure, as well as alternative arrangements for the school calendar**, in the interests of having a school calendar that can best help mitigate any impacts of disadvantage, narrow educational inequalities and support improved learner and staff well-being.

Miller Research has been commissioned by Welsh Government to explore learner and school practitioner experiences and perceptions of the **current** school calendar and the impact it has on progression, attainment, learner behaviour, fatigue, wellbeing and secondary school transition. The term 'school calendar' refers to the current structure of the school (or academic) year, including **term lengths** and the **distribution** of holiday periods across the year.

In considering the school calendar, we are therefore also interested in the school holidays and the effect that extended periods of time out of school may have on learners and/or school practitioners.

The research will consider the relative advantages and disadvantages associated with the inconsistency of term lengths at present. Welsh Government have committed to the position that days in school, number of staff training days, and the overall number of holiday weeks **will not change** should any recommendations to alter the school calendar be taken forward. All bank holidays will also still apply and the Summer holiday period **will not** be less than four weeks.

As such, the purpose of this research is to capture insight into the status quo and **not** to explore attitudes towards any specific, alternative models for the school year. The research will inform formal consultation on the school year structure later in 2023.

As part of this research, we are gathering the views of key stakeholders, including parents, school staff, and children and young people – in workshops such as this one.

Thank you for participating in this research. Your contribution will be anonymised through the analysis process and your contact details will only be used for internal record keeping.

1	Introduction	Notes
1 a	Would you please introduce yourselves and share the age and year of your children?	
1 b	Do any of your children learn in the medium of Welsh? If so, do you speak Welsh at home?	
1 c	Do any of you work in schools or the education sector?	
2	General attitudes towards the current school calendar	
2 a	What would you consider to be the main <b>strengths</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g., could mention the distribution of holidays throughout the year, length of terms and holiday periods</li> </ul>	
2 b	Why do you consider these elements of the school year to be strengths – who benefits from them? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I.e., specific groups of learners, their families, teachers, other staff and stakeholders)?</li> <li>• Do certain groups of learners/ practitioners / members of the school community benefit more than others?</li> </ul>	
2 c	What would you consider to be the main <b>shortcomings</b> of the way the school year is currently structured in Wales?	

2 d	To what extent do these shortcomings vary in terms of the way they <b>impact different groups</b> of learners, teaching practitioners and other stakeholders?	
<b>3</b>	<b>Fatigue and wellbeing</b>	
3 a	<p>To what extent, if at all, do you think the structure of the school year impacts your children’s level of energy or fatigue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you tell?</li> <li>• Does your child get a different amount of sleep over the course of the year? E.g. just before or just after particular holiday periods</li> <li>• Does the school calendar impact your children’s behaviour (e.g., eating, screen time, routine) in other ways?</li> </ul>	
3 b	<p>How (if at all) does the placement of holiday periods throughout the year and the length of term and holiday periods affect <b>your children’s overall wellbeing</b>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you notice particular impacts on your children’s mental health at specific points in the year? How do they seem at the end of the autumn term as opposed to just before Easter?</li> <li>• What about their attitudes toward learning and motivation to learn – are your children more motivated /eager to learn at particular times in the year?</li> <li>• To what extent does their level of motivation change just before / after holidays? Does this change depending on the length of the term / holiday period? Do they become less motivated just before / just after holiday periods?</li> <li>• Especially for those with children in secondary school / those with multiple children - have you noticed any differences in how the school calendar affects your child from year to year?</li> </ul>	
3 c	<p>In your experience, does your child tend to be absent from school more at particular times of year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is this? (e.g., sickness, exhaustion, mental health, motivation, etc)</li> </ul>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your child tend to miss school in the middle of terms or nearer to the start / end of a holiday period?</li> <li>• Does this depend the length of the holiday period / the term?</li> </ul>	
3 d	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and fatigue and wellbeing amongst learners and/or school practitioners?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would more even term lengths help reduce fatigue and improve wellbeing?</li> <li>• Would it help if autumn break was longer?</li> </ul>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Learner behaviour</b>	
4 a	<p>As far as you know, do your children / their friends become more disruptive in terms of their behaviour at school in different parts of the year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you feel you would know about low-level disruptive behaviour which occurs in the classroom?</li> </ul>	
4 b	<p>At home or at school, do your children become more disruptive at the end of a long term?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How about just after a holiday period?</li> <li>• Just after returning to school after summer break?</li> </ul>	
4 c	<p>What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and learner behaviour?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would modifying the structure of the school year help reduce disruptive behaviour?</li> </ul>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Primary to secondary school transition (for secondary school parents / parents with children in Y6)</b>	
5 a	<p>To what extent, if at all, does the school calendar <b>affect learners' transitions</b> from primary to secondary school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are / were your children anxious about the transition?</li> <li>• To what extent does anxiety have to do with assessment in secondary school versus the social aspect of transition?</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In your experience, how does the long summer break impact learners' wellbeing and attitude toward the transition to secondary school? How about their readiness to learn and progression once entering secondary school?</li> </ul>	
5 b	What, if anything, could be done to address any negative correlations between the school calendar and learner transition from primary to secondary school?	
<b>6</b>	<b>Progression &amp; Attainment</b>	
6 a	<p>Have you noticed any changes in your children's progression/ attainment at various points in the year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you notice a difference in progression and attainment just before holiday periods? Just after holiday periods?</li> </ul>	
6 b	To what extent do your children express concern over having forgotten things over summer break and other holiday periods?	
6 c	<p>Reflecting on this recent Easter break and winter holiday period, how much learning / revision did your children do while off from school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did your school offer any learning provision? (Especially for exam years)</li> <li>How did they spend their holiday? Did they participate in any particular activities (e.g., camps, cultural outings such as museums, travel, time with family, etc.)</li> </ul>	
<b>7</b>	<b>Closing</b>	
7 a	<p>Given everything we have discussed today, how much of an impact do you think the structure of the school calendar has on your children overall?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If 0 means the calendar has no impact at all on learners and 10 means the calendar is hugely influential, how would you rate the impact of the school year structure on your children?</li> </ul>	
7 b	What is the most important consideration of the school calendar for you/your family?	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which factors do you feel should be most highly prioritised? E.g. wellbeing, academic achievement, opportunities to decompress throughout the year, consideration of the needs of the whole family (ie. childcare, holiday times, home/school life balance)</li> </ul>	
7 c	Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding the school calendar in Wales?	

## School Year Structure Research

### Main Fieldwork - Topic Guide (Learners)

#### Research Themes:

Theme 1: Progression and attainment

Theme 2: Fatigue and wellbeing

Theme 3: Behaviour

Theme 4: Primary to Secondary school transition

Theme	
General questions  <b>Purpose:</b> opener questions to get learners thinking about the school year structure, and how decisions are made about it.	Why is the structure of the school year the way it is? / What things decide the pattern of the school year?
	Who decides how long the terms are?
Theme 2  <b>Purpose:</b> to get learners thinking about the associated	What times of the term/year are most looked forward to? Why?

<p>strengths and weaknesses of the school terms. We assume that learners may never have discussed this in detail before, so it may be helpful to start by characterising what each term looks like.</p>	<p>Prompt: how do you <i>feel</i> about each of the terms?</p> <p>(Explore what's good and bad relative to the Autumn/Spring/ Summer terms)</p>
<p>Theme 1 &amp; Theme 2</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions that the Autumn term is overwhelming for learners.</p>	<p><b>*For secondary learners:</b> What's it like covering so much new information in the Autumn term?</p> <p>Is it easy/challenging to cover lots of new topics? How does it make you feel?</p>
<p>Theme 1 &amp; Theme 2</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions that learners find it harder to concentrate as the terms go on.</p>	<p>(Follow up) Are there any times in the school year / term where you feel <b>most tired</b> or find it hard to learn?</p> <p>Why do you think that might be?</p>
<p>Theme 3</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> exploring stakeholder perceptions that behaviour declines towards the end of terms and before breaks</p>	<p>How does this (feeling tired/finding it hard to focus) affect behaviour in the classroom?</p>
<p>Theme 2 &amp; Theme 3</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions that the</p>	<p>What time of the term/year are people more likely to be absent from school?</p> <p>Why do you think this might be?</p>

<p>Autumn term produces the most absences, understanding how learners feel about illnesses and viruses</p>	
<p>Theme 2 &amp; Theme 3</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> prompting pupils to think about how a longer/shorter term affects both themselves and their classmates</p>	<p>What might be good/bad about having a long school term?</p> <p>What might be good/bad about having a short school term?</p> <p>Can you think of any reasons why someone might <i>prefer</i> either a longer or shorter term?</p>
<p>Theme 1</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions that pupils benefit (considerably) from more time spent in school before exams, compared to more time spent at home (where they may not be supported/ have the capacity to revise effectively)</p>	<p><b>*For Y11 learners:</b> How do you feel about the amount of time left in school until exams?</p> <p>What's the best way to prepare for exams? Is it better to have more time in the classroom to revise with teachers, or is it better to revise at home?</p> <p>Do you think that doing more work with teachers immediately before exams (so a longer half-term before the exam season begins) has a positive effect on results?</p>
<p>Theme 4</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> to better understand what Year 6 pupils anticipate about the transition period</p>	<p><b>*For Y6 learners:</b> How do you feel about moving into secondary school?</p> <p>Does this feel like it will happen soon?</p> <p><b>Is it easy to settle back into school after the summer holidays?</b></p> <p><b>Do you ever forget some of the things you've learned?</b></p>

<p>Theme 4</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions that a 6-week Summer break between primary and secondary school makes the transition period more challenging for learners</p>	<p><b>*For learners Y7+:</b> Is there anything that could have made the transition from primary to secondary easier?</p> <p>How was it adapting to the way learning happens in secondary compared to primary?</p>
<p>Theme 4</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> testing stakeholder perceptions of the weaknesses associated with the long Summer, understanding whether pupils themselves recognise these.</p> <p><b>**Considerations –</b> important to re-emphasise to learners that there is no intention to reduce the <b>amount</b> of holiday time they have</p>	<p>Does the Summer feel like a long break?</p> <p>What kinds of things might make it difficult for some learners to settle back into school after the long holidays?</p> <p>What might <i>some</i> learners find hard/dislike about having a long Summer holiday?</p>
<p>Theme 1</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Testing perceptions of the effect of a 6 week break on retention of knowledge and skills.</p>	<p>Do you feel like you forget anything over the summer break that you then have to relearn again?</p> <p><b>*For learners in Welsh medium, particularly where Welsh is not the language of the home*</b> Do you feel like you retain sufficient ability in Welsh over the summer holiday?</p>