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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Dyddiad / Date:</b>	12.02.24
<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	<b>The Structure of the School Year</b>

**Background information about Estyn**

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000<sup>1</sup> and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;

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<sup>1</sup> This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

## Response

Select all that apply to you from the following.

- Age 17 years and under
- Age 18 years and older
- Education workforce
- Tourism sector
- Childcare sector
- Full-time work (please specify)
- Part-time work (please specify)
- Parent or carer (the term 'parent' has been used as a shorthand to include mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, stepparents, 'kinship' parents, grandparents and guardians)
- Other

### Introduction

Overall, we support the proposals to better design the school year. Although, we acknowledge that there is no clear research on the impact of the proposals, providers and inspection activity tell us that pupils often regress in their learning and skills following a long summer break and long school terms lead to learner and staff fatigue. Therefore, we believe that the redistribution of a small period from the summer holidays and more consistent term-times will support schools in planning and delivering their curriculum, and hopefully reduce learner and staff fatigue throughout the year.

We feel that shortening the school summer break especially will have a positive impact on socio-economically disadvantaged learners, those with additional learning needs (ALN) and pupils who attend Welsh language schools who do not speak Welsh at home. The shortened summer break will help mitigate against loss of learning for pupils and help support better continuity in learning into the autumn term. It should also go some way to minimising the impact of a change of routine, for example for learners with ALN.

We support the options provided as part of Option 2. We agree with removing a week from the summer break and using that to extend the half-term autumn break. We also think that the flexibility to decouple the spring break from the Easter holidays would be advantageous in providing consistency to the length of term-times. This will also provide consistency for schools, especially when planning and supporting pupils during examination years.

We broadly support the proposal for phase 2 of option 3 in continuing to provide consistent term-times and reducing the time pupils are away from school during the summer break. However, the impact of this proposal on learners and schools during examination periods needs to be considered carefully. This also includes the possible effects of releasing examination results on the same day.

We also feel that it would be beneficial to consider the guidance on how these proposals will be implemented across Wales. Currently, although the law states that local authorities and school governing bodies must work together to try and keep term dates as consistent

as possible, there are variations to this for some holidays. We feel that it would be beneficial for Welsh Government to provide guidance to schools on the term-dates to limit variations to holidays across Wales.

We feel that the guidance around the use of INSET days and staggered starts to the school year should be considered carefully. Often, many school holidays are extended even further with the addition of INSET days and staggered starts at the beginning of the autumn term. For example, in some cases, schools are closed to pupils for nearly seven weeks in the summer with the addition of INSET days and a staggered start to the school year.

We noted in our consultation response to the additional INSET days for 2022 to 2025 that although it is important to provide flexibility for schools around the timing of the INSET day, leaders need to consider carefully the actual timing of the INSET day. We feel that schools should avoid extending the summer holiday as this extends an already long break from school. We also believe that the day should be taken as an INSET day rather than a series of twilight sessions to ensure a focused approach on the key priorities. Twilight sessions have the potential to dilute the focus on the key priorities. We think that INSET days should be spread throughout the academic year to ensure that the days are used effectively by leaders to plan, develop and evaluate. They should not be grouped together leading to extended breaks away from school for pupils, for example two or three days in July or September, before or after a lengthy summer break. We also feel that schools should ensure that their parents are well informed, in a timely manner of the INSET dates to allow them to organise childcare needs. In the best examples, schools share dates with parents nearly a year in advance.

### Consultation questions

**Question 1** – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 2** – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 3** – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with additional learning needs (ALN)?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 4** – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher or learner wellbeing and ease fatigue?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 5** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break) dividing the longest term (autumn)?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 6** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 7** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break) to even up term lengths?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 8** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 9** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: maintaining the existing school calendar?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 10** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a 2-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls) and a 5-week summer break?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 11** – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a 2-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a 2-week May break and a 4-week summer break?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 12** – For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?

Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 13** – What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English

Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?

Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

#### **Supporting comments**

Overall, we believe that the proposals will have a positive impact on the Welsh language. Currently, pupils who do not come from Welsh speaking homes often have limited opportunities to use or sustain their Welsh language skills throughout the holiday periods. The current summer break often means that many pupils' Welsh language skills regress requiring schools to spend valuable learning time during the autumn term to get pupils to catch up to where they were at the end of the summer term. A shorter summer break would go some way to mitigate this issue.

**Question 14** – In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

#### **Supporting comments**

We believe that the proposals will support learner progress in the Welsh language. However, it would be beneficial aside of these proposals for Welsh Government to provide support and guidance on how learners can access Welsh language provision during any school breaks. This would also support the Welsh Government's vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

**Question 15** – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

#### **Supporting comments**

Please see the comments in our introduction.

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