



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**Title: The Impact of the COVID 19
Pandemic in Wales on the Health
and Well-being of Learners and
Practitioners and the Implications
for Initial Teacher Education**

Title: The impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on the future of ITE
provision: The health and well-being of learners and
practitioners

Subtitle:

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

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Glossary

| Acronym/Key word | Definition |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| H+Wb | Health and Well-being |
| OEAP | Outdoor education advisors panel |
| OL | Outdoor learning |
| PA | Physical activity |
| PE | Physical education |
| PL | Physical literacy |
| RQ | Research question |
| SLT | Senior Management Team |
| WCfOL | Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning |
| WG | Welsh Government |

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 As part of Welsh Government's (WG) (2020) policy statement 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning: Continuity of Learning' in response to the COVID 19 pandemic and in accordance with the Wales' National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE), WG invited universities in Wales to collaborate; and commissioned them to work on a series of research studies with a focus of topics that may have been impacted upon by the pandemic. The purpose of this research was to produce evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as informing future initial teacher education provision in Wales. It was deemed that new teachers could benefit from understanding a changed context within Welsh education and ITE providers could ensure that teachers entering the profession could be properly equipped to teach in a post-COVID-19 environment. The impact of school closures as a result of COVID-19, on the health and well-being of learners and teachers became one of the priority areas for research. Bangor University, Glyndŵr University and the University of South Wales undertook research focussing on the health and wellbeing of learners and practitioners.

Research Questions

1.2 This research sought to understand the impact across three themes:
How the COVID 19 pandemic has affected the health and well-being of learners' and teachers.

Safeguarding issues that children may have experienced and how schools will need to work to support.

The increased emphasis and opportunity to engage in outdoor learning for both practical reasons (space restrictions / social distancing) and well-being.

1.3 Based on the above, the following priority research questions were identified:

RQ1: What is the role of schools in monitoring/promoting general well-being/health of learners and practitioners within the context of the crisis?

RQ2: How are schools promoting and supporting the health and well-being of learners', with a particular emphasis on outdoor learning and physical literacy (as outlined in the WG guidance document)?

RQ3: What steps have schools taken to ensure that practitioners' support networks have been maintained and/or developed?

RQ4: How have schools used outdoor learning to support learners' return to school/socially distanced teaching and learning? Which aspects of this can be highlighted as good/effective practice?

RQ5: What are ITE providers already providing in relation to health and well-being with a particular focus on outdoor learning?

RQ6: How can the findings from RQ1, 2, 3 and 4 be integrated into ITE to best support future practitioners and learners?

Background and Literature Review

- 1.4 With schools closed for long periods of time during the pandemic, it has meant that the lives of many within society have been affected. Parents have been left to home-school their children for extended periods whilst possibly having to work within educational accessibility constraints such as varying internet and technological issues and other resource barriers. Along with contending with the home education of their children, many families have also been impacted by wide-scale furloughing and job losses as well as the social isolation of not being able to see wider family and friends. The impact on the wellbeing of children and young people is therefore not surprisingly a concern and is a priority area for research (The Children's Society, 2020).
- 1.5 As well as the wellbeing of children being impacted, the well-being of staff in schools is also to be considered as research shows that well-being was being monitored before the pandemic and the well-being of the teaching education profession was unstable beforehand. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 55% of school leaders and 49% of teachers reported that their workplace had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing (Education Support, 2019). With the closure of schools, the need to adapt to a changing landscape within schools and the pressures of teaching from home in an online context, often whilst supporting families of their own, the need to investigate the well-being of school staff is also a priority area for research.

- 1.6 The minister for education, in her statement on 3rd June 2020, explained that one of the purposes of the return to schools before the summer holiday, was due to a concern for the health and well-being of learners. In addition, Public Health Wales write in a Health Impact Assessment of the ‘Staying at Home and Social Distancing Policy’ (2020) that one of the negative impacts highlighted by the policy, is that children and young people have had their education interrupted. They have experienced major changes to their routines and structures and have had reduced opportunities for socialising with peers. Children from low-income households are more likely to have been adversely affected (p.5).
- 1.7 On 10th June 2020, Welsh Government (WG) published guidance for schools on how to implement the return to schools, making explicit reference to ‘Supporting the well-being of learners and staff’. The WG guidance dedicated sections for staff well-being and learners’ well-being, as well as a section dealing with safeguarding issues for children. In addition, the guidance makes mention of the opportunity for the increased use of outdoor spaces in line with advice provided by the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, published in the High-Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales document (WCfOL/OEAP Cymru, 2018).
- 1.8 With regards to staff well-being, if examined in greater depth, the WG Autumn guidance (WG, 2020) recommends that upon return to school, contextually appropriate measures should be implemented. These include the provision of reliable and consistent information and a coherent understanding of the post COVID-19 plan. Workloads should be monitored and appropriate, clear support mechanisms should be in place, rotas and timetabling should support well-being and opportunities for discussion, ideally with a counsellor, should be made available.
- 1.9 With reference to what the WG Guidance recommends in terms of learner well-being, as well as school staff positively reinforcing behaviours around social distancing and, hygiene, and ensuring the timetable and school layout provide opportunities for breaks and time outdoors, the guidance recommends that intensive and specialist supports should be available. These include pastoral care, bereavement support, school and community-based counselling, ACES/Trauma

Informed Practice, appropriate psychological input and effective joint working with children's services (WG, 2020).

- 1.10 It is also worth noting the wider context of an approach to well-being in schools within which the achievement of well-being in schools, in a post-lockdown context may sit. In their 'Healthy and happy: school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing' report, Estyn (2019) recommend that schools should take a whole-school approach to well-being, strengthen relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils, provide quality experiences of teaching and learning in well-being, use pupils' views and academic research to support well-being and ensure that the school's environment and services support pupils' health and well-being. Elaborating on the recommendation made by Estyn, in their 'Draft framework guidance on embedding a whole-school approach to mental health and emotional well-being', WG (2020) cite those relationships within schools, as well as relationships with external services are central to promoting well-being. They also recommend that staff are trained in a trauma-informed approach and that there are strategies such as Universal and Targeted provisions within an ethos that is conducive to well-being.
- 1.11 A particular study that explored the wellbeing of school staff during the COVID pandemic was a methodologically robust survey of 3,034 education professional across the UK that was conducted in July 2020 (Education Support, 2020a). The findings showed that during the pandemic, 52% of school teachers participating in the survey reported the largest decrease in their mental health, followed by senior leaders and staff in other roles both at 48%. Also reported was that, in terms of sources of support, 60% of school teachers showed a preference for turning to family and friends, whilst 59% of senior leaders sought support from their partner or spouse. There was also a large group (24%) of individuals who did not access any form of support. These figures demonstrate that significant numbers of school staff are not seeking support around their mental well-being via their employers, perhaps highlighting the need for effective and accessible sources of support within schools.
- 1.12 In November 2020, Education Support further published the Teacher Wellbeing Index (2020), a large-scale survey benchmarking the mental health of all education professionals in the UK. Prior to publication, the initial survey was conducted in

June and July, 2020 and then, accounting for the uniqueness of the situation, a further short survey was conducted in October 2020 in order to investigate teacher stress in the academic year. It was found that stress levels rose from 62% to 84% between July and October. Further cited in the report was a concerning trend of increased symptoms of poor mental health which included mood swings, difficulty concentrating and tearfulness and also a finding that senior leaders report the highest levels of stress among all education staff (Education Support, 2020b).

- 1.13 A key finding that aligns with the recommendations of the WG Guidance is concerned with high workloads. 59% reported that they had considered leaving their profession due to high workloads, including 76% of senior leaders and 65% of teachers. Other key issues highlighted were around the perception of stigma and shame in reporting mental health problems and the relatively low levels of monitoring and intervention around staff mental well-being in schools. 35% of school teachers considered there was a stigma attached to disclosing mental health problems and therefore did not talk about them at work. 26% had access to Employee Assistance Counselling Services, only 8% had access to supervision which they felt was a safe space to discuss these issues and 58% reported that their institution did not regularly survey staff to establish levels of well-being (Education Support, 2020b) Again, these figures may highlight the need for further interventions around staff mental well-being in schools.
- 1.14 Both reports published by Education Support also highlight some positive findings. These include Wales reporting the highest improvements in mental health during the pandemic (26%) (Education Support, 2020a); that there is more mental health guidance available for educators in the workplace than in previous years; an increased perception of being supported by those who have experienced mental health issues at work and encouragement to speak up when struggling (Education Support, 2020b).

- 1.15 In terms of pupil well-being, a pertinent study conducted was a large-scale and methodologically sound survey conducted by The Children's Society in April-June, 2020 where over 2000 young people aged 10-17 were surveyed and a further 150 children were consulted around the impacts of COVID-19 and lockdown on their lives. The study puts forward that many of the published studies to date have relied on opportunist or non-representative samples, however those that have been published suggest that there have been increases in young people's levels of anxiety and of particular relevance, increases in emotional, behavioural and attention difficulties among primary aged children (4-10 yrs.).
- 1.16 Reported within the study is that other studies (Barnardo's, 2020 & ONS, 2020) have highlighted that loneliness and lower well-being scores are issues of concern in terms of children's well-being. The poll conducted by YouGOV on behalf of Barnardo's found that over one in three of the 4,000 participants were suffering from a rise in issues related to mental health and well-being, with over two-thirds saying that not seeing their friends was one of the three hardest things of lockdown (Barnardo's, 2020). Further reported in the findings was that although, in terms of well-being, most children continue to be happy with most aspects of their life and life overall, almost one in five children scored below the mid-point on the multi-item measure of life satisfaction which suggests that the cognitive well-being of some children might be affected.
- 1.17 Reflecting on the recommendations in the WG Guidance for Return to Schools in the Autumn term, in particular the recommendation for Trauma-informed practice, the implementation of this type of practice in schools is supported by what Danese and Smith (2020) report as increased parental mental illness, child abuse and neglect and complicated traumatic bereavement during the pandemic. The need for staff to be trained in a trauma-informed approach is also recognised by school staff themselves. 40% of education professionals felt that knowing how to help learners who may have experienced bereavement and trauma was also considered important in respect of attributes and skills needed on returning back to school following lockdown (Education Support, 2020).

- 1.18 Supporting these concerns are the findings from the Co-SPACE study (Co-SPACE, 2020) which has been conducted in England throughout the pandemic. During the study the mental health of children and young people has been monitored throughout COVID-19 via monthly online surveys completed by parents/carers and young people. Early findings suggested that younger children were experiencing an increase in mental health difficulties during lock down. Later findings identified that emotional and restless/attentional difficulties had increased among children and young people from low-income households compared to those from higher income households.
- 1.19 The findings then suggesting that the pandemic has already significantly impacted children and young peoples' mental health, particularly effecting the most deprived families and their children (Co-SPACE, 2020). In addition, the closure of schools has resulted in children and young people being faced with risks such as exposure to domestic violence, addiction and exploitation (Cowie and Myers, 2021). NSPCC (2020) also report that the number of children being abused at home increased by almost a third following lockdown. Perhaps commenting on these collective findings, Cowie and Myers (2021, p.71) state that 'the pandemic has served to increase the extent of inequalities in our society. Without the school as an institution of support for the vulnerable in society, there will be long-term problems for children and young people'.
- 1.20 Moving from a national to a global perspective, the Evidence Based Practice Unit has compiled evidence from around the world in order to identify the key mental health challenges that children and young people have faced during COVID-19, the groups that are most vulnerable and the strategies that might help children and young people manage these challenges. Periodic issues of their findings have been published throughout the pandemic and later findings identify that the evidence for the negative impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young people continues to build (Jefferey et al., 2020). Other later findings identify that children and young people have displayed a range of psychological distress during the extended periods of local lockdowns. Also, the pandemic has amplified the existing risk factors for decreased mental health in children and young people

experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, including poor health, social isolation, uncertainty, financial stability and job losses (Gilleard et al., 2020). Corresponding with the WG Guidance, the later findings recommend upskilling teachers in identifying the mental health challenges of pupils and ensuring that referral pathways are securely in place in order for teachers to signpost appropriately (Gilleard et al., 2020).

- 1.21 Despite the negative impacts on children's and young people's mental well-being now starting to become well documented, it has also been identified that there were advantages of lockdown such as being able to pursue hobbies and appreciating what they have in life as well as developing strategies for self-care that were similar to the 5 Ways to Well-Being (The Children's Society, 2020). The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) also states further benefits reported by children are spending more time with family and outdoors and relief from certain mental health difficulties, particularly in instances where children are bullied at school.
- 1.22 Again with reference to the WG Guidance, specifically the recommendation of the opportunity for increased use of outdoor spaces within schools, Maller and Townsend (2006) argue that the provision of high-quality teaching experiences to engage children in learning need not be restricted to the classroom setting and that learning outside the classroom and in a natural environment provides the opportunity for an integrated, cross-curricular approach to achieving education aims (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).
- 1.23 Additionally, as a result of a combination of factors such as a reduction in green spaces, increased reliance on technology (Estyn, 2011) children's time being more structured (Kellert, 2005) and parental concerns over safety, traffic and crime (Fiennes et al., 2015) it has meant that children's opportunities to access learning outdoors have become more limited. Marchant et al., (2019) therefore claim that the school settings have the greatest responsibility and potential in providing children

with access to natural environments through the school grounds and teaching activities.

- 1.24 Due to the variety of outdoor learning activities explored within the literature, the evidence base shows huge variability in terms of the duration and type of outdoor learning, the population involved and the outcome measures assessed (Fiennes et al., 2015). However, the evidence highlighting the health and well-being benefits of outdoor learning has grown in recent years (WCfOL/OEAP Cymru, 2018). A recent example pertinent to the South Wales context is the study conducted by Marchant et al. (2019). This longitudinal study aimed to explore headteachers', teachers' and pupils' views and experiences of an outdoor learning programme within the key stage two curriculum (ages 9–11). The case study evidence presented demonstrated that pupils and teachers reported improvements in pupils' engagement with learning, including those pupils with behavioural difficulties and Additional Learning Needs, concentration and behaviour, as well as positive impacts on health and wellbeing and teachers' job satisfaction. The limitations of the study include a 'less deprived' and small sample, a homogenous sample, in terms of ethnicity and the fact that the participating schools all had access to green space/natural environment in close proximity to their schools (Marchant et al., 2019).
- 1.25 A further project relevant to the UK context is The Natural Connections project delivered in a mix of 125 primary, secondary, and special schools across southwest England. This study demonstrated, via case study evidence in 12 schools, a positive impact of learning in the natural environment on pupils' enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, engagement with learning, health and wellbeing, behaviour and attainment (Natural England, 2016). The study also demonstrated the many challenges to implementing outdoor learning but also strategies that may assist in integrating outdoor learning into the curriculum. The main limitation of the study is that it is located in one region in the UK and caution is needed when generalising the findings to other contexts (Edwards-Jones et al., 2016).

- 1.26 Wider benefits have been reported as including: inhibition of Attention Deficit Disorder symptoms, increased concentration and impulse inhibition, reduction in myopia symptoms among young children, healthy social development, healthy body weight, increased rates of physical activity, better physician rating of immune functioning, and better generalized health and well-being. (Wells 2000; Wells and Evans 2003; Castonguay and Jutras 2009; Kuo 2013; Waite et al. 2013; Christian et al. 2014; Klinker et al. 2014; Ulset et al. 2017). With specific reference to the benefits of learning outdoors during the pandemic, the Evidence Based Practice Unit also suggest that outdoor access may help children and young people manage the negative impacts of the pandemic and is particularly important for children and young people with ADHD and epilepsy (Gilleard, et al., 2020).
- 1.27 As well as wider benefits being reported on, barriers to implementing outdoor learning are also reported in the literature. These include: lack of teacher confidence and expertise outdoors, shortage of resources, the constraints of a curriculum, concerns regarding potential disciplinary problems being exacerbated (Barfod, 2018) and general health and safety concerns for the children (Gill, 2007 & Zubrick et al., 2010). However, given the documented benefits and with the WG Guidance in mind, the importance of further investigating outdoor learning and its utilisation for increasing children's well-being within the current climate of COVID is also an issue at the forefront. The timeliness of this paper correlates with increasing concerns about reduced physical activity, increased sedentary behaviours and wider concerns about health and wellbeing. There is no consensus around a single definition of well-being and whilst health and well-being is multi-disciplinary an integral and significant element is physical wellbeing. Almond (2010) stresses there has been a failure in society and policy to treating physical exercise as a priority for the well-being and enrichment of people's lives. It is widely accepted (Biddle et al., 2004) that a healthy lifestyle is a result of regular participation in physical activity. National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Report (2019) on the Physical Activity of Children and Young People shows that physical activity guidelines (Chief Medical Officers, 2019) for both adults and children are consistently underachieved and there is increasing global concern about rates of both adult and childhood obesity. Considerable proportions of young people are not

meeting the World Health Organisation's (WHO) (2020) physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity (MVPA) daily and WHO's (2020) guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour reaffirm messages that some physical activity is better than none.

1.28 In terms of the purpose of this research, specifically that of contributing to the shaping of future ITE provision, acknowledging the developments that have set a contemporary educational context and shaped ITE provision in more recent times, is worthwhile. Specifically referring to the Successful Futures report (Donaldson, 2015) and the changes to curriculum and assessment it set in motion, the greater control over the curriculum that teachers now have means that teachers now have a greater responsibility regarding the curriculum and they are required to understand the 'why' and 'how' of teaching as well as the 'what' (Furlong, 2015). Additionally, what with the new curriculum being organised into 6 key 'areas of learning and experience', one of which being 'health and wellbeing', it means that this study cannot sit in isolation of this context and that ITE provision needs to be able to prepare teachers to be flexible and knowledgeable in their delivery of health and wellbeing (Donaldson, 2015). Furthermore, in the 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers' Report (2015), Furlong asserts that due to the changing nature of schooling in the 21st Century, ITE provision is in need of reform. ITE provision now needs to be able to prepare teachers to respond to the changing nature of knowledge in society (Furlong, 2015). These implications, as well as the complexities of the current climate around COVID-19, therefore have a huge potential in terms of impacts for ITE provision in Wales, in that it needs to be able to develop teacher professionalism that is able to meet the demands caused by the increasing complexities of a 21st Century society and its schooling.

1.29 **Summary**

Research into the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on teachers' and learners' well-being has not surprisingly become a priority area given the difficult circumstances experienced by both groups during this period. The potential resulting deficits around well-being were rightly recognised by WG and well-being was made a priority within policy pertaining to the return to school. The

policy addressed factors such as the provision of reliable information and workload for staff and in terms of learner well-being, appropriate emotional and psychological support in addition to the reinforcement of positive behaviours, were key recommendations. The policy also recommends that schools utilise outdoor learning with a view to improving the well-being of staff and learners (WG, 2020).

The need for such recommendations is mirrored in the research surrounding well-being in schools during the pandemic. 52% of teachers reported a decline in mental health (Education Support, 2020a) and 84% of teachers reported an increase in stress levels on returning to school in the Autumn Term (Education Support, 2020b). Also, only a minority of staff reported that they accessed emotional support via services attached to their employment (Education Support, 2020b). Despite these issues, on a UK wide basis, teachers in Wales rated the highest improvements in mental health during the pandemic, at 26%.

In terms of children's and young peoples' well-being large scale surveys that were conducted during the pandemic and lockdowns report that loneliness (Barnardo's, 2020) and reduced cognitive well-being (The Children's Society, 2020) were key concerns. Further deeply concerning issues reported were that children, particularly from deprived families, were exposed to more abuse, exploitation, domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental illness (Co-SPACE, 2020; Cowie and Myers, 2020) warranting a need for a trauma-informed approach to be embedded within schools (Danese and Smith, 2020). On a global perspective the evidence base that demonstrates an increase in mental health problems in children and young people has grown (Jefferey et al., 2020) and the evidence also demonstrates that the pandemic has amplified the existing risk factors for decreased mental health in children and young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Gilleard et al., 2020). In contrast to these findings, the advantages of lockdowns have also been reported. These include the pursuit of hobbies, developing self-care routines (The Children's Society, 2020) and the opportunity to spend time outdoors and with family (The Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

As referred to previously the WG guidance makes mention of the opportunity for the increased use of outdoor spaces in school. Claims that the school has great potential and responsibility in providing children with access to outdoor/natural environments are evident within the literature (Maller and Townsend, 2006; Teaching and Learning Scotland, 2010; Marchant et al., 2019). The benefits of outdoor learning have been reported within the research. These include improvements in pupils' engagement with learning, attainment concentration and behaviour, pupils' enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, positive impacts on health and wellbeing and teachers' job satisfaction (Marchant et al., 2019; Natural England, 2016). Commonly reported barriers to outdoor learning include: lack of teacher confidence and expertise outdoors, shortage of resources, the constraints of a curriculum, concerns regarding potential disciplinary problems being exacerbated (Barfod, 2018) and general health and safety concerns for the children (Gill, 2007 & Zubrick et al., 2010). The role that Physical Activity plays in terms of well-being and the clear links to access to outdoor learning, cannot be overlooked. With recent concerns about reduced physical activity and increasing global concern about rates of both adult and childhood obesity (National Assembly for Wales' Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Report, 2019) the impacts that the pandemic and lockdowns have had in this area need to also be explored.

In terms of the shaping of future ITE provision, this study cannot sit in isolation of the requirements of the new curriculum and the delivery of health and well-being as a key area of learning and experience. ITE provision needs to be able to prepare teachers to be flexible and knowledgeable in their delivery of health and wellbeing (Donaldson, 2015). Hopefully the findings of this study will be able to inform this area and make recommendations for the future of ITE provision in Wales.

2. Methodology

Research design

- 2.1 This section seeks to introduce research design and the process of consideration that has led to the methodology being deployed for the various aspects of this project. It will first consider the paradigm in which the research is to be located and very briefly discuss the ontological and epistemological factors that will guide the selection of an appropriate research design. A thorough consideration of these aspects is important as research methods specialists such as Gray (2018), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013), and those authors who have turned their attention to critiquing research methods in education specifically (for example: Brookes, 2003; Noffke and Somekh, 2009; Rea, 2008) have been trenchant of the uncritical adoption of research design that either does not align with the literature, the paradigm in which the research is located, the intended outcomes/use of findings, or in the worst cases a combination of these. Gray (2018) takes particular care to warn researchers of the dangers of planning enquiry projects based around a research design before considering the research question(s). This section of the report seeks to not only consider possible research designs that could be implemented, but to also offer a brief critique to ensure alignment between the paradigm in which the research questions are located, each research question itself, the existing literature (as detailed in section 1, above), the ontological standpoint required and the desired outcome of the research process. This section attempts to peel back the layers of consideration and processes that were followed in order to arrive at the approach that was deemed appropriate and suited to this research. Thus, the sections that follow will endeavour to proceed logically through the journey of research design, following the guidance of Gray (2018) and Cohen *et al.* (2013).
- 2.2 In considering the research questions with which the project is concerned, it is important to think about the physical arena and context against which the work is set. The research questions direct the investigation to deal with lived experiences of

both teachers and children in the education system in Wales during the varying phases of management of the cultural impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These range from an initial return to school after an extensive move to blended/online learning for the majority of children due to restriction of school attendance, a new school year commencing in a more normal way but still with restrictions on mixing and movement in place, and a subsequent lockdown requiring online teaching and learning in a home school setting once more (for the majority of children).

2.3 As the introduction has already confirmed, this research seeks to understand the impact across these themes:

How the COVID 19 pandemic has affected the health and well-being of learners' and school staff

Safeguarding issues that children have experienced, and that schools will need to work to support

The increased emphasis and opportunity to engage in outdoor learning for both practical (space restrictions/social-distancing) reasons and well-being.

2.4 In order to meet these research objectives, the following research questions have been formulated and their connection to the objectives is indicated. It is accepted that these questions further focus the research and that whilst there are other aspects of the objectives that could have been addressed, the literature, time-scale and collaborative nature of the research have guided the research team to conclude these are the most appropriate to consider.

What is the role of schools in monitoring and promoting general well-being and health of learners and school staff within the context of the crisis?

How are schools promoting and supporting the health and well-being of learners', with a particular emphasis on outdoor learning (as outlined in the WG guidance document)?

What steps have schools taken to ensure that practitioners' support networks have been maintained and/or developed?

How have schools used outdoor learning to support learners' return to school/socially distanced teaching and learning and which aspects of this may be highlighted as effective practice?

What are ITE providers already offering in relation to health and well-being with a particular focus on outdoor learning?

How can the findings from the above questions be integrated into ITE to best support future practitioners and learners?

- 2.5 The research questions (RQ) 1 through 4 indicate direct data generation from schools and those working in the education sector would be suitable as they deal with lived experiences, whilst RQ5 is directed at ITE providers. Although this will have some connection with RQ1-4 it is beyond the scope of this research to examine the interaction in detail. IN this context RQ5 aims to examine what is already in place and how the findings from RQ1-4 may contribute or enhance ITE programmes, and in a similar way RQ6 is focussed on providing tangible, useful outcomes from the research so that it not only informs, but also may provide practical guidance to ensure effective practice may be shared nationally. RQ1 may also need a contribution from literature to both inform the roles and responsibilities schools may already have, and also to further inform the methods to be used in data generation for each RQ. It is also important to apply a degree of pragmatism to the process due to the nature of the very conditions it seeks to investigate. School leaders and staff are under a greater than usual pressure to manage the relatively new situations in which they find themselves operating either delivering a majority of teaching through online platforms with children geographically separate from school staff, or in circumstances on the school site with restricted movement and interaction between staff and children. Thus, large scale participation over the relatively short time scale of the research is unlikely to produce sufficient data to support statistically justifiable conclusions. In addition, school leaders and staff are less likely to respond to surveys or questionnaires if they are involved in any of the other suite of research projects commissioned as part of the overarching research on the impact of Covid-19 on ITE provision. It is more likely that the professional relationships of the research team through their (significant) roles in ITE programmes will allow access to more in-depth conversations and interviews with

school colleagues that will allow a greater depth of data to be gathered. The collaborative nature of the research ensures that a sufficient number of school partners can be engaged to take part in the research to justify a representative sample (more on which below). Equally the RQ may have impact on the lives of participants outside school but by restricting the parameters to within school and specifically dealing with adults concerned the research can be more tightly focussed on what school can and are doing in supporting staff and children through the pandemic. Whilst children's views have also been shown to be valuable in various forms of educational research (see for instance Mygind, 2007) and learner's voice is important in gaining a picture of what happens in schools, some of the practical difficulties in gaining these type of data directory may preclude this a method of data generation. If school staff are under increased pressure with different ways of providing education, it may be reasonably assumed this is also the case for parents, many of whom may be juggling working at home, limited digital resources and home schooling. Gaining parental consent or participation may prove beyond the scope of this study in the time available, so learner's voice contributions can be incorporated indirectly through the work with school staff, who may also be able to offer greater contextual understanding of those learners' voices. Whilst discussing data generation may seem a little premature at this juncture, Gray (2018) highlights how an understanding of the context and type of data most likely to be generated is important to recognising where the study will be located. He sets out clearly that to decide where to locate a chosen area of study is to be in error; rather a researcher should explore where the research question *already sits*, based on the type of work, the context and the necessary outcomes/output of the process.

- 2.6 To some extent an examination of the location of the research question is complicated by the variable terms in use for describing both ontological and epistemological positions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013). Cohen *et al.* (2013) set out an attempt to rationalise the broader terms '*normative*' and '*interpretive*' to describe the two broad paradigms within which they suggest all research must sit. At this point it is also important to consider the semantics of a paradigm. Gray (2018) is explicit in his description of a paradigm as a lens through which research may be viewed, which means that one project may be viewed in different ways, according to the perspective of the observer. This seems dissonant with an earlier

citation from Gray, (that research is located *within* a paradigm) but it appears that is his intention in using these two terms early on in a discussion of qualitative methods to encourage the researcher's reflexivity right from the start of the research design process.

2.7 Cohen *et al.* (2013) summarise the normative paradigm as one where there is an acceptance that human behaviour is essentially governed by rules, and that these rules and their effects can and should be investigated by observers following methods of natural science; this can be seen to fit with a positivist ontology. They proceed to state that the interpretive paradigm is opposed to this position as data seen through it (repeating the lens metaphor from Gray, 2014) is considered as the concern of, and for, an individual or group of individuals. Ultimately interpretive research seeks to understand the complex and subjective world of human experiences which requires a depth of investigation and a repositioning of the researcher to understand subjects' views, opinions and lived-experiences. From this follows the assertion of Cohen *et al.* (2013) that a normative paradigm views behaviour as response to stimuli (either external or internal) i.e. it is in the past and to be studied. An interpretivist paradigm considers behaviours as action or behaviour-with-meaning and thus they require intent and are therefore future-orientated. At the nub of this viewpoint is the understanding of that intention, with the actual action sometimes having less value to the researcher than the reasoning behind it.

2.8 Gray (2018) sets out what he calls 'paradigms and perspectives' to guide researchers in understanding their own viewpoint. As he has already associated qualitative research with the interpretive paradigm from Cohen *et al.* (2013), his categories serve to further narrow down the taxonomy so that it most clearly communicates the outlook of both researcher and research question. The highly contextualised, intense and challenging nature of viewing data through an interpretive paradigm (Bazeley, 2013) means that paradigm cannot be built on a unified theory or methodological approach (Flick, 2009). Charmaz (2013) calls for

this type of research to go beyond giving a snapshot of a situation to offer deep and contextualised insight into the research question. Thus, terminology such as progressive, naturalistic, critical theory, post-positivist, realism, constructivist (all from Gray, 2018) are used to identify the paradigm through which data may be generated, seen and analysed. Gray does not confine each term to one or even a few specific research strategies (i.e. methods of collecting/generating and analysing data) but places the onus squarely on the researcher to select the most appropriate strategy to match their identified paradigm for the intended or desired outcomes/output of the research process.

2.9 Since education is a socially constructed entity (Vygotsky, 1978; Williams, 1977) and significant foundations in educational theory are located within a social constructivist world-view or ontology (Burr, 2003) it is entirely appropriate to identify the research questions as requiring a lens of social constructivism in order to produce the required outcome. Furthermore, this study may be seen to be in the refined position of a progressive social constructivism (Gray, 2018) as it seeks to delve into the operation of schools, curricula and to a slightly lesser extent pedagogy, their complex interactions and relationships, and people's lived experiences of that interaction. In this, is also explicitly acknowledged that the researchers may both play a role (in terms of professional working relationships) in and this may significantly influence (but not bias) the research process, i.e. that role and influence should not invalidate the findings. Rather, this acknowledgement and disclosure should add to the value and trustworthiness of findings and conclusions. Being aware of any bias and seeking to account for it or acknowledging the effect this has had on results is one of the major steps Rea (2008) encourages to bring greater validity to the field of education research.

2.10 Thomas (2009) argues that once the purposes of a research, the type of questions that research will ask, and the lens through which the questions will be viewed and answered have been established, it is high time to consider how these complex philosophical positions can be connected together in the real world and a 'design frame' (p92) constructed. This design frame is variously termed 'research design'

(Gray, 2018: 164) 'research methodology' or 'research methods' (Biggam, 2008: 79), and 'style of research' (Cohen, et al. 2013: 217) and Gray goes further to define 'strategies of enquiry' (p165) to clarify that this next step involves consideration of the process of the overarching strategy that will be used to both generate and, in some cases, start to analyse data. In this instance we will use the term 'research design' as the other terms cited above have similar sounding or synonymous terms which can mean something different. 'Strategies' and 'methods' can often be confused with the actual process of generating data, and 'style' implies a creative aspect to the researcher, which whilst not impossible, means something different in the context which Cohen et al. (2013) discuss the term.

- 2.11 There are, according to Gray (2018), several research designs that lend themselves to qualitative data generation that will potentially answer the research questions considered in this project and are also aligned with the social constructivist paradigm through which these research questions are to be viewed. Case studies, phenomenology, and action research (from Gray, 2018: 165) will each be briefly considered below to ascertain their suitability for the research questions and congruency with the research objectives. It should be noted at this point in the consideration that there may some overlap between some nomenclature of these designs and some data generation strategies, but here they are being considered as research designs, defined above.
- 2.12 A case study approach is probably one of the most closely associated with qualitative inquiry (they are sometimes held to be synonymous). Case studies allow multiple perspectives to be considered and contribute to the description or in some cases analysis of a particular system, situation or organisation (Lewis, 2003). Their nature allows multiple accounts and types of data, generated through differing means to contribute to the understanding of a whole. Examples of case studies are numerous and largely depend on what is defined (by the researcher concerned) as a 'unit'. The unit is in effect the case being considered. Thus, a case study may consider units as individuals, organisations, sectors etc. A case study design may be appropriate for partly answering RQ 1 as it is concerned with collecting

information on existing practice and policy to see whether that can contribute to or is in contrast to the findings and/methods in use (answering RQ2-4). In this case the case unit could be a school, a type of school or a geographical location, a role within the school or perhaps even the education sector as a whole. However, if this is so it may need to be part of a larger whole design, as it is may be more appropriate to use an alternative design for other of the RQs.

- 2.13 As a fundamental principle of phenomenology is to understand the world from the participants' perspective, it appears to have a degree of appropriateness to this study. The idea that the relationship between people and objects/thought objects is affected by that very interaction aligns with curriculum research such as that described by McMahon, Forde and Marlin (2011). This takes the position that curriculum (and any action outside this that may still be considered an action of school or educational systems) as phenomena need to be understood from the inside, and not just the outcomes. As an early proponent of phenomenology, (seen by some as the father of the approach as applied in social science settings (Gray, 2018)) Alfred Shultz has much in common with the work of Pierre Bourdieu whose work has been used in interpreting and informing previous education research (Murphy, 2013). In the same way as Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *doxa* exist as a constructed behaviour within a *field*, and *capital* in that field is needed to effect change, so it can be seen that any social reality (field and associated doxa) has a specific meaning and relevance to the people who are living, thinking and experiencing it (Gray, 2018). This specific meaning and relevance can be seen as simultaneously both the capital in that field and as a factor which needs to be understood to generate capital in order to effect any future change. This follows Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) assertions that professional capital also can only be generated from within a profession (field). If the study were only concerned with a deep understanding of how to generate the required capital (from either Bourdieu's or Hargreaves and Fullan's description) then phenomenology would be ideally placed to offer that depth of insight and understanding. However, the research questions requires an approach more focussed on understanding change, not just

simply understanding what currently is. Therefore, phenomenology as a research design will not be suitable to answer the research questions in the time frame allocated.

2.14 Action research is based on ideas and processes first developed by Lewin (1946) and has subsequently been refined and honed to exist as a large field of multiple research designs in its own right (Costello, 2011). This long history and the myriad arena in which action research has been applied and further developed have led to '*action research*' becoming a somewhat nebulous term. There are some who would choose not to use the term at all, in favour of its variations (for example: participatory action research (Gray, 2018), collaborative professional enquiry (Carroll, 2011)) and some who continue to use the term, but with vastly different meaning, such as Coghlan and Brannick (2005), Denscombe (2014), Dick (2002), Mertler (2009) and MacNaughton and Hughes (2009). Costello (2011) discusses action research in depth but identifies common principles of all action research in that it seeks to use a cyclical approach and involves active intervention. The cycles can be seen to be based on, or similar to, the Instructional Core (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2011) and involve some form of consideration, planning an action, implementing the action or intervention, reviewing and evaluating that action and returning to consider how this can be taken forward and moved to the next stage of development. However, it should be understood that action research is more than just a cyclical approach to research (although the cyclical nature is an important characteristic); it also has action and change at its core. It is more than fact finding, interpretation or understanding, and seeks to effect change, and is frequently instigated and realised by those who are experiencing that change. As a result of this, action research has become popular and widely accepted as the *de facto* research design in educational research (Noffke and Somekh, 2009) and some have made arguments that it should be accepted as the *de jure* research design within Wales (French and Beckett, 2019), in the context of government sponsored or contracted research in education. The active focus, cyclical (or even spiral) nature and acceptance in the field of educational/curriculum

research lead us to conclude that for the research questions under consideration, action research is less appropriate as the current study does not concern itself with making and evaluating an intervention and whilst there may be a cyclical aspect to the work, it is primarily an investigate project with a minimal evaluative facet.

- 2.15 In conclusion to this section on research design, the adopted approach across each of the research questions will be a broad case-study approach with the education sector considered as unit for reporting, and within that, smaller units of types of schools and geographical location may also be appropriate depending on the inductive conclusions from the data so drawn. This section has sought to outline the research design and will now move to consider research methods that will be used in data generation and analysis of each of the research questions.

Methods of data generation and sample selection

- 2.16 A collaborative approach conducted by a team with a range of experiences, expertise and representing a number of different institutions led to an in-depth consideration of the exact methods that would be used in data generation once the research questions had been formulated. The subsequent discussion and agreement upon a qualitative approach detailed above in section 2.1 also further narrowed the field in terms of specific methods that would generate data in a form and quantity that could be both analysed and had the potential to answer the research questions. RQ1 has a component that requires a complex or mixed strategy (but to be clear, not mixed-methods in terms of mixing data type or paradigmatic interpretation). RQ2-4 and the other aspects of RQ1 are similar in nature and contribute to building a full picture for each case study. RQ5 deals with a different type of institution so whilst the methods used may replicate those of RQ1-4 there may be some scope for a greater flexibility in this largely descriptive question. RQ6 requires a discursive approach which may be better understood in light of the findings and subsequent discussion from questions 1-5.

- 2.17 Some aspects of RQ1 and all of RQ2-4 appear to lend themselves to data generation via semi-structured or structured interviews in that they seek to gather personal, lived experiences of the application of policy and procedures as well as seeking the views of those who have experienced the changes and differences in education since the commencement of the national lock down measures (from March 2020). Each of these questions will generate a sub-set of questions which may help structure an interview with a member of school staff and generate data that can be used to answer that question consequent to analysis. It is accepted that there may be overlap in some of the answers and questions, but this is seen as a strength of the research as a whole as it allows participants to present a different interpretation of the questions but still provide relevant data for the analytical process.
- 2.18 A consideration of questions that would form the basis of the semi-structured interviews with school staff were based on the research team's wider experience of health and well-being work (both physical and mental) (for example: Cummins, Hughes, Tomy, Gibson, Woerner and Lai, 2007; Parker and Hyatt, 2011; Stanadage, Gillison, Ntoumains and Treasure, 2012; Stochl, Jones and Croudace, 2012), although the specificity of the research questions, relating to both children and school staff and the context of the pandemic and associated measures led the team to consider any of the above or other instruments inappropriate for the current study. However, the team's knowledge of such work and other associated publications (for example: *High quality outdoor learning for Wales*, Wales Council for Outdoor Learning/Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel , 2018) allowed a considered approach to both ensuring that the proposed questions for the semi-structured interviews were both aligned with the broader field of health and well-being (within schools as well as with adults in a work place) and constructed to generate data to directly answer the research questions (RQ1-4). An example of the semi-structured interview questions can be found in appendix A).
- 2.19 A pragmatic consideration drew the team to conclude that samples for the first four research questions needed to span a range of types of school and geographical areas. The most straightforward way of making contact with school partners was to

initially target lead partner schools in ITE programmes as the existing professional relationships were understood to increase likelihood of engagement. This would ensure a fairly wide geographic spread with one HEI partner based in the north west of Wales and in a previous ITE partnership having worked with schools in mid-Wales, one HEI partner based in north east Wales, and one HEI partner based in south Wales. It was accepted by the team that the range of schools and individual participants also needed to be considered in relation to ensuring efficient use of resources (time, human resource etc.) thus ensuring a representative picture was gathered, whilst not repeating data generation unnecessarily (due to the time scale for both data generation and analysis). Partly due to Covid restrictions imposed on the team by their various HEI leadership and partly to ensure said efficient use of time, all interviews were carried out remotely using secure online platforms (such as MS Teams), and a selection of schools was agreed before interviewing began. The range of schools targeted, and who subsequently engaged with the research, were as follows:

Secondary schools (English medium, Welsh medium)

Primary schools (English medium, Welsh medium and bilingual provision)

Independent schools (English medium)

Faith schools (English medium)

Pupil referral units (Bilingual provision)

Special schools (Welsh medium and Bilingual provision)

2.20 Whilst through schools (3-19 provision) were also approached to take part in the study, none chose to respond and so this must be accepted as a limitation in the range of schools represented. Whilst the geographic range of schools was inherent due to the locations of the partner HEIs, it was not within the scope of the project to consider (or indeed classify) schools as to whether they were rural, semi-rural, sub-urban etc. or look for any correlation between other indicative factors often used in school classification such as performance banding or free school meals. However, the team concluded that the spread of participants would give a good indication of the national picture and hence meet the objectives of the study as a whole. It was also considered helpful to try and gain some triangulation of the outdoor learning (OL) aspect of RQ2 and 4 by engaging with specialist OL providers, with a view to strengthening value in sharing the case studies where effective practice was

observed or reported. Thus, the sample for interviews also included two national providers of outdoor learning (one primarily providing through the medium of Welsh and the other offering bilingual provision) and two local authority funded outdoor learning service providers (one in the south and one in the north, one offering bilingual provision, the other offering mainly provision in English).

Table 1: Type of School interviewed

| School Type | <i>n</i> | Percentages |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Primary | 5 | 41.67 |
| Secondary | 5 | 41.67 |
| ALN | 2 | 16.67 |
| Faith | 2 | 16.67 |
| Social Deprivation | 3 | 25 |
| Bilingual | 2 | 16.67 |
| Welsh Medium | 1 | 8.33 |
| English Medium | 9 | 75 |
| Total | 12 | 100 |

2.21 The final consideration in sample selection for RQ1-4 was the roles played by individuals within schools. Schools have varying degrees of structure delineating roles and this was also anticipated to impact the types of answers that participants would give. Therefore, in each organisation it was deemed necessary to interview a member of the senior leadership team (often the headteacher, but in some cases particularly of larger secondary schools this responsibility was delegated due to the distributed leadership model employed by the school and/or the time constraints imposed by the Covid situation. It was also deemed useful to gain the perspective of the health and well-being coordinator (or similar role of that title was not used), and at least one member of the teaching staff. Thus, where possible there were different perspectives of the same systems/policies/procedures and interactions from each institution that engaged with the research team.

- 2.22 Research question 1 was acknowledged to be rather more multifaceted than subsequent questions and thus an additional method was used to provide data to address this question. A rapid review of literature was deemed as appropriate in this context as it would not only deal with some data generation for RQ1 but also inform the approaches that were most appropriate to take in addressing the other questions. Literature that was included in the review was all that deemed to consider both the health and well-being of children and staff at school and also some of the more recent policy, guidance and Welsh Government documentation on the impact of the pandemic so far. The findings of this rapid review can be seen incorporated into section 1 and how they have influenced the research design and subsequent research methods has been the object of this section to outline. Again considering time constraints and the team's areas of expertise, specific team members were designated to carry out the review of literature with guidance and suggested references as starting points based on the expertise within the team.
- 2.23 Research question 5 was approached in a similar way to RQ1-4 in terms of semi structured interviews, but this time the sample consisted of approaches being made to each HEI ITE provider. The research team already contained representatives from some of these programmes, so care was taken to collect data from as many other ITE providers as would engage so as not to bias the findings towards team members' institutions. Each potential participant was asked to provide a free response as to how their ITE programmes currently addressed issues of children's and teachers' (and to some extent ITE students') health and well-being. As each programme has its own unique approach to programme design it was considered that a free response type approach was most well-suited so as not to influence the question structure with the researcher's own views based on their experiences at their institution (and thus addressing reflexivity in the process).
- 2.24 Research question 6 demanded a different type of data and was intentionally left as a one focussed on the outcomes to draw the team towards providing tangible, usable outcomes for the research and appears as an almost meta-analysis of the other findings. It's exact nature is dependent on the nature of the findings from the

other research questions, but it is likely that case-studies of effective practice will be generated in a school-leadership consumable form, perhaps also with supporting materials provided through the Hwb platform as has been demonstrated as effective and utilised in projects such as the national professional and enquiry project.

Ethical approval and consent

- 2.25 described above. All documentation was made available bilingually and participants were asked for their language preference to complete their interview. Ethical considerations included ensuring to anonymise individual and school identifiers (codes known to each HEI were used) and the main project documentation being stored on one HEI secure cloud storage that was accessible to each of the research team. Current BERA guidelines were noted and adhered to at all points of the research.
- 2.26 **Methods of data analysis** Ethical approval was sought from each HEI although the project was acknowledged as a collaborative venture. An agreed consent and information sheet was passed through each HEI ethics committee, as were data storage plans and each HEI granted ethical approval for the study and data generation
- 2.27 The data generation methods employed in this research yielded qualitative data in the form of interview recordings and transcripts. In order to analyse these data and begin to answer the research questions the teams from each individual HEI agreed to conduct an inductive coding analysis of the interview data, highlighting themes, nodes and specific examples of quotes that would link directly to each theme. With several passes over the data, it was possible to identify the rich depth of information that qualitative methods support (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013), and this also ensured key information or themes were not missed. Once this initial data analysis had been completed, the teams from each HEI collated the information and started to group both the themes and specific quotes/nodes under the research questions they speak to. These were supported by the semi-structured interview questions

which were designed to generate data on specific research questions, but the intention was not to exclude any data should it also have relevance to another research question. All of the research team were able to access the first stage analysed data via the cloud sharing platform and further analysis could then be attempted focussing on specific themes connected the research questions. The frequency of occurrence of themes or nodes could be used to inform findings regarding each question, and as the whole team had access to the data, quotes could be drawn from these data to support specific findings. In practical terms each question was allocated to a specific member of the team to perform the second stage analysis and draw out findings, although they were allocated another team member to support them and act as a critical friend. The relatively small number of the team ensured that each member of the team was either leading or supporting at least one research question and hence there was also a cross checking of findings between research questions to further support the overall analysis and supporting findings from RQ6.

3. Findings

Introduction

3.1 The findings are based on the data collected by the 3 HEI and represent reflections across the school sectors and other identified stakeholders as shown in the Methodology section. The findings are organised by response to the research questions and based on qualitative interviews data. The themes for each section were identified by a cross HEI coding exercise following initial analysis of interview transcripts. The source of each quotation is provided at the end of each quotation and identified by sector and role. The findings section is concluded by a discussion of links between the literature review and this research and the identification of key messages by education sector. It is important to note the data collection considers the impact of different situations that schools were in during the period March 2020-February 2021.

Understanding the changing context of Covid-19

3.2 The data captured for research reflects the different situations that schools found themselves in during the period of this study. The findings capture how health and well-being was managed by the schools remotely and back in the classroom.

Table 2: Changing context of Covid-19 for schools

| Date | Context | Description |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| March 2020-July 2020 | National Lockdown 1 | Primarily in lockdown with some hub activity and opening of schools in July 2020 |
| September 2020-December 2020 | Schools re-open but there are local lockdowns. National lockdown 2 starts on December 20th | Schools re-open for face-to-face teaching but not all learners in school and some disruption due to outbreaks of Covid-19 and local lockdowns |
| January 2021-February 2021 | National Lockdown 2 | Return to national lockdown with some hub activity |

3.3 An overarching theme from the sample was requirement to be flexible and responsive to the changes and the impact on the health and well-being of all

involved. The following quote is a typical response to the situations the schools found themselves in:

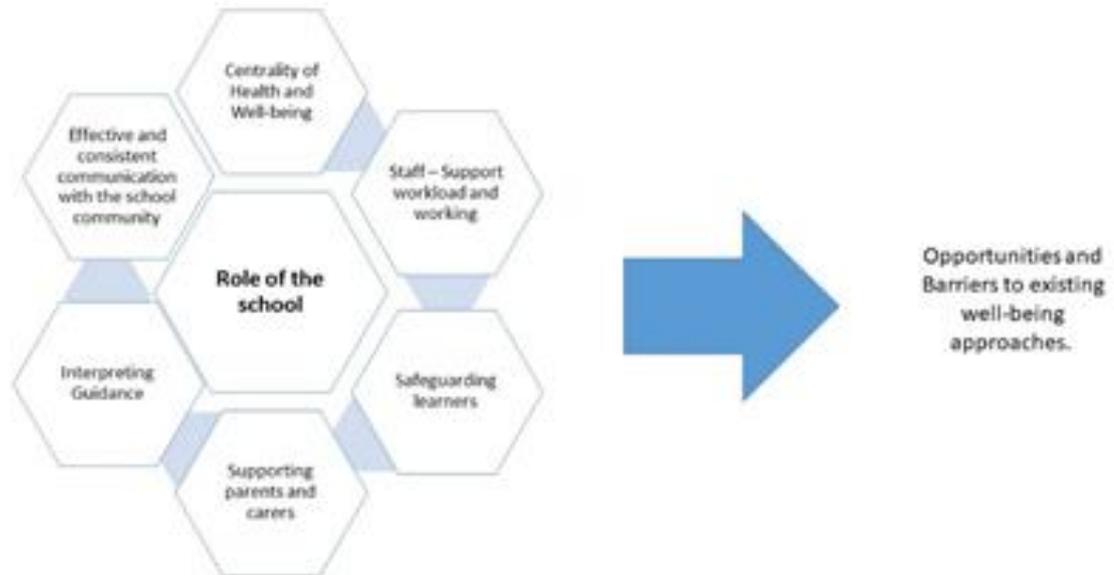
Special School - 'The approach is sort of flexible and it's been changing and it's constantly reflecting upon the situation that we're in' SP1-SLT1

Some schools noted shifts in priorities during the different lock down periods and although wellbeing was always central, the conversations had a different emphasis. For example, in lockdown 1, the focus was on making contact and making sure that learners and their parents/carer were okay. In lockdown 2, particularly in secondary schools, contact involved more discussions about engagement with academic work.

RQ1: What is the role of schools in monitoring/promoting general well-being/health of learner and practitioners within the context of the crisis

- 3.4 All interview respondents (Schools, Consortia, Outdoor providers) saw Health and Well-being as a priority for schools and 14 commented that it was central to the ethos of the school. Policies are in place and there is evidence from this research that schools have actively worked to enhance their health and wellbeing approaches. The Covid-19 crisis made them reflect on the needs of staff; learners and parents too. There is evidence from schools that demonstrates that they have conducted their own surveys with both staff and parents to inform their approaches during the period March 2020-February 2021. There is also evidence from Consortia about how they have worked with schools.
- 3.5 In discussing the crisis and its potential impact on monitoring/promoting the wellbeing and health of learners and practitioners with Schools across the sectors, Outdoor Learning providers and Consortia, the following themes emerged: the centrality of Health and Well-being in Schools; effective and consistent communication with the school community; implementing guidance (WG, LA and Consortia); safety and monitoring of staff; safeguarding learners; supporting parents/carers; impact on the working environment and workload and opportunities to developing well-being approaches.

Figure 1 – Themes from RQ1



The centrality of health and well-being

- 3.6 Within our sample there was an overwhelming commitment to importance of health and well-being and the role that schools and outdoor providers can play. Comments were made about whole school approaches and how this was a main priority and that it underpins learners' education. Without a focus on health and well-being, learning is compromised. The quotation below reflects the message from schools

Primary School - 'Our main focus of our learning policy is well-being first. So all of our communication with parents, all our communication with staff is basically putting that across...you have to have a safe and happy child before they can learn anything' PS2-SLT2

- 3.7 Schools could cite activities and policies that demonstrated how they were engaging with health and wellbeing approaches and how this was supporting their learners during the Covid-19 crisis. This involved looking at how learners learn, emotions and well-being, behaviour and the use of the curriculum. Social and emotional well-

being was seen as a significant area of focus. 3 schools make reference to the 'Thrive' in Schools programme and 5 shared examples of approaches they were engaging with.

Primary School - 'We're going through a nurture assessment to be a nurture school, so we have a health and well-being policy... We've got a policy on it focusing emotions and well-being and also a behaviour policy, you know there's a lot of policies that go with it. 'PS3-WBL

Effective and consistent communication

- 3.8 The importance of communication was raised by all respondents. SLTs played a significant role in interpreting and communicating information for their staff, learners and parents/carers. They responded to this challenging and changing environment being mindful of the needs of their school community.

Pupil Referral Unit - 'It is different for our children/parents/homes and needed careful approach' PR1-SLT

Secondary School - 'So every head of year contacted every pupil. At least one student in last three months. Some pupils have had daily phone calls from the student support officers. Some students have had weekly telephone calls. Some students have phone calls just to help get them up in the morning. Which they were finding difficult. Some students have had telephone calls just to try and get them back on track. 'cause because they've fallen behind for a few weeks they were stressed and worried about catching up.' SS4-SLT

- 3.9 All respondents made reference to the importance of regular communication with staff particularly during the two lockdown periods. All schools offered staff weekly check-ins and ensured there were clear lines of communication back and forth. 'WhatsApp' groups for staff was a popular approach. If a Health and Well-being

lead was in post, they had a key role is communicating with staff, learners and parents. There are many examples of how schools communicated with their learners and parents to reassure them and ensure they felt connected with the school. This involved a range of approaches using Apps (Seesaw being the most dominant for learners) social media (Twitter and Facebook), email, phone calls and letters and postcards

Primary School - 'One hundred postcards that we're sending out to the home learners with a picture of the school. And on the back, it just says, hope you can see, you know we're really missing you, really can't wait to see you when again school opens, you keep being amazing' PS4-SLT

Primary School - 'External communications with parents in multiformat-phone, social media, website – ensuring all homes covered and communicated with' PS6- SLT1

Outdoor Education Provider - 'Resorted to writing letters which families liked and responded' to' OEP3-SLT

- 3.10 Schools were able to evidence how they were continuously seeking the views of staff, parents/carers and learners. However, schools also reported the challenge of managing expectations in what at times was a very fluid situation. This leads to the next section about implementing guidance.

Implementing Welsh Government, Local Authority and Consortia Guidance

- 3.11 The SLTs interviewed reflected on the challenges and experiences of filtering and targeting advice from Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Consortia. Whilst appreciating this was a developing situation, managing different advice at short notice was a challenge.
- 3.12 All of the sample had consulted the guidance documentation that came out from Welsh Government and some specifically referred to the well-being assessment documents to see how assessment could be aligned with pupils. The sample reported different experiences about what had guided their role in relation to health

and wellbeing. As well as using WG, LA and Consortia guidance, reference was made to using wider professional learning to inform approaches and decision making. Reflections on the role of Welsh Government included:‘

Primary School - ‘The Welsh government, the guidance has been quite strong about wellbeing, hasn't it, and the local authority as well on the wellbeing of all staff’ PS4-SLT

Primary School - ‘Inconsistent and unrealistic in our context’ PS6-SLT

- 3.13 The concern about inconsistency, timeliness and the need to interpret the information was cited as a challenge particularly by respondents from the secondary sector. The following points were raised:

Secondary School - ‘Need a lot of interpretation which led to inconsistencies across schools especially between primary and secondary schools’ SS3- SLT

Secondary School - ‘Too rigid and couldn’t adapt to context or allow refinement’ SS2-SLT

Secondary School - ‘...we've got your 11 and 13 in the main message that we had from WG is bring back 11 and 13 make sure they're on track for what's required. They then introduced the opportunity for 10 and 12 if they were sitting examinations so well. If they were hoping to get certain qualifications for certain courses at the end of this year and then on the final hour, they sort threw the curveball of bringing key Stage 3 back in....’ SS4-SLT

Particularly during the first lockdown, there was concern about ‘mixed messages’

Secondary School - 'Lots of mixed messages from WG and LA and between LA teams' SS2- LT

*Secondary School - 'Mixed messages and inconsistent advice from LA'
SS2-SLT*

- 3.14 There are examples of how consortia have responded to the changing situation and amended and developed their guidance to provide the support that schools needed. There was an acknowledgement that appropriate support was needed as reflected in the next comment

Consortia - 'We've got a professional learning lead network and well being lead network so all those opportunities bring practitioners together so they didn't feel isolated and they were able to sort of compare and contrast'

Con1-SLT

And also importantly a need to work with schools to move from operational to strategic approaches.

Consortia - 'Schools wanted proper preparation to be ready for autumn term in terms of, you know, planning for continued disruption and planning for a whole strategic approach. When we talked to our schools we did quite a crucial piece of a piece of work that really did shape the approach across the region and schools are told us that it was really useful' Con1-SLT

- 3.15 An example of an output from Consortia that is particularly effective is a document called 'Striking the balance' which seeks to help understanding about the impact of negative discourse on health and well-being.
- 3.16 Some schools commented that as well as being aware of WG, LA and Consortia guidance, their own school networks provided support and help in managing well-being. This was particularly important for schools with specialist needs.

- 3.17 The research has also consulted other stakeholders with an interest in outdoor education. One respondent from the outdoor learning sector felt that the WG guidance actually excluded outside providers who could have provided an effective supporting role to schools

Managing and monitoring the impact on staff

- 3.18 The use of the word ‘community’ appeared in a number of transcripts and the sense that staff were looking out for each other and providing support. In primary schools, the health and wellbeing lead played a critical role in supporting staff. A range of approaches from the schools were reported including well-being days, managing emails, wellbeing calls, Live Q&As, regular team meetings. SLTs took a proactive role in supporting its staff to ensure that they were aware of support available both internally and externally.
- 3.19 The schools had an important role in understanding and managing the impact that working during Covid-19 was having on them and their professional practice. A representative example of comments from staff to show the range of experiences:

Secondary School - ‘Staff needed support and to know it was okay to reduce what they did in direct teaching’ SS2-SLT

*Secondary School - ‘Worry over quality of teaching or just engagement’
SS3-SLT*

Secondary School - ‘Struggling to make things valuable’ SS2-SLT

Pupil Referral Unit - ‘Concerns over engagement and how much we can chase or push this’ PR1-SLT

Primary School - ‘I can see there are some teachers who are highly anxious I'd say probably 60,-70 percent were feeling quite anxious And then it's it has gone better, but they're still very anxious’ PS4-SLT

Primary School - 'SLT had a crucial role in empowering staff to believe and trust in themselves.' PS2-SLT

Secondary School - 'While we were doing that it was ensuring regular communication with the staff, making sure that they were aware of what was going on in schools. There would be weekly briefings. I was a point of call for the staff. Obviously there has been bereavement illnesses, Childs illnesses, all sorts as per usual.' SS4-SLT

- 3.20 Respondents reported on the negative impact of perceptions of teachers and education in the media during lockdown period. Schools had a role of managing this impact on staff health and wellbeing. Schools reported that information from the media created a lot of stress and anxiety and SLTs had a role in managing this. One school stated that its Local Authority felt obliged to bring teachers into school to counteract negative perceptions

Primary School - 'it was fed through local authority that teachers were expected to be in because they didn't want the perception that teachers weren't in work' PS4-SLT

- 3.21 An example of how to manage this negative discourse was provided by one of the consortia. One consortia provided a template for schools to customise which explained the complexity of the Covid-19 situation, the different approaches that were being taken by schools based on their understanding of their learners. There is an important section on language being used. This was provided bilingually to all schools in the region. The following quotation is taken from one of the documents:

Consortia - 'It is important at this time that we surround our children / students with positive thoughts and language and that we avoid focusing on the negatives. We will therefore use the following language with caution and would encourage you to do the same: Loss of Learning; Everyone

needs to Catch-up; Narrowing the COVID gap; Start learning; Falling behind; Gaps in learning' Con1-SLT

Managing the Working environment and workload considerations

- 3.22 Schools had to consider different types of working environment during the lockdowns and the return to school. This was an additional role for schools and introduced additional health and well-being issues to manage. A more detailed discussion of the impact on staff with examples is undertaken under RQ3. As a school, senior managers had to consider the working environment and the impact on workload.
- 3.23 Working environment - Respondents made observations about two types of working environment and the impact on health and well-being: Off-site working – Concerns were raised about access to technology; internet, appropriate work spaces, the blurring boundaries and isolation. On-site working – Initial concerns about how to work safely outside from some respondents. There is evidence of adapting spaces to accommodate more groups both inside and outside. However, schools experienced different challenges to accessing safe outdoor spaces.
- 3.24 Workload - All school respondents commented on the impact on workload in each of the three work periods studied. Phrases were like 'increased enormously', 'significant increase', 'initial unrealistic expectations about teaching', 'inability to switch off' appeared frequently across the sample.

Primary School - 'Workload during the first lockdown was intense and was higher than if we'd been in school. Increased screen time due to Teams meeting sand documents to read. I found I was working from 8am to 7pm without taking the proper breaks, and still not having the time to finish work'

PS1-T

Primary School - 'We've gone to a rota system, which we did very early on, because I realised that there was a lot of pressure on staff to be home schooling' PS4-SLT

Safeguarding Learners

- 3.25 The schools were required to manage different learning environments throughout the period of this research. 8 of the schools were hub schools and used their knowledge to work with the most vulnerable and their families to provide support required. Many of the schools prioritised their vulnerable learners and this is reflected across all the sectors.

Secondary School - '(the)Priority was vulnerable pupils....we knew that they were safe' SS1-SLT

- 3.26 Some of the schools in the sample are in areas of social deprivation and challenging social circumstances. There are examples of how the schools supported their more vulnerable learners and also evidenced how much harder it was to work with outside agencies during lockdown due to shielding, staffing and access challenges.

Special School - 'Already complex and now made more so' SP2-SLT

- 3.27 A number of schools in the sample raised concerns about the impact on safeguarding as they had a number of at risk and vulnerable learners in their schools. More details on the approaches to safeguarding and supporting well-being of learner is discussed in RQ2.

Secondary School - 'You know we've had some people who've had a very difficult time. The parents had a very difficult time and as a result of that then there are police involvements, social worker involvement. A priority for them would be that daily conversation with somebody in school to check in. How are you? How are things and then potentially finding out whether or not that pupil is vulnerable enough to warrant a place in school to come in and do some work. And having somebody to talk to them.' SS4-SLT

Supporting Parents and Carers

- 3.28 The Schools have a very clear understanding of the needs of their community and this was demonstrated through their engagement with learners and their families and the activities they focused on. A number of schools made direct reference to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how their role was to provide some fundamental aspects of health and well-being. There is evidence about the wide ranging role that schools played in supporting their parents/carers during the Covid-19 crisis from checking on their health and well-being, appropriate learning activities for learners to in some cases providing food and clothing if needed.

Primary School - 'We were hand delivering to their houses, printed copies of everything, because we knew they couldn't necessarily afford the Wi-Fi and the printers and all of that sort of thing' PS1-SLT

- 3.29 Two schools commented that they had even closer links with their harder to reach parents/carers now and it had accelerated progress on their health and well-being projects. For example, extended family support teams and internal health and well-being projects for staff development. One primary school with 859 pupils has extended its family support team and provided support that was mindful of their community's particular needs.

Primary School - 'We're really proud to say that we have 100% engagement in terms of well-being and check-ins for all our families. This is tracked and monitored on a weekly basis'. PS2-SLT

- 3.30 Many respondents explain how important it was to talk to parents/carers, stay connected and demonstrate that they understand the challenges they might be facing.

Primary School - 'When we're looking at wellbeing, we are looking at the parents as well ... our SLO is on the phone all the time to parents, we've

*sent out messages, say, ring us, if you're upset, if you needed a chat, ..
Unless we get parents feeling happy and supported, it's not going to trickle
through to the children' PS4-SLT*

*Primary School - 'So our main message on Monday morning is here are our
home learning activities. However we would love to see your child's face if
we can.... (sometimes) you will feel you are top of the world and need more
activities and there are other days you won't feel like getting out of bed and
that's normal' PS2-SLT*

*Special School - 'quite a few of our families have said you saved us... (it is)
important about the parents feeling secure as well, isn't it? SP1-SLT*

Opportunities to develop and share Health and Wellbeing approaches

- 3.31 The responses focused on the schools' internal role and also the impact on organisations that schools work with on health and wellbeing in the curriculum. Some schools took the opportunity to implement community-based well-being projects to reinforce their role as educators and provide support.
-

*Primary School - 'We released a 'Kindness in the community' project. The
children were highly involved in it. Writing and putting up posters with
slogans to check people up. We worked with companies supporting our
food bank. Children had to go home and do something kind for their family
and we had lovely positive messages from parents' PS2-SLT*

- 3.32 There were also positive statements about the opportunities to re-think and re-align approaches. This is certainly evidence of schools as learning organisations during this period.
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*Primary School - 'We are developing confidence...We come away from
meetings thinking what do we need to do, What are we missing? We are*

regularly looking at case studies from other schools and publications thinking what we can take but also what can we park.’ PS2-SLT

Primary School - ‘A lot of staff did online training especially during the first lockdown. We were regularly doing seminars where well-being was the priority..., staff were doing things to help them with their understanding of the children’s well-being and behaviours’ PS3-SLT

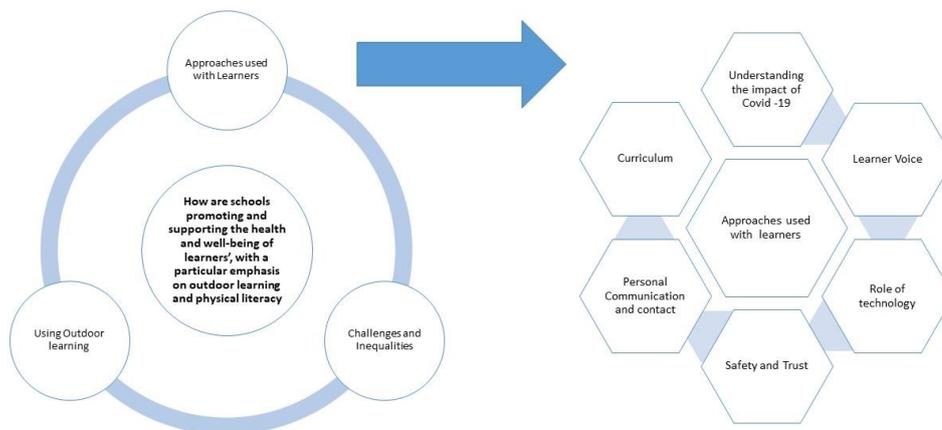
3.33 One school cited how it had shared its practice with other schools

Special School - ‘I’ve done some training with other schools ... The first couple of slides in my presentation are actually all about the parents... we’ve got to reflect on what this means for their parents (for) a lot of these parents the thought of being stuck in the house with their mainstream child nonstop for the next indefinite period of time is challenging. Multiply that by 100 when it’s a child who’s got complex needs and challenging behaviour’.
SP1-SLT

RQ2: How are schools promoting and supporting the health and well-being of learners’, with a particular emphasis on outdoor learning and physical literacy?

3.34 The research reveals the variety of approaches that schools used with learners to promote and support their health and wellbeing during March 2020-February 2021. The findings in RQ1 demonstrate the centrality of Health and Wellbeing to School and RQ2 this in more detail and demonstrates how approaches were developed based on their knowledge of their learners and their community. Data was primarily collected from Senior Leaders, Health and Well-being Leads and classroom teachers.

Figure 2 - Themes from RQ2



- 3.35 The diversity of approaches used reflects the changing Covid-19 environment and the needs of the learners. The following sub-themes arose from the coding: Understanding Covid-19; curriculum; personal communication and contact; safety and trust; using technology and listening to the learner voice.

Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on learners

- 3.36 The impact of the Covid-19 situation on learner health and well-being has been much discussed in the media during the period March 2020-February 2021 and this research reveals different responses and approaches. At one end of the range of response reference is made to pupils feeling scared and increased referrals due to anxiety and at the end children seem to have adapted and understand.

Secondary School - 'Trying to be covid safe but also make an environment for learning' SS2-T2

- 3.37 Schools have taken different approaches to explaining the implications of Covid-19. At the core are practical explanations for social distancing and hygiene moving to different approaches dependent on sector and the particular needs of their learning community. Many saw explaining Covid-19 as part of their role but one school felt that this was primarily the responsibility of the parents.

Primary School - 'Getting children to talk about how covid affects them at home' PS6-HWBL

Secondary School - 'Teaching the older children about the risks' SS2-HWBL

- 3.38 For younger learners, the effect of Covid was difficult to explain and schools concentrated on activities to make them safe. Older learners were more aware and many had experienced bereavements. One primary school had encouraged its staff to engage with professional learning on dealing with bereavement.
- 3.39 Schools particularly expressed concern about the impact that media representation was having on learners and this is considered in more detail in the challenges section

Curriculum

- 3.40 In the response to RQ1, Schools talked about the centrality of health and well-being and this was a priority that underpinned children's ability to engage with learning. Schools made specific reference to how health and well-being is incorporated into lessons and activities. Some focused on monitoring health and well-being and others to develop a sense of well-being. Primary schools in the study talked about having the flexibility to provide a balance between focusing on learning targets but prioritising activities that made the learners feel positive and safe. Concern was expressed about the negative focus on 'learning loss'.

Primary School - 'We used reading catch up activities to access wellbeing needs' PS1-HWBL

- 3.41 Schools where possible included specific topics on health futures, kindness in the community, PE based challenges and 4 of the schools had introduced yoga to promote health and well-being. As an example, one primary school in a multi-cultural area described how they used the courtyard in the school to grow flowers and vegetables and this translated into a class project during lockdown which

encouraged the children to learn about growing things, using flowers and share information about their families and cultural backgrounds. The teacher filmed nature walks and then develop activities for the learners to share.

Primary School - 'We filmed our nature walks ... collected different coloured flowers, turned it into flower dyes and that became our instructional writing... then it transferred into what grows in their countries or where their families are from...a lot of them had allotments, grew different things and we were getting pictures from families abroad... It was lovely and proves something like this does provide other opportunities, doesn't it?' PS3-T

Secondary schools in this study noted the difference between different lockdown period and then there was a shift in emphasis to 'recovery of the curriculum'

Secondary School - 'Recovery of the curriculum was a priority after the first lockdown... a recovery classroom was set up for Year 11 catch up after school' SS1-HWBL

- 3.42 Schools were aware of the pressure on parents to home school and there are examples of activities that were curriculum based that could be undertaken at home e.g. cooking to develop mathematics skills; health eating; engaging with exercise; art and social activities like virtual sports days.

Personal Communication and contact

- 3.43 Personal communication and contact was a key approach with learners. All schools referred to the importance of 'check-ins'. All schools mentioned the importance of personal communication and at least 5 of the schools in the sample organised in-person visits to drop off work packs and also food and clothing packs. A number of schools had dedicated teams who had weekly contact with learners to simply check in and ensure that all was well. As outlined in RQ1, schools were in regular contact with learner and parents and carers. Some examples of typical approaches include:

Secondary School - 'ALeNCO and team working to have weekly phone contact with all students on their list' SS2-HWBL

Secondary School - 'Pastoral learning mentors...check regularly on children at risk' SS2-HWBL

Primary School - 'Saying to be parents that it was okay if some days seemed better than others' PS2-HWBL

Safety and Trust.

- 3.44 Schools were very concerned with putting in place strategies to make learners feel safe whether at home or in school. They are very aware of the importance of bringing learners into an environment where they feel safe particularly after a period of unfamiliarity and uncertainty. The following quotations reflect some of the different approaches:

Secondary School - 'Important to project the image that school is safe and we know what we're doing' SS2-SLT

Primary School - 'the goal was for school to be as normal as possible, as quickly as possible partly because the way we work, there's a big focus on well being anyway, but also because we knew that our children would not cope well with coming back to a school that worked differently to what they used to do, it needed to pick up where they left off and slot back in PS1SLT

Primary School - 'New routines helped get things to be like a new normal' PS6-HWBL

Primary School - 'You know the children have to be ready to learn, they have to be in that right place to ensure that they they're going to want to do it'. PS3-HWBL

Role of Technology

- 3.45 Technology seems to have had a role in supporting the health and well-being of learners but also impacted on learners in a negative way too. On a positive note, technology could be used for contact and as schools developed better models of online teaching, they were able to further increase the focus on well-being and maintaining learner engagement.

Primary School - 'we use Seesaw so we could we could video ourselves. We could have chats with the children then. So it was a lot easier. They could still see us and know that we were still there. You know making it real, making them realize that we were part of it as well, showing them what we were doing, you know' PS3-HWBL

- 3.46 However, technology also had a negative impact on wellbeing and put both learners and parents under pressure. As this was a new way for learning, learners could feel unsettled by this different form of interaction and did not engage as a consequence. Many of the schools in this study noted problems with access to appropriate technology and also safeguarding concerns, particularly with younger learners and the use of technology.

Primary School - 'Lots of different advice and guidance on safeguarding online – whether to have cameras on, teachers' cameras on, record sessions etc. I think we were probably very cautious but this meant some children missed out' PS6-SLT

Secondary School - 'No clear advice from WG/LA on safeguarding for online lessons' SS2-SLT

Learner Voice

- 3.47 Many of the schools websites in this made reference to the learner voice and its role in health and well-being. Schools demonstrated that they were aware of learner

needs but it was much harder to capture their voice in a remote learning environment. There is evidence of surveys being carried by schools to capture the learner experience, learner forums and question boxes. In one primary school, learners designed their own classroom in collaboration with their class teacher based around the Covid-19 restrictions

- 3.48 Often schools will use observation to capture how learners are feeling and engaging and there were interesting and relevant reflections on capturing emotion and visual cues in an online environment.

Primary School - 'Younger children find it very hard to express their feelings as so much is seen in their creative play and this is missed in isolation or on a screen' PS6-T1

Primary School - 'Some children became upset and distressed if they felt that the teacher had not noticed them online' PS2-HWBL

Using Outdoor learning

- 3.49 This provides an overview of an area that is covered in depth in RQ4. The recognition of the importance of outdoor learning and its connection to health and well-being is significant.

Special School - 'It's important, but it's becoming even more important...the outdoors is crucial in so many ways that you know we have some children who are like a different person when they're outdoors to the person they are indoors'. SP1-SLT

- 3.50 Schools were also thinking about connections with the development of the new curriculum and the role that outdoor learning should play.

Primary School - 'Thinking more about outdoor learning as we bring in the new curriculum so this pushed us to do it sooner' PS4-SLT

- 3.51 Outdoor learning was used in a positive way during the first lockdown, but was more of a challenge in the second lockdown because of the time of year.

Primary School - 'Outdoor learning probably had improved since the first lockdown because we were outside a lot more. .. we tried to make sure the children were more physically active and we're outside a lot more rather than being inside... we've used nature lot more' PS3-HWBL

- 3.52 Most schools commented that the second national lock down had a greater impact on health and well-being due to the time of year.

Special School - 'I think that's made a massive difference for some of our parents, their general mental health is often worse in the winter than in the summer anyway, but also their options are so much more limited for a lot of our children who are very active' SP1-SLT

- 3.53 Schools shared how they had tried to enable outdoor learning and were mindful when setting outdoor based tasks in the environment their learners lived in as not all had easy access or were able to supervise outdoor activities. The role of outdoor learning is explored in depth in RQ4

Challenges and Inequalities for learners

- 3.54 Covid-19 surfaced social and financial inequalities that impacted on the health and well-being of learners and their families. The role that schools directly played in supporting their learners should be acknowledged. There is evidence of innovative projects that support different aspects of health and well-being and ways in which the differences between the most affluent and least affluent were addressed. A comment made by one school in this study could be applied to all of them

Primary School - 'We have a good relationship with our community already and in difficult times the school is seen as a beacon' PS6-SLT

- 3.55 A number of schools interviewed are in deprived areas and schools were mindful of the lack of resources in learners' homes. These schools did not want to impact on health and well-being in a negative way by providing activities that would be a challenge to engage with

Primary School - 'We've tried to do things that we know they'll be able to do and think carefully around those sort of things, because obviously we are a deprived area as well that a lot of the families haven't got much, so we've got to really think about what we're doing with regard to that' PS2-HWBL

- 3.56 Resilience of learners as indicated, learners responded to the Covid-19 situation differently and schools did not underestimate the challenge of this.

Special School - 'So some of the children in the hub were not the most challenging and complex children, but they were the ones coming from the families who possibly had the least resilience to cope with the scenario. So we offered places to about 30% and we ended up with 15% coming in'
SP1-SLT

- 3.57 Impact on pupils' physical health and wellbeing. The schools observed that learners were suffering due to lack of social contact, routine and physical activity. Learners has put on weight and did not have access to accessible outdoor environments.

Secondary School - 'Lack of any exercise through missing the walk to school and PE' SS2-HWBL

Primary School - 'Kids have put on weight' PS1-SLT

Primary School - 'We implemented outdoor play as a longer period' PS4-HWBL

- 3.58 Discussions in the media proved to be a challenge for schools. The negative discourse about the impact of Covid-19 on learning does not help the well-being of learners and worked against the positive interventions that schools were using.

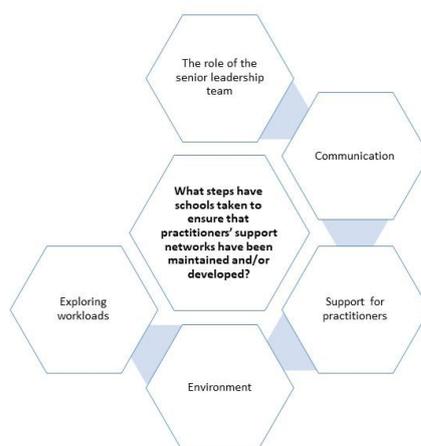
Primary School - 'Unhelpful media discussing 'learning loss' which isn't even really a thing' PS6-T

Secondary School - 'Covid education sessions given to try to counteract scare tactics of the media' SS3-HWBL

RQ3: What steps have schools taken to ensure that practitioners' support networks have been maintained and/or developed?

- 3.59 RQ3 considered the steps taken by schools to ensure that practitioners networks had been maintained and there are clear overlaps with the initial thematic coding and subsequent analysis for RQ1. Schools considered the health and wellbeing needs of practitioners and developed a range of ways in which staff can support each other during the changing context of the pandemic. Senior Leaders made significant efforts to maintain health and wellbeing amongst staff in the schools. A range of approaches have been developed to support and maintain those networks with practitioners.

Figure 3: Themes from RQ3



The Role of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

3.60 The data shows that in most cases the Senior Leadership Team played a key role in supporting practitioners' health and wellbeing. Staff felt supported by their respective SLT's and recognised that they were able to access support and training where needed. Schools referred to an open-door policy with their SLTs. Schools also acknowledged the challenges faced by the SLT in dealing with the constantly changing landscape of the pandemic and the Welsh Government guidance and constraints.

Secondary School - 'Must be hard with advice changing daily and being told what to do and then not offered support to implement things.' SS2-T2

Faith School - 'You know, the leadership has provided really good opportunities and made it really abundantly clear that well-being is a real priority at this point in time and going forward. And whether that's our well-being or that of the children. And it's being encouraged and supported in all that way. And without that, I don't think it would have even been anywhere near the quality that we provided.'

FS2-SFG

3.61 Weekly check-ins with staff were a common feature, including wellbeing calls to staff, wellbeing surveys and regular team meetings. The following quotes demonstrate that there were clear lines of support from SLTs.

Primary School - 'Re-organised leadership model temporarily for more direct accountability and clear lines of support' PS6-SLT1

Secondary School - 'From Leadership down – conscious of everyone's wellbeing' SS1-T

Special School - 'Filtering and targeting advice and support from consortia and WG.' SP2-SLT

Special School - 'They've worked hard to make sure we feel valued and know they're supporting us.' SP2-T4

Although the role of the SLT is not without critics.

Secondary School - 'Job is operational and sometimes detached.' PS1-SLT

Secondary School - 'Hard to see as they're so focussed on operations and managing the risks.' SS2-T2

Exploring Workloads

3.62 Exploring workloads was considered on a school-by-school basis and supported by their respective SLTs. There were a range of approaches to supporting staff workload including; ensuring staff were able to leave the school at the end of the day so that they could get home to their families, finishing the day at 12:00 on a Friday, banning emails at certain times of the day, scaling back on planning and also on lesson observations.

3.63 Key challenges for staff appeared to be around balancing working in schools or hubs and also working from home. For staff who were also home schooling their own children the pressure was increased. Also trying to balance teaching key

worker children in school and supporting learners online. School staff also commented on the additional time need to prepare for online learning.

Secondary School - 'Work life balance hard to keep when you're working at home. Hard to see where work ends and home begins when you work from the kitchen table.' SS2-T2

Secondary School - 'Really hard to try to teach in person to key worker children and online at the same time' SS3-T

- 3.64 In addition, being able to access digital tools etc. was more difficult for some when working from home and as a result working in school was preferable. For some staff they found that being in work was a better environment for them due to individual circumstances at home.
-

Secondary School - 'Easier to work at work'. SS3-T
Pupil Referral Unit - 'Need to be in work to use the tech properly.' PR1-SLT

- 3.65 There was also a sense from schools that changing workloads have created a sense that staff are there 24/7 and that schools may need to consider how they can re-establish boundaries for parents. While supporting staff, children and parents have been a key focus for schools, there will be a need to re-adjust expectations in the future.
-

Primary school - 'Some parents feel that staff are here 24/7 for absolutely everything. You know, they expect a response straight away. So I think re-establishing those boundaries of working hours, etc. is going to be really important.' PS5-SLT.

- 3.66 Schools amended timetables and created a rota system to support staff trying to ensure that there was additional time for planning. Schools tried to ensure that no-

one had a full timetable by using a rota system to share the workload. Each school has considered their staff, in their context and made appropriate changes.

Primary School - 'No expectation of marking to be fully up to date.'

'No observations (apart from NQTs) – just one observer.' PS1-SLT

Secondary School - 'some of our exam classes when we tallied up, you know they lost 56 hours in the core subjects each you know, so there was a real focus to try to recover that time lost.' SS1-SLT

One school supported their staff by enabling them to work from home and the SLT came in to support key worker pupils in the school on a rota basis.

Secondary School - 'We've ensured that the staff were able to stay at home during both lockdowns to deliver online lessons by not having to come in on a rota for the key worker provision pupils.' SS4-SLT

Communication

- 3.67 Keeping in touch with staff on a regular basis was seen as important to SLTs and to school staff.
-

Primary school - 'I'm messaging quite a lot to staff to make sure that they are looking after themselves.' PS4-SLT

Primary School - 'I go around every morning? I ask if everyone's alright. How're you doing? Are you okay? They know they can come and talk to me. And we've got a WhatsApp group' PS4-SLT

WhatsApp groups and other platforms such as Google Meet were a common means of staff keeping in touch with each other, sharing information and checking that everyone was okay. It is evident that staff in schools developed their own supportive networks to check on each other.

Primary School - 'Before Christmas staff were struggling and wellbeing was low. Staff would check in on each other. One staff member created bags and little cards to cheer staff up.' PS4-SFG

Although, it was noted that staff missed the conversations and face to face chat in the staffroom.

Secondary School - 'Miss the general conversations about school life from the staffroom' SS3-T6

Environment

- 3.68 The data demonstrated that overall school practitioners pulled together to support each other throughout all phases of the pandemic to date, supported by their SLTs. Schools became 'tight-knit' communities. Although one respondent described the environment as 'remote and distant'.
- 3.69 Supporting staff and ensuring the working environment is safe was a concern to SLTs. While one school explained that they had dedicated space, another noted the challenges of the school having no designated staff room.

Primary School - 'Designated space for staff at lunch and break away from children.' PS1-T

Secondary School - 'Very hard as no staff room for shared time at breaks and lunch' SS2-T

- 3.70 The need to follow appropriate health and safety guidelines such as the Display Screen Equipment Regulations (DSE) 1992 were a challenge. Other concerns about the environment included having to have windows open to provide safe ventilation.

Secondary School - 'We did all this stuff about using a correct desk and screen height and then I have to sit at a school table all day when I'm teaching.' SS3-T6

Primary School - 'Sometimes uncomfortable to work in as it's been so cold with all the windows open' PS6-T1

- 3.71 Staff were concerned about their safety in relation to contracting Covid-19 With some staff being anxious. The safety of staff was of key concern and one school noted;

Primary School - 'But the school, that no one could do anymore to make them safer. If that makes sense. They don't feel as safe as I'd like to, probably. But no one could do anymore. And that comes down to that personal anxieties as well and experiences.' PS4-SLT

Support for Practitioners

- 3.72 There was a feeling that staff were overwhelmed at times and that there needed to be time and space for staff to feel supported.

Primary School - 'I think people are really fragile' PS1-SLT

A number of respondents talked about 'care first' and appropriate inventions to support individual staff, including counselling support if required. Schools placed less emphasis on staff pressurising children for work and looked at reducing lesson times to allow for screen breaks both for children and teaching staff.

Ensuring that practitioners felt valued was a frequent comment and schools provided bacon baps in the morning, cakes and donuts and other treats. One respondent commented that a bottle of wine was left on the doorstep as a thank you. The comment below notes how staff in schools have worked together to keep each other going.

Primary school - 'I think what I've noticed as well as people are more, not that people weren't thoughtful before but people will just do little things for each other, that you just think, oh, and it's that boost for each other, that you just think it takes two minutes out of your day.' PS4-FSG

- 3.73 One school also considered student teachers as a valuable resource. Given the circumstances, this school used ITE as a resource to support the teachers by managing the children that were in the school.

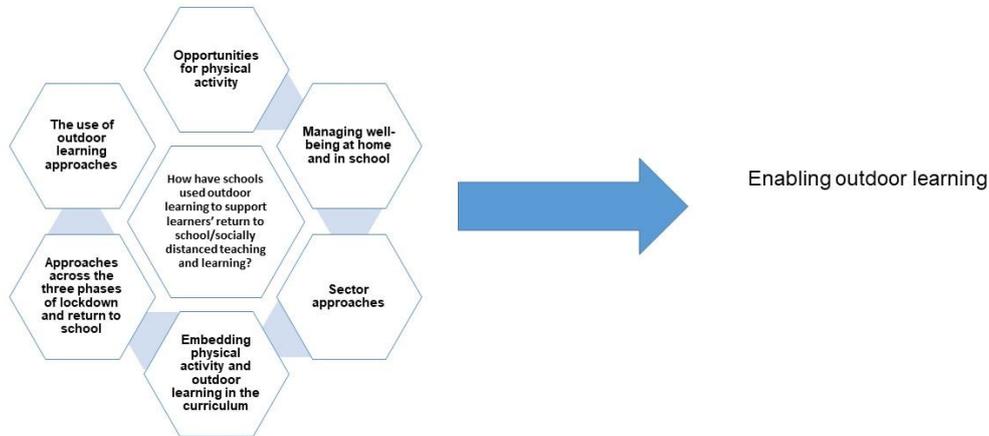
Faith School - 'we've got a student teacher in almost every class, because ITE have struggled to place, but also because it gives extra capacity for the teacher to get on with things so the student teacher could manage the children that were in.' FS2-SLT

- 3.74 The data shows that schools have worked tirelessly to support both staff and children in relation to health and wellbeing. Each school that has taken part in this study has ensured that the health and wellbeing of practitioners is key to ensuring that the learners are also supported. Schools have been given the autonomy to use appropriate approaches and methods that support staff in their respective contexts and situations.

RQ4: How have schools used outdoor learning to support learners' return to school/socially distanced teaching and learning? Which aspects of this can be highlighted as good/effective practice?

- 3.75 Whilst RQ4 dealt specifically with physical activity focussing on outdoor learning, it also draws some data from the earlier comments related to RQ2 so there is some inevitable overlap in both the initial thematic coding and the subsequent analysis. This is seen as a reinforcement or triangulation of the findings for both questions, but the nature of a linear report means that some points may occur in one and only be mentioned in the other even though the discussion is pertinent to both.

Figure 4: Themes from RQ4



3.76 Whilst it was not the aim to categorise statements or nodes of meaning across these themes, a broad reading and understanding of the responses to the interview questions was in the positive or constructive realm. There were suggestions about improvements and examples of what participants deemed as effective practice, and the only theme that generated significantly negative or contradictory comments was that of 'sector approach'. What follows is a more in-depth analysis of each of the themes identified above.

Opportunities for physical activity

3.77 Many participants were able to identify a need, perhaps even greater than usual of engaging children with physical activity during both the lockdowns and return to school. Both class teachers and school leaders offered positive perspectives from and understanding that children needed to be physically active when they had movement restricted and/or were following blended learning in front of a screen for much of the day, as quotes below demonstrate:

Secondary School - '...we're really trying to engage those children who don't seem to like sport or physical activity.' SS2-HWBL

Primary School - '...we've introduced creative games outside so when the children are at home they have some idea of what they can do.' PS6-HWBL

Secondary School - 'Getting the children to get changed into their PE kit at home so they come to school in their PE kit has given us more time in lessons for activity and the children fell more comfortable too.' SS2-HWBL

- 3.78 Another common approach mentioned and allocated to this theme was the more general approach of taking other (i.e. not physical education or outdoor) learning outside, or making it more active. Most if not all staff were unable to give a clear reason for this other than they believed it was a good thing. Some (exclusively primary school staff) mentioned the return to school advice from WG that had specifically mentioned utilising outdoor spaces more, but most felt that there was a need to be more (physically) active in learning and that the children were more engaged when this approach was used. There is some evidence to support this from research from Denmark using what is known as an *Üdeskole* or outdoor school approach (Mygind, 2007; 2009) but one comment that fit better with the theme 'sector approaches' specifically mentioned that education didn't quite have an outdoor learning culture like in Scandinavian countries, demonstrating a potential unacknowledged connection to cultural norms. The role of outdoor learning for cultural development in Wales has been examined (French and Philips, 2018) but trying to identify some of those cultural norms or aspects is a little beyond both this research question and the scope of this research.
- 3.79 A recurring aspect from primary school-based participants was the weather and appropriateness of children's clothing for that weather, particularly upon the return to school in the autumn term. Some schools had, or invested in 'puddle suits' (Primary teacher 1), some clearly stated they'd made an investment in outdoor clothing (Primary teacher 2) but it was always important that the weather was considered in the children's health and well-being:

Primary School - '...ensuring children have as much time as possible outside as they can even in bad weather, if they have the right coats...'PS6-T

3.80 One challenge identified in one school was that of timetabling outdoor sessions, but many schools had either given freer access to the outside spaces (mainly primary schools), and in some cases where space was limited, had split the school yard into zones for each bubble of children to work in. More generally it appeared that responses grouped under this theme dealt with innovation, new approaches and development rather than encountering insurmountable problems. Some schools had health and well-being days where normal timetable was collapsed for one day each week (two secondary schools), some had Friday PE sessions for everyone (another secondary school), some did their own version of the popular YouTube Joe Wicks workouts (a further secondary school) and others looked at alternative activities to the more regular/traditional PE sessions to engage more children (another secondary school and a special school introduced cycling/mountain biking on the school site).

Sector approaches

3.81 Whist not specifically defined as such in the question, the majority of answers from participants that were grouped under this theme concerned the outdoor sector rather than the education/school sector as a whole. This was also the theme (connected to this research question) that contained the only strong contradictions implying some schools had better access or better knowledge of the resources available. These comments mainly concerned access to human resource often in the person of the outdoor adviser (OA) provided by the local authority. Those schools that were located in LA with direct outdoor learning provision were both grateful for this provision and better understood the value that outdoor learning could bring to their children, as illustrated below:

Primary School - 'We're so lucky to have [outdoor centre] and [outdoor advisor] as there's so much support, but I know there aren't many centres left in Wales.' PS6-HWBL

Secondary School - 'We've been well supported by our local authority giving us a member of [outdoor centre] staff for one day per week – we tried to maximise their time with us to get as many children outside as possible'
SS3-HWBL

Similarly, the slightly less positive comments concerned the partial knowledge of outdoor learning or inconsistency in provision thus:

Secondary School - '...inconsistent approach across schools but at least we have [outdoor centre] that we can access' SS3-HWBL

Primary School - 'I'm not sure I could do anything as I'm not a qualified forest school person' PS6-HWBL

- 3.82 There would appear to be some knowledge of resources that are available to support school staff in delivering outdoor learning with one of the specialist national providers reporting a significant upsurge in attendance at online training events throughout the lockdown and return to school phases. One of the issues that occurred fairly often was that highlighted above of school staff believing they needed specialist qualification or knowledge before they could take children outside, although these were not the same schools where there was clear knowledge of the outdoor advisor or where the local authority provided a residential centre and/or outdoor leaning service. Whilst this is unsurprising in itself, one key finding from this research question so far relates to the collaboration and signposting needed to support schools in delivering outdoor learning to ensure all have equal access to these resources. This is particularly concerning in the several local authorities in Wales who have chosen not to appoint an outdoor education adviser and the very few LAs in Wales who have an outdoor learning service or residential centre (<5 at

the time of writing, although in some areas there is regional provision across multiple LAs).

Embedding physical activity and outdoor learning in the curriculum

- 3.83 The responses grouped under this theme demonstrated some innovative and effective practice and also that schools that were engaged in greater amount of PA and OL seemed to have clearly communicated aims through from the headteacher/SLT to the H+Wb coordinator and teachers. There were generally very positive responses to the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and the opportunities it offered to broaden the OL provision or look at different forms of PA/OL to suit the needs of the children in the school and the school's resources (human and physical). Schools acknowledged the challenge of getting children involved in physical activity when they were accessing blended learning or working at home, but this also demonstrated some of the most innovation from school staff. There was a tacit acceptance that if individuals were not engaging there was little the school staff could do about this ultimately other than keep trying new and different approaches. The freedom in curriculum planning is illustrated in the quotes below:

Primary School - '...with the constraints of the 2008 curriculum it's been difficult, but now with this new curriculum coming in, it should really give us a helping hand in providing and evidencing outdoor learning and its importance' PS6-HWBL

Secondary School - 'We already have forest school as one module in our project-based learning but we'd like to move it beyond year 7.' SS3-HWBL

Secondary School - 'We've been trying to increase what we do in line with the High-Quality outdoor Learning document – it's not just about going out but it's got to be good quality as well.' SS3-HWBL

- 3.84 Schools were looking to move science and other activities outdoors as well as increasing both the amount and quality of outdoor learning on offer. There was a

definite concern over quality (as illustrated above) and this connected with the quality of the support that was on offer for staff. One of the staff mentioned the outdoor learning instruction he'd received during his ITE course and how as a head of PE now he was trying to implement more OL to engage and develop what the school offered. One school commented that OL was 'not really for us' (Secondary teacher 4, but this was the only comment of that type, and few if any comments really highlighted any specific barriers to OL as has often been perceived. The quality issue was also connected by many staff interviewed to the support available and how they could access this, reaffirming the finding from the previous theme that a LA OA was vital in this process, but also school staff acknowledged the role of national learning/training providers such as Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and umbrella bodies such as the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning and the NRW Outdoor learning network groups (OLNG). One of the supporting interviews with representatives for NRW commented on the significant increase in uptake of both training opportunities and attendance at OLNG meetings.

- 3.85 In the past there has been a perception expressed that it has been easier to integrate or provide outdoor learning activities in a primary school setting, but the evidence gathered in these interviews demonstrates that there is a fairly equal split in terms of knowledge and motivation across the age ranges. Secondary schools felt that external accreditation was sometimes necessary as a justification for building OL opportunities into their curricula (as illustrated below) but as already discussed they also felt there were more opportunities for holistic/cross-curricular sessions in a project-based learning setting.

Secondary School - 'We like the extra accreditation [acknowledgement] the children can get from doing this, so the John Muir Award is brilliant, and we want to do more like this' SS2-T

Approaches to the three phases of lockdown

- 3.86 Although there is inevitably a little overlap between this theme and those of embedding OL in the curriculum and managing well-being at home and in school, there are some distinct aspects that need to be drawn out separately. Initially schools were significantly challenged in how to provide physical health and well-being content, and there was a concern already expressed that some of the quality of that distinct provision might be lost in an attempt to engage with as many children as possible. Although the lockdown rules allowed children to leave their house with members of their family for exercise every day, there was concern amongst school staff that this may be less of a priority for families either due to increased stresses of working from home or home schooling online, or because there was less time to go outside during the winter period with poor weather and shorter daylight hours. Some school had communication with parents and careers who were very concerned about taking children outside as there was a perception they would be more at risk of infection if they went out near others. Whilst the impact of the first lockdown campaign has been seen as reasonably effective in reducing the initial spread of the coronavirus, school staff reported confused and worried parents who had got the 'stay at home' message but not understood enough to manage risks and still allow their children outside to exercise.
- 3.87 Schools were challenged to provide time away from screens, whilst only having access to the children via the screen. Many used introductions or demonstrations and then asked the children to follow a routine of exercise and report back. Some were less structured suggesting that children should 'go outside for a walk' (Secondary teacher 4) although accepted that younger children should not be going out without a parent/career and that older teenagers found the motivation to walk anyway quite difficult. The more innovative approaches involved virtual 'expeditions' in some outdoor education lessons (Secondary teacher 5), dance videos in the style of the social media platform Tik-Tok, and scavenger hunts with reporting back.
- 3.88 Upon the return to school in both the summer and autumn terms schools were encouraged by WG guidance to make effective use of outdoor spaces and many

did. A common connecting theme here was the access to, and knowledge of, resources as illustrated below:

Primary School - 'The guidance form WG said to try to do more outdoors, so we did whilst the weather was good. There are so many resources out there you're spoilt for choice really. More schools should do it' PS6-T

RQ5 What are ITE providers already providing in relation to health and well-being with a particular focus on outdoor learning?

- 3.89 Findings for RQ5 are based on data collected by the 3 HEI and represent reflections across wider HEI ITE providers of how their ITE programmes currently consider issues of children's and teachers' (and ITE students') health and well-being. It is important to note the data collection considers the impact of the different situations that HEI ITE providers were presented with during the period March 2020-February 2021.

Health and Well-being

- 3.90 All interview respondents (100 per cent) recognise Health and Well-being as being a significant feature within their universities, something that is becoming more visible on campus and on university websites where health and wellbeing approaches are being developed and enhanced; one respondent reported these to include student yoga and mindfulness sessions for student well-being. The undertaking of staff and student Health and Well-being surveys are part of the fabric of the HEI offer. ITE students will therefore be well-versed in the importance of Health and Well-being but it is less apparent that links have been made and that this awareness translates into their practice.

Student well-being

- 3.91 In a similar vein to schools' concerns about their learners' and staff's Health and Well-being, students' Health and Well-being was also seen as a priority by all interview respondents of ITE programmes around Covid-19. Indeed, this was seen

by at least one provider as the cause of a significant intensity and increase in workload

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'The time students were due to go out into placement corresponded with the first Lockdown. This had a significant impact and was a cause of great angst for trainee teachers. I don't think this has particularly steadied again since, and is something at the forefront of what we continue to be mindful of now' ITE1

The Covid-19 crisis has made providers reflect on the needs of their trainee teachers. As one respondent offered

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'Normally in the intensity of a PGCE programme a week in the world feels like a month of emotional ups and downs– this has been intensified by the current situation.' ITE2

3.92 All universities felt a great deal of responsibility for the Health and Well-being of their students and noted that on reflection this could be at the detriment to the Health and Well-being of colleagues

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'Significantly longer days and a significant increase in screen time was just a contradiction of what we were telling our students....' ITE1

3.93 National and local guidance highlighting the importance of Health and Well-being was regularly produced and there is evidence from this research that ITE providers actively worked to enhance their health and wellbeing approaches. All respondents highlighted ongoing conversations, commitment, and planning to support Health and Well-being of their students. There was

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'Multi-level pastoral tutor support' ITE

'Initial Teacher Education Provider - Alarm bells highlighted in team meetings became a focus for action if necessary' ITE1

- 3.94 One outcome of developing health and wellbeing approaches was the way support is offered. Like the findings within schools the importance of communication was raised by all HEI respondents with accessibility to support for trainee teachers whilst they were attending university (virtually or face to face), or out in school. Universities responded to the challenges by offering both formal and informal opportunities for contact with a need for increased flexibility. One university offered weekly check in and check out messages complemented by virtual drop ins where another offered regular check ins and touch points. All respondents reported a mix of formal and informal support with a recognition of the blend of an online element offering increased flexibility and for some being more effective

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'They like the idea there's support there, but they come when they need it' ITE2

Suggesting students were able to take ownership of support but also utilise it as and when necessary

Initial Teacher Education Provider - '...conscious of their well-being and sense of not wasting their time or giving them more screen time if support was not actually needed' ITE2

Health and Well-being – programme level

- 3.95 An interesting point to note was that on approaching HEIs in relation to a research question on Health and Well-being signposting was made to colleagues delivering physical education and sport elements of their programmes. This suggests that historically from a programme perspective, content around Health and Well-being

has primarily related to physical health and been incorporated into modules around physical education. One respondent warned that there is a

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'misconception sometimes by seeing well-being as either mental well-being, or just about being active and being physical' ITE1

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'wellbeing means different things to different people' ITE1

- 3.96 Broader aspects of Health and Well-being appeared to be offered as an option or enrichment opportunity. Several of these opportunities have been offered and universities cited activities and training that demonstrate how they were engaging with health and wellbeing approaches which broaden trainees' knowledge and understanding. Undergraduate programmes in particular appeared to have the time to offer modules on cross curricular and thematic outdoor learning. Universities were able to evidence how they were continuously aiming to enhance the programme offer with external or accredited training opportunities, many of which relate to Health and Wellbeing e.g. Sainsburys Active Kids for All (Disability Sport Wales), Emergency First Aid Training, Teaching and Incorporating Mindfulness into Practice and Forest School Training. One university offers **Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel** (OEAP) Visit Leader Training, training with the OEAP outdoor learning cards and the John Muir Award. All respondents confirm a broadening of understanding around Health and Well-being as students are introduced to Curriculum for Wales' Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.

Health and Well-being and outdoor learning

- 3.97 Being outdoors has been repositioned because of Covid 19 in both a formal and informal capacity.

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'There's a couple of examples of schools that have really been on a quite interesting journey and what that looks like in context of engaging in outdoor learning and opportunities.'

ITE2

Trainee teachers have been informally guided during the pandemic to the benefits of being outdoors and how it can contribute to their Health and Well-being

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'Weekly communications with trainees would include an encouragement to consider their own well-being...we would often put images of green, open spaces and encourage them (and sometimes task them) to get outside' ITE1

3.98 Health and Well-being was also used for connectivity between teaching staff and students in addition to highlighting the benefits

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'During a virtual reconnection day during Lockdown 1 images were shared of the team engaging in outdoor activities, some out walking and some just sitting, enjoying being outside...it served a connection purpose...but we also wanted to show that we were facing the same challenges too'. ITE1

This shared experience offered a positive position from which to enable change as from a school perspective.

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'Staff were on the journey with the pupils' ITE2

All respondents recognise the need for spaces to be used differently and see an opportunity for innovative practice to evolve in the future.

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'in an upcoming reconnection day, we plan to capture innovative practice of creatively using the outdoor space which we are aware trainees are seeing whilst out in school. This needs to be embedded into our programmes so future trainees will plan for these opportunities rather than them being ad-hoc' ITE1

Implications for future practice

- 3.99 All respondents highlighted that schools have realised and recognised the importance of Health and Well-being and made the link of a wider recognition in terms of both policy makers and general opinion. There were positive statements and a genuine optimism about opportunities to rethink and realign. All respondents saw a Health and Well-being focus as a positive opportunity moving forwards

Initial Teacher Education Provider - '(there is a)level playing field as the pupils, staff, parents, teacher trainers are all experiencing wellbeing and valuing it' ITE1

One important consideration was that Health and Well-being is not just taught or covered within the context of physical education or related just to physical activity. Whilst consideration about how people have been actively locked down and what physical activity might look Health and Well-being is broader across the curriculum, the ethos of the school and beyond

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'HWB is part of the community and it is about using that community to improve it (HWB)' ITE1

A concern offered by one respondent is that

Initial Teacher Education Provider - 'schools might fall back into the pattern of getting learners through the teachers' assessments and about all the things they've missed' ITE1

All respondents agreed there should be a shift into starting from a place using positive language and embedding a new Health and Well-being culture from the lessons learned and changes to practice.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 This section revisits the research aims and objectives outlined in the introduction, in order to draw conclusions from the findings and present recommendations that will inform future practice. The purpose of this research was to provide evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and wellbeing of learners and practitioners. Furthermore, the research sought to consider recommendations that will inform future initial teacher education provision in Wales. It was deemed that new teachers could benefit from understanding a changed context within Welsh education and ITE providers could ensure that teachers entering the profession could be properly equipped to teach in a post-COVID-19 environment.
- 4.2 Conclusions are drawn from the qualitative data, collected through interviews and focus groups from senior leaders, teachers, health and well-being coordinators, ITE staff and students. Unless noted the conclusions are applicable to all school sectors.
- 4.3 RQ1. What is the role of schools in monitoring/promoting general well-being/health of learners and practitioners within the context of the crisis?
- The centrality of Health and Wellbeing to schools and the significant support of staff, learners and their learner community was evident.
 - Policies are in place and schools have actively worked to enhance their health and wellbeing approaches.
 - Schools attempted to implement guidance from WG, LAs and Consortia but there were conflicting messages.
 - Special schools noted the importance of working with other special schools to share specific experiences and expertise
 - The extensive role that schools played in their community was beyond the remit of learning and teaching. They were an invaluable source of physical and emotional support for learners and their families
- 4.4 RQ2. How are schools promoting and supporting the health and well-being of learners?
- Schools have engaged with a wide range of strategies to support their learners with health and well-being at the core.

- The themes identified demonstrate the depth and breadth of the approaches that the schools used to support their learners. Understanding Covid-19; curriculum; personal communication and contact; safety and trust; using technology and listening to the learner voice.
- Schools and their communities are dealing with challenges and inequalities in an innovative and positive way
- There are strong indications that outdoor learning has a significant role in developing physical and mental wellbeing.

4.5 RQ3. What steps have schools taken to ensure that practitioners' support networks have been maintained and/or developed?

- Staff reported feeling overwhelmed at times. However, all schools have taken significant steps to ensure that practitioners support networks have been developed and maintained during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Staff within the schools developed their own supportive networks to check on each other, supported by Senior Leaders within each school.
- Exploring workloads was a key factor in supporting staff wellbeing,
- Schools needed to re-establish boundaries with parents moving forwards, due to the over expectation of parents during the second lockdown.
- Working from home presented challenges in relation to communication. were also a factor in maintaining networks and supporting wellbeing.

4.6 RQ4. How have schools used outdoor learning to support learners' return to school/socially distanced teaching and learning? Which aspects of this can be highlighted as good/effective practice?

- Outdoor learning has been used in a variety of ways to support learners in their return to school. .
- Effective practice involves strong support from, and access to, a local authority outdoor education adviser and provision, both to work directly with children and also to train staff in outdoor learning pedagogical approaches. This was especially effective in those schools based in LA with a connect advisor and outdoor learning service as school staff knew where to go for resources and support.

4.7 RQ5. What are ITE providers already providing in relation to health and well-being with a particular focus on outdoor learning?

- Health and Well-being is a significant feature within the respondent universities; health and wellbeing approaches are being developed and enhanced.
- Although ITE students will be well-versed in the importance of Health and Well-being it is less apparent that this has followed through and that this awareness translates yet into trainees' practice.
- School staff, learners and the wider community are inextricably linked in terms of Health and Well-being.
- Understanding and recognising personal Health and Well-being could impact on practice as school staff or trainee teachers.

4.8 The final research question focused on implications for ITE from the research and the recommendations are listed in the next section

5. Recommendations

5.1 Welsh Government

- Schools to be recognised for their response to the pandemic and there should be opportunities in place to share practice and appreciate the diversity of the support that is needed.
- Acknowledge that health and well-being is at the core of our schools and provide appropriate professional and financial support and encouragement to continue their work in the areas
- Guidance on how to interpret policy and convert it into practice
- Recognising the needs of special schools and reflecting this in Welsh Government guidance.
- Resources (both human and other) should be more clearly signposted to school leaders and staff.
- A national portal to OL training resources could be provided through Hwb, combining contacts such as local authority outdoor education advisers and national training resources from organisations such as NRW, OEAP and the Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning etc.
- Sharing of case studies demonstrating effective practice as is currently the practice with other WG education projects such as NPEP.

5.2 Local Authorities and Consortia

- Every local authority/regional consortium should allocate/employ an outdoor education adviser as this is currently inconsistent across Wales. This person should have an understanding of outdoor learning pedagogy as well as health and safety management skills. The role should develop outdoor learning and support schools, rather than just ensure they are compliant with H+S law/responsibilities
- Guidance on how to interpret policy and convert it into practice
- Build on existing professional learning opportunities for staff to support how they monitoring and support well-being throughout a teaching career.
- Support schools to embed health and well-being in the curriculum

- Provide opportunities for a range of outdoor learning opportunities (accredited and non-accredited) on offer.
- Deliver creative and innovative training around Health and Well-being with a focus on physical activity and outdoor learning.
- Provide schools with an opportunity to share practice and to appreciate how different sectors have supported the health and well-being of its learners, parents and staff
- Acknowledge that health and well-being is at the core of our schools and provide appropriate professional and financial support and encouragement to continue their work in the areas
- There should be an investment in local authority outdoor learning provision, be this in direct investment to LA facilitates and staff, or in formal partnership with national/local organisations who can offer this specialist provision.

5.3 Schools

- Explore ways to embed health and well-being in the curriculum
- Explore ways of engaging and working with the community in which the school is based in a meaningful way.
- Share practice in parental involvement in learning
- Schools will need to re-establish boundaries with parents going forwards in order to maintain balanced workloads
- Supporting students on placement to feel a sense of belonging to the school community.

5.4 Initial Teacher Education Providers

Consider the following to be included in curriculum:

- Embedding health and well-being in the curriculum
- Guidance on how to interpret policy and convert it into practice.
- Collaboration and communication skills development
- Students to be exposed to a range of approaches/models to health and wellbeing.
- Exploring how to capture the learner voice

- Personal Health, well-being and resilience development.
- Managing and leading in a changing environment
- Outdoor learning pedagogy should be covered as part of the professional and/or pedagogical studies in ITE programmes

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Annex A -Copy of codes used to record sources of quotations

| Sector | Code for WG project |
|--------------------------|--|
| Primary School | PS1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Primary School | PS2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Primary School | PS3 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Primary School | PS4 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Primary School | PS6 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| Secondary School | SS1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Secondary School | SS2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Secondary School | SS3 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Secondary School | SS4 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| Special School | SP1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Special School | SP2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| Faith School (3 - 18) | FS1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Faith School (3 - 11) | FS2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Pupil Referral Unit | PR1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| Consortia | Con1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| Outdoor Education Provider | OEP1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Outdoor Education Provider | OEP2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Outdoor Education Provider | OEP3 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| Outdoor Education Provider | OEP4 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| | |
| ITE Provider | ITE1 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| ITE Provider | ITE2 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |
| ITE Provider | ITE3 (Add designation e.g. SLT;T;TA;SFG;HWBL) |

| | |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| Designations | |
| HWBL | Health and Wellbeing Lead |
| SFG | Staff Focus Group |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |
| T | Teacher |
| TA | Teaching Assistant |