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Welsh Government

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Summary of responses

## Consultation on the School Year

April 2024

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
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## Key findings

### 1. Could the school year calendar be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing and modern living?

- More than half of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that the school calendar could be better structured to support modern living, disadvantage and wellbeing. However, Option 1, maintaining the current school year, is still favoured (Q9 52.28%).
- Stakeholders report several issues with the current school calendar including fatigue in the autumn term and inconsistent term lengths as an obstacle for learners with additional learning needs.
- Strengths of the existing calendar include the way in which several sectors have adapted around it. A prominent perception is that a single longer summer break is better than other options presented at addressing fatigue and wellbeing.

### 2. What impacts do stakeholders anticipate the proposed alternate school year structures would have on them, in the short and the longer term?

- Views of stakeholders on the impacts vary depending on individual contexts of stakeholders, and the detail within the proposed structures.
- Those who are in favour of a two-week Autumn half term break note the potential positive effects on learner wellbeing, including a reduction in fatigue and illnesses among learners. Those who are against the proposed two-week Autumn half term break mention how any benefits gained during this additional week break would not be worth the sacrifice of one week less of the summer break.
- There are broad levels of support for a decoupled Easter break. Advantages of this proposal include providing some stability, ease of planning and consistency of term dates from year to year. A later spring break than in some years would be a benefit for tourism and prevent a condensed, short spring term, for education staff and learners.
- Many stakeholders are concerned about the potential impact of a two-week May / June half term on exam dates and learner performance. The warmer weather is seen as a positive mostly with parents and learners, with some highlighting a preference for a two week break in May / June half term rather than in October.
- In general, shortening the summer break to allow for lengthening the autumn and/or the May breaks is seen by many stakeholder groups as having a negative impact, especially on recruitment and retention of school staff.
- The proposal to move exam results days to be within the same week for GCSE and A levels is popular (Q8 69.18%).
- In terms of the possible impacts on the Welsh language, views are mixed. Some do not feel these proposals would affect the Welsh language, others highlight that a shorter summer break could improve Welsh language retention for learners who do not speak Welsh at home.

### 3. Which specific changes, if any, would be most effective in achieving a balance between the different needs and concerns of stakeholders?

- The needs and concerns of stakeholders are mixed and very little consensus exists across all of them.
- In the survey all demographic groups of survey respondents are not in favour of Option 3 and only part-time workers are in favour of Option 2.
- The qualitative research indicates a more complex picture:
  - Parents are broadly in favour of change, mostly split between Options 2 and 3. School governors and youth workers are also broadly in favour of Option 2. Tourism stakeholders welcome the decoupling of the spring break from Easter but strongly oppose all other changes in Option 2.
  - Among those in opposition to change are most school staff and education unions. Schools and unions mostly prefer the status quo (Option 1).
  - Interviewees saw Option 2 as a “happy medium”.
  - Local authority and early years, childcare and play stakeholders prefer Option 3.

#### **4. Which implementation options for any changes to school year structure, would be most and least effective and favourable? Why?**

- Because of the very mixed, and sometimes contradictory, feedback, it is difficult to be certain which of the 3 options proposed in the consultation would be the most, or least, effective.
- More than half of the survey responses agree that the school calendar could be better structured, whilst more than half of the survey responses prefer Option 1 of maintaining the current school year.
- Within the qualitative research there is little consensus: parents, school governors and youth workers are broadly in favour of change and tourism stakeholders, the education workforce and education unions in opposition to change.
- The expected impacts of any changes are varied, often stakeholder dependent, and frequently not focused on academic achievement, attainment, and progression.
- Some alternative proposals for reforms to the school year were offered by respondents.
- Of the proposed changes, having exam results days for GSCE and A levels in the same week is the most favoured by respondents.

### **The proposals**

- **Option 1:** The existing school calendar (Status Quo). A one-week break in October, two-week Christmas break, one-week break in February, two-week break for Easter, one-week break in May and a six-week summer break.
- **Option 2:** A new school calendar (“New Option”) from 2025 to 2026. A two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from Easter, and a five-week summer break to be introduced from the 2025 to 2026 school year. The February, Christmas and May breaks would not change in this option.
- **Option 3:** A New School Calendar (“New Option Plus”) rolled out in two phases.
  - Phase 1 implemented from the 2025 to 2026 school year and would be the same as Option 2.

- Phase 2 additional changes including a two-week May break and a four-week summer break. Further changes could also include AS/A level and GCSE results days held in the same week.
  - February and Christmas breaks would not change in either phase of this option.
- The existing provision of 190 days/380 sessions (38 weeks) of learning and the existing number of staff training (INSET) days per school year as well as all public holidays will remain within any changes proposed.
- Example term dates for the 2025 to 2026 school year, under Option 2 and Option 3 Phase 1 were outlined in the consultation document.

## Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

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This document is also available in Welsh: <https://www.llyw.cymru/strwythur-y-flwyddyn-ysgol>

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## Additional copies

This summary of response and copies of all the consultation documentation are published in electronic form only and can be accessed on the Welsh Government's website.

Link to the consultation documentation: <https://www.gov.wales/structure-school-year>

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# 1 Summary

## What are the main issues?

The Consultation on the School Year and engagement exercise stems from Welsh Government's Programme for Government and Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru pledge to explore changes to the school year calendar and, separately, the school day, as well as wider education reforms.

A pattern of structuring the school calendar has emerged over the last 150 years. However, because the school calendar is not set out in legislation, term dates are not always the same across the UK or across Wales. The law states that local authorities and school governing bodies must work together to try to keep term dates as consistent as possible, but there are small local differences.

The school year in Wales begins in September and ends in July. Typically, the current school calendar has a longer autumn term compared with shorter spring and summer terms. There is no stipulated way of distributing the 13 weeks of school breaks. The current school calendar typically has a one-week break dividing each term into half-terms (referred to as the "half-term break"), a 2-week break at the end of the autumn and spring terms (that currently coincide with Christmas and Easter, respectively) and roughly a 6-week break at the end of the summer term. The length of each term and associated half-terms is determined by the placement of public holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. The variability of public holiday dates, for example, Easter Sunday means that terms vary in length.

## Where are we now?

Over recent years there have been many changes and improvements to education in Wales including a new curriculum, changes to professional learning, and new ways of supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN). However, terms, and holidays has not changed. The Welsh Government is considering changing the structure of the school calendar for 4 reasons:

1. To better support the needs of disadvantaged learners and their families.
2. To better support the well-being of learners and teachers and reduce fatigue.
3. To better support learning and teaching.
4. To better support modern patterns of living and working.

## The evidence for change

Calls for a Commission for "re-imagining schooling in Wales" date back to the 2018 report on Conditions for School Teachers in Wales.<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government's 2021 Evidence Review<sup>2</sup> examined the existing evidence on impacts of reforming the school year. Beaufort Research<sup>3</sup> conducted field research in Wales to examine perceptions and found high levels of openness towards reform overall. Miller Research were commissioned to conduct a qualitative study (2023) to better understand the effects of the current school calendar on learners, their parents, and education staff, found that learners from socially and

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<sup>1</sup> [Written Statement: Re-imagine Schooling Expert Panel](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Effects of changes to the school year GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Exploring reform of the school year Beaufort Research report: attitudes towards school year reform in Wales GOV.WALES](#)

economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with ALN were perceived as most negatively impacted by the current school calendar.<sup>4</sup>

## The proposals

- **Option 1:** The existing school calendar (Status Quo). A one-week break in October, two-week Christmas break, one-week break in February, two-week break for Easter, one-week break in May and a six-week summer break.
- **Option 2:** A new school calendar (“New Option”) from 2025 to 2026. A two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from Easter, and a five-week summer break to be introduced from the 2025 to 2026 school year. The February, Christmas and May breaks would not change in this option.
- **Option 3:** A New School Calendar (“New Option Plus”) rolled out in two phases.
  - Phase 1 implemented from the 2025 to 2026 school year and would be the same as Option 2.
  - Phase 2 additional changes including a two-week May break and a four-week summer break. Further changes could also include AS/A level and GCSE results days held in the same week.
  - February and Christmas breaks would not change in either phase of this option.
- The existing provision of 190 days/380 sessions (38 weeks) of learning and the existing number of staff training (INSET) days per school year as well as all public holidays will remain within any changes proposed.
- Example term dates for the 2025 to 2026 school year, under Option 2 and Option 3 Phase 1 were outlined in the consultation document.<sup>5</sup>

## Findings

It is difficult to be certain which of the 3 options proposed in the consultation were felt to be the most, or least effective as a result of the very mixed, and sometimes contradictory, feedback to the consultation. More than half of the survey responses agreed that the school calendar could be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing, and modern living, whilst more than half (albeit slightly less) of the survey responses preferred Option 1 of maintaining the current school year. The qualitative research indicated a more complex picture with parents, school governors and youth workers broadly in favour of change on the one hand, and tourism stakeholders, the education workforce and education unions in opposition to change on the other. The expected impacts of any changes are varied, often stakeholder dependent, and frequently not focused on academic achievement, attainment, and progression. There was little consensus in the views and assumptions of stakeholders, clearly represented by the near 50/50 split on several questions.

The methodology can be found in Annex 4.2 and the consultation questions are included in Annex 4.3.

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<sup>4</sup> [Reform of the school year: perceptions and experiences of the current school calendar GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Reform of the school year consultation document GOV.WALES](#)

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The Welsh Government commissioned Miller Research in August 2023 to undertake research and analysis to support the Consultation on the School Year.

The consultation ran between 21 November 2023 and 12 February 2024. The consultation and engagement activities sought to answer the following research questions:

- Could the school year calendar be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing and modern living?
- What impacts do stakeholders anticipate the proposed alternate school year structures would have on them, in the short and the longer term?
- Which specific changes, if any, would be most effective in achieving a balance between the different needs and concerns of stakeholders?
- Which implementation options for any changes to school year structure, would be most and least effective and favourable? Why?

The consultation document and response form was also produced as an Easy Read version. Alongside the consultation documents, targeted engagement activities were carried out, including focus groups with learners, teaching professionals, parents/carers, local authority representatives, school governing bodies, early years professionals and representatives of the early years, childcare and play sector, hospitality and tourism organisations and education workforce unions. Interviews were also held with representatives from faith organisations, Transport for Wales and other stakeholders including the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), Qualifications Wales and Estyn. A self-completion toolkit based upon the Easy Read questions was developed for schools.

This report presents the findings from all elements of the stakeholder engagement and consultation. This includes 16,328 unique responses submitted through the formal consultation form and 68 responses to the Easy Read version, evidence captured from the 25 priority focus groups and 10 interviews with the stakeholder groups.

## 1.2 Policy Background

The consultation and engagement exercise stems from the commitment in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government and Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru to explore changes to the school year calendar and, separately, the school day, as well as wider education reforms.<sup>6</sup>

Welsh Government's programme of education reform is designed to improve the quality of education and increase parent and community involvement. The Welsh Government has stated it wants to consider whether or not the way the school calendar is structured could be changed in ways that have the potential to mitigate the impacts of disadvantage, reduce educational inequalities, support learner and staff wellbeing and ensure the calendar is in line with contemporary patterns of family life and employment.

The evidenced research on the relationship between learner attainment and economic circumstances is widespread, underscoring the need to carefully consider economically disadvantaged learners in this consultation and any subsequent calendar reforms. The attainment gap for the poorest learners as measured by GCSE outcomes has been identified as particularly significant, with only 26% of Welsh learners eligible for FSM achieving 5 good GCSEs, compared to 38% in England. As early as 2014, Estyn highlighted

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<sup>6</sup> [Programme for government | GOV.WALES](#)  
[The Co-operation Agreement 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

the impact of failures to plan strategically to raise the performance and target specific support for disadvantaged learners and evaluate the impact of strategies to improve disadvantaged learners' achievement and wellbeing<sup>7</sup>. The Senedd's Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households argued that policies aimed at 'generally improving attainment levels' would result in a 'rising tide raises all ships effect' but that there is a need for policies 'specifically targeted at raising the attainment of learners from low-income families'<sup>8</sup>.

Calls for a Commission for "re-imagining schooling in Wales" date back to the 2018 report on Conditions for School Teachers in Wales, although this was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Welsh Government's 2021 Evidence Review examined secondary data with hopes of providing a more conclusive view of options and projected benefits for school year reform, but was unable to draw clear conclusions, because evidence in relation to changing the school year was 'mixed and inconclusive'.<sup>10</sup>

Beaufort Research was subsequently commissioned to examine perceptions and attitudes to reform through qualitative and quantitative research with stakeholders.<sup>11</sup> The research tested attitudes towards alternative models and found that whilst most participants based their imagining of reform on the current school calendar (status quo) with minor changes there were high levels of openness towards the topic overall. It was recommended that further 'hard evidence' would be required to demonstrate potential impacts.

Crucially, the study also recommended those from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds and parents and carers of children with ALN are engaged further to gain a deeper understanding of their needs. Miller Research was commissioned in 2023 to conduct this deeper engagement, which found that learners from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with ALN were perceived as most highly impacted by the current school calendar.<sup>12</sup> This 2024 consultation was an opportunity to consider these groups and the way in which school year reform may impact their progress and wellbeing.

### **1.2.1 Background to the Consultation**

The suite of research activity set out above, and extensive policy engagement work, led to the development of a range of proposed modifications to the school year. The Welsh Government committed to test these proposals and the timing of any potential changes to the school year structure via a full, statutory 12-week public consultation exercise.

The public consultation started on 21 November 2023, supported by a communications campaign led by Welsh Government, and closed on 12 February 2024.

The consultation sought views on questions relating to the principle of modifying the school year, options for implementing any modification of the school year including some changes being proposed for the 2025 / 2026 academic year, and suggested term dates for that year corresponding to the proposed reforms.

The 3 options proposed as part of the consultation were as follows:

Figure 1.1.1 outlines Option 1, referred to as the status quo, which is the current structure of the school year. The current structure consists of a one-week break in October, two-week

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<sup>7</sup> [Pupil Deprivation Report Estyn](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Written Statement: Re-imagine Schooling Expert Panel](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Effects of changes to the school year GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Exploring reform of the school year Beaufort Research report: attitudes towards school year reform in Wales GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Reform of the school year: perceptions and experiences of the current school calendar GOV.WALES](#)

Christmas break, one-week break in February, two-week break for Easter, one-week break in May and a six-week summer break.

**Figure 1.1.1 – Option 1 Status Quo**

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

Figure 1.1.2 outlines Option 2. In this option, a school calendar with a two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from Easter, and a five-week summer break to be introduced from the 2025 to 2026 school year was proposed. The February, Christmas and May breaks would not change in this option.

**Figure 1.1.2 Option 2 – New Option from 2025**

| Option 2 (from 2025/26) | Autumn Term |     |     |     | End of Term 1 | Spring Term |     |     | End of Term 2 | Summer Term |     |     |  | End of Term 3 |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|--|---------------|
| Breaks                  |             | 2   |     |     | 2             |             | 1   |     | 2             |             | 1   |     |  | 5             |
|                         | Sep         | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan           | Feb         | Mar | Apr | May           | Jun         | Jul | Aug |  |               |

Figure 1.1.3 outlines Option 3 Phase 1 and Phase 2. Option 3 Phase 1 would be implemented from the 2025 to 2026 school year and would be the same as Option 2. In this phase, the Welsh Government proposed a school calendar with a two-week October break, the flexibility to de-couple the spring (“Easter”) break from Easter public holiday, and a five-week summer break. In addition to the changes in Phase 1, the Welsh Government proposed additional changes to the school calendar following implementation of Phase 1 changes. These additional changes, Phase 3 Option 2 included a two-week May break and a four-week summer break. Further changes could also have included AS/A level and GCSE results days held in the same week.

**Figure 1.1.3 Option 3 – New Option Plus**

| Option 3 Phase 1 (from 2025/26) | Autumn Term |     |     |     | End of Term 1 | Spring Term |     |     | End of Term 2 | Summer Term |     |     |  | End of Term 3 |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|--|---------------|
| Breaks                          |             | 2   |     |     | 2             |             | 1   |     | 2             |             | 1   |     |  | 5             |
|                                 | Sep         | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan           | Feb         | Mar | Apr | May           | Jun         | Jul | Aug |  |               |

| Option 3 Phase 2 (from a later date) | Autumn Term |     |     |     | End of Term 1 | Spring Term |     |     | End of Term 2 | Summer Term |     |     |  | End of Term 3 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|---------------|-------------|-----|-----|--|---------------|
| Breaks                               |             | 2   |     |     | 2             |             | 1   |     | 2             |             | 2   |     |  | 4             |
|                                      | Sep         | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan           | Feb         | Mar | Apr | May           | Jun         | Jul | Aug |  |               |

This report presents the findings from all elements of the consultation and engagement process. This includes the 16,328 unique responses submitted to the consultation and 68 Easy Read responses, evidence captured from the focus groups and interviews. Responses through the consultation form and the qualitative engagement have been independently analysed by Miller Research and summarised in this report.

### **1.2.2 Report Structure**

This report is structured around the different stages of the stakeholder engagement and consultation analysis process as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the findings under response type:
  - Consultation form responses
  - Easy Read consultation responses
  - Social Media responses
  - Focus Groups
  - Interviews
  - Additional correspondence – emails and letters
- Section 3 provides conclusions on the overall process.
- The Annex contains the research materials:
  - The method used for the research
  - Consultation Questions
  - Easy Read Questions
  - Focus Group Questions
  - Interview Questions

## 2 Findings

### 2.1 Consultation survey

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

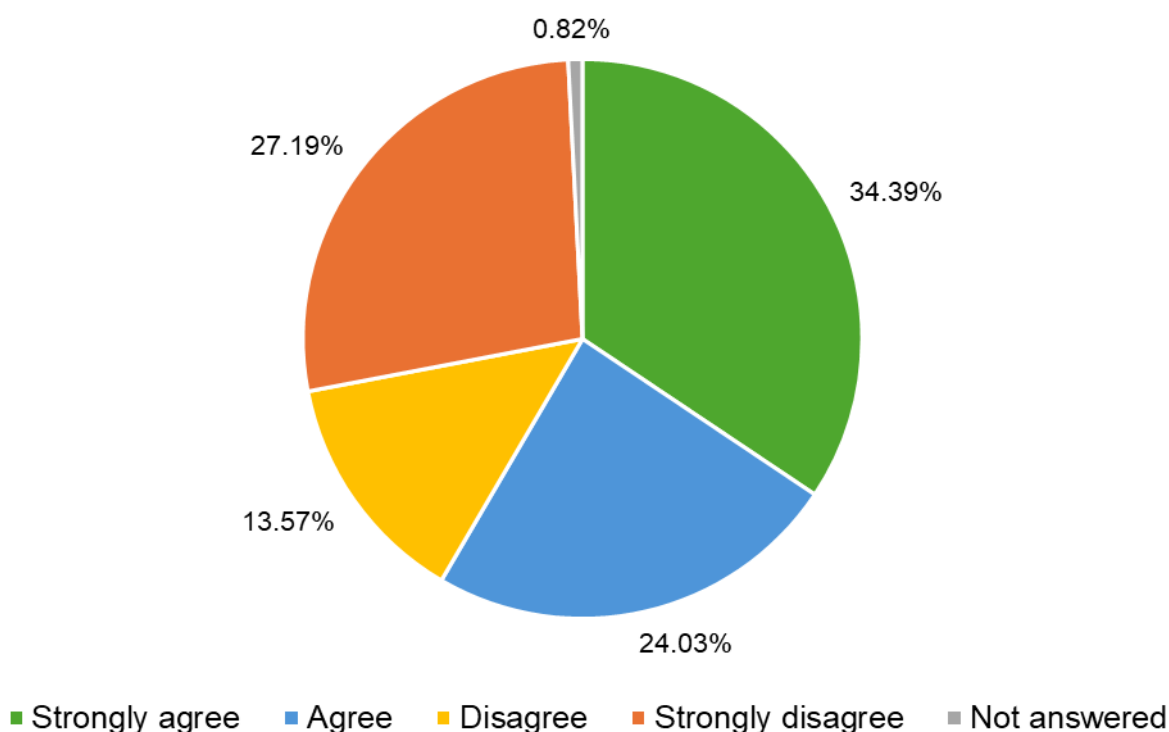
More than half (58.42%) either agreed (24.03%) or strongly agreed (34.39%) that the school year could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today. Strongly disagree received 27.19% and disagree received 13.57% of responses for a combined 40.76% of responses.

**Table 2.1.1 Consultation question 1 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 5616  | 34.39    |
| Agree             | 3923  | 24.03    |
| Disagree          | 2216  | 13.57    |
| Strongly disagree | 4439  | 27.19    |
| Not answered      | 134   | 0.82     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.1 Consultation question 1 responses**

Q1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today?



**2.1.2 Question 2 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio–economically disadvantaged learners?**

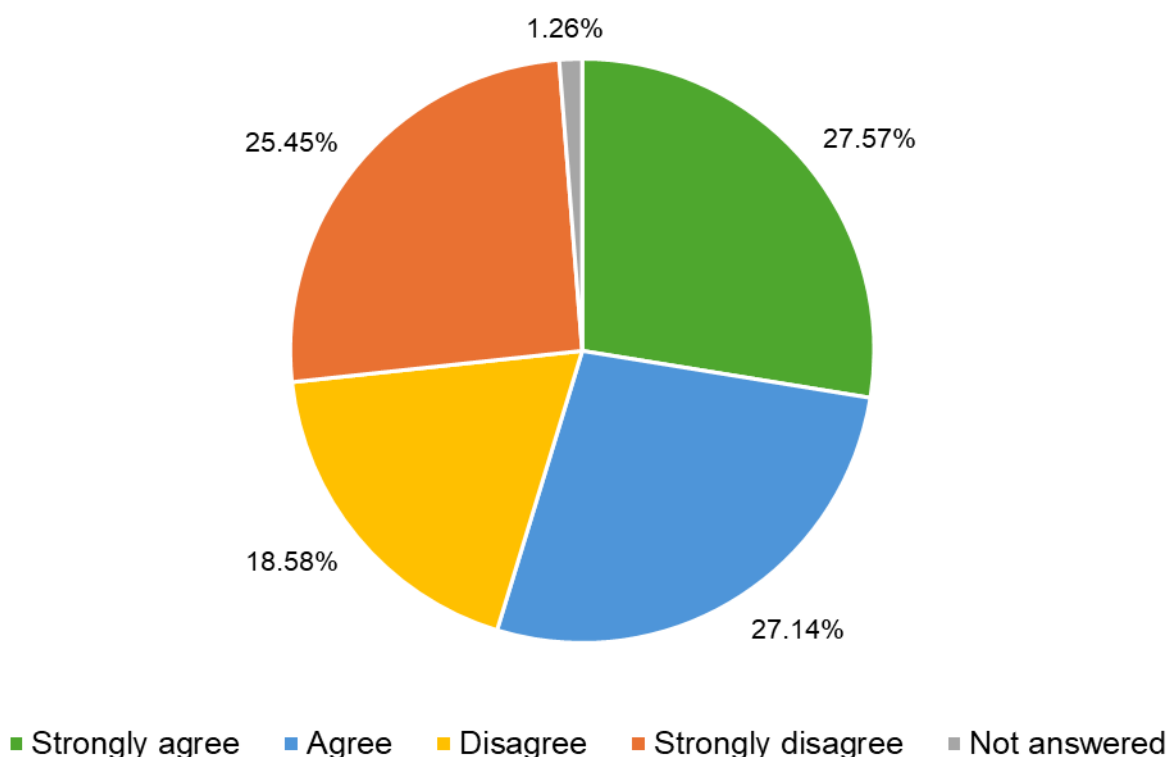
Over half (54.72) either agreed (27.14%) or strongly agreed (27.57%) that the school year could be better designed to support socio–economically disadvantaged learners. Strongly disagree received 25.45% and disagree received 18.58% of responses for a combined 44.02% of responses.

**Table 2.1.2 Consultation question 2 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 4502  | 27.57    |
| Agree             | 4432  | 27.14    |
| Disagree          | 3033  | 18.58    |
| Strongly disagree | 4155  | 25.45    |
| Not answered      | 206   | 1.26     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.2 Consultation question 2 responses**

Q2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners?





**2.1.3 Question 3 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with additional learning needs (ALN)?**

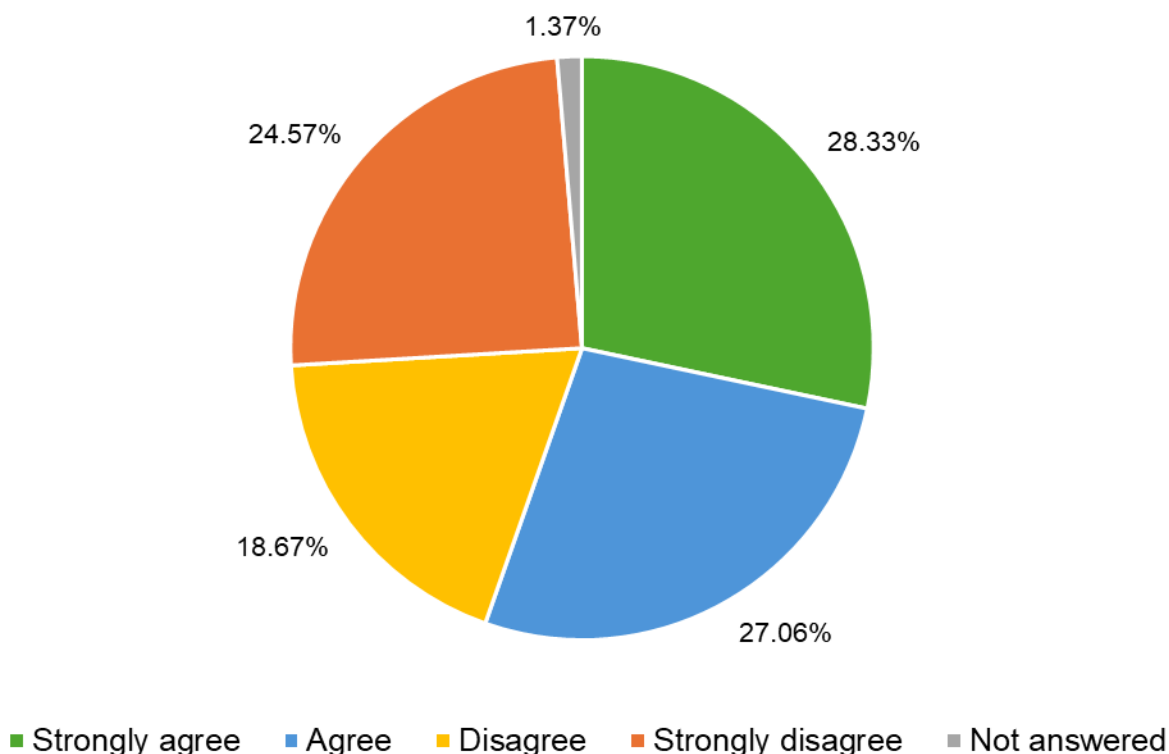
Over half of responses (55.39%) either agreed (27.06%) or strongly agreed (28.33%) that the school year could be better designed to support learners with ALN. Strongly disagree received 24.57% and disagree received 18.67% of responses for a combined 44.02% of responses.

**Table 2.1.3 Consultation question 3 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 4625  | 28.33    |
| Agree             | 4419  | 27.06    |
| Disagree          | 3048  | 18.67    |
| Strongly disagree | 4012  | 24.57    |
| Not answered      | 224   | 1.37     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.3 Consultation question 3 responses**

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with additional learning needs (ALN)?



**2.1.4 Question 4 – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher or learner wellbeing and ease fatigue?**

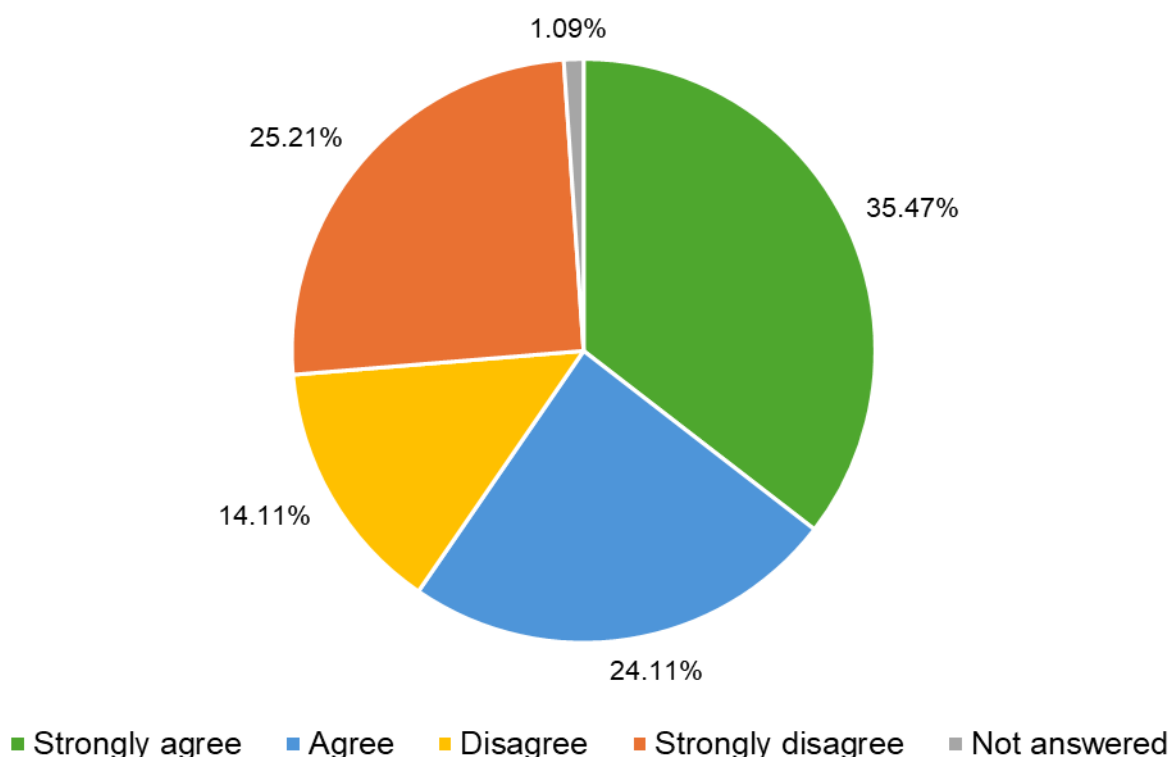
More than half of responses (59.58) either agreed (24.11%) or strongly agreed (35.47%) that the school year could be better designed to support teacher or learner wellbeing and ease fatigue. Strongly disagree received 25.21% and disagree received 14.11% of responses for a combined 39.33% of responses.

**Table 2.1.4 Consultation question 4 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 5792  | 35.47    |
| Agree             | 3937  | 24.11    |
| Disagree          | 2304  | 14.11    |
| Strongly disagree | 4117  | 25.21    |
| Not answered      | 178   | 1.09     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.4 Consultation question 4 responses**

Q4 To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher or learner wellbeing and ease fatigue?



**2.1.5 Question 5 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break) dividing the longest term (autumn)?**

Around half of respondents (50.7) agreed (17.74%) or strongly agreed (32.96%) with an additional break week in the autumn term taken from the summer break. Strongly disagree received the single largest share of responses (37.89%) and combined with disagree (10.66%), 48.54% of responses opposed an additional break week in the autumn term taken from the summer break.

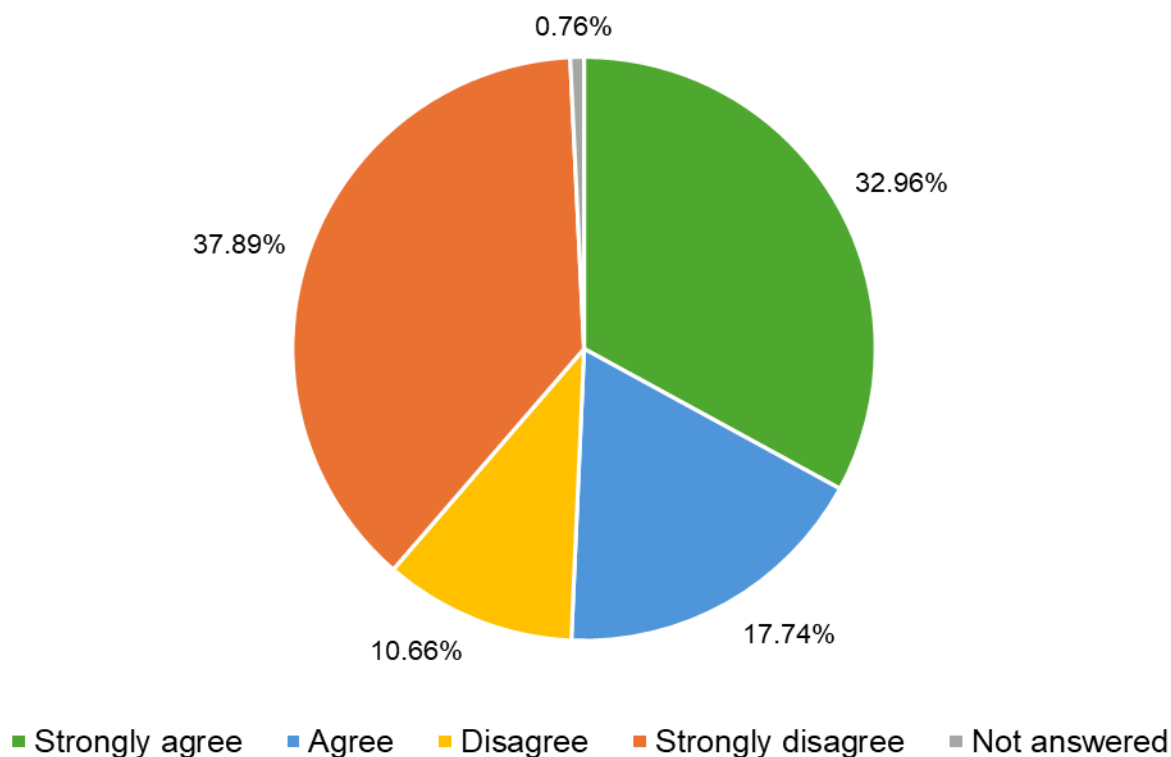
Question 5 received the most responses of any in the survey.

**Table 2.1.5 Consultation question 5 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 5381  | 32.96    |
| Agree             | 2897  | 17.74    |
| Disagree          | 1740  | 10.66    |
| Strongly disagree | 6186  | 37.89    |
| Not answered      | 124   | 0.76     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.5 Consultation question 5 responses**

Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break) dividing the longest term (autumn)?



**2.1.6 Question 6 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de–couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?**

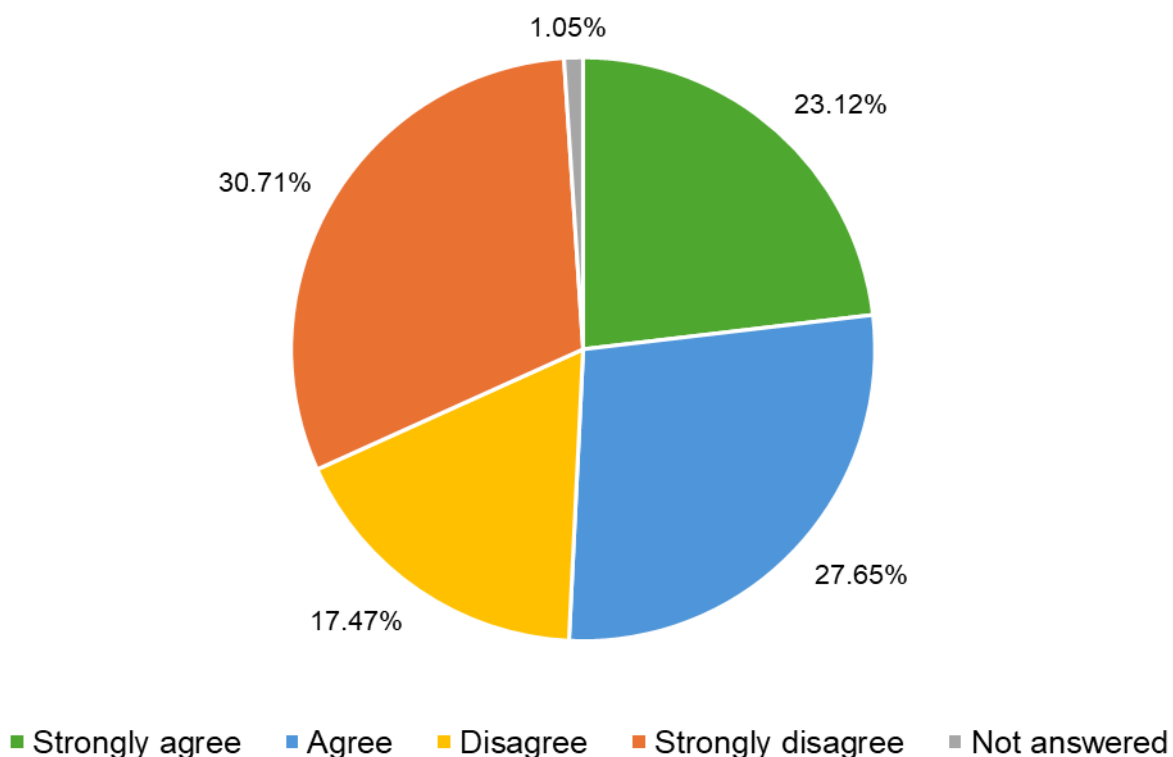
Around half (50.77%) either agreed (27.65%) or strongly agreed (23.12%) with having the flexibility to de–couple the spring break from the Easter public holiday. A combined 48.18% either disagreed (17.47%) or strongly disagreed (30.71%).

**Table 2.1.6 Consultation question 6 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 3775  | 23.12    |
| Agree             | 4515  | 27.65    |
| Disagree          | 2853  | 17.47    |
| Strongly disagree | 5014  | 30.71    |
| Not answered      | 171   | 1.05     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.6 Consultation question 6 responses**

Q6 To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de–couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?



**2.1.7 Question 7 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break), to even term lengths?**

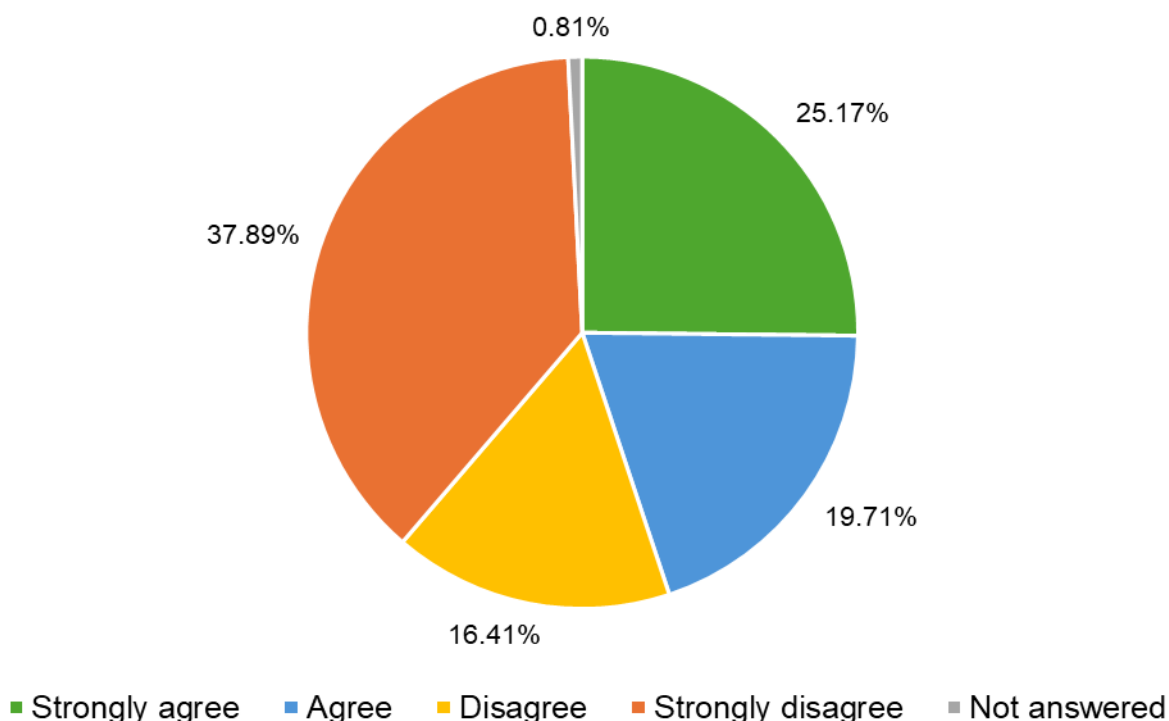
Over half (54.3%) opposed an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break) to even up term lengths. Strongly disagree received the highest response at 37.89% and disagree received 16.41%. A combined 44.89% either agreed (19.71%) or strongly agreed (25.17%).

**Table 2.1.7 Consultation question 7 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 4110  | 25.17    |
| Agree             | 3219  | 19.71    |
| Disagree          | 2680  | 16.41    |
| Strongly disagree | 6186  | 37.89    |
| Not answered      | 133   | 0.81     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.7 Consultation question 7 responses**

Q7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break) to even up term lengths?



**2.1.8 Question 8 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?**

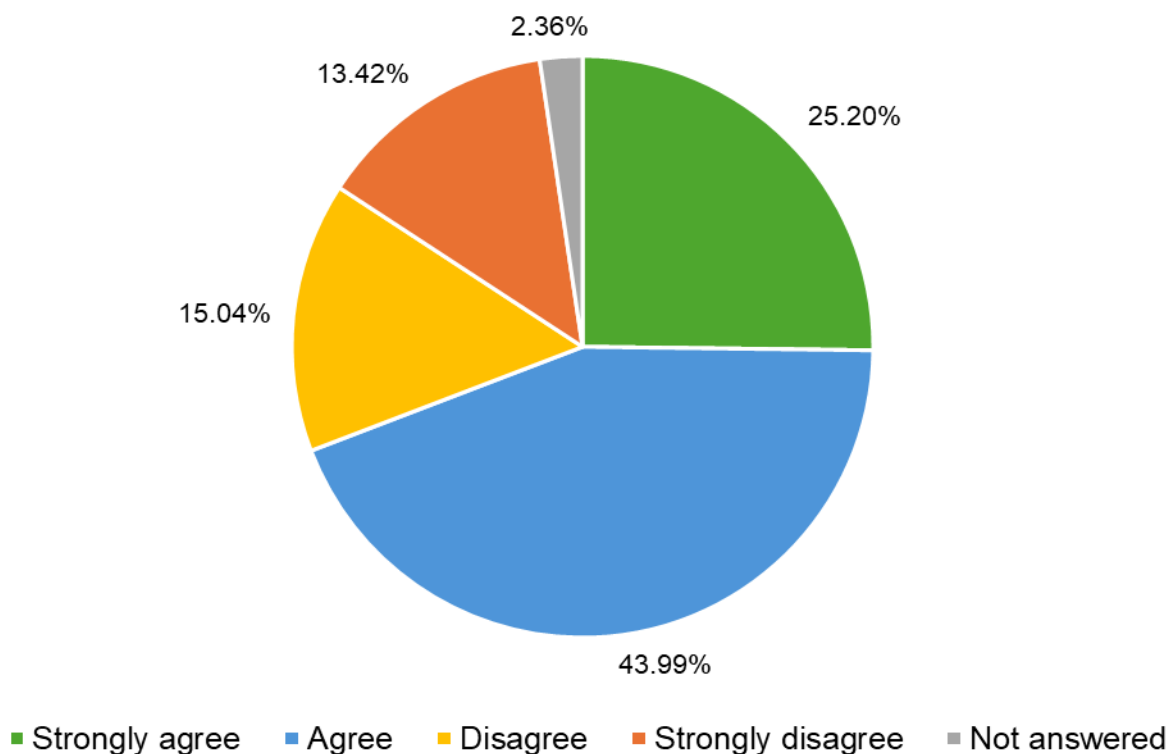
A majority of responses (69.18%) were in favour of holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week. Agree received 43.99% and strongly agree received 25.2% of responses. A total of 28.45% either disagreed (15.04%) or strongly disagreed (13.42%).

**Table 2.1.8 Consultation question 8 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 4114  | 25.20    |
| Agree             | 7182  | 43.99    |
| Disagree          | 2455  | 15.04    |
| Strongly disagree | 2191  | 13.42    |
| Not answered      | 386   | 2.36     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.8 Consultation question 8 responses**

Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?



### 2.1.9 Question 9 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: maintaining the existing school calendar?

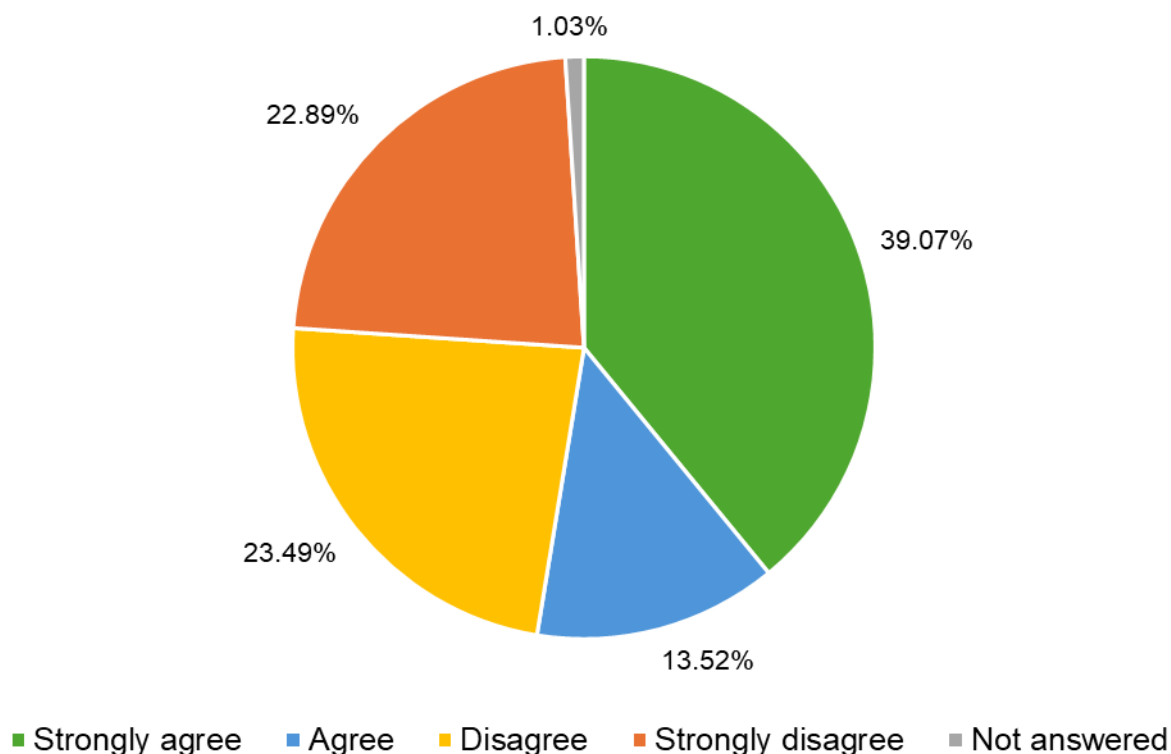
More than half (52.58%) agreed (13.52%) or strongly agreed (39.07%) with Option 1: maintaining the existing school calendar. Of those not in favour of Option 1 (46.39%), 23.49% disagreed and 22.89% strongly disagreed.

**Table 2.1.9 Consultation question 9 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 6379  | 39.07    |
| Agree             | 2207  | 13.52    |
| Disagree          | 3836  | 23.49    |
| Strongly disagree | 3738  | 22.89    |
| Not answered      | 168   | 1.03     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.9 Consultation question 9 responses**

Q9 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: maintaining the existing school calendar?



**2.1.10 Question 10 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a two–week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls) and a 5–week summer break?**

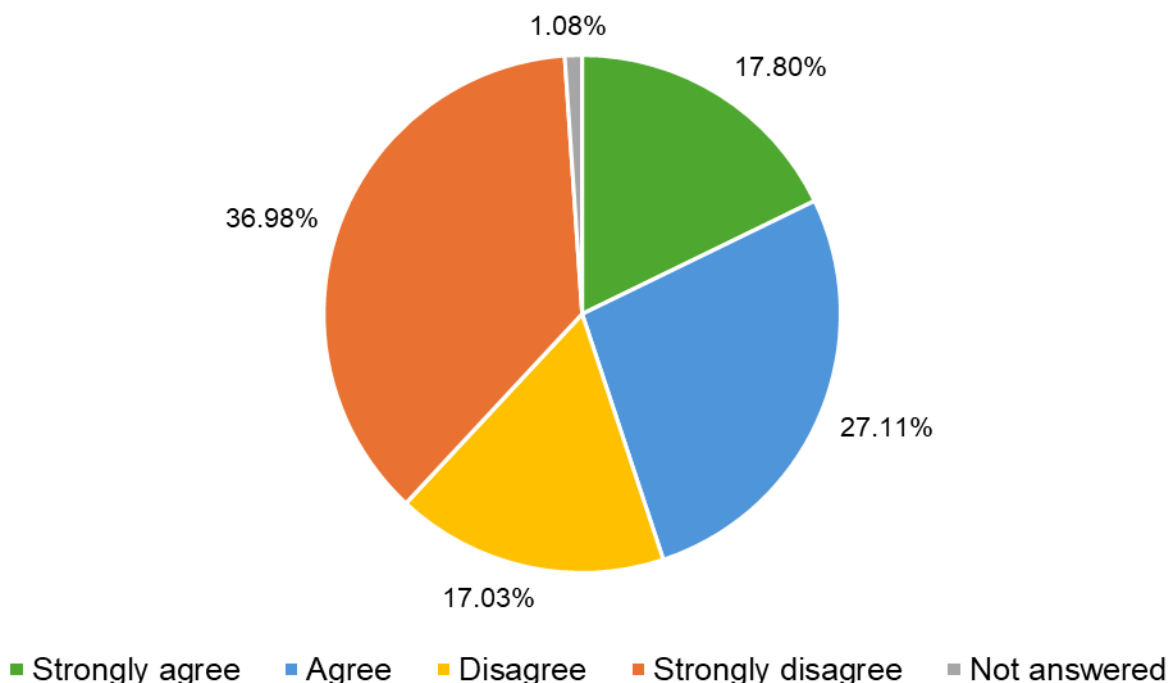
Over half (54.01%) either disagreed (17.03%) or strongly disagreed (36.98%) with Option 2: a school calendar with a two–week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls) and a 5–week summer break. A combined 44.92% either agreed (27.11%) or strongly agreed (17.8%) with Option 2.

**Table 2.1.10 Consultation question 10 responses**

| <b>Response</b>   | <b>Count</b> | <b>Per cent</b> |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Strongly agree    | 2907         | 17.80           |
| Agree             | 4427         | 27.11           |
| Disagree          | 2780         | 17.03           |
| Strongly disagree | 6038         | 36.98           |
| Not answered      | 176          | 1.08            |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>16328</b> | <b>100.00</b>   |

**Figure 2.1.10 Consultation question 10 responses**

Q10 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a 2-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls) and a 5-week summer break?





**2.1.11 Question 11 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a two-week May break and a 4-week summer break?**

A majority of responses (62.54%) either disagreed (13.39%) or strongly disagreed (49.15%) with Option 3: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a two-week May break and a 4-week summer break. A combined 36.64% either agreed (12.99%) or strongly agreed (23.65%) with Option 3.

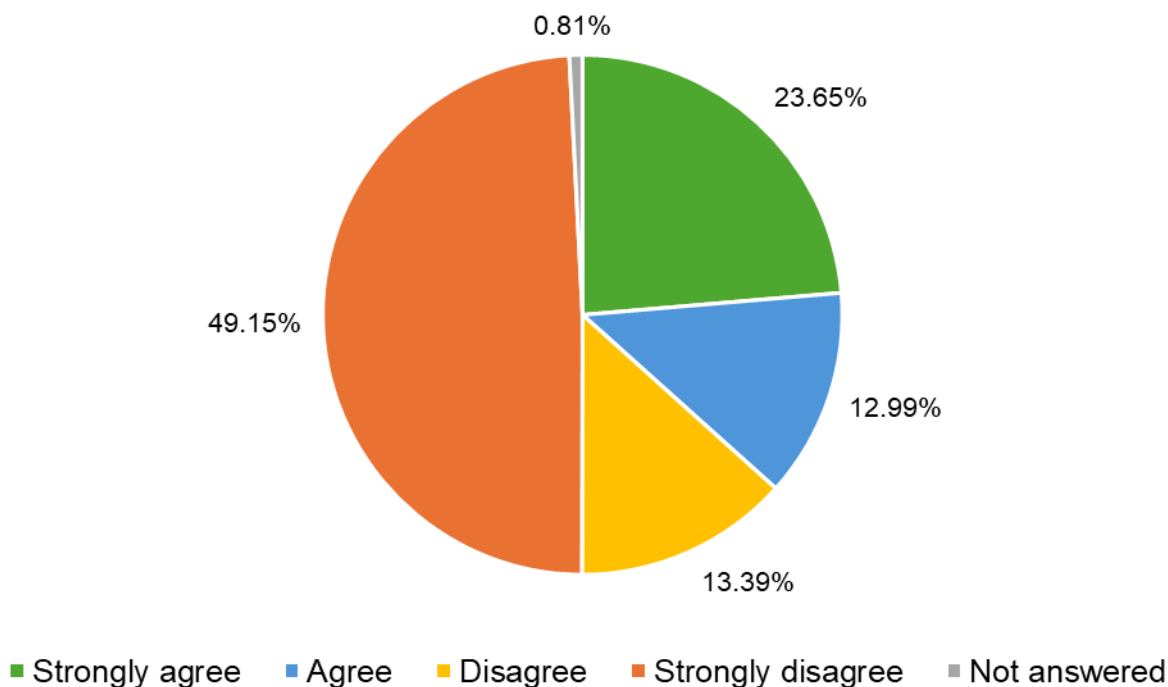
The strongly disagree option for question 11 received the highest response rate of all questions in the survey at 8025.

**Table 2.1.11 Consultation question 11 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 3862  | 23.65    |
| Agree             | 2121  | 12.99    |
| Disagree          | 2187  | 13.39    |
| Strongly disagree | 8025  | 49.15    |
| Not answered      | 133   | 0.81     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.11 Consultation question 11 responses**

Q11 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a 2-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a 2-week May break and a 4-week summer break?



**2.1.12 Question 12 – For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?**

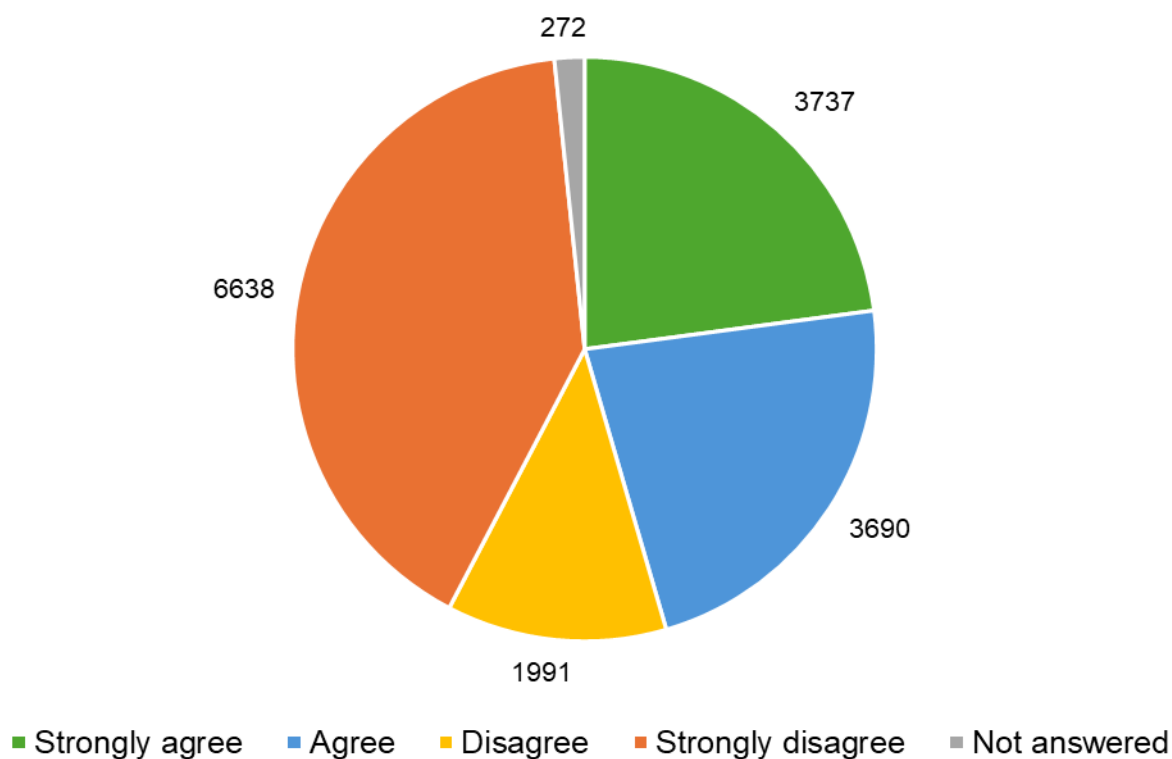
Over half (52.85%) either disagreed (12.19%) or strongly disagreed (40.65%) with the proposed term dates for 2025 to 2026 as set out for Option 2 and 3. Agree received 22.6% of responses and strongly agree received 22.89% of responses for a combined total of 45.49% who agreed with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3.

**Table 2.1.12 Consultation question 12 responses**

| Response          | Count | Per cent |
|-------------------|-------|----------|
| Strongly agree    | 3737  | 22.89    |
| Agree             | 3690  | 22.60    |
| Disagree          | 1991  | 12.19    |
| Strongly disagree | 6638  | 40.65    |
| Not answered      | 272   | 1.67     |
| Total             | 16328 | 100.00   |

**Figure 2.1.12 Consultation question 12 responses**

Q12 For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?



### 2.1.13 Effects on the Welsh language

As with all Welsh Government consultations, standard questions were included on the Welsh language. Question 13 and 14 asked:

- **Question 13 – What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English. Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects? Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?**
- **Question 14 – In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:**
  - **have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or**
  - **mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?**

Question 13 received 7210 responses and question 14 received 5415 responses.

Several key themes emerged in the comments for both questions, with the most frequent being that changes to the school year would either have no effect on Welsh language or that the school year structure has no relevance to the Welsh language. No connection was made, or believed to exist, between the Welsh language generally or the Welsh language ability of learners and the structure of the school year.

Other themes pointed to potential positive effects of changes to the school calendar for the Welsh language. A link was made in the responses between shorter summer breaks and greater retention of Welsh language skills by learners compared to the current six-week break. Learners who do not speak Welsh at home and attend Welsh medium schools were highlighted as potentially benefiting from this. Factors that were said to influence this, contributed to by changes to the school calendar, were lessened learning loss due to the shortened summer break, more regular exposure to the Welsh language, and as homework is set over two-week breaks there is less risk of learning loss by extending breaks from one week long, compared to the summer break where school work is not set.

The importance of opportunities to access the Welsh language outside of school was mentioned with no positive or negative context given. A lack of Welsh language support and provision during the summer was highlighted.

Cultural events were understood to have an important role for the Welsh language and could be impacted by proposed changes to the school year. A longer break in May (as in Option 3) could be beneficial to the Urdd Eisteddfod as longer away from school may encourage higher attendance. It could also support the wellbeing of staff and learners in Welsh medium schools as according to comments, many give up their time to compete at or support the Urdd Eisteddfod during the May break, reducing time for rest.

Themes on the negative impact of the proposals connected an increased number of longer breaks with being more disruptive to Welsh language skills in schools.

There was concern for potential negative impacts on cultural events that take place during the summer break that feature and promote the Welsh language. The National Eisteddfod could suffer as it would compete with other priorities for families during a shortened summer break. The Royal Welsh Show currently takes place outside of term time in Powys (and regularly outside of term time for other local authorities) and concerns were raised that proposed changes to the summer break would mean that this event occurs during term

time. Comments suggested that there would be a disproportionate effect on Welsh speaking communities for which these events are important calendar events.

Another consideration about the impact on the Welsh language related to the concern that were there changes to the school calendar, this could impact negatively on Welsh tourism, especially in areas with higher numbers of Welsh speakers.

#### **2.1.14 Other comments**

Question 15 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them. Question 15 received 5272 responses.

For those who did not support changes to the school calendar, themes included the wellbeing of learners and school staff, seasonal differences, and unintended consequences.

Responses stated that a summer break of six weeks is necessary or 'earned' for the wellbeing of school staff and learners. The proposed changes to the school year (in Option 2 and Option 3) would shorten this time and delay the start of the break when staff and learners are tired at the end of the summer term. The current structure was believed to provide time for learners to enjoy their childhood away from school and unwind after the academic year. Longer terms and breaks were said to help establish routines for learners which supports their wellbeing.

A six-week break was seen as vital to attract and retain the education workforce. Respondents explained that the summer break is the only time for a real holiday away from work as in their view, teachers regularly spend the other breaks throughout the year (i.e.: Christmas, Easter and half terms) working. Senior staff already routinely cut short their summer break because of their roles, as do secondary school staff because of the weeks of A Level and GCSE results.

Another theme that was considered to impact negatively on education workforce wellbeing was the view (presumably from those outside the sector) that schools are primarily a form of childcare service and therefore due consideration should be made on the implication of annual leave allocation from working parents. Childcare and education sectors are separate with their own challenges and professionals working in them.

Seasonal differences in the weather, comparing summer to autumn, were said to influence learner health and wellbeing, given that there are fewer opportunities for physical activity in the autumn compared to the summer due to the cooler weather and reduced daylight hours. There were concerns that an additional week in the autumn break would only increase screen time for learners as there is less opportunity to go outside. Greater negative impacts were expected for economically disadvantaged learners and their families with increased costs for (indoor) entertainment compared to the summer and additional spending on heating the home.

Concerns were raised about the unintended consequences of Wales having school breaks that differ from the rest of the UK. Different term dates to England would more heavily impact communities along the border with examples provided of families with children in different schools either side of the border, or parents who work in education in a different nation to their child's school. More widely, there were concerns that differing holiday dates to the rest of the UK may prevent learners from mixing with the rest of the UK's population. No mention of the existing difference in term dates in Scotland and Northern Ireland were made, so the inference is that references to the UK can be interpreted as England only. Term dates do already differ at times between Wales and England.

A theme brought up by some was that changes to the school year would negatively impact rural areas if term time were to clash with the Royal Welsh Show. Responses included

concerns that show attendance would be lower, negatively affecting the rural economy alongside an increased risk of poor school attendance during show times.

Some comments opposing change to the school calendar showed a belief the proposed changes would not have any effect and so were not needed. Others felt that there is still a lack of evidence supporting the need for change. Incorrect assertions were made that the consultation is not the first on the issue of reform of the school year and this time it was simply an exercise to try and produce a favourable result. Respondents may not have understood that, unlike the current exercise, the Beaufort Survey and qualitative research were not consultations about the options for reform of the school year.

For those who did support changes to the school calendar, themes that were mentioned included: support for more radical change, increased wellbeing, and cost implications for families.

More radical suggestions stated that the proposals did not go far enough to address wellbeing and the alignment with modern living. Suggestions included:

- altering the structure of the week to enable a 4–day week, reflecting that a Monday to Friday routine does not match the rest of society anymore
- placing an additional week break in the autumn term separate to the existing one to create three ‘half’ terms before Christmas
- breaks of three weeks at Christmas and Easter
- altering the length of the autumn term by beginning the break at Christmas a week earlier
- adopting the final position of Option 3 immediately without any lead–in time.

Seasonal weather patterns were also a theme in comments supporting change. More support was expressed for longer breaks in spring and summer instead of the autumn as well as requesting the summer break to start earlier than the end of July. This last point was connected to the view that the weather is better (warmer, drier, and with more daylight hours) before August and that with this arrangement the Royal Welsh Show would remain in the summer break.

Others stated that the current summer break is too long for learners with ALN. These learners were said to struggle with the disruption to routine at the end of the summer term and then again at the start of the autumn. Some reflected that more able and talented learners are often ignored when discussing impacts on learners.

The impact on costs for families were a factor. The proposed changes to the school calendar could potentially help to balance out the costs of childcare more evenly over the year as breaks from school are more evenly distributed. Thoughts on the effects of the price of family holidays was important for some, with the view that alterations to when school breaks are, and their length, may make it cheaper for families to go on holiday when terms do not align with England.

### **2.1.15 Demographics**

Question 16 asked respondents to select all options that apply to them from the following choices.

- Age 17 years and under
- Age 18 years and older
- Education workforce
- Tourism sector
- Childcare sector
- Full–time work (please specify)

- Part-time work (please specify)
- Parent or carer (the term 'parent' has been used as a shorthand to include mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, stepparents, 'kinship' parents, grandparents and guardians)
- Other (please specify)

These options were not exclusive. In several cases Other (please specify) was used to provide additional detail for the other options, such as how many hours are worked part-time, or the respondent's setting type or role in the education sector.

**Table 2.1.13 Demographic groups**

| <b>Response</b>                 | <b>Count</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Age 17 years and under          | 1009         | 6.18           |
| Age 18 years and older          | 6488         | 39.74          |
| Education workforce             | 7615         | 46.64          |
| Tourism sector                  | 538          | 3.29           |
| Childcare sector                | 705          | 4.32           |
| Full-time work (please specify) | 8134         | 49.82          |
| Part-time work (please specify) | 2277         | 13.95          |
| Parent or carer                 | 8251         | 50.53          |
| Other (please specify):         | 2524         | 15.46          |

Figures 2.1.13 to 2.1.24 contain charts outlining the breakdown of responses to each question by demographic response. Those who did not answer each question have been removed from this outline. A detailed breakdown of responses to each question can be found in Annex 4.1.

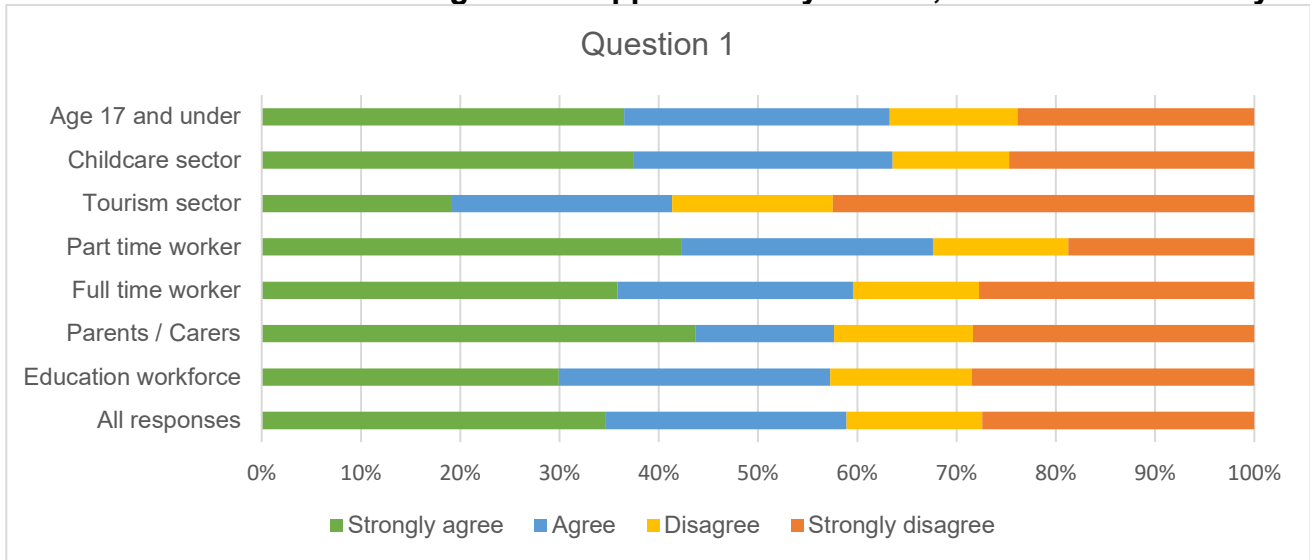
The majority of respondents from the tourism sector disagreed or strongly disagreed for all questions apart from questions 8 (exams results week) and 9 (support for Option 1, the status quo) where the majority agreed or strongly agreed alongside the overall trend. This put tourism at odds with every other response group for questions 1 to 5 and aligned with only age 17 and under for question 6.

All groups were in agreement for question 8 with agree/strongly agree receiving between 60.41% (tourism sector) and 72.51% (part-time workers). Full alignment was also seen for question 11 (support for Option 3) with the majority or over half opposed for all response groups.

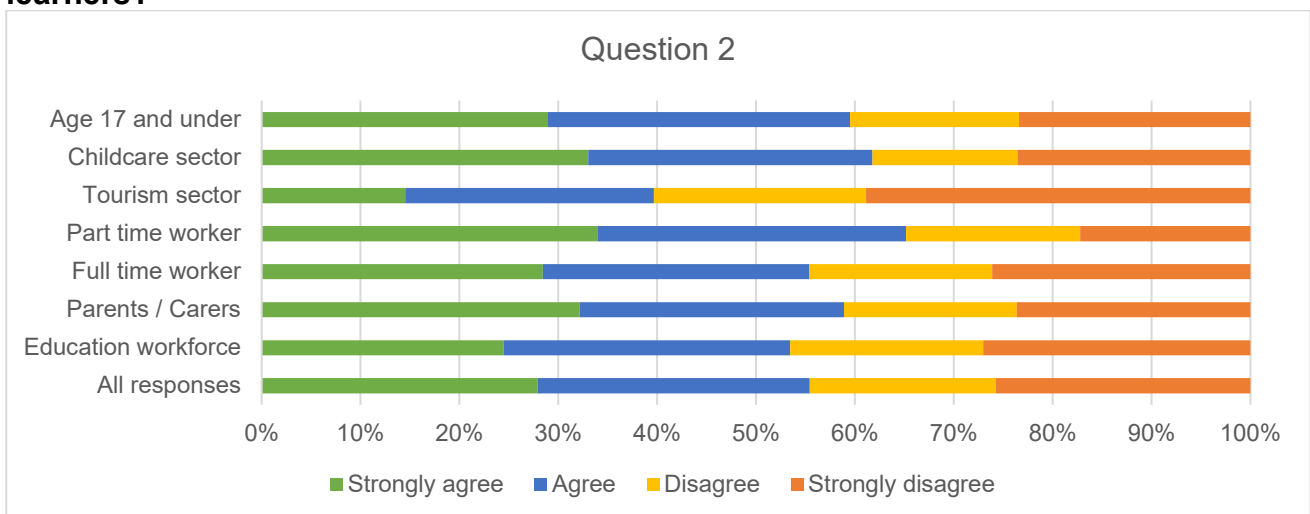
Parents/carers, part-time workers, and childcare sector responses were not aligned with the overall response for question 7 (additional May break) and agree/strongly agree compared to all responses disagree/strongly disagree. These three groups were also against the trend for question 9 (maintaining the status quo) and opposed Option 1.

Part-time workers were the only group to be in a majority to support Option 2 (question 10, two-week October break). They were joined by the childcare sector in support with more than half who agreed/strongly agreed with question 12 (proposed dates for 2025–2026) compared with other response groups who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

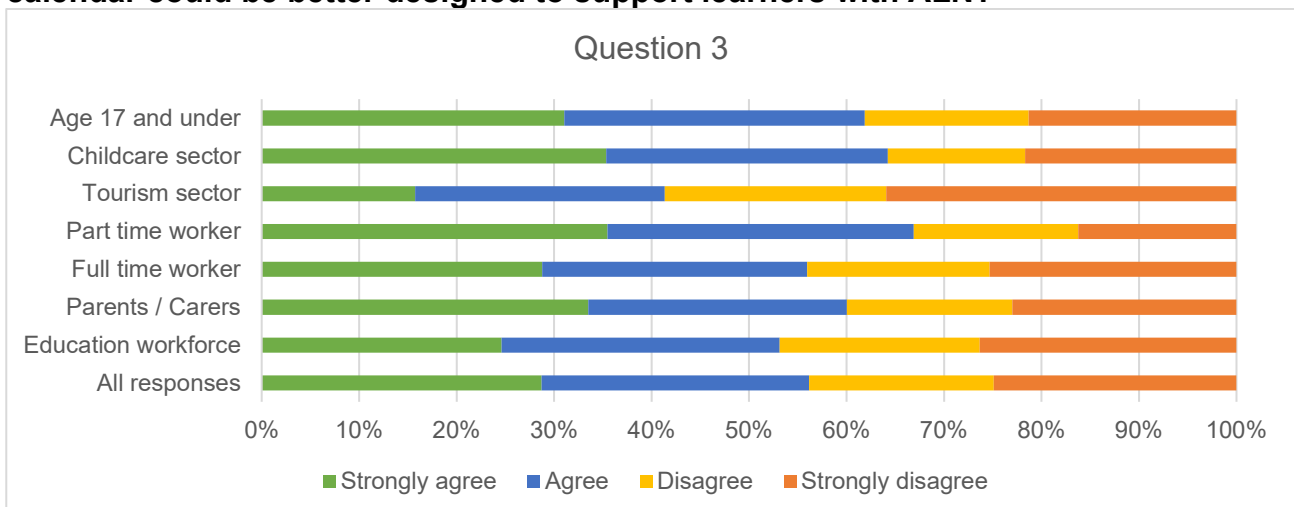
**Figure 2.1.13 – Question 1 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today?**



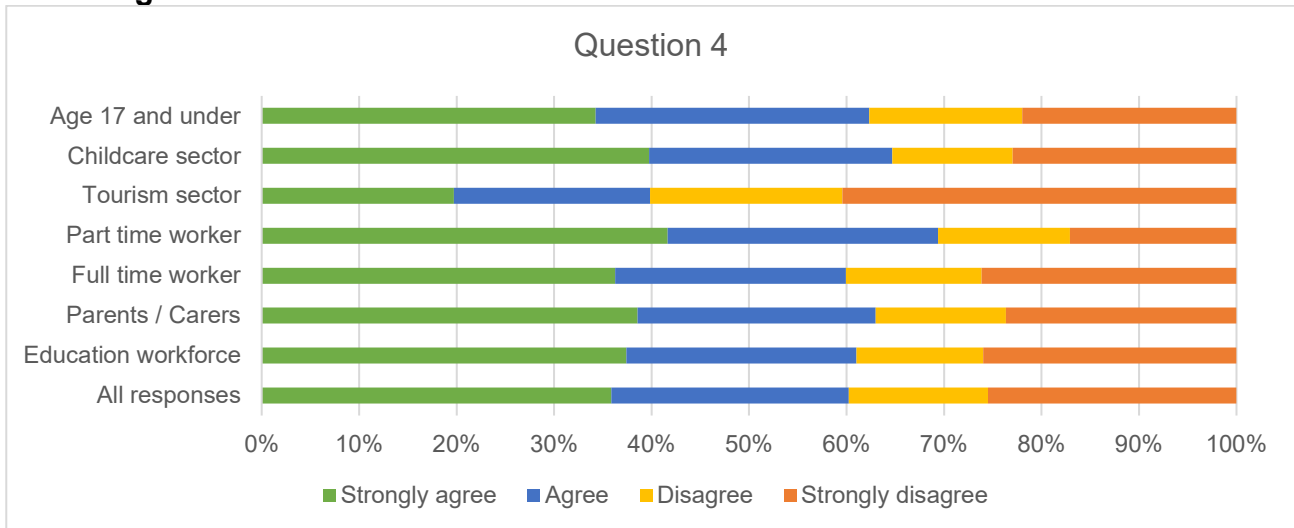
**Figure 2.1.14 – Question 2 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners?**



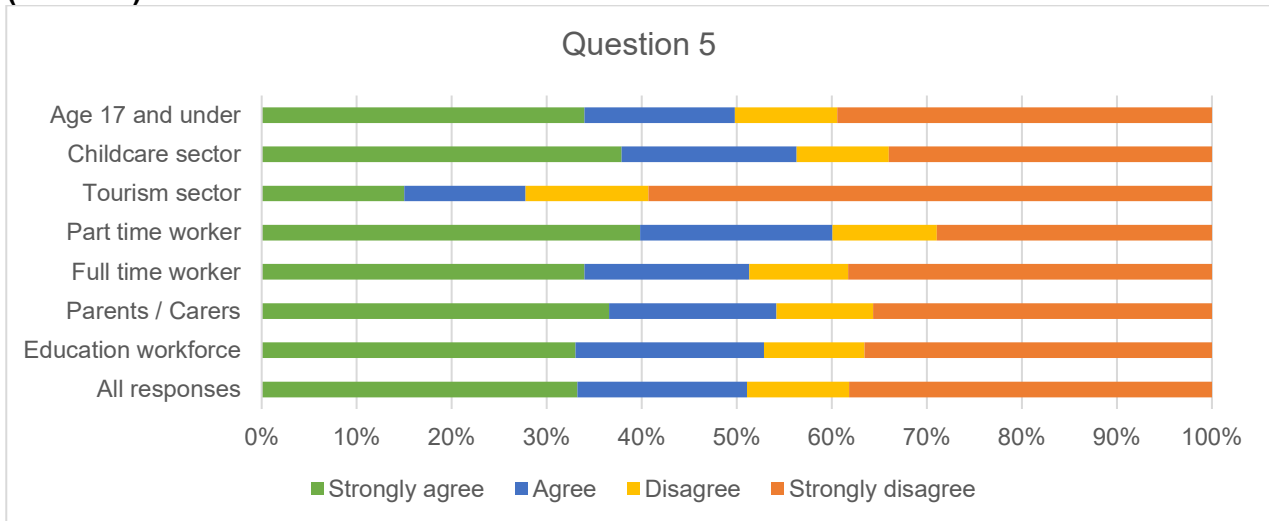
**Figure 2.1.15 – Question 3 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with ALN?**



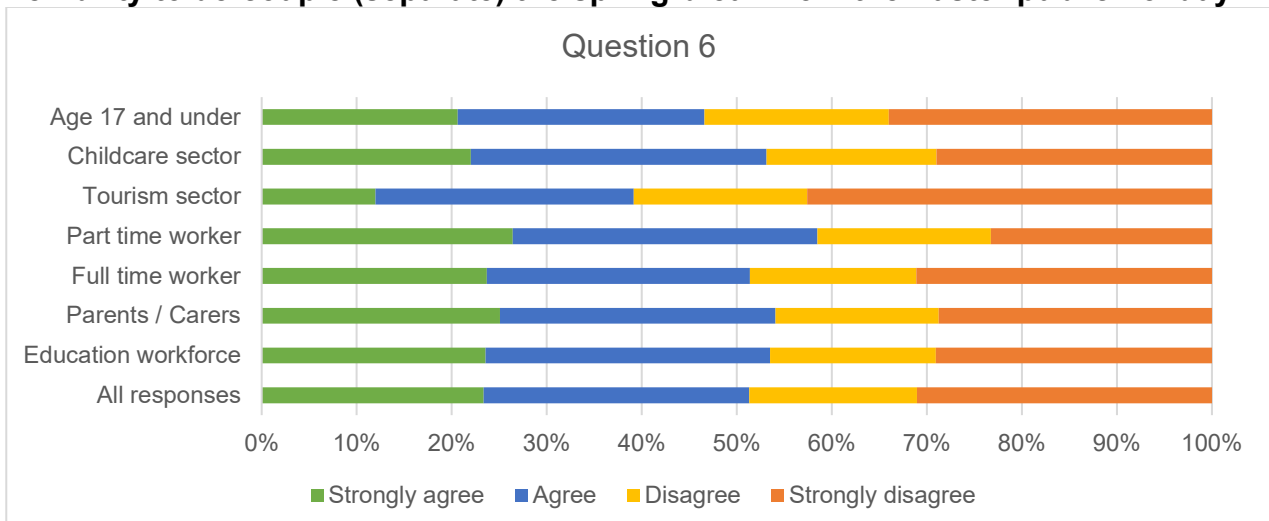
**Figure 2.1.16 – Question 4 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher and/or learner well-being and ease fatigue?**



**Figure 2.1.17 – Question 5 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break), dividing the longest term (autumn)?**

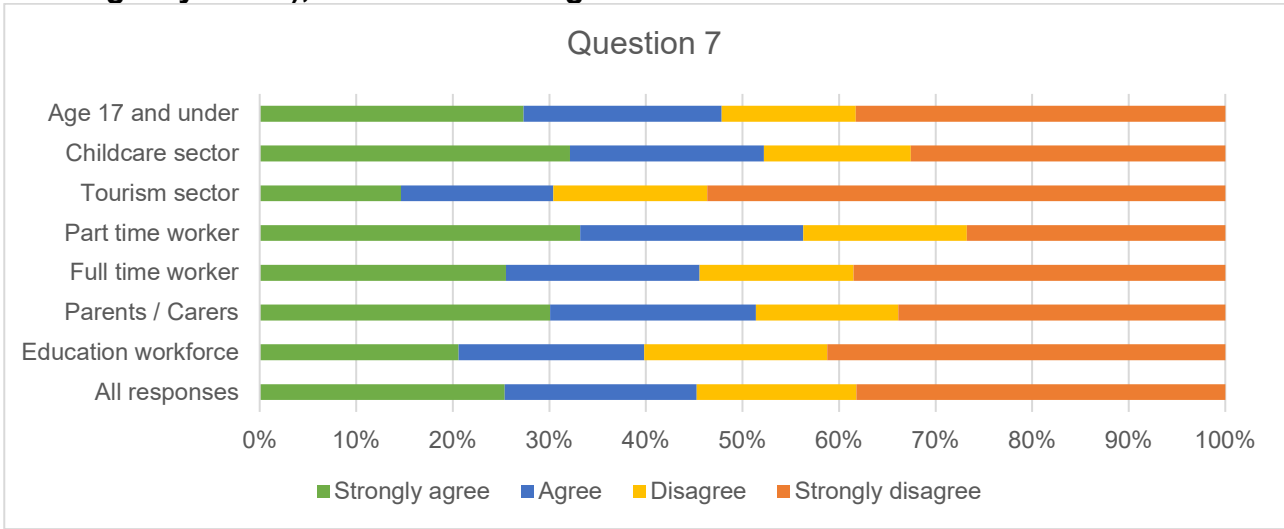


**Figure 2.1.18 – Question 6 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?**

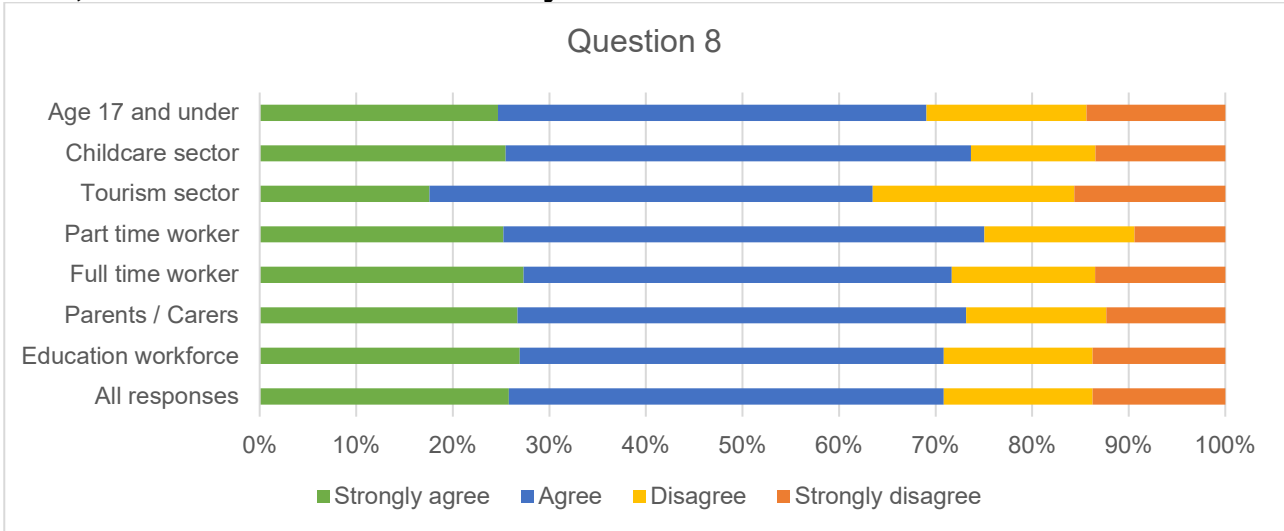




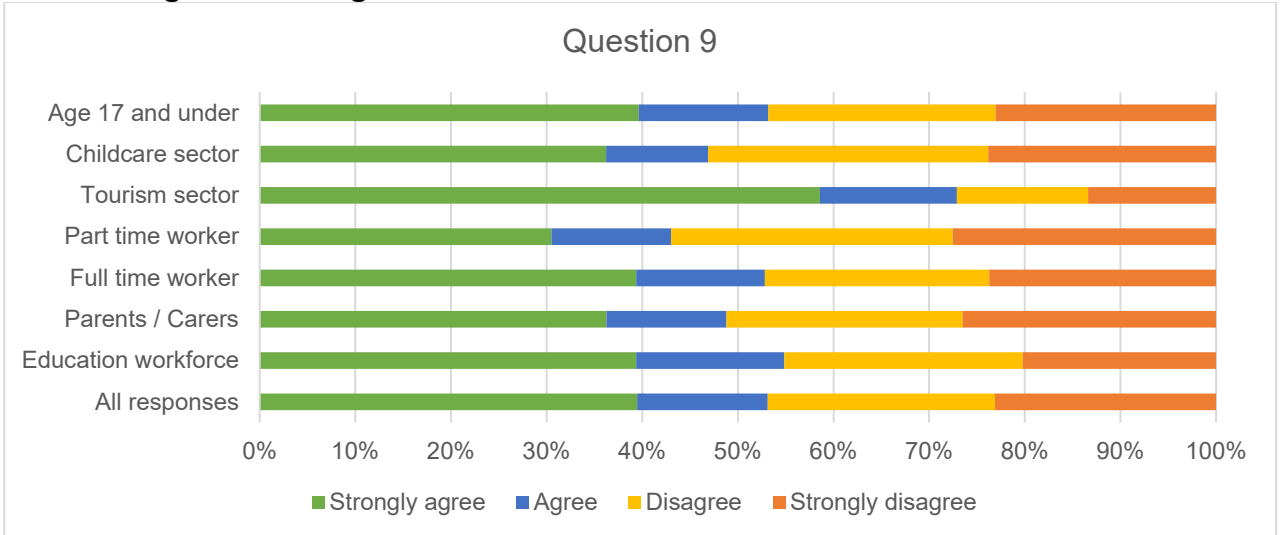
**Figure 2.1.19 – Question 7 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break), to even term lengths?**



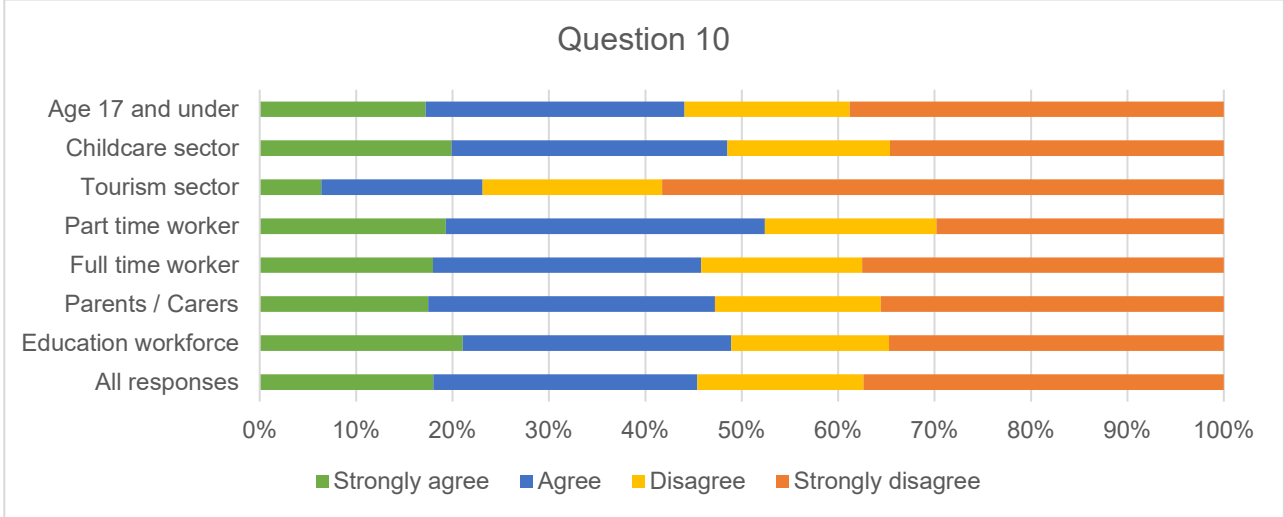
**Figure 2.1.20 – Question 8 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?**



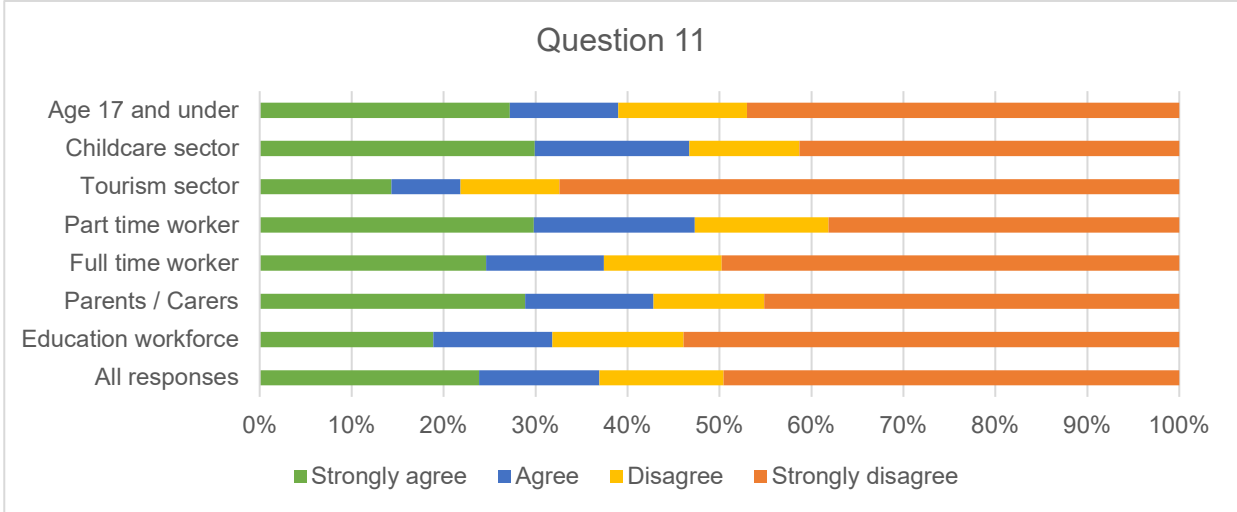
**Figure 2.1.21 – Question 9 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: Maintaining the existing school calendar?**



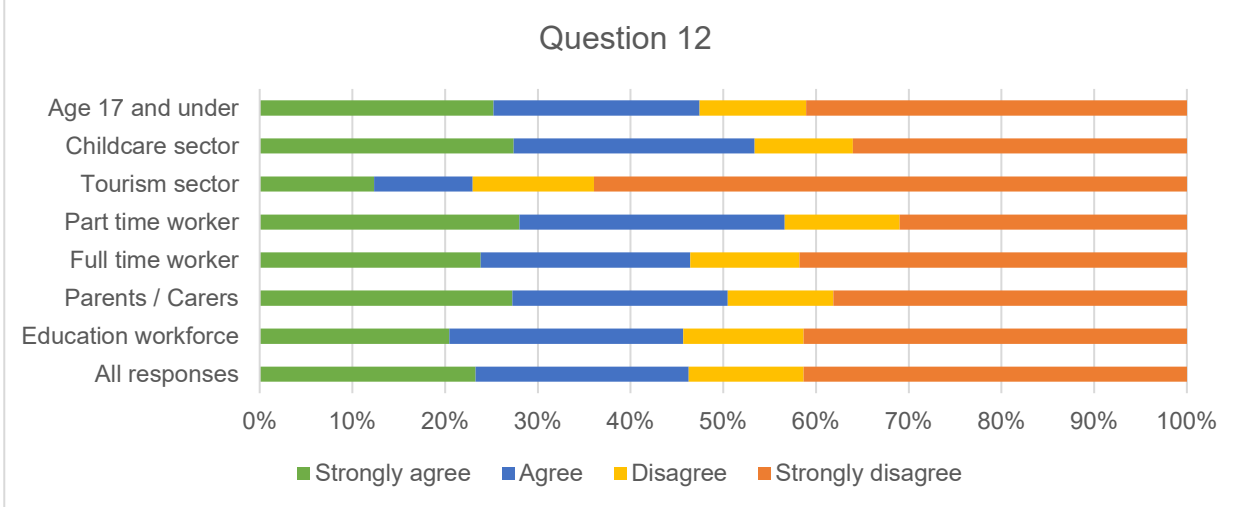
**Figure 2.1.22 – Question 10 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), and a five-week summer break?**



**Figure 2.1.23 – Question 11 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a two-week May break, and a four-week summer break?**



**Figure 2.1.24 – Question 12 - For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?**



## 2.2 Easy Read responses

The Easy Read consultation document contained 9 questions. Yes/no/unsure options were given for six of the questions with space for additional comments. Open text responses were available for 2 questions. A multiple-choice demographic question was also included. In total, 68 Easy Read responses were submitted.

### 2.2.1 Question 1 – Do you like the current school calendar?

Respondents were split with 31 in favour of the current school calendar and 28 not in favour and a further 8 unsure. This question was left unanswered by one respondent.

**Table 2.2.1 Easy Read Question 1 Responses**

| Response     | Count |
|--------------|-------|
| Yes          | 31    |
| No           | 28    |
| Unsure       | 8     |
| Not answered | 1     |
| Total        | 68    |

Comments were mixed with those who liked the current school calendar noting that everyone is used to the current arrangements and that it works for everyone. It was suggested that the 6-week summer break is located at the right time so that learners are in school during bad weather and out of school during better weather. Having 6 weeks gives time for learners and staff to rest, avoiding burnout for staff, and enough time for families to have the flexibility to spend quality time together and visit distant relatives.

Those who did not like the current school calendar stated that it needed reviewing to better fit modern living as it is old and outdated. Staff and learner burnout can be avoided by cutting down the length of terms with the autumn term particularly noted as being too long and leaving learners and staff tired and ill. Having a 6-week summer break was considered too long for working parents juggling childcare, learners with ALN and for those families reliant on free school meals.

Those who said they were unsure did recognise that teachers enjoy having 6 weeks off in the summer, but also said that autumn term was too long. Many unsure responses stated they had not thought about the school calendar before.

### 2.2.2 Question 2 – Imagine that 1 week of the summer break was moved to October to make the October break 2 weeks long instead of 1 week long. This would make the summer break 5 weeks long. Do you like this idea?

Responses to question 2 were mixed with a small majority (36) in favour, 24 not in favour and 8 unsure.

**Table 2.2.2 Easy Read Question 2 Responses**

| Response     | Count |
|--------------|-------|
| Yes          | 36    |
| No           | 24    |
| Unsure       | 8     |
| Not answered | 0     |
| Total        | 68    |

Comments stated that the autumn term is too long, and an additional break is needed to combat fatigue and illness. Conversely, risks were raised that a two-week break so soon after the summer would be disruptive for learning continuity and that whilst it would provide

a longer rest, an extended break in the autumn is the wrong time of year due to poorer weather and the absence of a special festival; instead, a break in May was considered a better choice.

**2.2.3 Question 3 – Imagine the spring break takes place at a similar time every year. At the moment the spring break moves so it can be at the same time as Easter. This can make some school terms very long or very short. Do you like the idea of having a spring break at a similar time every year?**

A majority (36) were also in favour of having a spring break at a similar time each year. Those opposed numbered 18 and a further 14 were unsure.

**Table 2.2.3 Easy Read Question 3 Responses**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes             | 36           |
| No              | 18           |
| Unsure          | 14           |
| Not answered    | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>68</b>    |

Comments from those in favour said that this would produce more stability, even out term lengths, and increase the length of peak times for tourist sector. Those opposed either saw no need for change, or highlighted the importance of Easter as a religious festival and the way in which working parents can use the bank holidays to supplement annual leave to manage childcare over the current Easter break. Those unsure could not see it having an effect either way but thought it may be worth considering.

**2.2.4 Question 4 – Imagine we have a 2 week break in May or June. We currently have 1 week. This would mean that the summer break would be 1 week shorter. Do you like this idea?**

Exactly half of all responses (34) were against question 4. Those in favour numbered 26 and 8 were unsure.

**Table 2.2.4 Easy Read Question 4 Responses**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes             | 26           |
| No              | 34           |
| Unsure          | 8            |
| Not answered    | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>68</b>    |

Thoughts on increased stability, better weather, and the chance for additional and cheaper holidays led respondents to say this option was the best choice for adding an additional break week. Those against this proposal cited possible negative impacts on school sports and learner routines or on preparation for exams in the summer term. Many respondents across all three opinions preferred a summer break as long as possible with 4 weeks (if this option also included a two-week break in the autumn) considered too short by some.

**2.2.5 Question 5 – Do you like the idea of having GCSE, AS and A level exam results days in the same week?**

Whilst most respondents clearly favoured having exam results days in the same week (31 yes compared to 11 no) this question had the highest number of unsure responses at 26.

**Table 2.2.5 Easy Read Question 5 Responses**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes             | 31           |
| No              | 11           |
| Unsure          | 26           |
| Not answered    | 0            |
| Total           | 68           |

Many selected unsure as this question did not affect them, they did not consider it an issue, or that they did not feel they had enough knowledge to comment. Concern was raised across all response types that alignment with the rest of UK would be needed especially for A-Level results. Where some saw this as adding more pressure to staff others saw it as easier to prepare for and would give staff, learners, and families more time away from schools during the summer.

### **2.2.6 Question 7 – Do you think changing the school calendar would affect the Welsh language?**

Most (41) did not think that the proposals would affect the Welsh language with 11 answering that they would and 14 unsure.

**Table 2.2.6 Easy read Question 7 Responses**

| <b>Response</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Yes             | 11           |
| No              | 41           |
| Unsure          | 14           |
| Not answered    | 2            |
| Total           | 68           |

### **2.2.7 Question 8 – What impacts do you think there would be on the Welsh language? How could we reduce any bad impacts and increase good impacts?**

Again, comments were mixed with different factors influencing the thoughts of respondents. No impact was expected by many because either the school year is not seen as connected to the Welsh language, the curriculum taught to learners would still be the same, or the changes are not sufficiently different to produce a difference for the Welsh language.

A negative impact was expected by a minority of responses as additional longer breaks (i.e.: an increase in two-week breaks) would be more disruptive to learning. Outside of schools, cultural events such as the Royal Welsh Show were asserted to be crucial for the Welsh language and any change that negatively impacted such events would negatively impact the Welsh language. Others pointed out a similar pattern in terms of knock-on effects on tourism as areas with higher levels of Welsh speakers are tourist destinations.

A positive impact was expected by another minority of responses due to reduced learning loss from a shortened summer break. Lessening the time spent away from school at any one point was said to be of particular benefit to learners in Welsh medium schools who do not speak Welsh at home. Finally, a change to a different school year structure from the rest of the UK could be seen as a bold statement of Welsh identity which may strengthen the Welsh language.

### 2.2.8 Question 9 – Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your thoughts on the school calendar?

Additional comments reiterated many of the points made in response to earlier questions. Some used the space to highlight how changes would have a positive impact on learners with ALN and help support attendance for all learners. Others said that the proposed changes are not enough to address any of the relevant issues or lacked evidence that they would be effective.

Other considerations raised included the impact on exam performance, children competing at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, and potential effects that climate change might have on when is the best time for school holidays.

### 2.2.9 Question 6 – Demographics

Question 6 included the same demographic response options as the online survey.

**Table 2.2.7 Easy Read Demographic Responses**

| <b>Response</b>        | <b>Count</b> |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Age 17 years and under | 1            |
| Age 18 years and older | 25           |
| Education workforce    | 30           |
| Tourism sector         | 3            |
| Childcare sector       | 5            |
| Full-time work         | 35           |
| Part-time work         | 14           |
| Parent or carer        | 36           |
| Other                  | 6            |

## 2.3 Social Media

### 2.3.1 X (formerly Twitter) polls

A total of 8 questions were posted on both Welsh and English language Welsh Government Education social media accounts as weekly X polls. These gathered simple yes/no/not sure responses to key questions from the Easy Read version of the consultation and allowed respondents to post comments.

### 2.3.2 Question 1 – Are there changes you'd like to see to the school calendar?

Posted on 23 November (86 votes English / 14 votes Welsh).

Respondents to the English medium poll were almost equally split between those who wanted to see changes (44.2%) and those who did not (45.3%). Those responding in Welsh were more in favour, but also had a larger proportion of unsure votes.

**Table 2.3.1 X Poll Question 1 n=86/14**

|         | Yes /<br>Oes % | No /<br>Nac oes<br>% | Not sure<br>/ Ddim<br>yn siwr<br>% |
|---------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| English | 44.2           | 45.3                 | 10.5                               |
| Welsh   | 42.9           | 35.7                 | 21.4                               |

### 2.3.3 Question 2 – Imagine that 1 week of the summer break was moved to October...

Posted on 30 November (858 votes English / 8 votes Welsh).

Again, respondents to the English medium poll were almost equally split between those who wanted to see changes (46.9%) and those who did not (43.8%). Those responding in Welsh were more in favour, but also had a larger proportion of unsure votes.

**Table 2.3.2 X Poll Question 2 n=858/8**

|         | Yes /<br>Oes % | No /<br>Nac oes<br>% | Not sure<br>/ Ddim<br>yn siwr<br>% |
|---------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| English | 46.9           | 43.8                 | 9.3                                |
| Welsh   | 50.0           | 12.5                 | 37.5                               |

Comments included those who did not want additional holiday during a time of shorter days and colder weather and those who would welcome more time at Christmas.

One respondent questioned whether the traveller community had been consulted, as the summer months are especially important for work commitments.

### 2.3.4 Question 3 – Imagine the spring break takes place at a similar time every year...

Posted on 7 December (197 votes English / 22 votes Welsh).

Respondents to the English medium poll were quite strongly in favour of the proposal (56.3%) and those responding in Welsh even more so (72.7%). There were relatively few unsure votes on this question.

**Table 2.3.3 X Poll Question 3 n=197/22**

|         | Yes /<br>Oes % | No /<br>Nac oes<br>% | Not sure<br>/ Ddim<br>yn siwr<br>% |
|---------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| English | 56.3           | 34.0                 | 9.6                                |
| Welsh   | 72.7           | 22.7                 | 4.5                                |

Comments included those from respondents who voluntarily described themselves as Christian in their replies who were keen to preserve a four-day break to respect the religious festival. Others, however, welcomed the certainty of fixed length terms that this might deliver.

### 2.3.5 Question 4 – Imagine we have a 2 week break in May or June....

Posted on 14 December (371 votes English / 4 votes Welsh).

A majority of respondents to both English and Welsh medium polls were in favour of the proposal, with a stronger approval from the Welsh medium respondents.

**Table 2.3.4 X Poll Question 4 n=371/4**

|         | Yes /<br>Oes % | No /<br>Nac oes<br>% | Not sure<br>/ Ddim<br>yn siwr<br>% |
|---------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| English | 53.1           | 39.9                 | 7.0                                |
| Welsh   | 75.0           | 25.0                 | 0.0                                |

There were few comments on this proposal, although one person expressed concern about the impact on timings for examinations.

### 2.3.6 Question 5 – Do you like the idea of having... exam results days in the same week?

Posted on 21 December (71 votes English / 9 votes Welsh).

A majority of respondents to both English and Welsh medium polls were in favour of the proposal.

**Table 2.3.5 X Poll Question 5 n=71/9**

|         | Yes /<br>Oes % | No /<br>Nac oes<br>% | Not sure<br>/ Ddim<br>yn siwr<br>% |
|---------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| English | 64.8           | 22.5                 | 12.7                               |
| Welsh   | 66.7           | 22.2                 | 11.1                               |

### 2.3.7 Question 7 – Do you think changing the school calendar would affect the Welsh language?

Posted on 8 January (506 votes English / 8 votes Welsh).



A majority of respondents to the English poll felt that the proposals would not have an impact on the Welsh language. Conversely there were mixed responses amongst Welsh medium respondents and equal numbers felt that the proposals would have an impact or were unsure with fewer saying there would be no impact.

**Table 2.3.5 X Poll Question 7 n=506/8**

|         | Yes / Oes % | No / Nac oes % | Not sure / Ddim yn siwr % |
|---------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| English | 7.3         | 85.8           | 6.9                       |
| Welsh   | 37.5        | 25.0           | 37.5                      |

### 2.3.8 Other activity on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook

The Welsh Government ran a campaign on X and Facebook throughout the consultation period. Posts were put out through a range of accounts including @WG\_Education, @edubeginsathome, @Addysg\_Cymraeg, @HwbAddysg\_Cymru, @LIC\_Addysg and @dechraucartref.

Social media activity was monitored during the campaign. For the period from 7 December 2023 to 8 January 2024, a total of 128 posts were delivered, engaging 230 users and achieving 570,361 potential impressions.

**Table 2.3.6 Social media activity**

| Week                                      | English      |             |                       | Welsh        |             |                       |
|---|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
|   | Total Volume | Engagements | Potential impressions | Total Volume | Engagements | Potential impressions |
| 7/13 <sup>th</sup> Dec                    | 24           | 52          | 114,698               | 7            | 12          | 27,184                |
| 14–20 <sup>th</sup> Dec                   | 11           | 56          | 76,810                | 5            | 0           | 4,670                 |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> Dec– 8 <sup>th</sup> Jan | 65           | 104         | 325,753               | 16           | 6           | 21,246                |
| Total                                     | 100          | 212         | 517261                | 28           | 18          | 53100                 |

There was significant external activity on X, with one post from a member of the education workforce attracting 225,300 views and 326 comments.

**Figure 2.3.1 – X (formerly Twitter) post**



### **2.3.9 Website Activity**

According to Google Analytics, the consultation webpage attracted 7,164 impressions and 2,593 clicks in the first 10 weeks of the consultation. The highest level of clicks were achieved for the phrases “term dates”, “school year Wales” and “school holidays.”<sup>13</sup>

### **2.3.10 Media coverage**

Media reports show that the consultation launch generated at least 80 pieces of press coverage – both local and national, including CBBC Newsround, the Sun, Mail Online, The Guardian and the Telegraph. There was also coverage in trade and local press, with a total opportunities to see (OTS) figure of almost 45m.

The coverage was well-informed and balanced during the launch period. During the latter half of the consultation period there was a change of emphasis – largely relating to the potential impact on the Royal Welsh Show and the position of unions.

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<sup>13</sup> [The structure of the school year consultation GOV.WALES](#)

## 2.4 Focus Groups

### 2.4.1 School Calendar Amendments – two-week Autumn half term and five-week summer break

Focus groups were held with learners, teaching professionals, parents/carers, local authority representatives, school governing bodies, early years professionals and representatives of the early years, childcare and play sector, hospitality and tourism organisations and education workforce unions. One of the first proposed amendments to the school year discussed within the 25 focus groups was Option 2, which entails an extension of the Autumn half term break by one week and an associated reduction in the summer holiday by one week.

Respondents noted the potential positive effects on learner wellbeing throughout the year with an extended Autumn half term break viewed as having the potential to reduce learner fatigue, behavioural issues and attendance issues over the longest, most intensive term in the school year. Although this positive effect was not expected to apply across all learners, particular concerns were expressed that for some younger learners, learners with ALN and learners in transition years, a longer autumn break would be more disruptive to the routine of learning that is built up in the autumn term. Learners themselves were not in favour of an extension of the autumn half term break due to the view that poorer weather conditions and shorter daylight hours compared to the summer break would limit their ability to socialise and participate in extracurricular activities.

The perceived effect this change would have on the wellbeing of the education workforce was more mixed. There was recognition that the long autumn term also had a negative impact on fatigue and wellbeing in teachers and support staff. However, it was felt that the benefit of one week extra in the Autumn half term break would not be worth the sacrifice of one week less in the summer break. Summer was viewed by respondents in the education workforce as one of the few occasions when teachers could get a 'proper' break.

Respondents stated that most teachers work during their holidays to help manage their workload and prepare for the new term, workload which could not be shifted to a different time of year. Also, there was recognition that many teachers and support staff are also parents and would have to manage childcare responsibilities over the longer Autumn break with the potential for fewer childcare or entertainment options depending on individual family circumstances alongside this workload which would affect the impact on staff wellbeing and levels of fatigue.

The extension of the Autumn half term break was widely viewed by the education workforce as having a negative effect on curriculum delivery. An additional week of teaching and learning in the summer was not viewed as comparable to a week of teaching and learning lost in the autumn in terms of delivery of curriculum content, particularly for GCSE and A-Level students who would not benefit from the extra week of summer term after their examinations and assessments had already been completed. This impact on curriculum delivery was also expected to have negative effects on education standards more widely, in particular for learners undergoing non-exam assessments which are predominantly delivered during the autumn term.

Parents indicated mixed views on the proposed changes to the autumn and summer holidays; responses were highly variable and dependent on individual family circumstances. Parents who were reliant on paid childcare felt that it may be more difficult to secure childcare for a shorter period of time (i.e.: in an extended autumn half-term compared to the current summer holiday); however other families could potentially benefit through being able to spread childcare costs more evenly throughout the year. Outside of childcare, additional costs were associated with an extra week in the autumn half term break compared to a

week in the summer holidays due to the increased cost associated with heating, feeding and entertainment during a cooler part of the year where there are currently fewer opportunities to engage in low-cost outdoor activities, particularly in the absence of holiday childcare provision in the extended autumn half term break. Parents and educators recognised the disproportionate impact this would have on low-income parents, including teaching support staff who are parents, negating the benefits of the extended break for these education staff.

Respondents from the youth work sector noted some concerns around the extension of the autumn half term highlighting that the demand for support over the holidays does not go away during the autumn and may even potentially increase for some low-income families struggling with the additional costs outlined above. As such there were questions raised by these respondents about whether holiday provision would be delivered during this extended break and would be funded on a comparable basis as the week of summer holiday provision lost. Whilst more logistical challenges associated with holiday provision were anticipated during an extended autumn half term break (in terms of securing indoor facilities) it was felt that the provision could be made more flexible to meet the needs of families and learners, so long as the funding was made available for these activities.

Respondents from tourist attractions and events were strongly against the shortening of the summer holidays, which currently fall in 'peak season' and extension of the autumn half term break in 'off-peak' season. This was expected to have a substantial negative impact on the sector, in particular for small, seasonal and outdoor-oriented tourist attractions and events. There was broad agreement that an extra week in the autumn half term would not be comparable to the lost week in the summer holidays, even for larger, indoor attractions, in terms of visitor numbers and spend per head, as parents are often saving for Christmas during the autumn. It was felt that this would have an extremely detrimental impact on the profit margins and therefore the financial sustainability of a number of businesses in the sector, which would have knock-on impacts of the viability of rural economies and availability of local work and training opportunities for young people. In addition, it was felt that events with a strong history such as the Royal Welsh Show could not be moved and parents, particularly in rural areas, would be likely to take their children out of school to attend thus negatively impacting attendance and learning. It was felt that smaller events that have historically been held on a particular date in the summer would have to manage lower attendance or be cancelled due to the increased competition for attention in a shortened summer break.

#### **2.4.2 School Calendar Amendments – Decoupled Easter**

The decoupling of Easter from the spring term was broadly welcomed with only a couple of minor concerns regarding attendance and communication with parents and learners.

The benefits associated with a decoupled Easter included more consistency in the placement of the spring term, which could ease planning for schools and youth workers. There were, however, a small number of teachers who indicated that teachers were already used to planning around the Easter term as it currently operates and so would not necessarily see a benefit.

Parents and learners had mixed views regarding the decoupling of Easter from the Spring holiday on the occasion where they did not align. Some welcomed the extra two days' bank holiday in those instances (i.e.: when Good Friday and Easter Monday fell in term-time); however a couple of parents were concerned about the loss of two learning days, particularly in the run up to exams for older learners. In addition, there was a concern expressed by one parent that parents would still take children out of school during the traditional Easter holiday in instances where it did not align with the Spring holiday, in order to align with the bank holidays they would have off work.

Tourist attractions broadly welcomed the decoupling of Easter from the Spring holiday. In instances where the two did not align, the attractions would welcome an additional two days of trade.

There were mixed views from teachers and governors from Church schools regarding the decoupling of Easter. The opportunity to celebrate the build-up to Easter within schools was welcomed; however, there were some concerns that this change would negatively affect the ability of cross border families to spend time together. One governor from a Church school was concerned that this change could result in Easter losing its protected status as a bank holiday and wanted to see clear communication around that.

There was a minor concern that these changes would affect employers, in particular in schools and settings, who would need to review their contracts and calculation of holiday allowance in light of the changes for job roles such as lunchtime supervisors.

Finally, it was widely felt that any changes that are made would need to be clearly communicated to parents and learners to avoid any confusion around what it would mean for the bank holidays, especially as some stakeholders do not agree with the rationale for this proposal or see it positively affecting learning outcomes.

### **2.4.3 School Calendar Amendments – two-week May / June half term and four-week summer break**

Most of the discussion around the extension of the May/June half term centred on how this would impact learners undergoing exams.

Some learners were in favour of this option, seeing it as providing them with extra time to revise and prepare for exams at home.

However, most stakeholders (school staff, the wider education sector and some learners) felt this break would have a negative impact on exams through lost learning time and reduced time in school with teachers to help them prepare. There was a worry this would disproportionately impact disadvantaged students and those with ALN, who are not always able to study outside school.

Some learners were worried that this would make them forget more course material and take them out of the routine of learning just before exams. Other learners simply felt this break was not necessary so soon before the long summer break.

Staff stressed that teachers would be expected to support learners throughout the extended break with revision sessions and would lead to resentment among the workforce, possibly leading to increased burnout.

Adding another week of holiday into an exam period was also seen as a logistical challenge.

Beyond exams, the warmer weather was mostly seen as a positive with parents and learners, with some highlighting a preference for a two week break mid-summer term instead of in October because parents would not have to pay for higher heating bills (as they would during a two-week October break).

There was some discussion around the effect an extended half term would have on holiday prices, with the idea that this break may offer more opportunity for parents to book cheaper holidays and thus take financial pressure away from summer.

However, consequences on holiday prices were uncertain. Concerns were expressed that this break may impact school attendance (with family holidays often extending before/after a two-week break).

Those in favour of a four-week summer break cited the challenges currently faced during the summer break, including safeguarding concerns (and a peak in referrals before summer

holidays), limited childcare provision in rural areas, insufficient support for ALN learners over summer, and long periods of disrupted routine.

Some also felt a four-week summer would make childcare easier by reducing the length of time families are reliant on providers or extended family, and that it would be helpful for young carers.

Many were opposed to a four-week summer. Teachers in particular felt that a four-week summer holiday was too short to fully relax, especially for school staff who must work in the summer (including during results week and to prepare for the new academic year).

The implementation of a four-week break was seen as an additional challenge for schools, it was noted that any maintenance or construction work needs to be done in summer, and that condensed demand for construction and maintenance might be challenging in a shorter summer.

It was felt that there would be less opportunity for older learners, school support staff, and families to secure extra employment over the summer to address financial needs. This is particularly salient in tourist destinations where seasonal employment is common.

On tourism more broadly, staff from tourist attractions and events felt particularly negative about the prospect of a shortened four-week summer break as this was seen as a loss of two weeks of "peak season" for events and travel, with particular concern about the Royal Welsh Show. A shorter summer could also negatively impact family-run agriculture and tourism businesses.

Some respondents also expressed concern around managing staffing of holiday provision for early years, childcare, and play settings, which is reliant on the seasonal university workforce and for which it is harder to get funding for shorter breaks.

#### **2.4.4 School Calendar Amendments – GCSE & A / AS Level results days**

It was suggested that one results week may give secondary school staff more of a break by preventing the need to come into school over a two-week period during the summer. This was seen as essential if the summer were to be shortened, for some stakeholders. Some reflected that this worked well during Covid-19.

Additionally, some learners felt this would reduce overall stress and would be convenient for families with children taking GCSE and AS/A level exams.

On the other hand, this would condense the workload currently undertaken over two weeks (including preparation, etc.) into a single week for school leadership, especially. There was concern that it would be difficult to ask teachers, TAs, leaders, and pastoral staff to support the results week (which is already on a voluntary basis). Some felt this was asking too much of school staff; one stakeholder felt this would upset the statutory requirement for staff breaks. This may mean not all learners get enough attention and support, with GCSE students potentially being deprioritised.

Finally, there was concern about how this would impact learners, given a lack of alignment with England, and about whether this was deliverable from an exam marking perspective, as it was noted that this would require the processing of 300,000 additional qualifications one week earlier.

There were calls from several groups for results to instead be published before learners leave for the summer holiday.

#### **2.4.5 Support for Option 1**

Support for Option 1 in schools was mixed, with some feeling the calendar was not designed intentionally and others feeling there is too much change occurring in the

profession, and any reforms to the school year would further negatively impact upon what they described as a recruitment and retention crisis.

School stakeholders all recognised that there are challenges with the current structure of the school year, but some felt reforms should be focused on how to better support learners when not in school rather than conflating the education and childcare sectors. Views that do link them neglect the different challenges and priorities of the sectors.

Some stakeholders felt the longer autumn term is useful for secondary schools to maintain a longer continuous period of learning, whereas others feel the term lengths are too long and need to be remedied.

Learners were largely content with this option as they are "used to it," however some did stress that the summer holidays feel too long.

Local authority stakeholders were among those reinforcing the challenges of the status quo for free school meal (FSM) learners in terms of safeguarding, academic achievement, and children with challenging behaviour or who are young carers themselves.

Parents were particularly concerned with the length of the current six-week summer, citing difficulties managing annual leave entitlement while caring for and entertaining children, and some felt the wellbeing of children declined over the long summer even if they enjoy being at home. On the other hand, parents with greater flexibility to meet childcare needs enjoy the long summer holiday and support this option.

#### **2.4.6 Support for Option 2 (two-week October break)**

There was some support among learners for Option 2, however some learners had concerns around shorter days and colder weather in autumn as opposed to during the summer holidays.

Parents were broadly in favour of change, mostly split between Option 2 and 3. Parents welcomed reduced pressure to entertain children over a long summer break and to use up annual leave, especially where childcare options during the summer break were limited. Parents with more flexibility to meet childcare needs preferred a longer break. Also, parents broadly expected positive impacts on learner wellbeing from shorter summer break especially for ALN/rural/disadvantaged learners.

Most school practitioners were opposed to any change with Option 1 preferred. Whilst they were sympathetic to the challenges of parents and disadvantaged learners around long summer holidays there was scepticism around the potential impact of proposals on learning loss and learner wellbeing. There were concerns around the implications of school year changes on curriculum delivery through greater disruption to the autumn term. This was viewed as shifting challenges to a different time of year rather than reducing them overall. Access to sufficient holiday provision during the summer break is seen as more of a priority than changing the structure of the school year. It was also noted that many teachers and support staff work through holidays and many need to manage childcare responsibilities too. The six-week holiday is seen as the only chance to get a 'real' break. There was also concern about the impact these changes could have on recruitment and retention, which is already seen as a big issue for schools.

Youth workers were mostly in favour of Option 2 and whilst some flagged challenges around securing appropriate indoor facilities in the autumn break, they also highlighted that as long as funding for provision is available, provision could be flexible to changes in the school year.

Governors were mostly in favour of Option 2 as whilst Option 3 was viewed as too big a jump, some change would be welcomed to support school planning. There was some

concern around availability of holiday provision in autumn and the continued discrepancy between the amount of annual leave for working parents and the length of the school holidays in general.

Education unions would oppose any change to current school year, holding the view that this would not have any noticeable positive impact on learner outcomes. They also felt that any change would, in a number of cases, be likely to worsen outcomes based on available evidence. The introduction of an additional week to the October half-term was not viewed as equivalent nor exchangeable with the summer term, given the emphasis on curriculum delivery and non-exam assessments in the autumn term. It was also expected that any changes to the school year would have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of staff.

Tourist attractions and events staff would welcome decoupling of Easter but otherwise strongly opposed Option 2. It was expected that replacing one week of peak season trading with one week of off-season trading would have a major impact on visitor levels and spend as well as the wider economic viability of Welsh tourist attractions. It was felt that the most acutely negatively affected would be outdoor, seasonal and smaller attractions as well as events that cannot be rearranged to another time of year.

### **2.4.7 Support for Option 3**

From a youth work perspective, the key concern with Option 3 is whether a shortened summer would lead to a reduction in funding for other summer holiday activities that would not be replaced for other parts of the year. Provided funding for activities during school breaks was maintained in the proposed extended October and May/June half terms on a like-for-like basis with availability for summer holiday provision, there was general support for Option 3.

Early years, childcare, and play stakeholders felt this option would provide parents the most flexibility to spread the cost of childcare throughout the year but were unsure whether school teaching assistants would still be able to and interested in supporting Early Years provision through a shorter summer holiday.

Local authority stakeholders largely preferred this option.

Education unions opposed this option, stressing the need to ensure all contractual agreements (e.g., Burgundy Book<sup>14</sup>) are respected.

While school staff understand the desire to have even term lengths, it was stressed that one week in summer term is not equal to one week in autumn term, and that this option is the biggest step into the unknown, so would take getting used to and clear communication to parents and learners.

There was particular concern about the impacts of Option 3 on border communities. Special schools, for instance, compete for staff with hospitals and with other schools, and worry they would lose their staff to jobs in England with this reform.

### **2.4.8 Effects on the Welsh language**

There were mixed views on whether a shorter summer would have an impact on Welsh language learning loss. Some agreed that a six-week summer break is too long and results in Welsh language loss especially for learners in English speaking families and that a shorter summer would mitigate these effects.

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<sup>14</sup> The [Burgundy Book](#) is a national agreement (England and Wales) between the five teacher unions and the national employers (NEOST). Its main provisions relate to notice periods, sick leave and pay, and maternity leave and pay.



Other stakeholders suggested that Welsh language loss has always been an issue and the proposals would not reduce it. They held the view that learners will still be learning Welsh when they return to school and that those who care about their skills will practise it outside of school to reduce learning loss.

There were also concerns that the proposals could affect recruitment of Welsh-speaking teachers and support staff, which is already considered to be an acute issue for the provision of Welsh language in schools.

There were also concerns about the Welsh language impacts of the proposals on the Royal Welsh Show and National Eisteddfod attendance with children either being absent from school or missing out on important Welsh cultural events, and competition for families' time in a shortened summer break.<sup>15</sup>

Opportunities to mitigate adverse impacts were suggested through encouraging engagement with the Welsh language during holidays such as through Welsh homework, Welsh lessons or visiting places where Welsh is spoken and that these opportunities should also be extended to English medium schools.

#### **2.4.9 Alternative Comments**

Several participants highlighted their support for decoupling Easter without changing any other elements of the calendar.

There were also some requests for a longer Christmas break, a fixed/"decoupled" Christmas break, starting the school year later, and starting summer holidays earlier for better weather.

There was significant discussion about the need to support children and young people outside of school where possible, with some stakeholders feeling that school year reform – regardless of what it looked like – would not be able to address the challenges disadvantaged children are facing. They stressed the need for more holiday provision and non-school services for children with ALN.

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<sup>15</sup> Planned dates for the Royal Welsh Show would place the event during term time based on proposed dates for the academic year 2025 to 2026 in the consultation. The National Eisteddfod typically takes place in August and would be during the summer break based on proposed dates for the academic year 2025 to 2026 in the consultation.

## 2.5 Interviews

### 2.5.1 School Calendar Amendments – two-week Autumn half term and five-week summer break

Supporters of this change saw it as a way to break up the lengthy autumn term and mitigate consequent fatigue for learners and the school workforce. School practitioners cited behavioural challenges leading up to half-term and illness levels as reasons for the need for a longer break. A variety of different stakeholder groups were in favour of a two-week autumn half term, including stakeholders from education and faith groups.

Conversely, some education stakeholders stressed the potential negative impact of a two-week Autumn half term on learner and exam centre preparation for the November GCSE series. However, this impact was not expected to be severe.

Others felt the poorer autumn weather would mean a two-week Autumn half term reduces the opportunity for people to be outside during a school break and would result in limited benefit for UK tourism, as people would be more likely to go abroad during this holiday. There was one interview comment about potential behavioural issues if Halloween was to fall in an extended October break.

One interviewee agreed that fatigue in autumn term needs to be addressed but did not see a longer October break as the right solution to this.

In terms of the effect this would have on the summer break – shortening it to five weeks – there were serious concerns about the impacts for the Royal Welsh Show, as it is scheduled within the Option 2 summer term in 2026 and could fall within the summer term again in future.<sup>16</sup> Family participation is significant to the “ethos” of the Royal Welsh Show, with 70% of members attending as part of family packages. Concerns were expressed that the impact of a change to the school calendar and therefore the impact on children’s abilities to attend could lead to drops in attendance, a potential £1 million direct financial hit and £40 million impact on local economy, as well as effects on the ability of the Royal Welsh Show to bridge the rural–urban divide in Wales by bringing together a diverse group of attendees.

### 2.5.2 School Calendar Amendments – Decoupled Easter

Decoupling Easter provides some stability, ease of planning, and consistency of term dates from year to year, it was noted. Stakeholders felt it challenging for schools to have uneven terms and that a decoupled Easter break would provide a clearer structure to the year.

The views of faith groups varied. Some agreed with the argument laid out above, provided Good Friday and Easter Monday are protected, and one outlined the potential benefits of being in school during Holy Week in the years that Easter break falls outside of the Spring break (apart from the Easter bank holidays). This included the additional opportunity of learning about Easter in Holy Week itself.

A faith group stakeholder not in favour of a decoupled Easter referred to several concerns it would pose. These included a perceived lack of evidence in the consultation document about the benefits of changing the Easter holiday; a view of the proposals as part of a broader trend (including the Curriculum for Wales) to make religion less visible in Welsh society; and perceived discrimination against clergy and church workers who experience similar fatigue as teachers and would not be able to take holidays with their families in cases when a decoupled Easter falls outside of the Spring break (apart from the bank holidays). The stakeholder also noted that decoupling Easter might limit the opportunity for

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<sup>16</sup> Currently the Royal Welsh show is outside of school time for Powys, and often for other local authorities term dates as well.

children in Wales to attend Christian retreat centres whose calendars will be based on England's holiday. Additionally, it was highlighted that Christian festivals and events falling in the week after Easter may result in learners missing school if Easter was decoupled. The stakeholder also stressed they would apply for the week after Easter to be on a list of recognised religious festivals for which children may legally miss school.

This interviewee expressing resistance to a decoupled Easter also stressed that it would be negative for tourism, leading to a narrower market potential. It was suggested that similar aims might be achieved by delaying the May holiday by a week rather than moving Easter.

### **2.5.3 School Calendar Amendments – two–week May / June half term and four–week summer break**

Most comments about a two–week May/June break related to exams, with some arguing it would be too disruptive to the exam timetable and may lead WJEC (other exam boards were not referenced) to only timetable approved qualifications outside that two–week holiday, forcing more learners and exam centres to fit more exams into a shorter timeframe. Exams for non-approved (i.e. designated) qualifications might then be held in the Easter holiday, with implications for exam centres. Depending on when the additional week falls, it may also be more difficult to timetable vocational qualifications and complete exam marking in time.

Education stakeholders also highlighted the concern that this would mean learners in Year 10, 11, 12, and 13 lose a week of learning (i.e.: in May/June) and highlighted this could negatively affect exam preparation; AS level exam preparation was noted here. One underscored that the additional bank holidays in this term provide more of a break for learners anyway and that adding an additional week to the half–term break at this point in the year would not be sufficiently beneficial to overcome potential confusion it could cause.

The rationale for this additional week break was unclear to some stakeholders in the education sector, and concerns were expressed about additional truancy at the end of the summer term that might be observed as a consequence of this reform.

On the other hand, those in favour largely cited the warm weather and potential for holidays in May.

In terms of the four–week summer, views were relatively polarised. Some saw this as positive for supporting disadvantaged students and as potentially easing the preparation and consolidation processes taking place on either side of summer break. Others worried about the impacts on tourism and local economies and compressed demand for holidays (and associated increase in prices) from staff in businesses. This could lead to an increase in unauthorised absences from school, one feared.

Several said teachers would strongly resist a four–week summer and would leave the profession, as many would not even get to enjoy the full four weeks due to results days and preparation work.

### **2.5.4 School Calendar Amendments – GCSE & A / AS Level results days**

Those in favour of this proposal felt that one results week would reduce teachers' workload over the summer and that this system had worked well in 2021 as a result of Covid–19.

Others expressed resourcing and quality concerns on the grounds that it would lead to a condensed marking window, increasing the risk of marking error, and more operational pressure on WJEC and the small statistics team at Qualifications Wales, as well as on facilities and learners.

Given that most exam markers are practising teachers, an altered calendar (e.g., shorter summer) and having one results week (i.e., moving GCSE results week forward) could

cause capacity strain. It was stated that having one results week would be possible but that this would require duplication of capacity (marking, resourcing) which would come at an additional cost. One education stakeholder made clear that the benefits of putting GCSE and A-Level results into the same week outweigh the risks from their perspective.

Most importantly, it was recognised that this could lead to learners not receiving their results on time, which could impact learner wellbeing for those learners who had concerns unrelated to university placements. This group may potentially receive less attention and support as a result.

Questions were raised about the how exactly results weeks would be moved, with stakeholders emphasising the need to keep A-level results day at the same time as in England and Northern Ireland for university consideration.

One education stakeholder felt results days should occur in term time and should remain in different weeks. There was a reference to other countries that hold exams before Easter and where coursework is submitted afterwards.

### **2.5.5 Support for Option 1**

Stakeholders recognise that autumn term is lengthy and noted that this past year's October half term landed later and so had a greater impact on the November exam series.

The six-week summer break is important to many, who feel this is the only real break that the education workforce gets all year and that it is key to stress management and mental wellbeing. It is clear that school staff and leadership often do some work in the summer, particularly around results days, meaning the nominal six-week break does not always equate to six non-working weeks. It was also emphasised that summer is a time for learners to have educational experiences outside of school and that government should support this more.

Some worried that reducing the summer holiday would mean that families are all squeezing the same holiday in a shorter time span. One interviewee from the business sector stressed that it is easier for businesses to spread workforce holidays over six weeks than it would be over a shorter period.

One education stakeholder highlighted lack of evidence that learning loss over six weeks is worse than after two-week breaks, putting the rationale for a shorter summer break into question. Another cited Ireland's higher PISA scores and longer summer break as a counter to arguments about learning loss over the six-week summer.

Others felt strongly that the six-week summer is too long for disadvantaged learners, including those affected by safeguarding concerns. With staggered starts and INSET days, this break can at times stretch even longer than six weeks, exacerbating concerns around disadvantaged learners and learning loss.

Overall, the impact of Option 1 on the workforce was expected to be "business as usual," which has constraints but is well understood. One interviewee highlighted they remained unconvinced this was worth changing the status quo. There was a widespread feeling that numerous changes are taking place in the education sector (including new qualifications) and that new challenges will arise alongside these.

### **2.5.6 Support for Option 2**

Positive reactions were noted from a range of stakeholders, with support for the impact on Welsh medium settings. Some stakeholders noted that the impacts may be positive, but relatively small. Some supported this as the best overall option but favoured a four-week summer.

There was a feeling that Option 2 is a "happy medium," a sensible solution that did not force radical change on the system.

Comments varied regarding Option 2's effect on preparation for learners in exam years, with some stating that this option would need further consideration of its impacts on the exam system and qualifications. Some respondents commented that it would significantly impact the exam system and others stated that it would not require the exam timetable to change. It was also suggested that this option could have positive wellbeing effects on exam-year learners but could negatively affect staff as they try to deliver an additional week of content to learners in fewer teaching weeks.

### **2.5.7 Support for Option 3**

This option would have the most significant impact on the exam system, with concerns expressed about accessing enough markers in a shorter time period. One felt the changes would not impact resources.

On the other hand, it was noted as a possibility that more even breaks and a shorter summer could minimise learning loss which would be more impactful in a more unitized exam system with more continuous assessments and could thus benefit learners. It was expected that staff and secondary school learners would benefit from the more even terms and breaks proposed in this option, in relation to their wellbeing and assessment preparation. Disadvantaged learners may experience particular benefits, it was also noted. Parents may also have more of an opportunity for quality time off and be able to better manage fatigue.

There was a feeling that of the options, Option 3 would impact businesses the most, especially smaller businesses. It was thought that cross-border businesses might benefit from different school holidays in England and Wales to better manage workload, but there was concern about the impact on hospitality and tourism. A business stakeholder stressed that Welsh Government should be looking to grow the Welsh economy, not disrupt it through this type of reform.

Several stakeholders were unsure about this option, with one stakeholder emphasizing that it was the largest step into the unknown and another stating it was likely to have a small impact but would require "massive upheaval."

### **2.5.8 Effects on the Welsh language**

The primary comment about Welsh language was that a long summer break may have a particular impact on Welsh language learners who have little access to Welsh at home.

Some felt that shortening the summer could reduce learning loss for learners from homes where second-language Welsh is not spoken, with one commenting that Welsh language oral assessments often occur near the start of Year 11, making summer learning loss particularly salient. One interviewee felt Options 2 and 3 would help mitigate the impact of Welsh language learning loss, particularly in areas where the density of English spoken as the main language at home is higher.

One interviewee highlighted that extended periods away from school may negatively impact Welsh language abilities, including for support staff who are learning Welsh (though it was acknowledged that support staff may have other jobs over summer and shortening summer may impact their supplementary income). That said, it was noted that the length of school breaks is not the most important factor in terms of Welsh language ability, even if it may have a marginal impact.

Others stressed the need for the Welsh Government to support the provision of additional activities which enable exposure to and use of the Welsh language over the summer

holidays. Several interviewees felt shortening the summer break was not the right way to address lack of access to the Welsh language outside of school.

Any school year reforms which affect access to the National Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show were seen as detrimental here, as these are felt to be key opportunities for exposure to the Welsh language. One stakeholder noted that 43% of Welsh speakers work in agriculture. Complications around moving the Royal Welsh Show would include shared infrastructure such as school bus fleets and could impact other local, regional, and national shows, including the National Eisteddfod.

Any reforms which condense the exam marking period may have a particular impact on assessments in the medium of Welsh, as there is a smaller number of Welsh speaking assessors.

### **2.5.9 Additional comments**

Some felt the consultation did not adequately demonstrate that these changes were evidence-based. One noted the references to evidence without consideration of the wider financial implications of change.

Some felt there is too much change in the education system right now, and that this was not the best time to propose such changes. Other stakeholders felt it was important this change is considered in light of the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector, and that teaching staff's terms and conditions should be reconsidered.

Similar comments about the timing of reform were made concerning the level of disruption since the Covid-19 pandemic and sector's desire for some continuity. Another stakeholder in the business sector said as long as there is sufficient notice given about any changes, businesses should be able to adapt.

Additionally, it was stated that any changes could impact the amount of non-inspection time in the school calendar due to current rules limiting any inspections taking place in the weeks around the Christmas and summer holidays. There was a call for stronger guidance around the consistency of term dates between local authorities and how best to place INSET days throughout the school year, as INSET days are often used to lengthen the summer holidays.

Opinions were mixed in relation to the impact the three options may have on modern living. Some felt a shorter summer would make childcare easier, while others underscored that the number of holidays stays the same, so it would not make an impact. Others felt the school year was not the right mechanism by which to fix modern living or childcare-related challenges.

Regarding Options 2 and 3, concerns were raised about staffing "new" holidays in non-maintained education settings, which would impact the Local Authorities' ability to offer the necessary number of education hours required due to some sessional settings closing during school holidays so may not be able to staff extra weeks of holiday in the changed options. On the other hand, more school breaks at times other than the summer break were suggested as possibly encouraging more tourism into Wales.

The need for more funding for social services and emphasis on social services and non-school support for disadvantaged children was highlighted repeatedly. Concerns were expressed about the impact that shortening the summer holiday would have on funding for summer schools and provision for disadvantaged learners.

In light of conversations around holidays, there were several calls for St David's Day to be a bank holiday and a call to fix the Christmas break so it begins the week before Christmas. One interviewee requested an exploration of summer breaks in which the school year starts

earlier, more aligned with Scotland's model. This was thought to improve holiday alignment along with a possibility of better weather.

Finally, there was some (inaccurate) perception that consultations on the school year have taken place previously, with a note that it is difficult for smaller and volunteer-led organisations to respond consistently to calls for engagement.

## **2.6 Additional Correspondence – emails and letters**

### **2.6.1 Additional responses to proposed changes**

In addition to the survey and Easy Read responses, 127 emails and 52 letters were received in response to the consultation, including 50 responses received on behalf of organisations. Of these responses, 16 were received in Welsh.

### **2.6.2 General responses to proposed changes**

Of the additional correspondence received, stakeholders communicated their thoughts in general on the concept of the changes proposed.

The individuals who expressed positive sentiments to the changes affirmed that the Autumn term is too long, echoing responses to the consultation in describing that both practitioners and learners are fatigued by the end of the Autumn term and experience higher rates of illness. The proposals to balance the term lengths could, as a result, support the workforce. Further, individuals commented how there is a need for change to meet current societal challenges, and that they felt the summer holiday is too long. Whilst some recognised that there may be 'other important things to focus on', they mentioned that the proposals are an example of the Welsh Government taking initiative on something which could make a difference without requiring funding, and possibly setting an example for the rest of the UK.

One indifferent response emphasised that the number of holiday days is not changing and therefore similar issues will show up at different times. This stakeholder linked this to the discontinuation of the holiday FSM voucher.

Those who responded negatively to the concept of the consultation mentioned the timing of the changes, the perceived improper conduct or criticism of the handling of the consultation, perceived lack of evidence and unconvincing rationale for change, the feeling that the proposals are the wrong tool for solving relevant challenges for society, that the proposed changes would be problematic for families living on the English border, and the knock-on effects for individuals in Further Education with the resulting differences in holiday patterns.

Respondents who commented on the timing of the proposed changes related this to the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector, including among those new to the profession. Also related to this was the perceived volume of change in the education sector as well as the feeling that the proposed changes were starting too soon for businesses potentially affected to adapt and build resilience to a new school year structure.

The correspondence relating to the perceived improper conduct or criticism of the management of the consultation mentioned a 'disingenuous use of learners' as a rationale for 'unnecessary' and 'politically driven' change, as well as a lack of support for the proposals from parents, learners and teachers. In addition, criticism of the consultation questionnaire related to the inclusion, exclusion, phrasing, and formatting of consultation questions.

The perceived lack of evidence and unconvincing rationale for change mentioned by some respondents related to the evidence referred to in the consultation document. They felt this evidence focused on the United States and Canada rather than a UK context, and that the evidence does not indicate a relationship between alternative calendars and student

attainment, nor make comparisons to other countries with longer summers and higher PISA scores.

The respondents who suggested that the calendar reform is a distraction or the wrong tool for solving relevant problems felt that challenges such as learner poverty and disadvantage and childcare provision should be addressed more directly and comprehensively, especially as standard annual leave entitlement for parents is less than school holiday length. The policy areas listed by respondents that the Welsh Government should instead focus on included affordable childcare, additional support for learners in school, financial support for low wage families, funding for the NHS, addressing the recruitment and retention crisis of school staff, teaching practitioner workloads, school budget cuts, pupil attendance and behaviour, school meal provision, and holiday club provision, particularly for those in Years 7 upwards.

Finally, those who had generally negative views on the principle of the consultation mentioned the feeling that calendar change would be problematic in terms of childcare particularly for families living on the English border, and shared concerns about knock-on effects on adult learners in Further Education, in terms of differences in holiday patterns and increased childcare costs.

### **2.6.3 Support for Option 1**

The respondents who showed support for Option 1 mentioned how the current school calendar is attractive for recruitment into and retention within the teaching profession, the feeling that children deserve a long break in the summer, the avoidance of potential negative impacts on tourism, as well as the belief that there is no evidence that changes would benefit education overall and that this is the option with the least disruption, that the Welsh Government should not 'fix what isn't broken'.

Of the respondents who did not support Option 1, several individuals mentioned factors explored within the consultation document. Others raised the inconvenience associated with the moving of the Easter holidays from year to year, and the excessive length of the summer holiday in terms of social isolation and wellbeing resulting in boredom for learners. Some respondents in favour of change expressed that this was on the condition that awarding bodies push assessment deadlines back to later on in the term to coincide with the proposed term dates.

### **2.6.4 Support for Option 2 – length of summer holidays**

Of the respondents who were in favour of Options 2 and 3 in relation to the shortening of the summer holidays, the factors mentioned related to childcare implications, the weather, safeguarding considerations and minimising the disruption to routine, including for Welsh language learners who do not speak Welsh at home.

Some respondents explained how the shortening of the summer holiday would be helpful in spreading the cost of childcare throughout the year, as the expense of the summer holiday has an impact on families, particularly for working parents. One respondent mentioned that a shorter summer holiday would be particularly beneficial for families with children of different ages.

In relation to the weather, some respondents commented that they felt the weather was better in May rather than in August, so it would be of benefit to increase the length of the May half term. Some respondents mentioned that they were in favour of shortening the summer holiday as long as the term dates were amended, with the Autumn term starting earlier (at the end of August) rather than ending later in July. Some respondents linked the dates of the Royal Welsh Show to this preference.



Some respondents felt that a shorter summer may reduce isolation for young people and positively impact social skills, friendships and wellbeing. This related to the disadvantages of having a longer summer holiday, including concerns around the safeguarding of disadvantaged learners. Others highlighted the difficulties a longer summer involves for learning, including learners forgetting the learning routine, difficulty transitioning back into routine, and learning loss for disadvantaged learners in particular.

Minimising the disruption to routine and loss of learning was thought to be especially pertinent for learners with ALN and for Welsh medium learners with little exposure to the Welsh language during the holidays.

It was noted that there were potential negative wellbeing impacts of a shorter summer holiday. Learners enjoy a long summer and the opportunity to spend time with family and friends, rest and recover from the school year, and avoid some of the worry associated with the return to school. A longer summer also allows self-development beyond the classroom. The implication of some of these comments was that shorter summer holidays might reduce the recovery effects of a long summer break and lead to learners taking time off during school time. In response to the contention that shortening the summer break could reduce the period of time during which disadvantaged children are subject to safeguarding concerns, some responses emphasised that shortening summer does not solve this problem and that additional provision and support should be implemented for these learners. A specific concern was raised in relation to a perception that school year reforms could complicate court ordered child arrangements in the case of divorced or separated parents.

It was noted that shortening the summer holiday might complicate border families' childcare arrangements and the increase in working from home since 2020 was seen by some to have mitigated the childcare challenge over the long summer more than the Miller Research report (2023) reflected. Large companies were reported to have adapted to the six-week break, allowing families more flexible working over summer, so a shorter summer would weaken these accommodations. Additionally, families were concerned the price of holidays might increase if there is a shorter tie period of time in which families can take a family holiday. This may in turn lead to more unauthorised absences from school in term time.

Importantly, school staff fatigued from the school year also need a long break to properly recover, with significance placed on the fact that school leaders and many other staff have additional work-related responsibilities during summer, shortening the six-week break substantially. The long summer holidays are a popular aspect of the profession and there was a concern that recruitment and retention would be impacted.

Shortening the summer break was also felt by some respondents to have the potential to affect summer employment and holiday provision. Existing summer staffing arrangements and seasonal work in tourist areas rely on university students and other young people and might struggle to find staff if displaced to other parts of the year. This is also true for the youth work sector, with a longer period of employment over summer being more attractive for the recruitment of staff. For secondary school learners, shortening the summer may also mean fewer opportunities to get their first work experiences, develop soft skills, and earn their own money. Young people take time to train and the impact on agriculture might be particularly poignant, it was noted.

This was also true for some school staff who work additional jobs in the summer, with comments that it would be more challenging for them to find additional employment if summer holidays were shorter. Further education lecturers may also be disadvantaged by a shorter summer due to the more limited opportunity to undergo professional learning opportunities.

Some responses highlighted a perceived lack of evidence that shortening the summer holidays would benefit learners, making comparisons to other countries (with long summer holidays) and high PISA results. It was also noted that experiences from the peak COVID-19 pandemic years are not appropriate to use as the basis for a need to reform the school year, and that global warming is likely to result in increasing temperatures, which learners should not be in school for, as schools in Wales are commonly not designed to withstand heat.

A final tranche of responses identified few benefits of having an extra week at the end of the summer term to shorten the summer break. This extra week at the end of summer term was not seen as equal to a week placed elsewhere in the year. Concerns noted that this would effectively mean a week of lost learning for learners who have already taken their examinations and would mean less time for exam preparation.

### **2.6.5 School Calendar Amendments – two-week Autumn half term**

The primary benefit of a two-week October half term break was the potential opportunity for rest and alleviation of fatigue for learners and school staff. The long autumn term has poor attendance rates because illness is prevalent, it was noted. This two-week break may also mean cheaper holidays for families, which could also prevent children from being taken out of school during term time for more affordable holidays. This proposal balances the term lengths and reduces the cost of heating and lighting for schools in the winter – though this was seen as a drawback by others, who noted that families would likely have increased heating and lighting bills as a result.

Those who saw the proposed two-week Autumn half term as a negative frequently mentioned the colder, darker weather. This may be more expensive for families, who would have higher energy costs and would have to find ways to entertain their children inside, compared to summer when children are better able to play outdoors. The added costs this would pose for families risks putting disadvantaged learners in a more difficult position, especially in relation to safeguarding issues. Additionally, some were concerned that children would spend excessive time on screens during this break if it were extended, and issues were raised about a potential rise in antisocial behaviour and worries about the safety of children who are more likely to be left alone during a longer half term. It was specified that these impacts on families are also true for support staff.

The impacts on the winter exam period were another source of concern. This exam period, often dominated by Year 11 learners sitting mock exams, typically begins in the first week of November following the half term break, so a week of exam preparation would be lost. It could also affect learners resitting GCSEs in mathematics, mathematics–numeracy, English language, and Welsh language, respondents added. One suggested that moving the November exams back one week later could avoid this problem.

For all learners in exam years, a two-week October break would also shorten the delivery timeframe for exam preparation generally. Taking a week from autumn term and moving it to the end of summer term would disadvantage learners in Wales compared to learners elsewhere in the UK, it was felt, as the “quiet” post-exam end of summer term may even see some of these learners having already left school. The longer October break also risks a loss of momentum for FE learners.

Some concerns were raised about a two-week October break for the local tourism industry, with some expecting families who can afford it to take holidays abroad in pursuit of warmer weather, disadvantaging lower-income families, local tourism, and possibly the environment if air travel rises.

### **2.6.6 School Calendar Amendments – Decoupled Easter**

In terms of decoupling Easter, opinions were also mixed. The advantages included the levelling out of the spring and summer terms and consistency for schools, particularly when supporting learners in examination years.

The disadvantages of a decoupled Easter include the potential disruption of two extra bank holidays during term time (Good Friday and Easter Monday) in years when the school break would be decoupled from Easter, and potential issues this might cause for faith schools. Some stakeholders also said that the idea of the bank holidays being decoupled from, but quite close to the two-week break would also be disruptive, and these “separate” bank holidays may impact attendance in term time. On that note, sports competitions for some learners take place in England during the Easter break, which may cause learners to miss school in order to complete, if the breaks in England and Wales are not aligned.

More generally, Easter was seen as an important religious and family holiday. One respondent saw this proposed change as an indication of Welsh society shifting away from the Christian faith. Given that many parents may take annual leave around Easter itself, it was preferred by some to keep the school break as it is. This point was also raised by the tourism sector, with some concerned about the impact on staff turnover and that a decoupled Easter may not result in “two bites of the cherry” around the school break and bank holidays, as parents could struggle to get time off.

### **2.6.7 Support for Option 2 in general**

The need to ensure implications for FE are fully considered was underscored. This includes the impact on traditional apprenticeships, and requests for awarding bodies to push assessment dates back in the summer term to expand teaching time and ensure FE learners are not disadvantaged. Additionally, the issues around childcare for staff and staff contracts also extend to FE lecturers, who are contracted to teach a set number of hours each year, so any school year reforms would need to consider this.

Other views on Option 2 included demands for further impact assessments, analysis of cost implications of each option including from changes in spending on supply teachers, workload impacts considering wider reforms in the education sector, effects on recruitment and retention, impacts on professional learning and development outside INSET days, and impacts on border families. There were also calls to ensure schools and colleges maintain term date alignment and that the regulatory infrastructure is in place such that any changes would not impact staff or learners. Some responses, particularly those mentioning the Royal Welsh Show, asked the Welsh Government to reconsider these proposals.

### **2.6.8 School Calendar Amendments – two-week May / June half term**

The respondents who were in favour of a two-week May / June half term largely mentioned the weather, with some stating a preference for a two-week holiday during this time of year rather than October due to the more favourable weather. It was also mentioned that a two-week holiday in May / June would give an opportunity to reduce stress for learners who are preparing or undertaking exams, and would also potentially spread annual leave requests for working parents to this time as opposed to being concentrated in the summer holidays.

Some respondents outlined that they would be less in favour of a two-week May / June half term because of a perceived negative impact on the summer exam period. This was mentioned in relation to the exams and assessments that learners would be taking by UK awarding bodies, where no Made for Wales alternatives are in place, which would require learners to sit assessments during the (extended) half term break. Also mentioned was the shortened delivery time of qualifications for Years 11 and 13. This would mean that learners in other nations in the UK would have two additional weeks of teaching time as compared to

their counterparts in Wales. Specifically mentioned were the timetables for many Level 3 vocational qualifications and GCSE 9–1 international languages that are designed with learners in England in mind.

### **2.6.9 School Calendar Amendments – GCSE & A / AS Level results days**

Of the respondents who thought that it would be advantageous for GCSE and A / AS Level results days to be held in the same week, considerations listed included additional time which would be afforded to place learners from school following an earlier GCSE results day to align with the A Level results day. Also mentioned was the advantage of Level 3 students relying on GCSE results for entry into Higher Education as it would enable their university admission to be confirmed on the same day as the publication of their Level 3 qualifications.

Of the negative factors listed by respondents, the most common consideration was the greater risk for the accurate and timely delivery of results, as well as risks impacting the ability of schools and FE colleges to provide the same level of support to learners during this pressured time. They mentioned the increased time, resource and workload for key school staff, especially within smaller schools.

Finally, other respondents were generally in favour of the amendment for the results days to be held in the same week, with caveats mentioned. This included associated implications for the availability of exam markers, and for WJEC to consider whether the increase in concurrent workload could be implemented successfully, especially in relation to exams via the medium of Welsh. Although the positive impact that having the results days had during Covid–19 was mentioned, this was with the consideration that the changes were under different circumstances with alternative assessment arrangements in place. In addition, it was mentioned that exam results days are a special day for young people, so any changes should not dilute their experience. Stakeholders also mentioned how this move would need to be well planned in advance to ensure that staff are not overburdened as part of this process.

### **2.6.10 Support for Option 3 in general**

Of the respondents who indicated they were in support of Option 3 in general, they felt that the resulting terms would be more consistent and predictable, two factors which greatly benefit the education of pupils and the wellbeing of both learners and staff.

There were quite a few stakeholders who were in favour of Option 3 and the resulting perceived improvements to the education system, but with caveats. These caveats included a consideration of teaching and learning loss for learners in Years 11 and 13, with others in favour of Option 3 as long as any changes to the school year do not negatively impact the Royal Welsh Show. In addition, ensuring that any half term is no longer than eight weeks, as well as ensuring that the impact of the proposals on examination periods and results days are considered carefully, were highlighted as important.

The respondents who were against Option 3 in general cited how further assessment of the impacts of the proposals should be undertaken and shared as they were not convinced that the benefits detailed in the consultation document outweigh the risks of the proposals. There were also specific implications for FE, including the integration of other exam timetables, traditional apprenticeships structures and any impacts on FE lecturer teaching hours and days to deliver the full curriculum. Also mentioned were further negative impacts on the tourism sector.

### **2.6.11 Impact on specific groups**

Some stakeholders mentioned the positive impact that the proposals would have on the Welsh language, as children in Welsh-medium schools who do not have the opportunity to speak Welsh at home can often regress in language competence during time away from

school. They believed that a shorter summer break would go some way to mitigate this issue.

Those who mentioned negative impacts on the Welsh language linked this to the timing of the Royal Welsh Show against the proposed 2025 to 2026 term dates. They asserted that there is a link between attendance at the Royal Welsh Show and language acquisition, and that if attendance was to decline (for instance as a result of the Royal Welsh Show falling in term–time) this could also have a negative impact on Welsh culture.

Stakeholders felt that shortening the school summer break would have a positive impact on socio–economically disadvantaged learners. One stakeholder mentioned that a long summer can result in increased inequity in attainment. They mentioned that whilst the break can provide opportunities for wider social and cultural experiences for some, these are not available consistently and are not accessible for all families, particularly at a time when families are struggling with rising costs. Lack of these consistent, stimulating activities, combined with poor access to community facilities in certain areas means that some learners are losing out on enriching opportunities and risk falling behind in their education during the summer break. It was stated that the vulnerable children that one organisation works with would benefit from more consistent health and wellbeing support, and increased safeguarding oversight stemming from a shorter summer break which may impact positively on reducing the need for emergency applications to court for taking children into care after the summer break. However, an unintended consequence of lengthening other term breaks could increase emergency applications at different times of the year for vulnerable learners.

Negative factors listed in relation to socio–economically disadvantaged learners were in relation to the additional heating costs during an extended October half-term break. Also mentioned was the potential negative implications on family court arrangements on existing court orders, and for separated families with siblings who live across the border in England.

Stakeholders mentioned that in order to support these learners, the Welsh Government would need to ensure that resources such as funded holiday clubs are provided to support wellbeing and prevent learning loss.

Some stakeholders mentioned confusion over how the proposals would apply to older learners in Year 11 and Year 13 where a week of teaching would be taken from October and added to July, as in Option 2, and where a week of teaching would be taken from May and added to July in Option 3. They explained that these exam classes in the secondary school sector would lose two weeks of teaching in important exam years. Another stakeholder was uncertain as to whether the plans would also affect FE colleges who offer non–vocational subjects to 16–18-year-olds who attend school.

In terms of the implications of the proposals on learners with ALN, several factors were mentioned by stakeholders. The shortened summer holiday and more structured term times were seen to be a positive for learners with ALN as these would promote structure and routine, which is reduced during the school holidays. However, those who felt that the proposals would have a negative effect on learners with ALN felt that learning loss and impacts can occur during any length of break, not just the long summer holiday. In general, stakeholders felt that greater support for learners with ALN would be needed in addition to reducing pressure of exams and assessments.

In relation to learners within PRUs, some stakeholders mentioned the negative effects they felt the proposals would have. This included the preference for learners attending PRUs to have a longer break from the classroom environment as they are the groups to find it most challenging, that they like to be outdoors rather than stuck at home in what quite often are poor housing conditions, and that their role as a PRU teacher is extremely challenging. They felt that the summer break is the only time they feel they can truly relax.

### **2.6.12 Impact on specific sectors**

In addition to the factors already mentioned within the specific options listed above, tourism stakeholders felt that there would be several additional impacts from the proposals. Some tourism stakeholders felt that the impact of the proposals cannot be considered in isolation and instead need to be considered as part of numerous other Welsh Government policies, listing policies such as the visitor levy and registration and licensing scheme for all visitor accommodation in Wales already having a cumulative negative impact on the sector. They argued that these specific proposals would have a 'ripple effect' on visitors and residents as well as learners.

Tourism stakeholders mentioned the effect that the proposals could have on the family holiday market, mentioning published Welsh Government data outlining that the domestic family holiday market claims a higher share of the overall market than it does in other parts of the UK, making the impact of any change to the school year more pointed. They also mentioned that prices would have to rise to mitigate against the loss of a peak summer holiday week, the benefits of which 'would not simply be replicated by a week when days are shorter, colder and wetter'. This is listed against an 80 per cent reduction in revenue when compared to the first week of July to the proposed additional week in October.

The youth work sector was also specifically mentioned by some stakeholders raising the point that using youth services to monitor vulnerable pupils would be far more beneficial and less financially expensive than changing a system 'that has worked for centuries'. There was also a question about how the annual leave for youth workers would be taken into account within the options proposed.

### **2.6.13 Alternative calendar suggestions**

Several alternative calendar suggestions were noted by stakeholders. This included starting the Autumn term earlier (at the end of August) and separating out the proposed two weeks' half term holiday in the Autumn term outlined in Option 2. Also mentioned by several stakeholders was ensuring that the Christmas holidays start earlier, as they felt that that they began too close to Christmas in 2023. One suggestion to ensure that Christmas holidays are earlier was to remove one week from the end of the Autumn term and extend the short half of the Spring term. One respondent mentioned how they would prefer for the Christmas holidays to be lengthened instead of two weeks in the October half term.

Other stakeholders mentioned their preference for a two week break in February, or having a two week May half term instead of a two-week October half term. This was in contrast to other stakeholders preferring an extended summer holiday length, starting summer holidays in June or July for better weather, adding summer school provision, and a preference for year-round schooling, or starting the school year in January.

Several respondents also mentioned their preference to have St David's Day as a Bank Holiday in Wales, as well as including GCSE and A Level results day in term time to remove any requirement for teachers and staff to come into school during the holidays.

Finally, some respondents mentioned their desire for the Welsh Government to review the structure of the school day, including considerations for daily start times for schools, half days to transition back into school after holidays, and considering half days on Fridays, cited as being the case in Scotland and France.

### **2.6.14 Additional comments**

Further to the proposed school year reforms, stakeholders also raised additional comments on the consultation.

Some suggested that with the increased cost of living, school year reform was secondary to other more impactful support measures that could be put in place for struggling families including extending access to food provision through the summer holidays, enabling greater access to affordable childcare and extending programmes to enable affordable public transport for children and parents to reduce the financial burden of long summer holidays.

Some stakeholders felt that there was insufficient evidence to support the proposed changes and that other countries with longer summer holidays than Wales had better learning outcomes. Additionally, evidence cited such as the Beaufort study (2022) was felt to be limited in looking only at attitudes towards the school year, which suggested most people were happy with the status quo. Also, respondents questioned the rationale of the reform of the school year, noting that under the proposed changes for 2025/26 term lengths would not be equal.

Evidence submitted from unions and organisations in the tourism sector drawing from survey data highlighted reluctance of businesses to engage with the Welsh Government due to consultation fatigue given the number of proposed changes by the Welsh Government and dismissal of evidence in previous consultations.

Some respondents felt that the drivers of the proposed changes to the school year were politically motivated and did not address the root cause of wellbeing issues, which were felt to be workload, funding constraints and the undervaluing of school support staff. It was felt that there will be wider implications for the workforce and learners as a result and potential strikes from unions if the proposals go ahead.

One organisational response requested that Welsh Government withdraw the proposals for school year reform and redirect efforts towards undertaking an economic impact assessment of the 182-day threshold and a cumulative impact assessment.<sup>17</sup>

Union respondents noted the importance of adhering to existing staff terms and conditions as outlined in the Burgundy Book. They suggested that a change in term times in Wales would require revision to dates set out in the Burgundy Book, which would have wider implications on working times and patterns including notice periods and dates from which salaries are calculated. Such a 'substantive alteration' from the Burgundy Book arrangements, it was felt, would go against the current collective agreement that is in place and may give grounds for constructive unfair dismissal claims for those who are impacted. There were concerns that these changes would also have implications for the retention of support staff who already have concerns around being rehired on a new contract or having to re-interview for their role and may decide on redundancy instead thus resulting in a loss of expertise in the sector.

One respondent felt that the consultation design was limited by a lack of a neutral response option for responding to the consultation questions.

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<sup>17</sup> The 182-day threshold refers to [non-domestic rates for self-catering properties in Wales](#) where a property must be let for 182 days a year to qualify for non-domestic rates. If it is let for fewer than 182 days the property is classed as domestic and the owner liable to pay council tax.

## 3 Conclusion

### 3.1.1 Could the school year calendar be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing and modern living?

The consultation survey results suggest that of the proposed options, the school calendar could be better structured to support modern living (Q1 58.42%), disadvantage (Q2 54.72% and Q3 55.39%) and wellbeing (Q4 59.58%).

Stakeholders reported several issues with the current school calendar. The length of the autumn term causes fatigue and negatively impacts wellbeing. Inconsistent term lengths are an obstacle for learners with additional learning needs and the uneven spread of school breaks is a hindrance to parents with this being most acute for socio–economically disadvantaged families.

For some there are strengths to the existing calendar. The long time it has been established means several sectors have adapted around it with the existing time out of school in spring and summer working well for tourism and events sectors. Examinations are set up to be delivered around the existing school year and education staff deliver to these arrangements. There is a level of expectation that a single longer summer break is better than other options presented at addressing fatigue and wellbeing concerns in between academic years as staff carry on working throughout other breaks and part of the summer.

These tensions mean that despite the majority figures given above and the high levels of interest in the proposals across consultation responses and social media, Option 1, maintaining the current school year is still favoured (see Q9 52.28%). Those who were in favour of Option 1 broadly included school stakeholders and the tourism sector who were unconvinced that the rationale for the proposed changes was worth a break from the status quo. Those who were not in favour of Option 1 broadly included parents and local authorities who echoed the rationale outlined within the consultation document as evidence for supporting changes. This included the need to better support the wellbeing of learners and teachers, better support modern patterns of living and working and reduce fatigue.

### 3.1.2 What impacts do stakeholders anticipate the proposed alternate school year structures would have on them, in the short and the longer term?

Views of stakeholders on the impacts vary depending on the individual context and the detail within the proposed structures.

Those who were in favour of a two–week Autumn half term break noted the potential positive effects on learner wellbeing, to include a reduction in fatigue and illnesses among learners.

Those who were against the proposed two–week Autumn half term break mentioned how any benefits gained during this additional week break was not worth the sacrifice of one week less of the summer break. The two–week break was seen to be too long especially for some younger learners, learners with ALN and learners in exam years, and the poorer weather and decrease in daylight hours was frequently mentioned by all stakeholders. Parents felt that the increased heating bills and cost of childcare would outweigh any benefits of this break. Tourism stakeholders saw only a substantial negative impact, especially for small, seasonal and outdoor tourism businesses and events such as the Royal Welsh show.

Broad levels of support for a decoupled Easter break were communicated within the stakeholder groups, to provide some stability, ease of planning and consistency of term dates from year to year. A later spring break than in some years would be a benefit for tourism and prevent a condensed, short spring term, for education staff and learners.



There were however some mixed views on the impact on families close to the English border, whether this would result in a tourism uplift and the potential impact on losing the 'protected' status of the Easter holiday, making it less visible within Welsh society and within church schools. If the decoupled Easter change is implemented, this would need to be communicated well with stakeholders, as some confusion about the implications of the 'extra' two Bank Holiday days was mentioned.

Many stakeholders were concerned about the potential impact of a two-week May / June half term on exam dates and learner performance. Teaching stakeholders and the wider education sector felt this break would have a negative impact on exams through lost learning time and a worry this would disproportionately impact disadvantaged students and those with ALN, who are not always able to study outside of school.

Beyond exams, the warmer weather was seen as a positive mostly with parents and learners, with some highlighting a preference for a two week break here rather than in October because of the weather and impact on chances for holidays.

In general, shortening the summer break to allow for lengthening the autumn and/or the May breaks was seen by many stakeholder groups to cause a negative impact. Further limiting staff flexibility due to remaining responsibilities and delaying the start of the summer was seen by some within education as posing a risk to recruitment and retention of school staff. For a small number of education workforce stakeholders and most tourism stakeholders, the rebalance of weeks was not equivalent with extra time in autumn being more valuable in school for teaching and learning and much less valuable for a break for tourism. Other than in this case and for concern for exams mentioned above, stakeholders generally did not comment on the proposals producing a negative impact on academic ability.

Moving exam results days to be within the same week for GCSE and A levels was popular (Q8 69.18%) but the impacts were not fully anticipated as the consultation document did not contain detail on how arrangements would make this possible. Expectations were mixed with worries about effect on workload or hopes that it would lessen the time education staff were needed to work during the summer break.

In terms of the proposed options' impacts on Welsh language, views were mixed. While a portion of respondents, and a majority of respondents who completed the Easy Read survey, did not feel these proposals would affect the Welsh language, others highlighted that a shorter summer break could reduce learning loss and improve Welsh language retention for learners who do not speak Welsh at home. Other comments related to how potential school year reforms could impact opportunities for learners to be exposed to the Welsh language, including at events such as the National Eisteddfod and Royal Welsh Show that are important to Welsh culture.

### **3.1.3 Which specific changes, if any, would be most effective in achieving a balance between the different needs and concerns of stakeholders?**

The needs and concerns of stakeholders are mixed and very little consensus exists across all of them. In the survey all demographic groups of survey respondents were not in favour of Option 3 and only part-time workers were in favour of Option 2. Yet according to the focus groups, parents were broadly in favour of change, mostly split between Options 2 and 3. They welcomed changes expected to benefit their ability to handle childcare, potential wellbeing benefits for disadvantaged learners, those with ALN, and those in rural communities.

School governors and youth workers were also broadly in favour of Option 2, with both groups highlighting concern about holiday provision in a longer autumn half-term break but had some concerns about the extent of change in Option 3. Holiday provision was key for

youth workers, with concerns about funding for summer provision and activities would be replaced in October and May/June if Option 3 were to be implemented.

Tourism stakeholders in focus groups welcomed the decoupling of the spring break from Easter (at odds with the findings of the survey for Q6 and tourism) but strongly opposed all other changes in Option 2, mostly due to resistance to shortening the summer break and removing one week of peak season trading.

Among those in opposition were most school staff who participated in the focus groups, as well as education unions. Reluctance to shorten the summer holiday was highlighted due to the need for a long break for staff to recover and the fact that most staff work through at least some of the six-week break already. The potential impact on recruitment and retention was a common worry. School staff and union representatives were sceptical that any of the proposed reforms would benefit learner wellbeing or learning loss and they had concerns around disruption to autumn term's heavy period of curriculum delivery. Education unions and school staff largely opposed Option 3, with unions underscoring the need to ensure respect of contractual agreements and staff highlighting the difference between one week in the autumn term and one week in the summer term in terms of exam preparation. Schools and unions mostly preferred the status quo (Option 1) and saw some of the proposed reforms as shifting challenges to different parts of the year rather than solving them.

Interviewees saw Option 2 as a "happy medium" with positive reactions from a range of stakeholders, including around impacts on Welsh—medium settings. The primary concerns highlighted in interviews surrounded Option 2's impact on the exam system, with potential to mitigate wellbeing pressures on exam year learners but could negatively impact staff. Interviewees stressed exam system impacts of Option 3, specifically in terms of accessing enough exam markers with a short summer break and one results week, but also highlighted the potential to reduce learning loss. Secondary school learners and staff, disadvantaged learners, and parents were expected by some stakeholders to benefit from the more even breaks by some interviewees, but there was concern around the impact on small businesses, hospitality, and tourism. The focus group data indicates that local authority and early years, childcare and play stakeholders preferred Option 3. Early years, childcare and play stakeholders preferred Option 3 for its ability to spread the costs and staffing pressures around childcare throughout the year but they were concerned about staffing Early Years provision with teaching assistants in a four-week summer break. Option 3 brought up concerns about communities on the English border, including around staffing of special schools.

#### **3.1.4 Which implementation options for any changes to school year structure, would be most and least effective and favourable? Why?**

From Option 1, 2, and 3 no clear preferred option is evident. Option 1 is the most favoured in the survey (52.58%) but stakeholders were more open to change in the focus groups. In terms of the specific term dates for 2025 and 2026 for Options 2 and 3 proposed in question 12 of the consultation, over half (52.85%) of respondents opposed these dates.

Respondents and participants also offered some alternative proposals for reforms to the school year. Some involved a different combination of proposed elements from Options 1, 2, and 3. For example, support for decoupling Easter without changing any other elements of the calendar, or a preference for a five-week summer with the two-week half-term in May/June instead of October. Others centred on separate reforms, such as lengthening Christmas break to three weeks, "fixing" Christmas break to start at a given time in December to avoid term time running close to Christmas Eve, starting the school year later on in September, or starting the summer break earlier for better weather. Some called for St David's Day to become a bank holiday. A common theme was the need for additional

support for learners, particularly disadvantaged learners and those with ALN, during school breaks.

Of the proposed changes, having exam results days for GCSE and A levels in the same week is the most favoured by stakeholders, although guidance on how to implement this was not included in the consultation and further the impacts were not fully explored by stakeholders themselves.

Because of the very mixed, and sometime contradictory, feedback to the consultation it is difficult to be certain which of the 3 options proposed in the consultation would be the most, or least, effective. More than half of the survey responses agreed that the school calendar could be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing, and modern living, whilst more than half (albeit slightly less) of the survey responses preferred Option 1 of maintaining the current school year. The survey responses settled into a pattern from week 8 onwards and before that week more responses in favour for Option 2 and no option favoured by more than half of responses before that week. The qualitative research indicates a more complex picture with parents, school governors and youth workers being broadly in favour of change on the one hand, and tourism stakeholders, the education workforce and education unions in opposition to change on the other. The expected impacts of any changes are varied, often stakeholder dependent, and frequently not focused on academic achievement, attainment, and progression. There is little consensus in the views and assumptions of stakeholders, clearly represented by the near 50/50 split on several questions.

## 4 Annex

### 4.1 Consultation responses by respondent type

**Table 4.1.1 – Question 1 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today?**

| <b>Question 1</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 34.39                          | 24.03                 | 13.57                    | 27.19                             | 0.82                         | 58.42                                    | 40.76  |
| Education workforce | 29.78                          | 27.18                 | 14.18                    | 28.34                             | 0.51                         | 56.97                                    | 42.52  |
| Parents / Carers    | 38.99                          | 12.50                 | 12.50                    | 25.32                             | 10.70                        | 51.48                                    | 37.81  |
| Full-time worker    | 35.55                          | 23.54                 | 12.61                    | 27.51                             | 0.77                         | 59.10                                    | 40.13  |
| Part-time worker    | 41.99                          | 25.21                 | 13.57                    | 18.62                             | 0.61                         | 67.19                                    | 32.19  |
| Tourism sector      | 18.96                          | 21.93                 | 15.99                    | 42.01                             | 1.12                         | 40.89                                    | 57.99  |
| Childcare sector    | 37.16                          | 25.96                 | 11.63                    | 24.54                             | 0.71                         | 63.12                                    | 36.17  |
| Age 17 and under    | 36.27                          | 26.56                 | 12.78                    | 23.69                             | 0.69                         | 62.83                                    | 36.47  |

**Table 4.1.2 – Question 2 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners?**

| <b>Question 2</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 27.57                          | 27.14                 | 18.58                    | 25.45                             | 1.26                         | 54.72                                    | 44.02  |
| Education workforce | 24.27                          | 28.80                 | 19.38                    | 26.83                             | 0.72                         | 53.07                                    | 46.21  |
| Parents / Carers    | 31.86                          | 26.49                 | 17.31                    | 23.42                             | 0.92                         | 58.36                                    | 40.72  |
| Full-time worker    | 28.15                          | 26.68                 | 18.28                    | 25.85                             | 1.03                         | 54.83                                    | 44.14  |
| Part-time worker    | 33.55                          | 30.74                 | 17.39                    | 17.00                             | 1.32                         | 64.30                                    | 34.39  |
| Tourism sector      | 13.94                          | 24.16                 | 20.63                    | 37.36                             | 3.90                         | 38.10                                    | 57.99  |

|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Childcare sector | 32.62 | 28.37 | 14.47 | 23.26 | 1.28 | 60.99 | 37.73 |
| Age 17 and under | 28.64 | 30.33 | 16.95 | 23.19 | 0.89 | 58.97 | 40.14 |

**Table 4.1.3 – Question 3 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with ALN?**

| <b>Question 3</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 28.33                          | 27.06                 | 18.67                    | 24.57                             | 1.37                         | 55.39                                    | 43.24  |
| Education workforce | 24.46                          | 28.34                 | 20.42                    | 26.17                             | 0.60                         | 52.80                                    | 46.59  |
| Parents / Carers    | 33.15                          | 26.25                 | 16.77                    | 22.76                             | 1.07                         | 59.40                                    | 39.53  |
| Full-time worker    | 28.46                          | 26.87                 | 18.53                    | 25.04                             | 1.09                         | 55.34                                    | 43.57  |
| Part-time worker    | 34.87                          | 30.87                 | 16.60                    | 15.94                             | 1.71                         | 65.74                                    | 32.54  |
| Tourism sector      | 15.06                          | 24.54                 | 21.75                    | 34.39                             | 4.28                         | 39.59                                    | 56.13  |
| Childcare sector    | 34.89                          | 28.51                 | 13.90                    | 21.42                             | 1.28                         | 63.40                                    | 35.32  |
| Age 17 and under    | 30.72                          | 30.53                 | 16.65                    | 21.11                             | 0.99                         | 61.25                                    | 37.76  |

**Table 4.1.4 – Question 4 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher and/or learner well-being and ease fatigue?**

| <b>Question 4</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 35.47                          | 24.11                 | 14.11                    | 25.21                             | 1.09                         | 59.58                                    | 39.33  |
| Education workforce | 37.14                          | 23.44                 | 12.93                    | 25.79                             | 0.70                         | 60.58                                    | 38.73  |
| Parents / Carers    | 38.30                          | 24.24                 | 13.27                    | 23.50                             | 0.69                         | 62.54                                    | 36.77  |
| Full-time worker    | 35.95                          | 23.47                 | 13.77                    | 25.93                             | 0.89                         | 59.42                                    | 39.70  |
| Part-time worker    | 41.19                          | 27.45                 | 13.39                    | 16.91                             | 1.05                         | 68.64                                    | 30.30  |
| Tourism sector      | 18.96                          | 19.33                 | 18.96                    | 38.85                             | 3.90                         | 38.29                                    | 57.81  |

|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Childcare sector | 39.29 | 24.68 | 12.20 | 22.70 | 1.13 | 63.97 | 34.89 |
| Age 17 and under | 33.99 | 27.85 | 15.56 | 21.80 | 0.79 | 61.84 | 37.36 |

**Table 4.1.5 – Question 5 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break), dividing the longest term (autumn)?**

| <b>Question 5</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 32.96                          | 17.74                 | 10.66                    | 37.89                             | 0.76                         | 50.70                                    | 48.54  |
| Education workforce | 32.83                          | 19.74                 | 10.53                    | 36.35                             | 0.55                         | 52.57                                    | 46.88  |
| Parents / Carers    | 36.40                          | 17.51                 | 10.14                    | 35.49                             | 0.46                         | 53.91                                    | 45.63  |
| Full-time worker    | 33.73                          | 17.25                 | 10.33                    | 38.04                             | 0.65                         | 50.98                                    | 48.36  |
| Part-time worker    | 39.48                          | 20.07                 | 10.89                    | 28.72                             | 0.83                         | 59.55                                    | 39.61  |
| Tourism sector      | 14.87                          | 12.64                 | 12.83                    | 58.74                             | 0.93                         | 27.51                                    | 71.56  |
| Childcare sector    | 37.59                          | 18.30                 | 9.65                     | 33.76                             | 0.71                         | 55.89                                    | 43.40  |
| Age 17 and under    | 33.80                          | 15.76                 | 10.70                    | 39.25                             | 0.50                         | 49.55                                    | 49.95  |

**Table 4.1.6 – Question 6 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?**

| <b>Question 6</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 23.12                          | 27.65                 | 17.47                    | 30.71                             | 1.05                         | 50.77                                    | 48.18  |
| Education workforce | 23.39                          | 29.76                 | 17.35                    | 28.85                             | 0.66                         | 53.15                                    | 46.20  |
| Parents / Carers    | 24.89                          | 28.77                 | 17.05                    | 28.54                             | 0.74                         | 53.67                                    | 45.59  |
| Full-time worker    | 23.51                          | 27.46                 | 17.38                    | 30.86                             | 0.79                         | 50.97                                    | 48.24  |
| Part-time worker    | 26.17                          | 31.75                 | 18.09                    | 23.06                             | 0.92                         | 57.93                                    | 41.15  |
| Tourism sector      | 11.71                          | 26.58                 | 17.84                    | 41.64                             | 2.23                         | 38.29                                    | 59.48  |

|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Childcare sector | 21.84 | 30.92 | 17.73 | 28.79 | 0.71 | 52.77 | 46.52 |
| Age 17 and under | 20.32 | 25.57 | 19.13 | 33.50 | 1.49 | 45.89 | 52.63 |

**Table 4.1.7 – Question 7 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break), to even term lengths?**

| Question 7          | Strongly agree per cent | Agree per cent | Disagree per cent | Strongly disagree per cent | Not answered per cent | Agree and strongly agree per cent | Disagree and strongly disagree per cent |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| All responses       | 25.17                   | 19.71          | 16.41             | 37.89                      | 0.81                  | 44.89                             | 54.30                                   |
| Education workforce | 20.46                   | 19.11          | 18.86             | 40.96                      | 0.62                  | 39.57                             | 59.82                                   |
| Parents / Carers    | 29.91                   | 21.20          | 14.66             | 33.66                      | 0.57                  | 51.11                             | 48.32                                   |
| Full-time worker    | 25.33                   | 19.92          | 15.85             | 38.22                      | 0.69                  | 45.24                             | 54.07                                   |
| Part-time worker    | 32.94                   | 22.92          | 16.78             | 26.57                      | 0.79                  | 55.86                             | 43.35                                   |
| Tourism sector      | 14.50                   | 15.61          | 15.80             | 53.16                      | 0.93                  | 30.11                             | 68.96                                   |
| Childcare sector    | 31.77                   | 19.86          | 15.04             | 32.20                      | 1.13                  | 51.63                             | 47.23                                   |
| Age 17 and under    | 27.16                   | 20.42          | 13.78             | 38.06                      | 0.59                  | 47.57                             | 51.83                                   |

**Table 4.1.8 – Question 8 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?**

| Question 8          | Strongly agree per cent | Agree per cent | Disagree per cent | Strongly disagree per cent | Not answered per cent | Agree and strongly agree per cent | Disagree and strongly disagree per cent |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| All responses       | 25.20                   | 43.99          | 15.04             | 13.42                      | 2.36                  | 69.18                             | 28.45                                   |
| Education workforce | 26.57                   | 43.35          | 15.19             | 13.57                      | 1.33                  | 69.91                             | 28.76                                   |
| Parents / Carers    | 26.12                   | 45.44          | 14.19             | 12.03                      | 2.22                  | 71.55                             | 26.23                                   |
| Full-time worker    | 26.80                   | 43.53          | 14.58             | 13.22                      | 1.87                  | 70.33                             | 27.80                                   |
| Part-time worker    | 24.37                   | 48.13          | 15.02             | 9.09                       | 3.38                  | 72.51                             | 24.11                                   |
| Tourism sector      | 16.73                   | 43.68          | 19.89             | 14.87                      | 4.83                  | 60.41                             | 34.76                                   |

|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Childcare sector | 24.96 | 47.23 | 12.62 | 13.19 | 1.99 | 72.20 | 25.82 |
| Age 17 and under | 24.18 | 43.51 | 16.25 | 14.07 | 1.98 | 67.69 | 30.33 |

**Table 4.1.9 – Question 9 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: Maintaining the existing school calendar?**

| <b>Question 9</b>   | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 39.07                          | 13.52                 | 23.49                    | 22.89                             | 1.03                         | 52.58                                    | 46.39  |
| Education workforce | 39.11                          | 15.39                 | 24.75                    | 20.08                             | 0.67                         | 54.50                                    | 44.83  |
| Parents / Carers    | 35.94                          | 12.42                 | 24.49                    | 26.26                             | 0.88                         | 48.36                                    | 50.76  |
| Full-time worker    | 39.05                          | 13.34                 | 23.30                    | 23.52                             | 0.80                         | 52.39                                    | 46.82  |
| Part-time worker    | 30.17                          | 12.38                 | 29.12                    | 27.23                             | 1.10                         | 42.56                                    | 56.35  |
| Tourism sector      | 57.81                          | 14.13                 | 13.57                    | 13.20                             | 1.30                         | 71.93                                    | 26.77  |
| Childcare sector    | 35.60                          | 10.50                 | 28.79                    | 23.40                             | 1.70                         | 46.10                                    | 52.20  |
| Age 17 and under    | 39.35                          | 13.48                 | 23.59                    | 22.89                             | 0.69                         | 52.82                                    | 46.48  |

**Table 4.1.10 – Question 10 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), and a five-week summer break?**

| <b>Question 10</b>  | <b>Strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree per cent</b> | <b>Strongly disagree per cent</b> | <b>Not answered per cent</b> | <b>Agree and strongly agree per cent</b> | <b>Disagree and strongly disagree per cent</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| All responses       | 17.80                          | 27.11                 | 17.03                    | 36.98                             | 1.08                         | 44.92                                    | 54.01  |
| Education workforce | 20.89                          | 27.64                 | 16.24                    | 34.48                             | 0.74                         | 48.54                                    | 50.73  |
| Parents / Carers    | 17.34                          | 29.50                 | 17.06                    | 35.29                             | 0.80                         | 46.84                                    | 52.36  |
| Full-time worker    | 17.83                          | 27.55                 | 16.57                    | 37.16                             | 0.89                         | 45.38                                    | 53.74  |
| Part-time worker    | 19.10                          | 32.76                 | 17.61                    | 29.51                             | 1.01                         | 51.87                                    | 47.12  |



|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Tourism sector   | 6.32  | 16.54 | 18.40 | 57.62 | 1.12 | 22.86 | 76.02 |
| Childcare sector | 19.72 | 28.37 | 16.74 | 34.33 | 0.85 | 48.09 | 51.06 |
| Age 17 and under | 17.15 | 26.76 | 17.05 | 38.65 | 0.40 | 43.90 | 55.70 |

**Table 4.1.11 – Question 11 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a two-week May break, and a four-week summer break?**

| Question 11         | Strongly agree per cent | Agree per cent | Disagree per cent | Strongly disagree per cent | Not answered per cent | Agree and strongly agree per cent | Disagree and strongly disagree per cent |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| All responses       | 23.65                   | 12.99          | 13.39             | 49.15                      | 0.81                  | 36.64                             | 62.54                                   |
| Education workforce | 18.78                   | 12.87          | 14.18             | 53.57                      | 0.60                  | 31.65                             | 67.75                                   |
| Parents / Carers    | 28.70                   | 13.90          | 11.96             | 44.90                      | 0.53                  | 42.60                             | 56.87                                   |
| Full-time worker    | 24.50                   | 12.72          | 12.76             | 49.51                      | 0.50                  | 37.23                             | 62.27                                   |
| Part-time worker    | 29.56                   | 17.35          | 14.40             | 37.81                      | 0.88                  | 46.90                             | 52.22                                   |
| Tourism sector      | 14.13                   | 7.43           | 10.59             | 66.54                      | 1.30                  | 21.56                             | 77.14                                   |
| Childcare sector    | 29.79                   | 16.74          | 11.91             | 41.13                      | 0.43                  | 46.52                             | 53.05                                   |
| Age 17 and under    | 26.96                   | 11.69          | 13.88             | 46.58                      | 0.89                  | 38.65                             | 60.46                                   |

**Table 4.1.12 – Question 12 - For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?**

| Question 12         | Strongly agree per cent | Agree per cent | Disagree per cent | Strongly disagree per cent | Not answered per cent | Agree and strongly agree per cent | Disagree and strongly disagree per cent |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| All responses       | 22.89                   | 22.60          | 12.19             | 40.65                      | 1.67                  | 45.49                             | 52.85                                   |
| Education workforce | 20.16                   | 24.89          | 12.82             | 40.77                      | 1.37                  | 45.04                             | 53.59                                   |
| Parents / Carers    | 26.88                   | 22.94          | 11.21             | 37.63                      | 1.33                  | 49.82                             | 48.84                                   |
| Full-time worker    | 23.53                   | 22.29          | 11.63             | 41.22                      | 1.33                  | 45.82                             | 52.85                                   |

|                  |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Part-time worker | 27.49 | 28.06 | 12.17 | 30.39 | 1.89 | 55.56 | 42.56 |
| Tourism sector   | 12.08 | 10.41 | 12.83 | 62.64 | 2.04 | 22.49 | 75.46 |
| Childcare sector | 27.09 | 25.67 | 10.50 | 35.60 | 1.13 | 52.77 | 46.10 |
| Age 17 and under | 24.78 | 21.80 | 11.30 | 40.34 | 1.78 | 46.58 | 51.64 |

## 4.2 Methodology

The engagement and consultation analysis followed a mixed–method sequential approach to capture as comprehensive a picture as possible on the key areas of interest, to answer the following research questions:

- Could the school year calendar be better structured to tackle disadvantage, and support progression, wellbeing and modern living?
- What impacts do stakeholders anticipate the proposed alternate school year structures would have on them, in the short and the longer term?
- Which specific changes, if any, would be most effective in achieving a balance between the different needs and concerns of stakeholders?
- Which implementation options for any changes to school year structure, would be most and least effective and favourable? Why?

The approach was divided into four phases. This included a scoping and preparation phase, qualitative engagement phase, analysis phase, and reporting phase.

### 4.2.1 Scoping and Preparation Phase

The purpose of this phase was to prepare for the main consultation exercise through co–production of consultation and engagement questions and collaboration with the developer of media materials to ensure the messages/concepts in the materials were consistent with consultation materials. The focus on the development of questions was to ensure clarity and accessibility in lines of questioning with different stakeholders, including what is and is not in scope for the consultation.

The scoping phase also included consideration of which issues would be relevant to which stakeholders. For example, parents/carers and learners would be more likely to consider the implications of the proposed reforms for them personally, whilst teaching professionals and other stakeholders may be in a better position to reflect more strategically and consider what this means for teaching and learning in the future.

The concluding step in the scoping phase was to finalise the workplan, including the sample structure for the qualitative research, a robust recruitment strategy, a finalised consultation questionnaire and topic guides, a Code of Conduct for focus groups and Privacy Notices.

### 4.2.2 Qualitative Engagement Sessions

Altogether 25 focus groups and 10 interviews were conducted in line with the sampling structure. Recruitment for the parent focus groups was undertaken by our partner, DJS Research. The recruitment of the other stakeholder groups was undertaken by Miller Research, with support from Welsh Government and the Regional Education Consortia.

Five focus groups were conducted with parents/carers and included a combination of working/non–working parents/carers and parents/carers in BC1 and C2DE social and economic groups of learners in:

- English medium and Welsh medium/bilingual schools
- Primary, secondary and Special schools
- Schools with high and low FSM status
- Schools in rural and urban communities
- Faith schools
- Parents of children whose primary language spoken at home (English, Welsh or other) is different to the language medium of their school.

Six focus groups with teaching professionals took place involving a combination of SLT members, classroom teachers and teaching assistants, as well as those providing pastoral support or in administrative roles, to capture a cross-section of perspectives. The sample also included those working in:

- English medium and Welsh medium schools
- Primary, secondary and Special schools
- Schools with high and low FSM status
- Schools in rural and urban communities
- Faith schools.

Children in Wales conducted focus groups with learners in 6 schools, including learners who were: eligible/ineligible for FSM, in English medium and Welsh medium/bilingual schools, in primary, secondary and Special schools, in schools in rural and urban communities and in faith schools.

This direct engagement with learners was supplemented by a self-completion tool, designed to capture feedback on the consultation issues from learners from a wider sample of schools.

The remaining focus groups took place with the following stakeholder groups:

- Early Years professionals and representatives of the early years, childcare and play sector
- Local authorities
- School Governors
- Youth workers
- Hospitality and tourism organisations
- Representatives from the anchor tourism attractions sector
- Education workforce unions

All focus groups were facilitated online for consistency and inclusivity and began with the explanatory video produced by Welsh Government to introduce the session. Where appropriate, a visual summary of the differences between Options 1, 2 and 3 were also shared with participants.

Interviews supplemented the focus group engagement and 10 total were undertaken with representatives of the following organisations:

- Federation of Small Businesses
- Qualifications Wales
- WJEC
- Catholic Education Service
- Inter-Faith Council for Wales
- Estyn
- Church in Wales
- CBI Wales
- Transport for Wales

- The Royal Welsh Show

The interviews were undertaken via MS Teams or telephone and were conducted in either English or Welsh according to the preferences of the interviewee.

### **4.2.3 Consultation Analysis**

An initial research framework and database was developed in order to ensure careful and efficient management of the analysis process. Summaries at 4, 8, and 12 weeks were produced during the consultation period and shared with Welsh Government. This allowed tracking of the response rate and associated narrative as the consultation progressed. The key themes for each consultation question were highlighted in the early stages, with subsequent responses reinforcing, expanding upon, and broadening out these themes.

A sample of responses received within the first 4 weeks informed key word analysis and thematic breaks for the wider analysis activity and enabled the analysis team to sense-check the themes identified in the initial quantitative analysis.

The consultation survey received a total of 16,298 responses online and 49 responses via email. These responses were analysed together.

Duplicate, or campaign, responses were treated as a single response in the analysis. For the online survey this was achieved by identifying duplicate values for the open text questions. Where duplicates were identified the full response was removed in every instance after the first. Given the nature of the closed questions many responses only differed in the open text response. Where the open text response questions were not answered duplicates were removed where the time of submission made it clear that a response had been submitted twice (possibly through technical error). Spam responses were identified using demographic data. Responses were removed from analysis that had selected every response option to question 16. Blank responses were also removed. In total 19 responses were removed from the analysis of the survey leaving 16,328 unique responses.

All categorical questions (e.g.: yes/no) were analysed using Microsoft Excel Pivot Tables. Microsoft PowerBI was used generate word clouds identifying frequently mentioned themes and phrases, which were then used as initial codes to organise responses. Responses in each category were then manually coded and analysed by researchers to produce a summary of responses.

For irregular responses we have reported the breadth of feedback received but have not quantified that breadth; therefore, multiple responses that were identical in content are reported once not given any more weight than a unique response.

The focus groups, interviews and additional responses (emails and letters) were analysed using Miro, an online mind-mapping software, enabling an iterative cycle of structured analysis and tracking of identified themes.

Analysis was undertaken on a question-by-question basis and according to engagement type in the first instance, with secondary analysis undertaken on a thematic basis. This complemented better understanding of any areas of contention.

Irregular responses, including those received by email and letter, which did not explicitly address the consultation questions but were still relevant, were analysed and attributed to the most relevant question. This sometimes required drawing inferences from the content and making assumptions about the intended question being addressed by the authors.

#### **4.2.4 Reporting Phase**

A slide deck of emerging findings was shared and presented to the Steering Group, prior to this report being submitted. This report will be supplemented by a searchable tabular summary of consultation responses.

### 4.3 Consultation Questions

|    |   |
|----|---|
|    | <p>Select all that apply to you from the below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age 17 years and under</li> <li>• Age 18 years and older</li> <li>• Education workforce</li> <li>• Tourism sector</li> <li>• Childcare sector</li> <li>• Full-time work – please specify</li> <li>• Part-time work – please specify</li> <li>• Parent or carer (The term ‘parent’ has been used as a shorthand to include mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, stepparents, ‘kinship’ parents and grandparents, guardians)</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> |
| 1  | To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support the way we live, learn and work today?   |
| 2  | To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support socio-economically disadvantaged learners?   |
| 3  | To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?   |
| 4  | To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school calendar could be better designed to support teacher and/or learner well-being and ease fatigue?  |
| 5  | To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week (taken from the summer break), dividing the longest term (autumn)?  |
| 6  | To what extent do you agree or disagree with having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?  |
| 7  | To what extent do you agree or disagree with an additional break week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break), to even term lengths?   |
| 8  | To what extent do you agree or disagree with holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?<br>(Currently examination results are distributed on the third and fourth Thursday in August respectively. Aligning results days would mean that WJEC GCSE results be moved forward to the same week as A level and AS level results.  |
| 9  | To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1: Maintaining the existing school calendar?  |
| 10 | To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2 and the proposed draft direction: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), and a five-week summer break?   |
| 11 | To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 3: a school calendar with a two-week October break, a spring break at broadly the same time each year (despite when Easter falls), a two-week May break, and a four-week summer break?  |
| 12 | For 2025 to 2026, do you agree or disagree with the proposed term dates as set out for Options 2 and 3?   |
| 13 | What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English  |

|    |   |
|----|---|
|    | Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?<br>Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?  |
| 14 | In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:<br>have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or<br>mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English? |
| 15 | We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them   |

#### 4.4 Easy Read Questions

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Do you like the current school calendar?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> Use this box to tell us more about your answer.  |
| 2 | Imagine that 1 week of the summer break was moved to October to make the October break 2 weeks long instead of 1 week long. This would make the summer break 5 weeks long. Do you like this idea?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> Use this box to tell us more about your answer.   |
| 3 | Imagine the spring break takes place at a similar time every year. At the moment the spring break moves so it can be at the same time as Easter. This can make some school terms very long or very short. Do you like the idea of having a spring break at a similar time every year?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> Use this box to tell us more about your answer. |
| 4 | Imagine we have a 2 week break in May or June. We currently have 1 week. This would mean that the summer break would be 1 week shorter. Do you like this idea?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> Use this box to tell us more about your answer.  |
| 5 | Do you like the idea of having GCSE, AS and A level exam results days in the same week?<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> Use this box to tell us more about your answer.   |
| 6 | Please tick any of the boxes that describe you best<br>Age 17 years and under.<br>Age 18 years and older.<br>I work in education.<br>I work in tourism.<br>I work in childcare.<br>I work full-time.   |

|    |  |
|----|--|
|    | I work part-time.<br>I am a parent or carer.<br>Other.   |
| 8  | Do you think changing the school calendar would affect the Welsh language? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> </ul> |
| 9  | What impacts do you think there would be on the Welsh language? How could we reduce any bad impacts and increase good impacts?                                     |
| 10 | Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your thoughts on the school calendar?   |

## 4.5 Focus Group Questions

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Facilitators:</b>       |  |
| <b>Attendees:</b>          |  |
| <b>Date:</b>               |  |
| <b>Focus group Number:</b> |  |

### Background to the research

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to join us today. My name is [x] and I'm joined by my colleague [x] and we are from Miller Research. We have been commissioned by Welsh Government to explore the views of a wide range of stakeholders as part of the consultation on the structure of the school year.

We will start the session by sharing a short video setting out the three options being proposed in the consultation.

We will then ask you some specific questions, focused primarily on:

- Your views on the advantages and disadvantages of the various elements set out in the three options from the perspective of:
  - You /other parents
  - Your child/children
  - Teaching professionals
  - Other children in disadvantaged groups, such as those with Additional Learning Needs or from financially disadvantaged backgrounds
- Your overall level of support for the three options

Please note, this is an evidence-gathering exercise, with no absolute right or wrong answers.

The session will last up to 90 minutes and the feedback you provide will be anonymised in our final report.

We are taking notes and would also like to record the session to support the note taking process. This recording will be deleted during the analysis stage. Is anyone opposed to the session being recorded?

**[Show video if appropriate]**

Link to English video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBvZFfkYgjQ>



Link to Welsh video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdJ50s0h1Mw>

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <b>Introduction</b>   |
| 1 | Would you mind introducing yourself (and sharing with the group the age or year group of your child or children?)   |
|   | <b>Advantages and disadvantages of the various elements within the proposed options</b>   |
| 2 | What would you consider to be the advantages <u>for you/other parents</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?                   |
| 3 | What would you consider to be the advantages for <u>your child/children</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?                 |
| 4 | What would you consider to be the advantages for <u>teaching professionals</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?              |
| 5 | What would you consider to be the advantages for <u>children in disadvantaged groups</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?    |
| 6 | What would you consider to be the disadvantages <u>for you/other parents</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?                |
| 7 | What would you consider to be the disadvantages <u>for your child /children</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?             |
| 8 | What would you consider to be the disadvantages <u>for teaching professionals</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)?           |
| 9 | What would you consider to be the disadvantages <u>for children in disadvantaged groups</u> of having a two-week half term in the autumn term (and reducing the summer holidays by one week)? |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 10   | What would you consider to be the advantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups <sup>18</sup> ) of having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?   |
| 11   | What would you consider to be the disadvantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups) of having the flexibility to de-couple (separate) the spring break from the Easter public holiday?   |
| 12   | What would you consider to be the advantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups) of having an additional week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break, making the summer break four weeks), to even term lengths?    |
| 13   | What would you consider to be the disadvantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups) of having an additional week in May or June (taken from the summer break and added to the existing May break, making the summer break four weeks), to even term lengths? |
| 14   | What would you consider to be the advantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups) of holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?  |
| 15   | What would you consider to be the disadvantages (again, thinking of the perspectives of those different groups) of holding A level, AS level and GCSE results days in the same week?   |
| <b>Overall degree of support for the three Options</b> |  |
| 16   | To what extent do you support Option 1 (show diagram on screen)  |
| 17   | To what extent do you support Option 2 (show diagram on screen)  |
| 18   | To what extent do you support Option 3 (show diagram on screen)  |
| <b>Closing comments</b>                                |  |
| 19   | Is there anything else you would like to say in relation to the proposed changes to the school year calendar, and their impact and effectiveness?  |

## 4.6 Interview Questions

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Facilitators:</b>          |  |
| <b>Attendees &amp; Roles:</b> |  |
| <b>Date:</b>                  |  |

<sup>18</sup> You /other parents, your child/children, teaching professionals and other children in disadvantaged groups

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Interview Number:</b> |  |
|--------------------------|--|

## Background to the research

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to join us today. My name is [x] and I'm joined by my colleague [x] and we are from Miller Research. We have been commissioned by Welsh Government to explore the views of a wide range of stakeholders as part of the consultation on the structure of the school year. The areas we are capturing views of during the consultation are:

- Could the school year be better structured to support disadvantage, progression, wellbeing and modern living?
- What impacts are anticipated from the proposed options in the short and long term?
- What options are most and least effective and favourable?
- What specific changes, if any, would be most effective in achieving a balance between the different needs and concerns of stakeholders?

Alongside the [main consultation](#) document and responses, we are using discussions such as this one to explore supplementary questions in more depth. This is an evidence gathering exercise, with no absolute right or wrong answers. Today's conversation will focus on two of the questions I just mentioned – anticipated impacts of the options and the efficacy of different changes in balancing stakeholder needs.

The session will last 30–45 minutes and the responses you provide will be anonymised in our final report. Your contact details will only be used for arranging this session and will be removed from our systems at the end of the consultation period, unless otherwise agreed with your permission.

We are taking notes, and the session is being recorded to support the note taking process. This recording will be deleted during the analysis stage.

### [Show video if appropriate]

Link to English video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBvZFFkYgjQ>

Link to Welsh video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdJ50s0h1Mw>

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <b>Introduction</b>  |
| 1 | Would you please introduce yourself, your organisation/your role?  |
|   | <b>Impact of proposals</b>   |
| 2 | What impact would any of the proposed options have on you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Probe for effects of more consistent term lengths, decoupled Easter, and two-week October break (Option 2)</li><li>• Probe for further effects from Option 3 phase 2, including results days (for workforce stakeholders), two-week May half term.</li><li>• Probe for effects of no changes (Option 1)</li></ul> |

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (For all probe for impact on support for disadvantage, progression, wellbeing and modern living)</li> </ul>  |
| 3                               | <p>Which option would best balance the different needs of others? Including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners</li> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Different members of the education workforce (probe for variations within e.g. leadership, support staff)</li> <li>• Different areas of the economy such as tourism (probe for others)</li> <li>• (For all the above probe for examples of disadvantaged groups such as ALN and different socio-economic groups)</li> <li>• (For all probe for impact on support for disadvantage, progression, wellbeing and modern living)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Effectiveness of options</b> |   |
| 4                               | <p>Which of the options would be the <b>least</b> effective and why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for effectiveness in supporting the needs of this stakeholder group.</li> <li>• Probe for effectiveness in supporting the needs of other stakeholder groups (learners, parents, workforce, economy)</li> <li>• Probe for specific effectiveness on support for disadvantage, progression, wellbeing and modern living</li> </ul>  |
| 5                               | <p>Which of the options would be the <b>most</b> effective and why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe for effectiveness in supporting the needs of this stakeholder group.</li> <li>• Probe for effectiveness in supporting the needs of other stakeholder groups</li> <li>• Probe for specific effectiveness on support for disadvantage, progression, wellbeing and modern living</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Welsh Language</b>           |   |
| 6                               | <p>What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?</li> <li>• Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?</li> </ul>  |
| 7                               | <p>In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or</li> <li>• Mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?</li> </ul>   |

|   | <b>Closing comments</b>   |
|---|---|
| 8 | Is there anything else you would like to say in relation to the proposed changes to the school year calendar, and their impact and effectiveness? |

## 4.7 Glossary

| <b>Acronym/Key word</b> | <b>Definition</b>                              |
|-------------------------|--|
| ALN                     | Additional Learning Needs                      |
| FE                      | Further Education                              |
| FSM                     | Free School Meals                              |
| GCSE                    | General Certificate of Secondary Education     |
| INSET                   | In-service Education and Training              |
| OTS                     | Opportunity to see                             |
| PISA                    | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| PRU                     | Pupil Referral Unit                            |
| WJEC                    | Welsh Joint Education Committee                |

