



YHA's Wales strategy 2022

Conversation document

We are developing a Wales-specific strategy outlining our priorities for developing YHA in Wales over the next three years.

We welcome your views on the draft proposals set out here.



Image
YHA Idwal Cottage

We are YHA

We believe in the power of travel and adventure. To connect people to each other, to nature, the outdoors, culture and heritage.

Hostelling makes travel and adventure accessible to everyone, everywhere. YHA operates sites throughout England and Wales – a community of shared spaces, open to all and for the benefit of everybody.

We provide inclusive adventures, in extraordinary buildings, in amazing places.

We are a leading social enterprise and a 90-year-old movement. A charity on a mission to enrich the lives of all, but especially young people, and improve physical health, mental wellbeing and life skills through the experiences we create.

We are YHA.

Because where you go changes who you become.

Working towards a strategy for YHA in Wales

It has been a tough few years. For all of us. For our charity, for the travel and hospitality sector, for society at large. But toughest of all for young people and families with challenging lives and facing increasing hardship.

Much about the future remains uncertain. Yet the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic have reinforced our belief in the power of travel and adventure to connect people with each other, the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage.

In early 2020 we published our 10-year strategy, *Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime*. Building on a decade of modernisation, its ambitions will see us reaching more people and growing our impact, with a focus on those who could benefit the most in an era that needs us more than ever.

During the consultation, we heard from Welsh members and stakeholders in Wales and their input supported the creation of our 10-year strategy. We now need a strategy for Wales which is tailored to Wales and its own specific strengths, challenges and priorities.

Wales has its own unique history, heritage, language, landscapes, communities and government. For us to best support people and communities across Wales, we need to recognise this in a way that we haven't in the past.

Wales has its own distinct policy and legislative agenda. Our strategy for Wales aims to ensure that YHA contributes to the delivery of these priorities including Welsh Government's Wellbeing objectives and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

This conversation document lays out our commitment to the people, partners and communities of Wales. We hope you will share your thoughts with us over the course of the conversation.

YHA in Wales

Where it all began

Our 10-year strategy sees us return to the core values of our roots, to our beginnings. Born of economic disasters and demand for social reform, our founders determined to improve the lives and life-chances of young people by providing access to opportunities, the countryside, leisure activities and adventure. In Britain, hostelling's first green shoots sprang up in Wales.

In July 1929, seven friends from the Liverpool branch of the Holiday Fellowship travelled to Germany to find out what youth hostelling was all about. Eager to bring the idea to Britain, they set up the first experimental hostel at Pennant Hall in North Wales, just in time for Christmas. More hostels opened from Easter 1931, with four in North Wales – including YHA Idwal Cottage, YHA's second oldest hostel still in operation.



YHA in Wales today

YHA has a history to be proud of, a trusted brand and loyal membership of c. 130,000 members, donors, and volunteers.

YHA operates

21 hostels

in Wales

This is approximately 15% of YHA's hostel network. These properties have their own local significance and offer access to Wales' rich natural and cultural heritage.

In 2019/20*

YHA welcomed

one million guests

c. 12% stayed in Wales

Of these

120,000

people

34% were under 26

15% were residents of Wales

73% were from England

12% were international visitors



With most of our guests in Wales coming from other countries, we're proud to play an important role in introducing the splendour of Wales to visitors, through sustainable tourism.



We also see YHA's role as one that can introduce people who live and work in Wales to the wider hosteling network – be that across the border into England or more widely with our international partners across Europe and the globe.

We want to do more for the people who live and work in Wales.

*Figures are taken from 2019/20 as these are more representative of YHA's scale and reach than those achieved in COVID times. The data is taken from our automated booking system. Not all visits are recorded through this system so the figures are indicative only.

Developing young people in Wales

In 2019/20

c. 8,000

young people accessed a residential learning experience in Wales through their school or youth group

only 8%

of these were young people from 23 schools in Wales



How can we better support the education and personal development of Wales' young people – for those in mainstream education and those who are part of alternative provisions?

c. 5,000

young people and families with challenging lives received a supported stay through the YHA Breaks Programmes

only 5%

of these were from Wales



We want to ensure we're supporting young people and families with challenging lives in Wales, so must increase this number.



Volunteering, work experience and employment

Across YHA (England & Wales)

c. 500

young people are currently employed

In 2019/20

c. 150

young people employed in Wales

c. 1,000

young people volunteered with YHA



Only a fraction of our volunteering opportunities are taken up by young people in Wales. We recognise we need to better connect young people to the huge range of volunteering, training, work placements and job opportunities we can offer in Wales.



Working in partnership

We cannot deliver our vision and priorities in Wales alone; we must work collaboratively with others. We are not primarily an environmental organisation, but we are well placed to contribute to the protection of the natural world. We are not a mental health organisation, but residential, physical activity, being outdoors and culture all lead to greater wellbeing. We are not a hotel chain, but we must maintain the highest standards for overnight stays, food and customer service.

We therefore want to connect with partners and stakeholders across a range of sectors and bodies, including:

- ✓ tourism
- ✓ health and wellbeing
- ✓ equity, diversity and inclusion
- ✓ outdoor
- ✓ heritage and culture
- ✓ voluntary and community sector
- ✓ education
- ✓ youth
- ✓ statutory bodies

Youth voice and representation

We've set up a new youth voice group for Wales, made up of young people representing organisations working in the outdoor sector. This forum includes young people from YHA's Youth Advisory Team, Girl Guiding Cymru, Scouts Cymru, Field Studies Council, Brecon Beacons National Park, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and other youth organisations. We will ensure young people's voices are included in the development of this strategy. Please get in touch if you are interested in joining this group.

Strategic priorities

Our priorities in Wales

We know that the following issues are important in Wales¹ and areas that we can make significant contributions:

- Education reform and the implementation of the new curriculum across education providers.
- Nearly one in four people in Wales live in poverty, including around a third of all children. The gap in wellbeing between rich and poor is widening.
- There is a growing need to support young people's mental health with a focus on prevention and early intervention.
- Social prescribing and the integration of health and social care.
- Increasing the opportunities available for young people to access work, education and training.
- Supporting a green economy, sustainable tourism, transport and behaviours, and improving our green spaces.
- Working more collaboratively to support the recovery from the pandemic and the consequent restrictions implemented across 2020/21.

In Adventure. For the first time and lifetime we set out 10 strategic priorities that will help us to effect the change we want. Five priorities focus on our impact on people and the other five enable us to achieve this impact effectively, efficiently and in line with our values.

We need to make sure that these will impact across Wales for people in Wales. So, what do these priorities mean and look like for our hostel network in Wales? For the people and communities in Wales we want to support, and for the partners, collaborators and stakeholders working in these spaces?

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/programme-for-government-update-december-2021.pdf>

YHA's strategic impact priorities

1

Our top priority is to ensure that all means all, increasing the scale and breadth of our reach and ensuring that YHA is for everyone; **we will promote social inclusion and equity of access** with a particular focus on young people under 26 and by proactively targeting our efforts on those with challenging lives.

2

We will increase access to stays away from home and improve connections to nature, outdoors, heritage and culture – recognising that our hostel network provides a unique opportunity to make these things for the many not just for a few.

3

We will improve physical and mental wellbeing by providing activities and programmes and by supporting people to take their own action using our hostels as a base – both through overnight stays and as part of day visits.

4

We will develop life skills and employability by developing the YHA Campus and YHA Curriculum – for our staff, volunteers and the young people that we work with.

5

We will contribute to social cohesion. We will encourage different sectors of the community who visit us – both overnight and for day visits – to learn from and with each other. We are part of the sharing economy. We will make best use of our places and spaces, and our activities programme, to make stronger links to local communities.

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What this might look like in Wales

With growing concern about the cost of living, and mental health a priority for young people in Wales, we can make a difference by providing supported breaks that provide respite, promote connections to nature and develop skills and resilience.

- ✓ We could create a dedicated support programme tailored to meet the needs of young people and families with challenging lives living in Wales.

YHA has a strong track record of delivering quality residential trips for school groups – with 150,000 delivered in 2019/20. We have piloted new residentials to help ease the transition between primary and secondary schools and have developed programmes for young people in alternative provision. Wales has a strong tradition of residentials for young people, so how can YHA best add value to the existing landscape?

- ✓ We need to support schools with the implementation of the new curriculum in Wales in a way that best supports and complements what is already in place. In particular, the new focus on cynefin – building a sense of place and belonging for young people in their surroundings and developing understanding and respect for local habitat and the environment more widely. We could offer new programmes in Wales that speak to its rich history and heritage – developing creative, artistic and cultural experiences of nature and the outdoors, to enrich the holistic offerings of access to heritage.

Wales is rich in natural assets yet there is still an inequity of access to these green spaces.²

- ✓ We could broaden and diversify access to YHA places and programmes for those who are currently underserved by getting better at being more inclusive and diverse, both internally and externally. We could work with partners who can support us in this through initiatives such as Outdoor Citizens.

Three in five jobs lost during the pandemic belonged to young people under 25. It is predicted that youth unemployment will increase further, at an estimated economic cost of £6.9b in 2022.³

- ✓ We are building employment and volunteering opportunities through YHA Campus. This programme offers young people a wide variety of work placements, internships, apprenticeships, volunteering and residentials across the hostel network and at our national office. We could connect more young people in Wales with opportunities in the green economy.

Our hostels in Wales should perform as and be seen as important local assets.

- ✓ We could support hostels in Wales to strengthen their connections with their local community. We could raise the profile of our hostels so communities know that the space and grounds can be used to serve local needs – from community meeting spaces to gardening clubs and space for youth groups to run activities.

² https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/media/693695/ogn-045-by-all-reasonable-means-least-restrictive-access-to-the-outdoors_-004.pdf
³ <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/2021-learning-and-work-research-launch-with-hsbc>

YHA's strategic enabling priorities

6

Maintain a viable network of quality hostels – places and spaces – that matches our strategic ambitions.

7

Deliver against a framework of industry-standard benchmarks that draws on the best quality models across charity, social enterprise, hospitality and work with young people. Work with transparency and with a focus on the experiences of our users – excelling in both digital and offline services.

8

Support growth by continuing to **generate an annual cash surplus** that supports our strategic intent, based on social enterprise principles.

9

Recognise that the risks to the environment and to the world and its population are a real and immediate threat by connecting people to nature. We will set a strong example – in how we use our assets and through our work with partners **we will help to improve the environment.**

10

Build support for the hostelling cause – drawing on our 90-year history to establish the importance of hostelling for all today; growing both the numbers of members but also how many members are active with YHA; and leading the movement for those who support hostelling as a route to affordable travel and adventure.

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What this might look like in Wales



We will keep monitoring and making sure our hostel network in Wales is fit for purpose and can deliver our impact priorities.

As part of YHA's wider capital strategy, we intend to resume the capital programme for YHA Snowdon Bryn Gwynant.

In 2020, YHA Cardiff Central was one of a number of properties that was repurposed in partnership with local councils to support the most vulnerable and keep people safe during the pandemic. The hostel has since become an integral part of Cardiff City Council's 'No Going Back' approach to the delivery of homelessness services in the city and its COVID recovery. Using the guiding principles outlined in YHA's capital strategy, we will continue conversations to inform how the network of hostels across Wales can be best fit for purpose.



We will demonstrate a greater commitment to celebrating Welsh identity and sense of place.

We want to improve how we use the Welsh language across our organisation and we will create and progress a Welsh language development plan for YHA – aiming to achieve recognition from Cynnig Cymraeg, the Welsh Language Commissioner language development programme.

We want to improve our Welsh identity for both our customers and external communications and see that it is reflected within our staff teams across hostels and our governance structures and central office.



We recognise our responsibility to champion social tourism and become more sustainable.

We want to encourage young people to become fierce advocates and protectors of green spaces and processes.



Join the conversation

So we can make best use our assets in Wales, we need to hear from you. You can share your thoughts, questions and comments on our priorities and activities in Wales:

Twitter: [@YHAOfficial](https://twitter.com/YHAOfficial) and by using #YHAWales2022 or #YHACymru2022

Visit: yha.org.uk/about-yha/yha-in-wales and take our short [survey](#)

Email: walesstrategy@yha.org.uk

We've sent this document to a long list of people – including our teams across Wales and England, members, supporters, existing partners and stakeholders. You may know others who want to input, so please share it with your networks.

We will be running a series of open sessions to hear from people directly. If you'd like to join in, please consult yha.org.uk/about-yha/yha-in-wales for the latest details on these sessions and other ways to contribute.

Questions for your consideration:

- Do you see what we're outlining as helpful to your work? Are there initiatives or programmes that you're working on that we can support?
- Do you see any duplication? Are we making best use of resources and adding to/ complementing what's already out there? If not, what do we need to avoid and why?
- Any obvious challenges, hiccups or obstacles that may get in the way of what we're trying to achieve?
- Who do we need to work with? How can we best work with them?
- How can YHA help support other organisations that are working towards to the same goals?
- If you had to prioritize our list what would put first. Why?
- What is missing? Is there an elephant in the room we aren't recognising?

Get more involved

We are on the search for critical friends to help support, challenge and progress our work in Wales on a more regular, more formal basis. This is likely to lead to an advisory group that'll meet throughout the year.

We're particularly interested in education professionals, those working in the youth or outdoor activity sectors, and those who can help us improve our equitable and inclusive working practices.

If you are interested in finding out more, please get in touch with Wales Development Manager Emma Robinson via email emmarobinson@yha.org.uk or on [07908 788 873](tel:07908788873).

This is the start of the conversation; this initial consultation will close late summer. We'll publish a summary of findings later this year and hold a launch event in autumn to share how this informed our strategy for Wales.

Thank you for your contributions and continuing to support and challenge YHA.

We are YHA.

We transform young lives forever through travel and real adventure.

Because where you go changes who you become

stay | join | give | volunteer yha.org.uk