



YHA in Wales

**Our strategy to deliver
adventure for the first time
and a lifetime for people
and communities in Wales**

2022 - 2025



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.

YHA in Wales



For the full network map, please turn to the inside back cover.

Foreword

Wales has its own unique history, heritage, language, landscapes, communities and government. For us to best support people across Wales, we realise we need to recognise this in a way we haven't in the past. This document outlines our strategy for YHA in Wales for the next three years. It demonstrates a tailored approach to the country and its specific strengths, challenges and priorities.

In early 2020, we published our 10-year strategy for the charity as a whole: *Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime*. Building on a decade of modernisation, it outlined our ambitions to reach more people and grow our impact.

In the creation of that strategy, we looked to our past. To the beginnings of our organisation, to the ambition and commitment to increase access to the countryside and broaden participation in health and wellbeing-promoting activity. Ninety years ago, those ambitions took form in North Wales with the opening of Britain's first youth hostels.

It has been two years since our strategy launched; two of the most challenging years in the charity's history – because of the pandemic and new and emerging issues facing the sector and society. Whilst we never imagined that the first years of the strategy's implementation would have been undertaken in this context, it is rooted in our core values and has remained at the forefront of our decision-making throughout.

As we step out on the road to recovery, we have a unique contribution to make to society – in reconnecting people with each other, nature, the outdoors, culture and heritage. We have proven capabilities in improving health, wellbeing and life skills – for children and young people in particular. But from our own impact evidence, we can see that there is room to grow and more we can achieve in Wales.

To begin to address this, over spring and summer 2022, we reached out to hear how YHA could better support people and communities in Wales. The insight and feedback we received during that consultation has helped shape our priorities and pledges. Thank you for engaging with us so generously and thoughtfully. As a society, we are all coping with additional challenges – not least energy prices, squeezed resources, labour shortages and a cost-of-living crisis. Working in partnership to focus resources on common priorities will be critical to success. We look forward to working with you to deliver a strategy fit for purpose, to meet Welsh policy contexts such as the implementation of the new Curriculum and – most importantly – for the people of Wales.

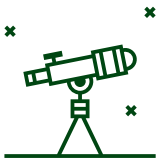


Margaret Hart

Chair

Charitable object

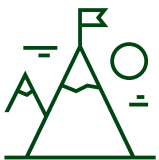
To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, and appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities, particularly by providing youth hostels or other accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote health, recreation and education.



Vision

Everyone has access to the benefits of adventure, for the first time and a lifetime.

By 2030, every child is able to stay away from home, travel, experience adventure and access the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage. YHA will work with others to end the inequity that means some children have never been to a beach, visited a museum or rolled down a hill.



Mission

To enrich the lives of all, especially young people, by providing brilliant hostel stays and experiences that improve physical health, mental wellbeing and life skills.

Increasing our impact in Wales

Our ambition is to achieve the following annual targets by 2025:



1 million people of all ages to stay with YHA.



Ensuring at least half of these – **500,000** – are children and young people.



And that at least **50,000** of these children and young people are those with the most challenging lives.



And finally, to be certain that **all means all** – that those who stay with us, benefit from our provision and support, our employees and volunteers, reflect the demographics of England and Wales.

Within these overall targets, we want to achieve specific targets for Wales:



Increase the proportion of Welsh residents using YHA hostels.



Increase the proportion of young people in Wales accessing a residential learning experience in Wales through their school or youth group.



Increase the proportion of young people and families who are living in challenging circumstances in Wales that receive a supported stay from YHA.



Increase the proportion of young people accessing the range of volunteering, training, work placements and job opportunities we can offer in Wales.

Summary of the consultation

We started the conversation about our strategy for YHA in Wales in May 2022.

We distributed a conversation document to thousands of individuals via our membership and supporter communications, stakeholder networks and with the help of partner organisations.

Thank you to everyone who helped us to spread the word, including the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales office, Visit Wales trade team, Outdoor Alliance Wales and voluntary and community services across Wales.

The consultation in numbers

We received over 300 responses and spoke directly with more than 30 representatives from key stakeholder organisations.

We heard from members, visitors, staff, volunteers, partners and donors.

We heard from new people. Over 5% of respondents had no current relationship with YHA.

Results

94%

agreed or partly agreed with our priorities

We asked if you agreed with the areas in which YHA can best support young people. Widespread approval of what we have planned is really encouraging, demonstrating consensus in our supporter base towards collective aims.

68%

agreed that our priorities covered the most important issues

Most respondents agreed that we're focussing on the right areas. Some suggested that other issues should be included. Many of these suggestions were, in our view, implicit in the priorities we had listed. But we needed to make this plain. We have therefore expanded our descriptions to make explicit all the issues we seek to address with our priorities for YHA in Wales.

What matters most

Our priorities ranked in order of importance.

We asked which priorities were the most important. Our survey results demonstrate a range of opinions and there were no outright front runners in the ranking. However, the top three give us an indication of where we might focus our attention and resources.

1

Working with schools (primary and secondary) to deliver residential for young people.

2

Working with alternative provision educators (outside of primary and secondary schools) to deliver residential for young people.

3

Developing apprenticeships, volunteering, training and employment opportunities for young people.

Your feedback

We asked you to tell us what YHA does well, not so well and how we could improve.

We received positive feedback as well as more challenging suggestions. Some comments were about YHA in Wales, other suggestions applied network wide.

What you like about us:



staff



being part of a movement



locations



strong social purpose



shared social spaces



ethos with national recognition



self-catering facilities

8

What you'd like us to improve on:



consideration of older members as much as young people



increasing sustainable practices and encouraging green travel



meeting the needs of solo travellers as much as groups



more information on changes to the hostel network



maintaining affordability in the face of increasing costs and challenges



celebration of the unique and local, while maintaining national standards

Improving YHA in Wales

The following themes came up consistently in comments about YHA in Wales specifically.

Welsh identity

Contributors wanted to see us improve on the sense of Welsh identity across our network of Welsh hostels. This included imagery, food and drink for example.

Welsh language

People want to hear and see greater use of the Welsh language in our hostels and in communications. Some underlined the importance of having Welsh-speaking activity instructors.

More hostels in Wales

Some people simply wanted more hostels in Wales and put forward a number of suggested places. We received ideas of lesser-known destinations away from tourist hot spots.

General comments on our strategic approach

Scope

Some people recognised that our proposed priorities are quite wide-ranging and said they would prefer us to do a small number of simple things well.

Access and inclusion

Based on some responses received about YHA's role in helping all to access travel and adventure, we want to reaffirm our position statement on equity, diversity and inclusion. For our full EDI statement, please visit yha.org.uk/inclusion-diversity-policy.

YHA's 90-year history is rooted in access – to nature, the outdoors, culture, heritage, and travel. Access to these public assets is not equitable.

YHA is a large charity with a powerful brand and platform. We will apply our resources to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our own work.

As a leader in the sectors in which we work, we will amplify the messages of diverse members, users and partner community groups.

We will challenge ourselves, governments, charity partners and our communities. We will model good practice. We will be honest.

Environment and sustainability

Thank you to those who underlined the importance of promoting sustainable travel and environmental responsibility. Setting YHA's place as an environmentally conscious organisation and examining how we can reduce our environmental impact speaks to the very core of our charitable objects. We have recently published a statement of intent on sustainability and pursuit of net zero. You can read it at yha.org.uk/environment-policy.

Our wider environmental strategy will develop a clear plan that covers everything from how we use energy and resources to how we encourage sustainable behaviour in our guests. A large part of this will be promoting active travel through partnerships. We will get better at providing information and signposting the resources available to support sustainable and active travel plans to our hostels across England and Wales.

Our strategic priorities

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.

12

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.

These priorities were first set out in *Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime.* – our 10-year strategy for YHA published in 2020. And they still stand across all areas of our operation, including in Wales.

In the following pages, we outline how these will translate in practice in Wales through a series of pledges. We set out examples of where our approach needs to differ in Wales to England. And we reaffirm how our work in Wales will contribute to achieving our vision, mission and targets.

Our pledges

1 We pledge to strengthen the role our hostels and YHA play in celebrating Wales' natural and cultural heritage.

We will better connect with local communities in and around our hostel locations. This will improve customer stays and engage local groups with opportunities to use our places and spaces.

We will seek out opportunities to support Welsh cultural and heritage celebrations and events.

2 We pledge to improve the use of the Welsh language across our organisation.

We will sign up to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Cynnig Cymraeg initiative. This will create a development plan over the next few years with specific objectives set out to assess our progress with both customer-facing improvements and operational delivery.

We will audit our staff and volunteer network to identify Welsh language speakers and learners to establish a baseline.

We will make sure our recruitment materials are made available in Welsh where appropriate and ask all applicants if they speak or are learning Welsh.

3 We pledge to support more young people and families living in Wales to experience adventure.

We will work more closely with partners to engage more young people and families with our various programmes and projects – including our funded breaks, our Campus and work readiness programmes, and tailoring our schools/education residential offer to support the implementation of the new curriculum in Wales.

We will use our influence to better support wider networks in Wales to effect change and improve access to adventure, nature and the outdoors.

We will deliver a project designed to connect young people to nature – similar to our recent Generation Green project – working in partnership with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and alliances such as Access Unlimited.

We will work to embed our programmes within Welsh policy and grow our circle of referral partners.

We will develop the Outdoor Citizens programme to increase access to the outdoors in Wales.

We will develop our relationship with civil society and public sector bodies in Wales so that we can map our impact against the wider Wales agenda and policy landscape. This means reporting against key legislation and policy such as Welsh Government's Programme for Government and the seven wellbeing outcomes in the Wellbeing of Future Generation's Act.

4

We pledge to ensure we have the right mix of hostels in the right places in Wales, offering quality stays.

We will consider all of our potential income streams and ensure we have the best mix for a modern charity and large social enterprise.

We will ensure we work with communities and partners to develop the right operating model for our sites in Wales, strengthening local bonds and enabling longer term sustainability.

We will look carefully at how to make best use of YHA Snowdon Bryn Gwynant given its importance in North Wales.

We will look to re-establish a hostel in Cardiff at the earliest suitable opportunity.

5

We pledge to make sure our programmes and operations across the organisation consider the specific context of Wales.

We will recruit at least one Welsh representative to our Board of Trustees.

We will ensure that our Youth Advisory Team membership includes at least two young people from Wales by 2023. We will include this in the Youth Advisory Team terms of reference.

Project and steering groups will have Wales as a specific agenda item.

Our community engagement initiatives – such as the YHA Festival of Walking and Outdoor Citizens community of practice – will be considered through a Wales lens.

We will update our brand standards to include guidance on introducing Welsh identity and language to our spaces and communications.

We will bring together expertise across our operational teams in Wales to support the work of the strategic impact team.

Delivering on our pledges

The objectives outlined in this document will provide a framework for our work to improve our programmes in Wales over the next three years.

We recognise this is a process and things very rarely stay static.

We will review our objectives to make sure what we do is still relevant and adding value to the wider landscapes and our own organisational processes.

As part of the conversation, 90 people expressed interest in being part of a group to help us progress our work in Wales. We will look at how best to ensure we're informed by the advice and expertise of others.

We will make sure youth voice is heard and considered via our Youth Advisory Team and we are committed to hearing from other youth voice groups in Wales.

We will report honestly and transparently on our progress. This will include measuring how we are doing against a set of key performance indicators.

The Wales specific objectives outlined in this document will become part of our annual business planning cycle and will be resourced by the appointment of a project manager, programme director and management team with responsibility to deliver against the objectives identified in this strategy.

A school trip to the Brecon Beacons

Year two children from Ysgol Y Berllan Deg (a Welsh medium primary school in Cardiff) took a day trip to YHA Brecon Beacons Danywenallt in spring 2022. Their teacher, Mrs Amy Bull, explains how the trip supported the children's learning:

“

Our school works in a cluster of schools (the Bro Edern Cluster) to make sure that the themes, created as part of the new curriculum for primary schools, are tailored to the needs of children across the schools in the cluster. Recently, the theme was 'Life in the Countryside' and the children have been learning about the National Parks of Wales.

We used DataMapCymru to find Danywenallt on the map. We learned about mapping symbols, the countryside code and plotted several routes from Talybont to the hostel at Danywenallt. The children created their own treasure hunt tick sheets, using our Chromebooks. I had several conversations with the team at the hostel, who were super helpful and together, we chose the most suitable walking route.

The children learned so much in preparation for our trip and were able to use their knowledge and skills in an exciting and real-life adventure. The hostel surroundings are just beautiful and there is lots of potential for meaningful and inspiring outdoor activities. We're looking forward to our next visit!

”



Working with youth homelessness charity Llamau

A group of young people from Llamau stayed with YHA as part of our Breaks Programme in September 2022. Their head of learning, training and employment explains the impact of the stay, on both the young people and the organisation itself:

“

The YHA funded stay was genuinely life-changing for the young people. It was also empowering and thought provoking for colleagues and will shape how we work with young people better. Llamau is keen to build on the partnership with YHA.

”

Young musician travels Welsh hostels on tour

Ash Bates, a young folk musician inspired by the likes of Joni Mitchell, Nick Drake and Leonard Cohen, performed a 10-date tour across YHA hostels in Wales in July and August 2022, starting at YHA St David's in Pembrokeshire and ending at YHA Brecon Beacons Danywenallt.

We asked Ash to share his thoughts on the experience:

“

I so loved it. YHA is a beautiful and well-connected community. Staying with YHA you get to be introduced to a friendly team and feel a part of a house with interesting and colourful people moving through it all the time.

You will be met with only kindness in these places. People willing to share a story, a good walk nearby or even their food.

I always felt so welcomed at every arrival. I can only recommend hostelling to anybody who hasn't tried it in Wales. It's breathtakingly beautiful and the cheapest and perhaps the best way to get the most out of a place. You are encouraged to be active and enjoy the beauty around you.

I will never forget this experience with you and certainly won't hesitate to return.

”

We hope to have many more live performances across the network, providing opportunity for creative inspiration and more events that can be enjoyed by audiences including the local community and our guests.





**Thanks for engaging
with the strategy for
YHA in Wales over this
next three years.**

**Now you've read our
pledges. What will you
pledge?**

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