

Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education

9 October 2025 – 13:00-14:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP – Chair
Beatrice Wishart MSP
Brian Whittle MSP

Invited guests

Debbie McCulloch – West Lothian Council
Gemma Hendry – Able2adventure
Sarah Murphy – Edinburgh Council
Chloe Clark – GetOut Outdoor Learning
Holly Briggs - GetOut Outdoor Learning
Liz Habgood - GetOut Outdoor Learning

Non-MSP Group Members

Nick March – AHOEC
Patricia Johnston – AHOEC
Neil Baird – Scouts Scotland
Jamie Miller – Scottish Outdoor Education Centres
Richard Gerrish - Scottish Outdoor Education Centres
Rob Bushby – Wilderness Scotland
Hazel Wiseman – Ocean Youth Trust
Calum Robinson – Ardentinn Outdoor Centre
Lee Musson – Rock UK
Paul Bayton – SU Scotland
Rachel Luxton – SU Scotland
Professor Peter Higgins – University of Edinburgh
David Anderson - NASUWT
Mike Harvey – Parliament
Gavin McWhinnie - Parliament

Apologies

Roger Scrutton – University of Edinburgh
Andrew Bradshaw – SAPOE
Neil Wightwick – Blairvadoch Outdoor Centre
Kevin Marsh – Craikhope Outdoor Centre
Martin Davidson – Outward Bound

Phil Thompson – Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre
Tara Lillis – NASUWT
Jane Campbell Morrison – Scottish Adventure Activities
Peter Moir – Duke of Edinburgh and Youth Link

Agenda item 1

Welcome and Introduction

Liz Smith MSP welcomed and thanked all members for being present today - those attending in person and those attending online.

Liz explained that the first part of the meeting would cover the matter of the Annual General Meeting (AGM). This part of the meeting would be led by AHOEC, Nick March.

Liz then introduced the main topic for the meeting – High-Dependency Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Residential Outdoor Education.

Agenda item 2

Cross Party Group AGM 2025

This was a short AGM, primarily to ensure proper process in re-electing office bearers. Liz Smith MSP gave a brief update on recent committee sessions pertaining to the progress of the Outdoor Residential Education (Scotland) Bill.

AHOEC then chaired the AGM.

During the AGM Liz Smith MSP was re-elected as the group's Convenor (Proposer: Hazel Wiseman Member, Seconder: Beatrice Wishart MSP)

Beatrice Wishart MSP was elected as the group's Vice Convenor (Proposer: Neil Baird, Seconder: Jamie Miller).

The Association of Head of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) were appointed to continue in the secretariat role (Proposer: Liz Smith MSP, Seconder: Beatrice Wishart MSP).

Agenda item 3

Presentations

Liz Smith led a discussion on High Dependency ASN in Outdoor Education (Residentials), with a view to gaining a greater understanding of the barriers and strengths or opportunities of delivering this universal provision.

Presentations were carried out by:

Debbie McCulloch: Principal Teacher – Beatley School, West Lothian, gave the first presentation on the barriers experienced in managing an ASN Residential for a group where there are a wide range of additional and complex support needs. The key points from this presentation were that the:

- wide range of additional support needs intensifies the challenge of finding an appropriate residential centre.
- length of travel impacts on the choices that are available.
- ever increasing costs can make a residential experience prohibitive and this also impacts on the activities that can be offered to the pupils.
- lack of ASN resources within Centres (such as a ceiling hoist).
- levels of staffing required both educational and medical can be a significant barrier.
- Centres need to have medical facilities nearby.

In conclusion, Debbie went on to stress, that whilst the main issue is catering for the small number of pupils with the most complex needs, the over-arching challenge is ensuring that undertaking residential is sustainable in terms of the cost. Schools are helped through having access to Pupil Equity Funding and certainly at Beatley School, they now travel to centres that are more local and have even started to think 'outside the box' by creating their own activities.

Debbie also said that she is very proud of those pupils that have successfully undertaken their Duke of Edinburgh Award, and she mentioned that parents and carers really appreciate knowing that their child will be able to take part in Outdoor Learning activities within the Senior Phase of their school life. Pupils gain such a lot from these experiences, giving them greater confidence and a huge sense of achievement.

Gemma Hendry: Able2Adventure – Organisational Manager, Third Sector Support and Solutions for ASN Residential, led the next presentation on supporting and meeting the needs of different types of Additional Support Needs at residential centres. The key points from this presentation were as follows:

- Able2Adventure is based in the Cairngorms National Park and operates as a mobile outdoor activity provider specifically for disabled people of all ages.
- have a background of strong belief that any student with ASN can be taken on an activity, whether it's caving, climbing, canoeing etc.
- supports other centres and organisations regarding outdoor learning activities – this also includes providing the kit, which is available for hire.
- Able2Adventure offers training and awareness on how to adapt activities for ASN – organisations can employ instructors as well as the kit to go out on the sessions.
- more funding would obviously allow for greater adaptations to amenities that are already on offer. For example - Cairngorms National Park have invested in outside toilet facilities in four different places - incredible for when ASN groups are off on a day activity and then not coming back to the centre until later – gives them a facility to use in between leaving and returning.

Gemma finished by saying that over time, she has noticed, that whilst there are barriers to residential for ASN, there is also a huge amount

of willingness to try and overcome these hurdles. The need and the demand are there! She said that residentials are possible – it just takes a little bit more planning. Schools are coming to Able2Adventure and asking for assistance. Centres are coming and asking for support – and this partnership ensures that schools or groups have an outdoor education experience and not outdoor recreation. Gemma said that these experiences are not just ‘taster sessions’, but rather sessions that offer the biggest adrenaline rush, independence, integration, socialisation and learning for those individuals that are taking part. *(After Gemma had finished speaking, Nick spoke about Suresh Paul, who runs an organisation called Equal Adventure, a business that is based in the Highlands and is one of the main providers to Able2Adventure and other organisations with equipment and resources for those with Additional Support Needs – enabling access to outdoor learning. Nick described Suresh’s business as a ‘diamond’ in the Highlands.)*

Nick March: Head of Centre - Lagganlia Outdoor Centre, spoke about his role in enabling and supporting a school with High Dependency ASN to attend a residential at Lagganlia. The key points from this presentation were the:

- necessity to build a relationship with Oakland School from the start – shared a presentation with parents and staff, visited the school – got involved in feeding, playing, doing activities and for the first time ever ‘disco-dancing’ with wheelchairs. An experience that was an adventure for all.
- need for involved conversations on the how-to details and included the need to unpick everything – requiring meetings and discussions about the in-depth planning.
- importance of building into the equation the adaptations, preparation and resources needed for Lagganlia Outdoor Centre.

After this point Nick handed over the remaining part of the presentation to Sarah Murphy, as he felt it was the best way to illustrate the partnership between Oaklands, CEC staff and Lagganlia. He stressed that the commitment from all helped to make the Oaklands residential at Lagganlia such a great success.

Sarah Murphy: Active Schools Coordinator, City of Edinburgh Council, the final presenter who, using a power-point presentation, gave an impact report, highlighting the many skills and opportunities gained from attending a residential with Oaklands ASN School to Lagganlia Outdoor Centre. The key points from this final presentation were the:

- commitment and determination of all the staff to take the young people on a residential.
- importance of the partnership between Lagganlia and Oaklands
- work involved in the planning, preparation and in making sure that all the right equipment was available and in the right place, at the right time.

- organisation of staffing ratios and expertise to meet all needs and ensure comfort, safety and success.
- sense of acceptance, excitement, freedom, triumph and inclusion – illustrated by the fact that the Oakland school joined together for a disco with the other visiting school at Lagganlia.
- great feeling of opportunity, the skills gained and the confidence building that took place – not just for the young learners, but also for all the staff that attended too.

Sarah concluded by stressing that the Oakland residential was only made possible through the hard work and strength of the whole staff team. She said, 'in some ways, it was like making and seeing the impossible happen. And the experience was complete magic for all!'

After the presentations, Nick March thanked all the guest speakers, emphasising how important and valuable each talk had been in demonstrating the barriers, challenges and gains of undertaking an ASN residential. However, he also highlighted the importance of Scottish Outdoor Centres having the infrastructure and resources to act as a provider for ASN residencies. Nick felt that this could only enhance the great sense of accomplishment for all involved, not to mention the achievement and joy felt by the young learners. Nick then invited comments or questions from the other attendees of the CPG.

Agenda item 4

Liz Smith led the further discussion that took place, which involved affirming and emphasising some of the key points made by the Speakers on the topic of High Dependency ASN in Outdoor Education (Residential). Liz pointed out that the main outcome from the meeting today was to allow everyone present to have a greater understanding of the barriers and strengths, as well as the achievements, joys, opportunities and successes of delivering this universal provision.

Agenda item 5

Closing and next meeting date.

Liz Smith MSP brought the meeting to a close, thanking speakers and members for their participation and AHOEC for facilitating. Date of next meeting is Thursday 19th February 2026.