

Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education

2 February 2022 at 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP

Rachael Hamilton MSP

Mark Ruskell MSP - Ioanna Hadjicosta acting on Mark's behalf

Invited guests

N/A

Non-MSP Group Members

The Outward Bound Trust, Martin Davidson

Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE), Ali Dreyer, Andrew Bradshaw

Keir Bloomer

Field Studies Council Scotland, Alex MacFie, Joy Blizzard

The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC), Neil Baird standing in for Nick March

Scottish Outdoor Education Centres, Dave Spence

Scouts Scotland, Addie Dinsmore

Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, Hazel Wiseman

Mike Harvey

Rock UK, Lee Musson

Prof Peter Higgins

OutLET, Jackie Simpson, Nicola Innes

Education Scotland, Tracy Johnston

Craikhope Outdoor Centre, Kevin Marsh

Youthlink, Gillian Lithgow

Rob Bushby

Scottish Adventure Activities Forum (SAAF), Jane Campbell Morrison

Duke of Edinburgh, Pete Moir

John Muir Trust, Rebecca Lodgson

Apologies

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Daniel Johnson MSP

Fulton MacGregor MSP

Brian Whittle MSP

Mountaineering Scotland, Stuart Younie

Scripture Union (SU) Scotland, Paul Bayton

Ardentinny, Peter Wilson

Munro Society, Alan Watt

Agenda item 1

Introductions

Liz Smith MSP welcomed members to the meeting. It was agreed to take agenda items 3 and 4 before item 2.

Agenda item 3

Local authority alignment advice

Scottish Local Authorities are in charge of providing statutory advice on school trips. This advice is inconsistent and still varies across Scotland. Advice has ranged from giving schools a 'green light' through to an outright ban on all school trips not just residential. Some advice has also changed due to the Omicron variant.

A meeting with Clare Haughey, Minister for Children and Young People and Councillor Stephen McCabe, COSLA Spokesperson for Children and Young People was held in November with representatives from Outward Bound, SAPOE and AHOEC. Further discussions at a COSLA Children and Young People's Committee resulted and it was thought that the issue was more relevant to senior officials in local authorities rather than elected members. A further meeting is therefore to be held on 3rd February 2022 with sector representatives Association of Directors of Education (ADES), COSLA.

There is still a mixed picture across local authorities although the situation has been improving. Some local authorities still have an outright ban (the latest data from November indicated about one third). Since the latest relaxation of restrictions there is no shortage of demand for residential from schools, but the approval from local authorities is the blockage.

SAPOE is developing resources to help local authorities and some SAPOE members are involved at higher levels of decision making than others. Therefore, it was felt that the support of the Scottish Government, COSLA and ADES is essential to ensure high levels of influence.

Some local authorities continue to maintain a ban, but it was acknowledged that they do have some very genuine concerns including financial issues for parents and schools dealing with outbreaks. Providers are working hard to support the return to residential which is still frustratingly slow.

Liz Smith reported that the concerns of the sector had been getting through to the Scottish Government. She had met with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy Kate Forbes regarding additional financial support of £2M for the sector which Liz Smith was fairly confident would be signed off shortly in relation to a letter sent to all MSPs on 20th December. The Scottish Government understands the issue and does not want staff problems or a loss of expertise at a time when demand is returning.

Agenda item 4

Short-term funding issues (insurance, refunds, ability to trade)

Dave Spence reported on an email that had been sent out from the Scottish Government relating to insurance and how the line regarding insurance being the responsibility of schools and councils will be interpreted. After two years, the issue is still a muddle. Providers have had to resort to providing a Covid 19 guarantee so that nobody is effectively out of pocket. This is a significant risk and has put providers in the position of being their own insurers.

The situation needs clear signals and a more cohesive message from Government, Councils and providers. Liz Smith offered to write to the Scottish Government and update them if Dave Spence could provide a draft.

Concerns were raised over the issue of councils offering experiences locally as a complement to residential experiences or suggesting “better and cheaper” offerings, leaving little finances for residential.

Agenda item 2

Summary of current policy landscape for OE and Learning for Sustainability by Professor Pete Higgins

Liz Smith welcomed Prof Pete Higgins to deliver the first in what will possibly be a series of short inputs. The presentation set out the broader context of outdoor learning in Scotland and future presentation could cover the evidence behind the value of outdoor learning and residential.

A copy of the presentation has been circulated.

Martin Davidson drew the group’s attention to Outward Bound’s recent report looking at health and wellbeing *Feeling Good and Functioning Well*.

Gillian Lithgow stated that the report on the Outdoor Education Recovery Fund has been submitted to the Scottish Government for sign off prior to publication. The report took extensive evidence from the 45 projects supported and the resulting case studies, statistics and qualitative data has provided some powerful quotes and good news stories.

Agenda item 5

Closing remarks

Pete Higgins acknowledged the importance of residential to many at the meeting, but also the concentric ring model showed how informal and local experiences at a very early age can stimulate learning and build a sequential experience of formal and informal outdoor learning.

There was a discussion on the importance of balance between local learning and making sure that it does not remain the only option and that residential are fully complementary to the process. There should be a diversity of pathways for young people from local green spaces to expeditions.

Liz Smith thanked all those for their input and indicated that the next meeting might be in person.