



Natalie Don-Innes MSP
Minister for Children, Young People
and the Promise
Scottish Government

Liz Smith CBE MSP
Scottish Parliament

By email

3 July 2025

Dear Minister

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

Thank you for a constructive meeting on Tuesday to discuss my Bill. As indicated at the meeting, it is clear that we are making progress. I appreciate the collaborative approach which you and your officials are taking to this issue and I welcome your willingness to meet again in the next few weeks, and note that a meeting has now been confirmed for 12 August 2025.

As discussed on Tuesday, I had a constructive meeting with COSLA last month, and, whilst continuing to note the concerns they have, I was pleased to hear one of their representatives state that he considers the provision of one week's residential outdoor education to be an example of preventative spending given the very positive effects it has on educational attainment and building resilience in young people.

Furthermore, I will be continuing my extensive engagement with the outdoor sector over the summer recess including several visits to outdoor centres. As you are aware, the sector is extremely keen for the Bill to progress timeously. I will feed back to our next meeting on these visits, in particular in relation to the extent to which centres are geared up to provide one week's residential outdoor education for children with complex additional support needs.

As discussed on Tuesday and mentioned in previous correspondence, whilst I consider that the Bill should deliver universal provision for all school children, I recognise that this remains a matter of concern for you in respect of affordability of the Bill's provisions. In order to make progress, I am therefore prepared to consider an amendment to the Bill that would provide transitional measures whereby, in the first few years, the Bill's provisions would be targeted at pupils in primaries 6 and 7. Nevertheless I would wish to ensure flexibility for the future so that ultimately there

is a statutory requirement for all school pupils in state and grant-aided schools to have the opportunity to experience one week's residential outdoor education. I consider this to be a significant concession on my part and would have the effect of markedly reducing the cost in the early years of implementation and allaying concerns you have expressed around the potential impact on the teacher workforce.

There are obviously many pupils whose families are in a position to contribute towards their residential outdoor education and who, in many cases, already do so. As mentioned previously, this is another area I would be willing to consider further, provided all pupils who are in receipt of free school meals or the Scottish Child Payment, or have additional support needs, are fully funded to attend residential outdoor education. Should the Bill be amended to target funding in this way, then the overall cost would reduce significantly.

During the meeting you asked me to project a figure of the Bill's cost should amendments to target provision and funding in the ways set out above be agreed to. I understand that you want to be able to inform colleagues, in particular the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, of the estimated cost of an amended Bill, ahead of a motion for a financial resolution being lodged. As such, to assist this process, I would be happy to do some further work setting out my estimate of what the cost might be should the Bill be amended to provide for a more targeted approach.

As you will be aware, the Financial Memorandum accompanying the Bill estimates the cost of attending a week's residential outdoor education for all pupils in primaries 6 and 7 to range from £8.25 million to £13 million per annum¹, and transport costs to range from £400,400 to £591,500 per annum.² My office will review these figures again, factoring in potential amendments such as funding being targeted towards pupils on free school meals or in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment, or with additional support needs, and provide you with an indication at our next meeting of what I consider to be the likely cost of a more targeted approach.

Nevertheless, as mentioned at the meeting, some of the data required to make a wholly robust estimate is held by the Scottish Government.

It is also important to recognise that the Finance and Public Administration Committee and the Education, Children and Young People Committee have already scrutinised the estimated costings and methodology underpinning the Bill, and that the Parliament has agreed the general principles of the Bill. Therefore, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to produce a formal set of revised costings given that there is no mechanism at this stage for the Parliament to scrutinise any such revised costings. Furthermore, it remains my view that precise costing of the implementation of the Bill is a role for the Government, in collaboration with other partners with responsibility for that implementation.

¹ [Financial Memorandum](#), page 7 (Table 3)

² [Financial Memorandum](#), pages 9-10 (Table 4)

A further area I am prepared to move on is the commencement date for the Bill's provisions. Delaying commencement slightly would afford government and the sector additional time to prepare for implementation. Under section 4(2) of the Bill, should the Bill receive Royal Assent before the Scottish Parliament election next May, sections 1 and 2 of the Bill would come into force on 7 July 2026. I recognise that delaying commencement of those provisions by a year to the start of academic year 2027-28 (two years from now) would provide the necessary time for the sector, local authorities, the Scottish Government and other partners to enable them to be better prepared. You mentioned leaving the commencement date to be set out in regulations rather than on the face of the Bill, thereby allowing the Scottish Government to set that date. On balance I would prefer for a commencement date to be set out on the face of the Bill. However, this is an issue I am prepared to discuss further so that we can reach a mutually agreeable position.

I believe that amending the Bill in the ways set out above will significantly alleviate the concerns you have about the cost of the Bill's provisions. Furthermore, as you know I believe that there are a number of ways in which private sector funding can be used to enable school pupils to receive one week's residential outdoor education. As I mentioned at the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting on 11 June and again at our meeting on Tuesday, I was very interested to read the Deputy First Minister's [Panmure House](#) speech of 4 June 2025. In this speech she highlighted the importance of harnessing private investment to deliver strategic priorities. In particular, the Deputy First Minister stated:

"We also need to ensure that the public sector works cohesively, effectively and quickly, that we support investors and take action to deal with issues and problems as and when they arise...I have communicated to all parts of the public sector that they should see themselves as part and parcel of our economic development work. Stimulating economic growth and attracting private investment isn't only in the domain of our enterprise agencies or the Scottish National Investment Bank...we are looking at how we use financing models and instruments in the most effective way to de-risk projects, partnering public and private sector investment to make something happen."³

I welcome the Deputy First Minister's commitments, and believe that use of private sector investment to enable school pupils to have one week's residential outdoor education would be an excellent example of such partnership in action. As I highlighted in our meeting, this would represent preventative spending in action and, therefore, good investment leading to long-term economic growth, as pupils develop leadership skills which benefit them in later life. Whether this investment is harnessed through the development of a bespoke fund, or by another means of the Scottish Government's choosing, I would be very happy for the provisions of my Bill to be used as a model for such partnership funding to operate in practice. Should this require amendments to my Bill to make this happen, I would be very happy to consider any such amendments.

³[Panmure House - Deputy First Minister's investment speech - gov.scot](#)

Thank you again for your time on Tuesday, and I reiterate that we are making good progress. I look forward to meeting again on 12 August. To inform discussion at that meeting, it would be helpful if you could send me the text of draft amendments that would give effect to my proposals outlined above, in addition to any amendments which you consider necessary to allow the Bill to progress. At the committee meeting on 11 June 2025, you explicitly mentioned providing me with draft amendments, and I think it would aid discussion if the text of specific amendments is on the table.

As mentioned, I will endeavour to provide estimates of the likely cost implications of a more targeted approach, drawing heavily on information that is already contained in the Financial Memorandum. I hope that, after this meeting, you will be in a position where you consider that the Scottish Government can lodge a motion for a Financial Resolution, to enable proceedings on the Bill at Stage 2 to commence and for amendments to be considered.

I am copying this letter to Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, and to Douglas Ross MSP, Convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

I look forward to our next meeting on 12 August.

Yours sincerely

Liz Smith CBE MSP