

## **Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education**

**20 March 2025 – 13:00-14:00**

### **Minute**

### **Present**

#### **MSPs**

Liz Smith MSP – Chair

Brian Whittle MSP

#### **Parliament**

Mike Harvey – Parliament

Gavin McWhinnie - Parliament

#### **Invited guests**

Naimah Kader – Impact Statement Speaker

John Bailey - Impact Statement Speaker

Jamie Long – Impact Statement Speaker

Liz Mackenzie – Impact Statement Speaker

#### **Non-MSP Group Members**

Nick March – AHOEC

Neil Baird – Scouts Scotland

Jamie Miller – Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Richard Gerrish - Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Jamie Miller – SOEC

Rob Bushby – Wilderness Scotland

Hazel Wiseman – Ocean Youth Trust

Martin Davidson – Outward Bound

Neil Wightwick – Blairvadoch Outdoor Centre

Lee Musson – Rock UK

Phil Thompson – Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Paul Bayton – SU Scotland

Rachel Luxton – SU Scotland

Andrew Bradshaw – SAPOE

Tara Lillis – NASUWT

#### **Apologies**

Freda Fallon – Outward Bound

Roger Scrutton – University of Edinburgh

Professor Peter Higgins – University of Edinburgh

Jane Campbell Morrison – Scottish Adventure Activities Forum

Kevin Marsh – Craikhope Outdoor Centre

Peter Moir – Duke of Edinburgh and Youth Link

Ian Menzies – Education Scotland

## **Agenda item 1**

Liz Smith MSP welcomed attendees and provided a brief update on the Outdoor Residential (Scotland) Bill, explaining that the date for the vote for the Bill is to be held on 27 March 2025.

Liz then introduced the main topic for the meeting – the impact of attending a Residential Outdoor Learning Centre – the ‘lived experience’.

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## **Agenda item 2**

Nick March of AHOEC set the scene for the guest speakers, who had come along today to share their experiences of attending a Residential Outdoor Learning Centre and the impact that this had on their lives. Nick delivered the following statement:

‘Over the course of the past two years this CPG has dived into the details of high-quality outdoor learning, ASN delivery and the ambition of securing future provision. Each session has aimed to unpick how Outdoor Learning provision can deliver immediate outcomes in terms of addressing the current challenges including resilience, attendance, anxiety and behaviours in young people. We have also referred to the potential long-term impacts and behavioural changes that can influence a young person once the dust has settled post residential experience. At the current time the academic community are increasing their attention into these long-term impacts. In the recently published High Quality Outdoor Learning from the IOL, Dave Harvey gives us the following reference:

The experiences that young people have at outdoor education centres lead to measurable outcomes. These in turn contribute towards impact - the longer-term goals that we are trying to influence. This impact might not be immediately felt by a participant but may instead become apparent much later. Understanding the long-term impact helps providers to both demonstrate the value of their offer and to develop its quality. Linking the activities with intended outcomes and impact forms the basis of a theory of change, an idea that lies at the heart of the quality model in High Quality Outdoor Learning 2025.

These impacts are variable and therefore very hard to measure which is a long-term challenge to residential outdoor learning. We can however listen to the first-hand stories of individuals who have been on residential in their younger days and see how these experiences have impacted them. Today we have four speakers from very different backgrounds and spaces, who are going to share their experiences and tell us how residential outdoor learning has impacted their lives. We are going to start with Naimah Kader who although the youngest of our speakers is already living a life heavily affected by her earlier residential experiences.’

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## **Presentations - Summary of Transcript**

### **Naimah Kader – Impact Statement**

- 20-year-old British Pakistani Muslim from Ashton Under Lyne – top 20% of the most deprived areas.
- Limited opportunities - little to no outdoor connection.
- Women in the outdoors unheard of, as was travelling.
- Financial barriers too.
- Ashton Youth Club provided opportunities – became Young Leader.
- Scotland - winter skills expedition - first time going on 'holiday'.
- Never the fittest, never the fastest, never the strongest.
- Joined Youth Club - someone believed in me.
- Employed by Ashton Youth Club - full time on a year's gap scheme.
- Completed speech at Kendall Martin Festival, Duke of Edinburgh Gold, Alpine climbing in Wales, Morocco – summited Atlas Mountain in Morocco, Mount Toubcal, summited Ben Nevis - CMD Arete.
- Recognised by Muslim Hikers
- Kilimajaro – raised £3500 to attend expedition.
- Train alone, flight alone, solo travelling – trek across France, camping, climbed the Alps.
- Buxton Rotary Club - 'Young Citizen of the Year' award.
- Paramedic – outdoor experiences helped to develop as person, get dream job and complete C1.
- Marathon in Morocco.
- Mountain Leader Training.
- Talks for Outward Bound - create a can-do attitude - if you can't see it, you can't be it!
- Still not the fittest, still not the fastest, still not the strongest - happier, more resilient, more grateful and driven as person. Hope to have shown the real impact that Residential had life, lifestyle and directly on others too.
- Thank you - Head of Ashton Youth Club (Mark) - believing in me, providing me and so many young people with so many incredible life changing opportunities.
- Thank you very much.

### **John Bailey - Impact Statement**

Nick March introduced the second speaker, John Bailey, who is here to share the impact and the story of his time at a residential and how it has affected his life.

- Grew up in small town called Penicuik, South of Edinburgh.
- BMX rider, mountain biker, skier, beginner surfer.
- Age 10 – weeklong residential trip to Lagganlia - first introduction to outdoor sports.

- Penicuik – quiet place – welcomed the trip to the wilderness.
- Strongest memory - cold water tests at Lagganlia, jumped in to freezing water, most talked about experience of childhood.
- Ancient Greeks have two words for time. Cronus and Kairos - words deal with time, linear time. Kairos about the right moment, the opportune moment, the perfect moment, and a moment where everything can change. Cold-water test was my Kairos.
- Massive, massive obsession with all outdoor sports, started riding mountain bikes, built mountain bike jumps in hometown, something done ever since.
- Started small company building jumps and ramps for anyone that wanted them, travelled all over the world, worked for Red Bull, creating mountain bike videos everywhere from Dubai to Argentina.
- Gained clients - Surface Lay and James Bond.
- 2019 after putting the last screw in James Bond's ginormous 30-foot-tall ramp for latest film, saw Daniel Craig and stunt man having same moment I had on rocky outcrop, looking over the freezing cold Scottish water. All did same thing and egged each other on and did this huge jump which started the new film.
- Opened own skate park in Glasgow - Loading Bay, finally build my own space after building for clients for years and years and years.
- Opened second facility - south side of Glasgow, Glasgow Council backing, amazingly supportive, worked collaboratively with them on new cycling and urban sports policy, guides how sports, urban sports used throughout the city.
- Quantitative Data shows those exposed to/practise urban sport or other outdoor sports at young age, more likely to use active travel in later life. Many staff, customers that cycle to work, became more active due to involvement with these sports.
- Conclusion - how much the experience of Lagganlia impacted life - cold water test was my moment - Kairos.
- Seemed like just a singular skill or a singular jump, gave courage and confidence to facilitate some of the biggest, biggest jumps and biggest stunts the world has seen.
- Inspired the Loading Bay and Devon Street Urban Park, which is to open this year and will facilitate tens of thousands of urban sport sessions over the coming years.....all because I spent that week in Lagganlia.
- Thank you for having me here today.

### **Jamie Long – Impact Statement**

Nick March introduced the third speaker, Jamie Long who is here to share the impact and the story of his time at a residential and how it has shaped his life since that time.

- Paraplegic with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.
- Brought up in tiny town - northwest of Scotland called South Airedale.

- Had nothing, nothing for children, especially those with serious disabilities, didn't really have a future, as person with severe disability - felt like an outcast.
- Change began when parents signed up to SBHS - Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Scotland.
- Specialised knowledge of disability and access to funding, allowed to take part Adventure Residential Holidays. Centres were all over the UK.
- Stayed in contact with staff of SBHS from age of nine until now at 38.
- Regular meetups, keep in contact, changed my life, not been for them, wouldn't have left the house, wouldn't have had much of anything.
- Allowed me to confide in people - knowledge of my disability, disabilities like mine, didn't have that before - nobody truly understood me.
- Residential opportunity changed my outlook - residential facilities attended ultimately changed everything, able to connect with likeminded and able people.
- Opportunity to take part in adventure sports - kayaking, woodland trails, off roads, bike rides, climbing and many other sports too - too many to mention.
- Especially love kayaking, on the water have a sense of freedom, as a full-time wheelchair user - just don't get that. Too many barriers in place - don't have choices, on the water, can go where want, do what want. Amazing!
- Wheelchair basketball - incredibly competitive person, team sport allows me to let loose.
- 20 years on, still playing, play in regional league all over Scotland. Team is called Inverness City Lines.
- Love the breaks and benefits, experience and knowledge gained from them enormous. Helped my confidence, which was eroded over many years due to bullying and being different. Unable to live a normal life like any of my peers.
- Outdoor instilled in me drive to succeed in sports, try in life and be competitive – as well have a sense of fairness - take into my sports.
- Attend such events as often as can. Team plays mostly four or five months a year.
- Chances to be in the outdoors, sports - take anything I can get for that sense of freedom.
- Thank you - hope this statement sheds some light on what it is to be disabled and live with that too.

### **Liz Mackenzie – Impact Statement**

Nick March introduced the fourth and last speaker, Liz Mackenzie, who was once of this city (Edinburgh) and is speaking to us today from London, with another completely different story of the impact of attending a residential.

- Opportunities given at primary school and secondary school shaped life, going to be 70 tomorrow, probably oldest of the people talking today. Grew up in large council housing estate - Little France on the fringes of Edinburgh.

- Now Royal Infirmary and huge science park there, but not how it was back then. Prefab backed onto a farm - playground was farmer's fields.
- Attended St. John Vianney's Catholic Primary School, Craigour - age 11 offered opportunity school cruise, extraordinary for my background, didn't tell my parents – they got word of it, scraped money together – cost £33, back in early 60s, lot of money.
- Suddenly visited foreign countries, heard different languages, bonded with others in dorm, experienced violent seasickness going round top of Scotland - North Sea hits nearly Norway. 60 years on - remember every second of that trip.
- Attended St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary School, Edinburgh, reconnected with other girls from cruise, at 15 offered opportunity to go to Ben More Outdoor Pursuit Centre. Changed life!
- Council housing estate, life's quite narrow, didn't have a car, bus into Bridges in Edinburgh was about as far as went, maybe trip to Princes St Gardens during the summer holidays.
- Went to school, came home, played on the street, no extracurricular activities at school, didn't exist.
- Bus journey to Benmore - breathtaking, suddenly drove through Glens, passed hills, seeing Cobbler at Arrochar, driving down the Rest and Be Thankful - amazing. Benmore widened horizons hugely.
- Tried canoeing - jump into cold waters still impacted in memory. Something you don't forget. Did rock climbing, sailing, orienteering - managed to crash into a nuclear submarine on the Holy Loch when doing sailing, something rather forget about.
- Living away from home, meeting instructors, things you wouldn't expect, like discos and learnt music that the instructors heard - Johnny Be Good and Route 66 - was the 60s and 70s.
- Saved money from every Saturday job and took every opportunity to go back to Benmore. It was so impactful.
- Amazed why still spaces at Benmore, why everybody wasn't taking this opportunity to go there, why didn't everybody know about it?
- Made us want to see much more of Scotland - gave us confidence to hitchhike, gave us skills to climb mountains, to camp in the odd field and develop resilience.
- In awe going through Glencoe, being welcomed into houses by crofters and Skye - just so lucky.
- Studied chemistry - lived and worked in many different places, Bristol, West Germany during the Cold War, Norway, Hull, Chicago, Melbourne, London many times. Now home. Elected twice as a Labour Counsellor in London Borough of Richmond - no mean feat, not a labour heartland.
- Learned languages, met different people, in different walks of life.
- Early experiences made me so comfortable in different situations. When stuck halfway up a rock face and legs are shaking so badly you can barely move, either

have to get up to the top or find way down, realise can cope with things that life throws at you.

- School cruise and outdoor centre at Benmore gave so much, broadened life, sure it broadened the life of everybody who went there.
- Realise life experiences add up, each one builds on the other. But it's that first step - what we've heard from the other people, first step gives confidence to go on and do other things.
- Experiences cost money, if offered to every child, but the payback for society is huge - think we've heard that from the three previous speakers.
- Thanks for listening.

Nick March thanked all the guest speakers, mentioning how fantastic and valuable each talk had been in demonstrating the impact that a residential had upon their lives. Nick then invited questions from the other attendees of the CPG.

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### **Agenda item 3**

#### **Group discussion**

Following the presentations the group reflected on the contributions of the speakers, the power of their testimonies and the importance of sharing the level of impact that Residential Outdoor Learning Centres had for each speaker and their lives, as well as the possible wider impact or implications, such as contributing to decision-making and policy making.

Key points included:

- The exponential rise in the last two years since COVID in Additional Support Needs (ASN) in terms of neuro divergent conditions, especially ADHD, which is around 800% - with an eight-year waiting list.
- The possible correlation between that and access to things like outdoor learning and all sorts of different sports, arts, music and drama.
- The lack of equity in opportunity in other portfolios like education or health.
- The importance of sharing these stories from our speakers which have been an inspiration and should drive a different pathway in the way in which policy is developed.
- The significance of ensuring that the ASN provision in each of the Centres is as good as it can be in giving that extra support.
- The question of what more could be done to get the message out there about the value of Outdoor Education.

- The positive impact of when whole classes across Scotland go on a residential where in that context all class members get the opportunity to attend, as opposed to a more ad hoc experience of residentials.
  - The importance of getting the message out there about the value of Outdoor Education through going out to visit schools to give talks, as well as the worth of breaking down barriers in relation to cost, whereby communication is shared about the fact that Centres provide children and young people with 'kit' – an expense families will not need to incur.
  - The strength of working with City Councils and Local Authorities to secure funding and influence policymaking.
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#### **Agenda item 4**

##### **Visitor levy**

Andrew Bradshaw representing SAPOE, raised the concern from members about the visitor levy, which is an additional levy on residential visiting across Scotland. Given that this could potentially put an extra layer of cost onto a residential experience, the question was could consideration (under Section Three of the Act) see Local Authorities giving an exemption to an educational residential?

Liz Smith MSP responded by saying that this was a very well raised question as it is so important because there are lots of issues around the visitor levy. The power has been given to local authorities to decide whether or not they want to impose a visitor levy.

Some will choose to do that, and some might choose not to, but at the moment there are some local authorities who have already put that in place, and that is an additional cost as has been rightly set out.

Liz Smith MSP continued by saying that it would be a very considerable worry, to outdoor education centres and the fact was that at one stage, if the legislation had stayed as it was, we were going to end up with people who, in a mountain rescue hut, were going to have to pay a visitor levy because there was a loophole. This would have been ridiculous.

Liz Smith MSP concluded that there are still lots of situations that local authorities are coming across where there is a big debate to be had. It's been a live issue in the Parliament, as we are probably aware, and Liz will certainly take these concerns back to colleagues who are leading on the legislation.

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#### **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 5 June 2025.