

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

## **19 February 2026 – 13:00-14:00**

### **Minute**

### **Present**

#### **MSPs**

Liz Smith MSP – Convenor

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Brian Whittle MSP

#### **Invited guests**

Dave Harvey – Outdoor Learning

Jane Campbell-Morrison - SAAF (Scottish Adventure Activity Forum)

Ian Robertson - SAAF (Scottish Adventure Activity Forum)

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

Nick March – AHOEC

Andrew Bradshaw – SAPOE

Mike Harvey – Parliament

Gavin McWhinnie - Parliament

Neil Baird – Scouts Scotland

Jamie Miller – Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Richard Gerrish - Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Hazel Wiseman – Ocean Youth Trust

Lee Musson – Rock UK

Rachel Luxton – SU Scotland

Professor Peter Higgins – University of Edinburgh

David Anderson - NASUWT

Professor Roger Scrutton – University of Edinburgh

#### **Apologies**

Patricia Johnston - AHOEC

Rob Bushby – Wilderness Scotland

Calum Robinson – Ardentinn Outdoor Centre

Paul Bayton – SU Scotland

Neil Wightwick – Blairvadoch Outdoor Centre

Kevin Marsh – Craikhope Outdoor Centre

Martin Davidson – Outward Bound

Phil Thompson – Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Tara Lillis – NASUWT

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 this would be the last CPG Meeting on Outdoor Education, due to the dissolution of Parliament six weeks from this date.

Liz also spoke about the fact that the Bill had successfully gone through and that it was now known as an Act of Parliament. Liz took the opportunity to thank everybody who had been involved in this process, particularly for the efforts that were shown in support of the Bill. Liz emphasised that the hard work would continue to ensure that the Act is delivered. Liz will continue to work with the Scottish Government over this matter into the future. Liz again thanked everyone for their help, in particular, the sector for their input and support.

Liz then introduced the main topic for the meeting – Looking to the future with the Residential Outdoor Education Scotland Act.

# Agenda item 2

## The Scottish Residential Quality Improvement Framework Nick March and Dave Harvey

### Presenter's Profile

**Dr Dave Harvey** is a Leading Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning and former national chair of the AHOEC. Prior to studying for his PhD, he worked for Brathay Trust, leading and managing their outdoor education provision. He is now self-employed, running his own consultancy, training and research business, [Dave Harvey Outdoor Learning](#). Dave is an Honorary Senior Lecturer at Bangor University, a regular contributor to both local and national sector conferences, and to *Horizons*, the outdoor learning sector's practitioner journal.

### Presentation - Summary

Nick spoke about the background to the guiding framework, explaining that it had been developed over a period of three years. In the past the main reference document for outdoor centres had been Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning (2010) and whilst it remains a very relevant and worthy document, it did not address the very important element of self-evaluation and self-improvement. This is what the framework sets out to address. Thanks to a high level of support from the Scottish Government and other stakeholders, funding was made available through Education Scotland, AHOEC and SAPOE.

This allowed the journey to begin and in October 2024, a two-day working party took place of about 30 people, which included a wide range of expertise from the field of education – Head Teachers, Teachers, Academics, Head of Centres, Service Managers and Education Scotland – ASN and Gaelic were also represented. From this initial work, most of the data/feedback was successfully gathered, as well as agreement about the structure of the document. And from there began the writing.

At this point Nick handed over to Dave, who outlined the writing method. Dave mentioned that this involved researching worldwide best practise in this area, to arrive at a document that placed an emphasis on high-quality experiences in residential outdoor learning. Over a period, the document went from Version 1 to where it is now, Version 9.

He further explained that the Guiding Framework is a document that:

- builds the bridge between provider and setting, reflecting a clear and compelling vision for inclusion, sustainable outdoor learning that's fully aligned to strong values and the curriculum
- where 'impact' is at the heart
- champions leadership at all levels
- follows the structure of effective frameworks, such as HGIOS4
- focuses on self-evaluation, self-improvement and development planning, through a cycle of review, reflect and react – supported with characteristics of highly effective practice, challenge questions and examples of high-quality practice
- contains a built-in toolkit to ease the process of development planning
- aligns and references to Curriculum for Excellence, High Quality Outdoor Learning and many other important sources, such as Going Out There, Interdisciplinary Learning etc.

At this point, Dave then handed back to Nick, who emphasised that the final draft had been very well received by all stakeholders and other audiences. He went on to say how proud he was of this piece of work.

At the end of this presentation, a small discussion took place around the importance of Interdisciplinary Learning and Learning for Sustainability, CPG members were given the reassurance that this had been fully considered in the writing of the document, and that these are referenced throughout.

Liz Smith then rounded up this part of the agenda, commending Nick, Dave and Patricia, as well as the other contributors, adding that it gets to the 'Holy Grail' of the delivery of high-quality experiences. Liz likes the depth and simplicity of the document and felt that providers and settings would be able to easily engage with it. Liz also mentioned that it placed a responsibility on the partnership between schools and providers, whilst keeping children and young people in focus. This is testimony to the engagement between government, parliament, the outdoor education sector and schools. Liz felt that it puts us steps ahead in coherency to approach.

After this, in answer to a question, Nick went on to explain that the final version of the document would be ready once all the next steps had been identified and other components added in to it. The timeline is still to be agreed.

Liz Smith then introduced the next presenters, welcoming Ian Robertson and Jane Campbell Morrison.

## Agenda item 3

### **Workforce in the Outdoor – Ian Robertson and Jane Campbell Morrison MBE**

#### **Presenters' Profile**

## **Ian Robertson**

### **Chief Executive Countryside Learning Scotland**

Ian is passionate about creating informed and responsible access to the countryside.

Ian qualified from Jordanhill College of Physical Education where he studied sport in the community and was then involved with Scottish Rugby for 12 years as player, coach and development officer. Ian then moved to project manage the Scottish National Angling Programme followed by a spell managing the Country Sports Tourism Group. Before taking on his role as Executive Director of CLS Ian spent 4 years as wildlife manager at Pitcarmick estate. Here he created a rural environment where recreational activity, volunteering opportunities, rural livelihoods, and traditional land uses can live in harmony through better education and understanding.

## **Jane Campbell Morrison MBE**

### **Chair of Scottish Adventure Activities Forum**

Member of Adventure UK and the Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee (Scottish Representative)

Vice Chair of AdventureSmart UK

With a background and a passion for skiing and sailing, Jane has always championed the benefits of participation in the outdoors to anyone who would listen. Having grown up with skiing and sailing parents, it was inevitable that Jane would choose to become a skiing and sailing instructor for 11 years. She then became the Development Manager for the Royal Yachting Association Scotland, before taking on the role of CEO of Snowsport Scotland after a serious illness. Due to a change in personal circumstances, Jane had to leave Snowsports, to go on to become the Senior Inspector for Scotland for the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority. Once this role ceased to be required, Jane then became a peripatetic trainer and inspector for RYA Scotland, before going on to set up Findhorn Watersports at the tender age of 56.

Jane is passionate about getting people into the outdoors, and campaigns to not only increase participation across disciplines, but to also support the sector itself and ensure it can be sustained in the long term.

### **Presentation - Summary**

**Ian Robertson**, Chief Executive Countryside Learning Scotland began by explaining that he is a provider who is trying to deliver a workforce for the outdoors sector. Fundamentally his organisation looks at every aspect of the outdoors, looking at every career within the outdoors such as conservation careers, recreation, adventure

and the outdoor sector. The aim of the company is to try to provide a service to schools, young people and businesses.

Working in this area, can present many challenges and issues as outlined below:

- Scottish Government statistics show that around 98% of the Scottish landmass is classed as rural resulting in a huge resource that is under utilised
- businesses struggle to recruit skilled young people
- urbanised populations versus the rural environment, which tend to consist mostly of small businesses

and that on top of:

- the phenomenal product in the outdoors for young people and businesses to benefit from in terms of developing health and well-being - mental health and physical health for the wider population.

This situation creates a perfect storm, caused by the following issues:

- Brexit – this saw a mass exodus from the workforce due to the departure of young people who came from European countries, leaving a vacuum in Scotland
- far less of our young people seem interested in working in the outdoor industry
- impact of COVID on the younger generation, where they were unable to go out, or have experience of a 'residential' – more young people coming out of school with less confidence and higher levels of anxiety
- general lack of opportunity for young people to get their hands dirty and try different types of jobs and careers
- less teachers within schools
- historically emphasis on gaining certified qualifications and the lack of available workplaces and apprenticeships – not everyone can or wants to go to university
- scarcity of funding or structure in relation to career paths in outdoor education

Ian went on to say that there was a need to:

- raise awareness about careers in the outdoors
- promote the merits of having a trade
- develop a wider plan to include local authorities, universities, colleges, schools and businesses

Furthermore, he has been involved in the setting up of a Rural Mentor Qualification - a one-day course that is designed to get rural employees more comfortable working with young people and vice versa and the Rural Employability Scheme - a two year

course which is part of the transition phase from school to work, designed to teach employers how to protect young people in their care through good role modelling, as well as offering them training and a chance to develop their soft skills (how to run a business, finance etc) in preparation for joining the workforce.

**Jane Campbell** from Scottish Adventure Activities Forum (SAAF) emphasised the matter of a lack of people coming through to join the workforce in the outdoor sector. She explained that SAAF is an organisation that is based on the input of volunteers, mostly undertaken by people in their spare time or fortunate enough to do it as part of their work time. SAAF also contributes to consultations and provides answers to people who are looking for information on the outdoors.

Jane said that she appreciated the positivity of both the framework and the Act, which should increase awareness and offer more opportunities for young people.

Jane agreed with the challenges and issues mentioned by Ian but felt that one of the most important factors to be addressed is working and building relationships with further education colleges. The aim of this would be to deliver courses with awards that kept learning for instructors up to date and relevant, as well as matching the needs of employers.

The main message Jane wanted to share is the need to build capacity within the workforce for the outdoor sector. This will require collaboration with a number of stakeholders, such as schools, colleges, businesses and outdoor centres, so that there are clear pathways and programmes to encourage and incentivise young people into the industry. However, to make this sustainable for young people and businesses, it must also be accessible.

## Agenda item 4

### Summary and Questions

Roger Scrutton asked whether there had been any collaboration with teacher training colleges, to which Jane replied that so far, she had not connected with them, but that both her and Ian will be delivering a presentation to some teachers on the 9th of March. Ian and Jane are very aware of the need to reach out to teacher training providers.

Advice was given that they should contact the Scottish Councillor Deans who are the people who look after the provision of preservice teacher education in schools of education on learning for sustainability to provide an integrated approach across the whole of Scotland. And a contact at Stirling is Lizzie Rushton and Beth Christie, for Edinburgh University.

Additionally, Pete Higgins went on to say that the brand-new Nature Scotland corporate plan, reflected that there were 200,000 jobs directly linked to the rural economy - one way or another directly linked to nature, totalling 7% of all Scotland's jobs. He

mentioned that one of the things that they are trying to do is to re wet peatlands and plant trees to meet our net zero targets. This is work that needs to be integrated, where it breaks down the divide between what people think of as academic schoolwork versus vocational schoolwork or practical schoolwork. Pete said that there are jobs out there and this needs to be made as evident as possible. Pete suggested that Ian might like to contact him if he could be some further help to him.

A further comment was made about the fact that some providers are noticing that more recently several of their new instructors have come from England – this poses the question as to why this might be the case – why is there a gap in Scotland?

## Agenda item 5

### **Closing Comments**

At this point, Nick took the opportunity to give huge thanks to Liz Smith for the way she has represented the outdoor education sector for the last six years. He acknowledged how hard she has worked to convey the massive benefits of a residential experience and the outdoors. Nick commended Liz for her work on the Bill and the success of it becoming an Act. Nick said that he could not thank Liz enough and that she would be hugely missed once she steps down.

In response Liz said that she would be continuing to be involved with the work in relation to outdoor education. Liz thanked Nick personally for all that he had done for the Cross-Party Working Group, offering a small token of thanks for all his endeavours.

Liz went on to thank all members, adding that she would not have been able to achieve the success of the Act without their input and passion for the outdoors. Liz also thanked her staff for their support. Liz also acknowledged the support and input from the Scottish Government, recognising the big job ahead in getting the implementation of the Act right. Liz said that this was very important, as the one thing that mattered to her was the future of the young people in Scotland.

Liz Smith MSP brought the meeting to a close, thanking speakers and all the members for their participation and again to AHOEC for facilitating the CPG on Outdoor Education.