

Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education

23 November 2021 at 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP

Daniel Johnson MSP

Brian Whittle MSP

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Invited guests

N/A

Non-MSP Group Members

Prof Peter Higgins

Keir Bloomer

Mike Harvey

Rob Bushby

Duke of Edinburgh, Pete Moir

Education Scotland, Tracy Johnston

Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education, Ali Dreyer, Andrew Bradshaw

Youthlink, Gillian Lithgow

The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC), Nick March

John Muir Trust, Toby Clark

Ardentinny, Peter Wilson

Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, Hazel Wiseman

Scottish Outdoor Education Centres, Dave Spence

The Outward Bound Trust, Martin Davidson

Rock UK, Lee Musson

Craikhope Outdoor Centre, Kevin Marsh

Scouts Scotland, Neil Baird, Addie Dinsmore

Field Studies Council Scotland, Tim Foster, Joy Blizzard

Mountaineering Scotland, Stuart Younie

Scripture Union (SU) Scotland, Paul Bayton

Apologies

Fulton MacGregor MSP

Rachael Hamilton MSP

Mark Ruskell MSP

City of Edinburgh Council (Awards)

Scottish Adventure Activities Forum (SAAF)

Agenda item 1

Introductions

Liz Smith opened the meeting and subsequently invited members to introduce themselves and say whether they were an individual member or representing an organisation.

Agenda item 2

Overview of purpose of the CPG

Liz Smith addressed the background and purpose of the group.

Agenda item 3

Each individual member and one representative from each organisation were invited to tell the meeting which issues were most pressing in terms of the challenges ahead

Two main themes emerged from the discussion – one was the immediate crisis facing the sector and the other was the longer-term view.

Immediate issues

It was acknowledged that these first needed to be addressed to ensure that centres survive to deliver outdoor education/learning in the future. Of particular concern was the ongoing issue of disparate local authority advice to schools about school trips. COSLA needs to be involved to help with this advice and AHOEC confirmed that they are meeting with COSLA.

Restrictions are still placed upon the sector. The view was expressed that it must be the one remaining sector that is still unable to operate. Travel restrictions have implications for equity, risking a postcode lottery for school children.

Last-minute cancellations, last-minute booking changes and the need to pay refunds are having a profound impact on centre finances. The issue of insurance has still not been resolved with the Scottish Government. It was suggested that it's time for blunt speaking about this issue.

There is a huge backlog of demand for residential and expedition opportunities for those undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh awards and partnership working will be needed to help with this.

Longer-term issues

The themes that emerged were that there was a large policy disconnect between the government policy including the Curriculum for Excellence, Learning for Sustainability, the climate change & biodiversity crisis and what is happening on the ground.

Concerns were expressed that the importance of outdoor education/learning has been downgraded and seen in terms of "cost" rather than in terms of "added value". Its role in closing the attainment gap was stated. There needs to be a clear and secure pathway to ensure equity of provision of all children.

It was suggested that the outdoor learning sector could look for allies in other sectors with overlapping objectives e.g., health and wellbeing but also that there was a need to address some of the dysfunctional relationships within our own sector.

Feedback from outdoor learning projects funded by the Outdoor Learning Education Recovery Fund had provided very strong and positive feedback.

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/programmes/youth-work-and-the-attainment-challenge/sharing-good-practice/outdoor-learning/> This was also backed up by the research into the improvement in a range of education measures including attainment from preschool right through to universities that learning in the outdoors can achieve. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature/>

The main themes discussed were investment, relationship building, the benefits of outdoor education and disparity. These will form the basis of future meetings. Several members of the group have submitted supplementary information. It is proposed to circulate these and other ideas in advance of the next meeting.

Agenda item 4

Closing remarks

Liz Smith made closing remarks and intimated that a second meeting would follow in the new year.