

Minutes

Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education

28th March 2023, 1pm

Hybrid: In person at Scottish Parliament and via Teams

MSPs in attendance:

Liz Smith MSP

Daniel Johnson MSP

Fulton MacGregor MSP (online)

Non-MSP Group Members in attendance:

Jamie Miller, CEO, Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Rob Bushby, Wilderness Scotland

Mike Harvey, Scottish Parliament

Claire McIntosh, Scouts Scotland

Laura Jack, Scouts Scotland

Nick March, AHOEC

Freda Fallon, Outward Bound

Paul Bayton, SU Scotland

Erin Joyce, Liberton High School, Edinburgh

Simone Ruszaj, Liberton High School, Edinburgh

Ainsley Martin, Outward Bound

Ann Moore, Retired Head Teacher, Wester Hailes, Edinburgh

Stuart Younie, Mountaineering Scotland

James Allan, SAPOE

Hazel Wiseman, OYT Scotland

Frazer Horswell, Scouts Scotland

Brian Whittle MSP, Scottish Parliament

Rachel Luxton, SU Scotland

Pete Higgins, University of Edinburgh

Online:

Ian McCall, Paths For All

Andrew Bradshaw, SAPOE

Toby Clark, John Muir Trust

Andy Ferguson, Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Ali Dreyer, Abernethy

David Exeter, Outward Bound

Kevin Marsh, Craikhope

Peter Wilson, Ardentinn

Mike Etherington, Field Studies Council

Apologies:

Jane Campbell Morrison, Scottish Adventure Activities Forum (SAAF)

N Wightwick, Blairvadach

Io Hadjicosta, Asst for Mark Ruskell MSP

Mark Ruskell MSP

Phil Thompson, Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Lee Musson, Rock UK

Neil Baird, Scouts Scotland

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Agenda

1. Welcome by Liz Smith MSP, update on Schools Residential Outdoor Education Scotland Bill.
2. Apologies / Introduction to Nick March, Chair of AHOEC Scotland
3. Presentations:

Nick March – introduction

Paul Bayton/ Rachel Luxton - third sector provision, benefits and challenges

Nick March/ Ann Moore – building good relationships with schools

Freda Fallon/ Liberton High School Pupils – benefit to young people

Nick March – summary

4. Questions
5. Closing remarks, date and time of next meeting

Thank you to everyone online who waited patiently for us to fix an audio issue in the room. We apologise for a loss of sound at the start of the CPG.

Agenda Item 1

Welcome by Liz Smith MSP, feedback re: Schools Residential Outdoor Education Scotland Bill

Liz Smith MSP - welcome, and first I'd like to take this opportunity to apologise for the late postponement of our last meeting. I appreciate that this caused disruption for some of you and I really am sorry about that. It's great to see so many people here in person today and that we were able to be hybrid too.

Firstly, I'll provide a brief update on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill. The Bill gained the support of 39 MSPs and obtained the required cross-party support so I have introduced the final proposal as a Bill to be considered by Parliament.

It will go through three stages in Parliament. In the first stage, a committee will examine the Bill and issue a report. There is no guarantee the Bill will proceed past this stage but I'm optimistic that with your support, and the support of colleagues, we can raise awareness of the Bill and provide compelling evidence about why Residentials are so important. Thank you to Mike in my team for his work on this and everyone involved in the CPG for your support.

Agenda Item 2

Apologies and Introduction to Nick March, Chair of AHOEC Scotland

Liz Smith - Today, we are joined by Nick March and guest presenters who certainly know a lot about best practice in residential outdoor learning.

Nick March has spent his whole career working in a variety of Scottish Local Authority, private and third sector outdoor residential centres. He is currently employed within the Edinburgh Outdoor Learning team but is here today in his role of AHOEC Scotland Chair. AHOEC is the national representative body for those leading and managing high quality outdoor centres, services and education.

Agenda item 3

Presentations

Nick March, AHOEC - From the 1940s outdoor centres have been giving Scottish young people residential opportunities that give memorable life changing experiences, full of impact.

Welcome to the desert island experience – food, shelter, support and adventure were provided, but then young people were returned to their home environment in the hope that they could apply this learning to their everyday life. We know it's so important that the transformative experience of Residentials is brought to life back in the neighbourhoods where young people live, play and go to school.

In the 1960s local authorities invested in outdoor education centres, repurposing castles and country homes to provide experiences in the wilderness. At this time, the wardens and heads of centres formed AHEOC to represent the newly emerged centres and their shared work.

In the 90s many LA centres closed. Some evolved into third sector bodies and the growth of adventure tourism. Through the pandemic AHOEC was very active in working with Scottish Government, SAPOE and YouthLink in securing and distributing essential funds to ensure the survival of residential centres and providing 1000's of outdoor learning experiences to young people – never a greater need.

Today, AHOEC membership is mostly third sector with local authority and private centres maintaining our capacity. There are around 4655 centres at my last count – national assets - from castles to bothies, and new ones crop up all the time. Each needs to be preserved.

Key change for all centres came with the birth of Curriculum for Excellence, changed the landscape for us all. The authors knew the impact and importance of outdoor learning and wanted to expand the opportunities to ensure Residentials are not desert island experiences. The circular progressive map gave a design to how we can deliver Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning.

SAPOE reported how successful this journey has been at the last CPG. There are key intersections between the positive outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence for the learner and their community – confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners, responsible citizens - and the experience of a Residential.

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning is an exciting opportunity for us. In terms of realising its full potential, it has taken everyone working in education, teachers and centres staff, some time,

but we are getting better at this - bringing Residential experiences into the real world, into the classroom and connecting the dots.

Today we are going to focus on the residential aspect of the map, how the shared Curriculum language has enabled us to integrate the Residential experience, increase its impact and importantly apply this back to the school and home environment.

Paul Bayton, Director of Centres for SU Scotland - Classroom Outdoors is the SU programme of school residentials, run from three residential centres, welcoming over 3,200 pupils from 100 different school groups representing 16 local authorities this year.

Ideally the first stage in a Residential begins with relationship building, laying foundations from P4 through to P7, to break down barriers and ensure we get it right.

Many young people are understandably anxious about being away from home. A Residential is often their first taste of independence and a chance to learn new skills. It's essential to get them ready by developing a good relationship with centre staff in their school, giving them information about the centre and getting to know the staff and their expectations ahead of a visit.

Rachel Luxton, Schools Manager at Lendrick Muir, SU Scotland - I'm going to present two case studies looking at P4-6 School Residentials, which you could say is the start of their journey with Residentials, and how we embed inclusion, wellbeing and equality and support attainment.

We offer pre-visits to help build relationships with our instructors. It's amazing to see young people's achievements and skills grow in that time. It's exciting to be on the journey with them from when they are getting ready to when they are with us at our centres. The case studies I'm going to share are from our work with two schools.

The first is Wallacestone Primary School who have been coming to us since 2018. They bring P6's for a 1-night Residential, the aim being to prepare for their 4-night P7 Residential. Through the P6 one-night stay they might learn to pack their bags, sleep in a different bed and eat in a different place. It can help reduce the worry before a 4-night stay in P7.

The school reported a huge drop in the level of homesickness as a result of this experience ahead of the P7 Residential.

When we build up to a longer Residential over time, stage by stage, we see a reduction in homesickness, more positive attitudes because the young people are better prepared having done a few activities, and they have greater confidence and resilience. They feel a sense of achievement that they can take forward onto the rest of their schooling, where it can grow and develop in other areas.

The 2nd case study is from Westfield Primary School and Torphichen Primary School. Both small PS that come together (since 2019). P4/ P5 come on one Residential for 2 nights and the P6/ P7 come for a full week's Residential. We see the progression from P4 to P7. Young People have the opportunity to challenge themselves next time. E.g. see friends on king swing, not ready, give it a go the next time. Or, not ready to try biking at the centre, but do Bikeability during school year and come back and are able to take part. The activities with these schools are very aligned to School Curriculum, but they do this in a different setting and the focus is on collaboration and communication. Teachers say pupils return to class as a more cohesive group. The teachers have developed a relationship with them that they wouldn't have been able to do in a school classroom. The kids thrive, especially those who struggle in school and they really value the experience. Central to providing expertise that's not possible within School budgets. Opportunity to do something and go on a journey together.

Nick March – Stepping into my Outdoor Learning LA role, I'm lucky to work for a team that actively chooses outdoor learning, they really do support the whole outdoor learning journey. How do we take a wilderness journey and connect it back to young people's daily reality? Begin by taking outdoor educators out of their natural environment (the mountains) and put them into the school, to understand the place, the teaching language and what they need to do to encourage growth and impact. By working with the school, each week, through good relationships with teachers, a set of outcomes they'd like to be delivered. Each school have a different set of outcomes and different set of pupils, programmes and activities are build for them. To ensure we grow the school over the week.

Ann Moore, Former Head Teacher at Canalview Primary School – we have developed a strong relationship with Lagganlia and the instructors there. The primary school is in a built-up area, and young

people have little access to outdoor pursuits such as canoeing or skiing. The experience goes way beyond the Residential. Young people have a voice in the planning. They find Lagganlia on the map, they share what they think the experience could be like – with teachers and peers – then they meet the instructors and they have questions they want to ask. The buzz starts from P4, they meet cool, young instructors and see them out in the playground making dens etc. Staff were much more confident as a result of observing, chatting to and getting feedback from instructors. Two-way process, learning from each other, including the children. Very powerful as there are lots of challenges in going away for the first time, the worry of being safe and secure. Prepares them for transition into high school, they start to think – change is good, a necessary part of life, a bit scary but that's how it goes. Young people knew what they wanted to achieve, and they learned about adaptability. Sometimes it was necessary to be flexible, if the weather changed and an activity wasn't available, but they'd carry on and try a new activity and make it happen. The relationships were improved between staff and children. It had a huge impact for both.

Through this experience over more than 9 years, felt it was crucial that every child had experience of high-quality learning outdoors. We have been lucky; Lagganlia is gold standard, something the kids will never forget for their whole lives. Former pupils get in touch up to 15 years later, remembering the experience. That's also the case for staff who talk warmly about the experience. For young people its development of independence, for us all its sharing and learning together. We do lots of that at school, but going to a wilderness was powerful and we then brought it back to school where children and staff worked together to develop and extend those learning experiences.

Nick March – a lot of asks before a school comes about their expectations of the journey. For a high quality we have to give school something that they can't get for themselves in their local environment. Filling them up with experience, but its now connected. Stepping stones, journey to make the best of the wilderness. We don't like to tick the boxes. We are trying to integrate greater Learning for Sustainability in every learning pathway. In order to connect young people to a natural environment we need to take them out of e.g. Wester Hailes, every instructor needs to take an interest and demonstrate care and love for the environment they are journeying in.

Living away from home is the peak level of adventure for some schools. There is a big focus on P7s and the transition to high school journey.

Many schools see this as the peak time to take part in a Residential, readying young people for that next step.

How do we show our success? We need these experiences to go back to school.

Ann Moore – pupils adopt a growth mindset, achieve it together and help each other. They bond together with their peers, especially important since the pandemic. Staff too, with children willing them on to succeed. Children find new friends, make links they thrive on, carry them on when they come back to school. Staff learn a lot too. Young people share experience with other learners in the school. Pupils return to school with a difference in relationship due to believing they can achieve things together.

With support from instructors, parents felt reassured and medication was well monitored, so young person with disability was able to take part - it was “best day in his life” when he completed an abseil.

Made sure every child could go, where parents can't afford the cost, fundraising in school (starting in P4) and applying to trusts, school funds covered the cost. Felt it was the right of the child to participate, that the opportunity could transform and change their lives.

At a recent inspection, relationships were highlighted as strength of the school, no doubt Residentials played a part. Pupils' sense of empowerment links to their achievement and to their attainment. All part of the package of experiences at the school.

Nick March – This work is relatively new but it's gathering momentum. The journey to understand Curriculum for Excellence only now being realised. Taken about 10 years. Exciting time for Outdoor Centres.

Next up in the outdoor education journey are secondary schools where the outdoor offering is often thought of as being limited to Duke of Edinburgh Awards. This is not the case.

Freda Fallon, Education Team, Outward Bound – 80% of courses we run are for secondary schools. Work in school grounds can be fantastic, its inspiring what schools can do. Through the pandemic these sessions achieved great outcomes – young people connect and develop their relationship to themselves, to others, to nature and their learning. Through the pandemic, Outward Bound delivered sessions to 2000 young people. Our focus is on relationships, the nub of what we can do.

When centres re-opened post-pandemic, it was like coming back in technicolour. Been busy, focusing on kindness, re-connecting communities, re-engaging young people with their learning - it's been really special. Report released end 2022, role of Residentials had become more important – email Freda for more info. The depth of the experience is more intense, as progression from school grounds or from shorter residentials, when planned to match the young people's educational context, Residentials can be very powerful.

Understanding yourself and your capabilities – on a Residential there is space to reflect, recalibrate and focus on what's important in your life. New experiences allow you to develop as a person, in confidence and resilience. You learn what your contribution can be. Sharing dorms and eating together offers opportunity to be part of a Residential community, you see teachers in a new light. Shared experiences are rewarding and memorable, with your peers and educators – building relationships that help you when you are back in school. When young people are challenging back at school, seeing them face challenges in the outdoors provides an anchor to bring them back in.

Relationship with nature can't be ignored in light of recent IPCC report, young people need to see more of our country if we expect them to care for it. To be an entitlement for all would be amazing.

Direct relationship between Residentials and Learning. Teachers tell centres this, looking at school improvement plans to bring this to life and into context.

Liberton High School, Edinburgh takes part in a Transition Residential in S1 (focusing on school values), in S2 they do the John Muir Award with overnight expedition (focusing on Rights Respecting Schools agenda), in S3 they do a 2-night expedition focusing on end of broad general education attaining Adventure and Challenge Award at SCQF Level 5 to support attainment in their Senior phase. Then in S6, Leadership Project through Outward Bound. Each tailored to their stage and education, supported by dedicated instructors and educators at Liberton High School. Outward Bound becomes a satellite campus for partners each week, not a standalone experience.

Contrast of the experience on a Residential comes through in the collective experiences gained – other residential experiences, life experiences, what they are doing in school – but the context for learning is really complimentary even though it contrasts.

February 2022, Pete Higgins, University of Edinburgh, reported in research that only 30% of secondary school kids get the opportunity to take part in a Residential. Sadly, as number of free school meals goes up, the number of people getting this experience goes down (25% of primary and 25% of special schools). Many missing out on integrated learning opportunities.

Please see clip from Outward Bound here – [Why come on an Outward Bound Adventure? - YouTube](#)

Young people say “it’s silly not to take opportunities when you’ve got them”. We could relate this to the opportunity presented by the Entitlement Bill. So much good stuff going on but for so few. We have this opportunity so we should make this happen.

Erin – S6, Deputy Head Girl, Liberton High School, Edinburgh – over last 6 years done Outward Bound and its connecting courses three times, some of best experiences especially the gorge walk. Influenced what I want to do when I grow up. Wanted to do psychology for some time. Had no idea that psychology would be connected to Outward Bound until I went on a Residential. From the team building exercises to personal

development tactics, I've learned and solidified my love for psychology. I would highly recommend Outward Bound to anybody. Experiences I've had on the camps have helped shape who I am today.

Simone – S6, Deputy Head Boy, Liberton High School, Edinburgh – been to Outward Bound many times over the past 6 years, and it has benefited me a lot. In S1 I was very shy, lacking in confidence. The first benefit was opening up my friendship group at camp and speaking to those people again in a classroom environment. I had to work with these people, using each other's strengths and abilities to design and assemble a raft to save us from the freezing waters! This kind of experience helped me make lifelong friends with other members of the team, people I would never have talked to ordinarily.

Another benefit was that I learned organisation skills that have helped me plan and prioritise efficiently and effectively for exam revision; this really boosted me academically, so I was able to go on and achieve my targeted grades, which I'm really thankful for. At the beginning of the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award Residential I didn't know anybody of my teammates, but now we keep in touch daily and have come together to use our individual skills to make a great project for our community.

A lifetime benefit I've got from the Residentials is that I'm not frightened by a challenge any more. I can step out of my comfort zone. At the start of the year I didn't know how to put skis on, but a month ago I skied down the Matterhorn in the Alps.

The experiences have a domino effect on one another. Because I attended Residentials so early in secondary school and because they were such a positive experience, I jumped to sign up to the next one and the next one. It's because of the confidence I got from this that I can speak to you all in Parliament today.

Nick March – to summarize, all the examples show how the Outdoor Learning and Curriculum for Excellence map has given Centres a place to fit in and contribute in a far more effective way. The school classroom

has now expanded its day-to-day teaching and high quality Residentials can be measured in how they connect and extend the experiences of school, take them back and give them a place. This is about impact. However, honestly the currency of school success is still measured in closing the attainment gap. If the school choose to use its PEF money it will be measured against its success in closing the attainment gap. In school inspections, the additional parts about character and confidence (all the additional parts of human development) are side notes instead of key notes. What we are here challenging ourselves to do, is really champion that other part.

High quality examples – the journey we've been on has yet to be measured. Already been 14 years, but only just now showing the impact of Curriculum for Excellence and Outdoor Learning. How can we prove to those who did such a good job in writing it that we are doing a good thing? I believe we are now championing that. To the academic community of Scotland, now is the time for a check in, a piece of research to be done on how these Schools Residentials and the stories we've heard have had an impact on young people.

Not all local authorities choose outdoor learning. The great stories shared today, and by SAPOE at the last CPG, are not generic through Scotland. They are down to the schools that have chosen to champion it. Each LA has its own direction and each school has its own story. Big challenge for third sector organisations to engage them, may find it a challenge to build relationships. For third sector, they may be required to make up to 32 different relationships, in 32 LAs and then filter into the schools. Relationship with SAPOE and these LAs is key to ensure high quality outdoor experiences.

Key threads -

Connection to the school

Communication with the teachers

Shared language and curriculum

Progression

Most important - Impact that the Residential has (Ref Ann Moore, biggest singular impact on a child in their time at Canalview PS was their Residential experience)

Currency of success, can't remove numeracy and literacy from offering. Liz Smith's Residential Bill champions an experience which provides a young person with the confidence to choose to go to school and the school with the improvement needed in closing the attainment gap. Can't see how we can't progress with the Bill.

Agenda Item 4

Questions

Q – Liz Smith MSP – Very uplifting, especially hearing from Erin and Simone. Can I ask, if you had to say a stage or year group in school, do you have views on when the experiences you've both thrived from are best?

A – Simone, Liberton High School – In S1 the Residential is very important because it puts your footing into new high school life. You mix with hundreds of kids who you don't know, because you're from different primary schools. You connect with new teachers that you've never talked to before and it's a completely different experience. The S1 Outward Bound Residential really helped me settle into high school life, this new chapter of my life.

Q – Liz Smith MSP – For Ann Moore, you mentioned how you raise money for youngsters who wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity. Did you use any of your PEF funding?

A – Ann Moore – Yes, we used PEF funding, we used school funding - the kids organised various bake sales, things like that. We also used the John Muir Trust and the Friends of Lagganlia. So, we took it from everywhere we could.

Q – Liz Smith MSP – Were your Inspectors interested in that?

A – Ann Moore – I wasn't there for the inspection, but they did pick up on the fact that this was a big thing for the school. I used some of the PEF funding to take a teacher out to focus on outdoor learning and I know

that she was highlighted in the report. It's too early to know what was said.

Q – Daniel Johnson MSP, Edinburgh Southern – Delighted to hear from Liberton High School pupils today. I would challenge the point around outdoor learning being set against attainment. The growth mindset is integrated. From a pedagogical point of view, is Lagganlia really so different from Wester Hailes in terms of what it can offer, the clue being in the school's name, Canalview, where there might be an opportunity for example to try canoeing. Hillend isn't that far away though I appreciate skiing there isn't quite the same as the Cairngorms. How has it informed your teaching practices and how are teachers applying learning outcomes to teach literacy and numeracy?

A – Ann Moore – it was the exposition to those types of activities, ways of teaching and interacting with pupils, that staff really were exposed to when they went to Lagganlia so they had this expertise to call on that wasn't in their teacher training. Key to it was the communication between teachers and instructors. I've seen teachers change their outlook from unsure to "of course we do outdoor learning". When I first went to Canalview 9 years ago it wasn't happening despite beautiful grounds with woods and the canal area nearby. On having this new connection, we've built up connections with other community groups, with instructors coming from Bridge 8. They give the children the foundations in skills which they can take to a new level on their Residential. It's an extension of what we teach in school. And, when children come back they are able to take that on further. I can see staff's confidence increasing hugely, not just teaching staff, pupil support too. Creates a culture that you can teach maths or environmental studies outdoors. Real shift in the past few years.

Q – Daniel Johnson MSP – to follow on, to compound that, what things can we do to reinforce that outdoor education sits within broader teaching and pedagogy? Discreet learning experience is really important, but it continues on in school. What can we do to make this easier for teachers, rather than make it an extra burden?

A – Ann Moore – no easy answer. I went to Canalview having already developed a good relationship with a high-quality outdoor learning provider in Lagganlia so at first, I did a job of persuasion, which the teachers themselves then took on once they too had had that positive experience. I had teachers buddying up with one another – the "I do, I understand" proverb meaning you build confidence by doing and having

a supportive person to help. The benefits they see outdoor learning has on young people's lives is also persuasive. It's not only teachers, but parents too, who may need some convincing. Do it in a planned, continuous way. Our parents felt a sense of pride in our Bikeability status and got behind outdoor learning.

Q – James Allan, SAPOE – lovely hearing from everyone, seeing the nods and smiles in the room. We get it, but there are a lot of teaching staff who don't. The Bill can't come soon enough, but in the meantime what can we do collectively to speak to the right people in the right way. The people we need in this room are ADES. We need to enthuse Directors of Education so they go back to LAs and say, we need to re-think this. All of our outdoor learning is really important – need to export the value in a meaningful way - can the Convener comment?

A - Liz Smith – that should happen as part of the Bill, it is my intention to speak to the committee and ask that ADES come in to hear examples demonstrating this value. Some people in LA's are keen to do something. There is a funding challenge. However, Covid has made people understand that the need for this is even clearer. Relatively optimistic about that, but there are those who still need to hear this and understand it.

Comment – Pete Higgins, Moray House School of Education and Sport – like to respond to some of the points raised. As an Outdoor and Sustainability Educationalist for a long time, nice to get name checked with Curriculum for Excellence. Depth, coherence and balance was written in to that report with a statement from the Minister at the time, Keith Brown, to say that this will happen, this is an entitlement. Key point, if it's going to be an entitlement, it needs to be an entitlement and it needs to be a responsibility.

That's what we did with Learning for Sustainability. National development for in-service teachers was built in. There was money for it and that's not available now. Building outdoor learning in starts with what pre-service education teachers get e.g. through Moray House. But we won't until such a time as we're told to do it due to way model works. When GTCS says this will happen, we'll do it.

Example of those who've done Masters, funded by themselves, not for teacher education qualifications, but to become outdoor educators. There isn't an outdoor education PDGE or a requirement. Until you build

this in, same for Learning for Sustainability, it won't be real for teacher education institutes.

ADES – we need to build communicating this to ADES into the structure of what we plan to, as for Learning for Sustainability which is a policy commitment.

Research - no funding for long term research, but previous research exists to provide evidence, including research by psychologists, good work coming out on this, very convincing.

In terms of long-term benefits, John Telford, PhD Graduate, carried out research at Ardentinn Centre, captured long lasting benefits, reported up to 25 years after experience. However, found disbenefits too, so we can't get too rosy. Ensuring high quality is essential and that requires the inspectorate to take seriously these opportunities and make sure they are properly developed.

Agenda Item 5

Liz Smith MSP thanked presenters and organisers. Really positive feeling in the room, great to have members attending online, and lots of excellent examples to share with policy makers. Any questions we haven't had time to cover, please get in touch. Apologies again for the earlier postponement of this meeting. Thank you.

Proposed date and agenda for the next CPG will be communicated shortly. If you have suggestions or would like to participate, please contact Claire - claire.mcintosh@scouts.scot