

THE NEED FOR AND FUTURE OF RESIDENTIAL OUTDOOR LEARNING IN SCOTLAND

**Proposals for the Scottish Government
Autumn 2012**

THE ASSOCIATION OF HEADS OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES IN SCOTLAND

The proposals in this document have been drawn up by the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) in Scotland whose members include the Heads of:

- *Abernethy Trust (Ardgour, Ardeonaig, Barcaple, and Nethybridge Centres)*
- *Ardmay House Outdoor Centre*
- *Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre*
- *Arran Outdoor Education Centre*
- *Benmore Centre for Residential and Outdoor Learning*
- *Blairvadach Outdoor Education Centre*
- *Lagganlia Centre for Outdoor Education,*
- *Lendrick Muir*
- *Scottish Outdoor Education Centres (Belmont, Broomlee, Dounans and Loaningdale Centres)*

Together, these Outdoor Centres deliver Curriculum for Excellence-based residential experiences for over 70,000 young people every year.

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Introduction

This document makes the case for residential outdoor learning within the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence.

It sets out the challenges that the next generation will face and the qualities, skills, knowledge and experiences that will help this in that future. It describes how residential outdoor learning will be a major part of the solution.

It outlines the importance and enormous potential of the residential experience in helping young people to develop essential qualities, skills, knowledge and experiences. In doing so, will help to project Scotland beyond the barriers of economic downturn.

It lists the benefits and outcomes, derived from experienced outdoor educators working in partnership with teachers and highlights the residential experience as a powerful pedagogical approach. It describes opportunities for teachers with respect to attainment, assessment and achievement. Finally the document makes recommendation for the safeguarding and sustainability of residential outdoor learning.



Major Challenges

The world is facing unprecedented change. Drivers of change such as globalisation, realignment of major economic powers, technological developments and climate warming all operate at a scale and intensity that will ensure our children will live and work in a very different world. How do we prepare young people for such a world?

On a range of indicators, Scotland's young people are starting from a poor position. In health, we are concerned about sedentary lifestyles and children 'wrapped in cotton-wool.' Obesity is on the rise and some young Scots for the first time in generations are more likely to die earlier than their parents.

Confidence is a major concern and research shows many young people have a pessimistic view of their future. How might we build confidence when austerity is likely to undermine it?

In environmental terms, there appears to be a worrying disconnect. Research from SNH highlights that some young people believe eggs come from cattle and milk from cartons. When the Scottish Youth Parliament narrowed down their priorities of concern they marginalised issues relating to sustainable development. Sustainability is an international issue that will clearly be important to them but it is possible that, like most young Scots being brought up in cities and towns, they currently do not see the environment as relevant to them. How will they protect the environment if they consider it an irrelevance?

Globalisation demands new skills and abilities. Historically, Scotland has contributed to

business and politics throughout the world. But in the future, competition to participate in leading edge teams will be more multinational and more intense. It has also been suggested that 40% of jobs today did not exist 20 years ago, so it is not clear what the jobs will be that our children will have to do. How do we prepare them for jobs which do not yet exist?

Should young people model themselves on their parent's generation? We adults dislike change. We resist changes in working practices and are reluctant to adapt our lifestyles. In a world of change young people must see the world differently to us. They must see opportunities in change and not just the threats.

Scotland needs young people who can survive and thrive in the world of rapid change. Faced with such an enormous and wide ranging challenge, what can be done? Is there an intervention with evidence of success in these areas?

Residential Experiences – Part of the Solution

Residential Outdoor Learning can be life affirming, even life changing but primarily, it is a powerful approach to develop the qualities, knowledge, competencies and skills that young people need.

Following two national strategic advisory bodies in recent years, the Scottish Government acknowledges the potential of the residential experiences stating,

“progressive outdoor learning experiences are best delivered through a combination of school-based outdoor learning and residential programmes.” The Minister for Schools and Lifelong Learning, March 2010.

However, the potential of residential outdoor learning needs to be more widely recognised and supported, if this substantial resource is to be safeguarded and used effectively.

The Benefits of Residential Experiences

High quality residential programmes develop in young people:

- confidence, optimism and a ‘can do’ spirit;
- the ability to make decisions in the face of complex and daunting challenges;
- motivation and hence more successful learners;
- positive attitude toward problem solving;
- resilience, tenacity and determination;
- adaptability;
- understanding of risk and risk management;
- creativity both initiating and being receptive to innovation;
- knowledge and appreciation of healthier and more active lifestyles;
- ability to reflect on their own potential and contribution to society;
- appreciation of others, their place, contribution and potential in the world, hence responsible citizens;
- team work and strong communication skills; and
- leadership qualities and ability to delegate, hence effective contributors.

Equipped with these qualities, competencies and skills, young people will be prepared for whatever the future will throw at them.

Residential Experiences – A New Approach

It is important to distinguish the new approach that redefines residential outdoor learning and distinguishes it from the past.

More than just helmets, harnesses and muddy boots, and more than just distraction, fun and sport, residential outdoor learning today:

1. integrates challenge and enjoyment, personalisation and choice through motivating and challenging activities;
2. the immersion of a young person in a safe and nurturing, 'away from home' environment i.e. the residential centre;
3. requires specialist trained outdoor educators capable of delivering programmes with clear learning and health and well-being outcomes.

To achieve the above, the programmes will:

- create opportunities for attainment and assessment as well as achievement;
- reinforce and consolidate Es and Os for all 8 Curriculum areas, thus providing a breadth of experience;
- provide contexts for literacy, numeracy and health and well-being development;
- provide contexts outwith the classroom for assessment and evaluation or attainment and achievement within the Os and Es and 4 capacities;

This is a powerful combination for learning, attainment and achievement for all.

Residential Experiences and Attainment

Teachers need to evidence where a child is on the attainment continuum (developing, consolidating or secure.) They do this by observing the use of knowledge, skills and understanding in different contexts.

Residential outdoor learning provides new

contexts, different surroundings and different activities.



A school may choose from a range of programmes at an outdoor centre with varying degree of emphasis. An eco-literacy programme focuses on food chains and webs, earth cycles, eco systems and landscapes; to national parks and the tension between conflicting priorities: leisure and air production. This programme not only allows for progression in terms of complexity of concepts but also in the progression of pupils knowledge, understanding and skills development within the subject areas.

Teachers are required to observe and assess their children. Opportunities to engage in quality observations are made possible at outdoor centres where the teacher works in partnership with the outdoor educator. With an outdoor educator directly involved with the pupils in delivering the activities, teachers are afforded protected time to observe and assess their pupils across a range of experiences and outcomes.

As well as assessing the Es and Os related to discrete curriculum areas, it is also the responsibility of all educators to assess literacy numeracy and health and well-being across the curriculum. Residential outdoor learning provides a relevant context in which to do this.

Literacy skills e.g. listening, talking and communicating when working together to solve problems or using descriptive language to describe the different environment they find in the outdoors can be developed and their use assessed. Active learning is evident as the children engage with the learning through the environment around them.

The application of numeracy knowledge and skills can be developed and assessed through outdoor learning activities from the usual suspects e.g. coordinates when map reading to time, speed and distance on a zip wire, planning an expedition, or looking at the species in a river correlated to speed of water flow.

Health and wellbeing outcomes can be further developed and assessed by providing opportunities that can range from confidence building to connectedness to the environment. Emotional and mental health and well-being outcomes are not easy to assess and evidence. Yet teachers frequently report being able to evidence a growth of confidence, self-esteem and generally happier young people following a residential outdoor learning experience.

Evaluation is a skill that educators, within Curriculum for Excellence are focussing upon developing in children and young people. Residential outdoor learning

provides another context for pupils to discuss the learning intentions and success criteria of an activity / task and then to evaluate their attainment and achievement and identify next steps. Most pupils are becoming increasingly confident in this evaluative process within subject areas. Residential outdoor learning provides an interdisciplinary experience where they have to transfer this skill across subject boundaries, assess their progress towards the identified learning outcomes and also identify and celebrate their personal achievements.



Another skill that is much debated within education is that of risk assessment. How can this be developed in pupils within a classroom environment? The theory can be discussed and taught, theoretical scenarios given to develop knowledge and understanding of risk. Residential learning experiences create opportunities for young people to develop their safety consciousness. They are engaged in risk assessment and the management of risk in

meaningful contexts and this is facilitated by being both away from the ultra-safe school environment, and through working with specialist outdoor staff who develop high levels of expertise and familiarity with adventure activities through constant use.

Residential Experiences and Achievement

During a 5-day residential, young people develop at a step change from where they were before. It is an holistic and integrative approach and in many ways epitomises progressive learning. In fact, it is so effective it is perhaps difficult to be fully appreciated. However, it is possible to evidence:

- development of relationship and confidence;
- very specific changes meeting individual needs;
- multiple outcomes for different young people simultaneously.



Development of Confidence & Relationships

A 5-day residential experience equates to 2 full weeks in school. This immersion creates opportunities when teachers and pupils can spend time together and see each other in a different light. With a specialist outdoor

educator and a teacher working together, the ratio of young people to adults may be nearer 6:1. Opportunities for in-depth conversations, the development of shared understanding and meaningful relationships are greatly enhanced. This was captured by a secondary teacher with responsibility for transition who said of a 5-day residential that, ***“it has been great. In 5 days, I have developed a rapport with the pupils that would have taken 3 months in school.”***

In terms of general outcomes, residential outdoor learning is particularly effective at developing, for example, confidence. Through a programme of carefully planned challenges and achievements, young people emerge with an enhanced understanding of their potential. All young people leave, clear in the knowledge, that their potential is far greater than they previously thought.

Meeting Individual Need

Residential experiences trigger behaviour changes away from those which impede personal development and learning. For example, one class included a pupil who had restricted their diet while another pupil was self-elective mute in school. Within a few hours of a residential stay, one was eating a wide range of healthy food types and the other was talking to her teachers, talking to outdoor tutors and singing in the shower. For the staff teams at residential centres, such examples are regular occurrences.

However, it is noteworthy that both these pupils had attended regular meetings with the relevant specialists (dieticians and educational psychologists) for 6 years with no noticeable improvement. Being in the outdoors, engaged in motivating activities, and in a safe

and nurturing environment, enabled these young people to trigger their own fresh starts.

More on Multiple Benefits and Outcomes

It is important to note that the residential experience delivers not just one or two, but multiple benefits and outcomes. While the pupils above were making important changes to the benefit of their health and well-being, they and their class mates were also learning about rivers and the hydrological cycle, co-operative working, and many other things that supported the work of the class teacher. It is the ability to produce specific, tangible and multiple outcomes, that makes the residential experience so highly cost effective.

It should be no surprise that residential outdoor learning contributes and delivers in all education and youth work policy areas. Being outcome focussed, residential outdoor learning can deliver all Curriculum for Excellence outcomes as well as the Youth Work Strategy, Skills for Learning, Skills for Work and Skills for Life, and other Government policy areas such as Getting it Right For Every Child, Bridging the Gap and Sustainable Development Education.

The Outdoor Profession's Contribution

The combination of specialist staff trained to deliver multiple outcomes, the 'away from home' experience and the activities are powerfully effective when working in combination. The holistic and integrative approach creates added-value and innovation necessary to meet the very specific needs of different schools, groups, ages and abilities.

Residential centres are among a very few organisations to work with all young people

and organisations from special need, independent and local authority sectors. The combination of resources, innovative needs-based programmes and specialist staff teams provide a depth of resource and experience that facilitates partnership working.

Residential outdoor learning is a vital component. Usually occurring between upper primary and secondary, it is the strengthening interconnector between the good work done in primaries, in school grounds and local communities, and the award opportunities in secondary schools and youth groups. The steps toward, and the significance attached to going away from home, makes the residential a Rite of Passage.



It is important to keep in mind the wider picture. The goal should be for all young people to benefit from regular and frequent outdoor learning experiences, in school grounds, in local green spaces, within their local community for example at scouts and guides, and in expeditions in Scotland and overseas as well as residential. Young people experiencing pathways of multiple experiences will perform better at school and be better prepared for their future.

Pathways are more successful if continuity and progression guide the various

experiences. This highlights the importance of collaborative working between school and centre educators both before and after the residential experience.

Specialist centre tutors bring essential skills to any partnership. Their ability to use a range of motivating activities while emphasising multiple outcomes, for the full range of ages and abilities, is made possible through familiarity of activity use. It is not easy for others to pick up such skills and employ them to good effect for just a few hours in the year. For the outdoor specialist, regular use ensures safe and confident delivery, and an understanding of how to use the outdoors to its full potential as a place for learning.

AHOEC RECOMMENTATIONS

AHOEC recommends that the Scottish Government take every opportunity to affirm the relevance, importance, and powerful contribution made by residential outdoor learning to benefit of young people in Scotland and commit to taking it further.

AHOEC requests that the Government take steps to clarify the effectiveness of residential outdoor learning through for example cost benefit analyses.

AHOEC requests that the Government explore the sustainability of residential outdoor learning to secure its place in the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence and other policy areas.

AHOEC also recommend that options be explored such as partnership approaches for funding to ensure the residential experience is available to all young people. Already parents

contribute in full for this experience but this will be difficult for them to maintain in the emerging economic climate. There are also opportunities for considerable philanthropic support to be explored. A little Government support would make a big difference.



This is not a call for vast additional resources. A substantial infrastructure already exists and there is enough residential resource in Scotland for two year cohorts of the school population among existing providers.

This is primarily a call for leadership and for partnership working. The Government has an essential role to play in bringing this about.

Residential outdoor learning has an exciting and significant contribution to make. It will deliver for young Scots in a big way despite austerity. It offers a great opportunity for the Government and the Government has a vital role in ensuring that the potential of residential outdoor learning is realised.

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