

Leas Phrìomh Mhinistear agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Foghlam agus Sgilean



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Education and Skills
John Swinney BPA/MSP

T : 0131-244 4000
E : dfmcse@gov.scot

Alex Rowley MSP
Daniel.Moran@parliament.scot

Our Reference: 202000088315
Your Reference: AR01/CSES/OE/dm

8 October 2020

Dear Alex

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 September 2020 in which you raised concerns about the future of outdoor education centres.

As you know, the Scottish Government is clear that outdoor learning is an effective way of delivering outcomes under Curriculum for Excellence and we are also aware of the educational benefits that visits to outdoor education centres provide. In considering the use of the outdoors we would expect local authorities, schools and educators to consider the distinct benefits afforded by learning outdoors within the school estate, across local green space and at outdoor education centres.

It is important to ensure that young people can continue their education safely in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is for that reason that on 4 August 2020 the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues considered the appropriateness of [school visits](#). The sub-group concluded that the risk of virus transmission would increase during school visits which include an overnight stay. The Scottish Government subsequently [advised](#) schools against residential visits in the autumn term.

The advice against overnight residential school visits was therefore made on the basis of public health and it does not question the value of residential experiences. Risk assessed day visits are permitted

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

Accredited
Until 2020



and this includes day visits to outdoor education centres.

The current guidance on school visits applies to the end of 2020. We continuously keep coronavirus (Covid-19) guidance under review and will therefore ensure our guidance on school visits is reconsidered before 2021. It is not possible to set out the exact date on which our guidance will be reviewed as this will depend on the progress of the pandemic and the trajectory of virus transmission in Scotland between now and the new year.

I am sure you will appreciate that as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Scottish Government is managing significant financial pressures across a range of sectors. Following the Parliamentary Members Debate on 22 September, the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Richard Lochhead, is engaging further with the outdoor education sector to consider next steps. However, we have already taken action in an effort to help centres continue to function during this challenging time. We have:

- commissioned the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education to develop comprehensive guidance for schools and local authorities on day visits to outdoor education centres. This guidance was published on 14 August 2020.
- committed to continuing to support YouthLink Scotland to offer assistance and guidance to outdoor learning providers in respect of their youth work offer and the links to wider community learning and development policy at a national and local level.
- facilitated a meeting on 7 July 2020 between representatives of outdoor education centres (including the uniformed organisations) and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland to allow centres to discuss the potential for:
 - outdoor centres to be used to extend the school estate should physical distancing be required in the months ahead;
 - experienced outdoor education centre staff to support local authority-employed educators to take learning outdoors during the education recovery phase; and
 - the use of outdoor education centres to provide immersive, fun and curricular-relevant outdoor experiences that can improve the physical and mental wellbeing of young people transitioning from the experience of school closures.

In addition to the above, Third Sector organisations that run outdoor education were able to apply for a range of Covid-19 support funds since the onset of the pandemic. They have been able to apply for support through our £25m Third Sector Resilience Fund. We alerted Third Sector outdoor education centres to the fact that Social Investment Scotland has up to £5m available in fully flexible, 0% interest loans starting at £50,000. The newly created £3 million Youth Work Education Recovery Fund – announced on 16 September – will be targeted at those communities and young people who need the most support.

As I mentioned earlier, a Scottish Parliament debate was held on 22 September in relation to the challenges facing outdoor education centres. We subsequently committed to engage further with local authority partners to explore ways to encourage and support arrangements which provide a role for centre staff during the period when overnight residential stays are not permitted. Examples from some

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot



parts of the country have included the assignment of outdoor centre experts to schools to assist with outdoor learning in the school groups as well as innovative use of day visits, sometimes over the course of a week.

You can be assured that the Scottish Government continues to value and support outdoor learning. We have funded the development of guidance to help early years and school staff take learning outdoors and offsite; provided £862,000 to support eight local authorities to improve their outdoor learning including the establishment of outdoor nurseries; provided a further £159,000 to Living Classrooms to expand its Virtual Nature School programme across the country; funded the development of e-learning courses to support teaching and non-teaching staff across Scotland to take learning outside; developed a collection of links to online resources to help practitioners undertake outdoor learning; and worked closely with outdoor learning partners to host a series of professional learning webinars.

I hope that you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely



JOHN SWINNEY

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

