

## Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

### **The Institute for Outdoor Learning's response to the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill consultation.**

#### **2. Information about your organisation**

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference for others.

We are driven by a vision of Outdoor Learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society.

Key questions

#### **1. Do you agree that every local authority school pupil and pupils in grant-aided schools should have the opportunity to attend a course of residential outdoor education?**

The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) agrees that every local authority school pupil and pupils in grant-aided schools should have the opportunity to attend a safe, meaningful and high-quality course

of residential outdoor education.

An increasing volume of research evidence supports the implementation of outdoor learning approaches, the quality of which has improved significantly since the publication of High Quality Outdoor Learning (2015). A summary of the evidence base supporting outdoor learning in the UK found that nearly all interventions had a positive effect. Evidence supports positive impact on building social capital, fostering pride, belonging and community involvement, while a growing number of Social Return on Investment Studies (SROI) are showing a significant return on investment in relation to wellbeing and preventing poor mental and physical health, and positive learning outcomes.

Outdoor learning has been shown to improve health and wellbeing, engage students and develop personal competencies. Numerous studies demonstrate that experiences in nature promote learning, fostering nature connection leading to pro environmental behaviour and develop leadership, communication, problem solving and critical thinking skills.

There is significant qualitative research supporting the benefits of residential. The Residential Outdoor Education experience occupies a unique and profound space within the outdoor learning journey as described in Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning. This journey describes outdoor

learning interventions from early years, in school grounds to ambitious overseas adventures in senior phases. The impact and outcomes of the residential element within this journey cannot be understated, replicated or replaced through other experiences, such as in school grounds or local green spaces. When used effectively in conjunction with each school community the residential element can enhance and extend all previous outdoor learning outcomes.

The length of stay has a direct influence over the content, depth of experience and most importantly impact of the residential. Pupils' gain will increase significantly with each additional night. It is for this reason that the residential should consist of four overnight stays and five days. Immersion in residential outdoor education that is outside the child's normal home environment can be used to target resilience, confidence and the desire to learn. It can also enhance relationships with teaching staff, improve behaviour, increase learning for sustainability, as well as developing transferable skills in a wide range of curricular areas. Our experience tells us that the return on these targeted outcomes increases significantly with

length of stay.

The length of stay also has an impact on the breadth, range and environment that each outdoor journey/activity can achieve. This length of stay will allow Centres to build programmes that can effectively access a wide range of activities and environments that will allow for individual needs, inclusion and achieving chosen school outcomes.

Consecutive or non-consecutive days should be at the discretion of each local authority and learning community. The IOL believes that local authorities, schools and where appropriate individual classes should be empowered, (supported by appropriate national and local guidance) to develop an approach that caters for their specific needs.

Needs that should take into consideration are things such as location, travel time, class outcomes, age of pupils and additional support needs. Essentially the process should put the 'pupil at the centre' and the residential should be built around their needs.

The IOL favours consecutive days in most instances.

## **2. What are your thoughts on the stage at which pupils should be entitled to this residential outdoor education? Do you think this should be set in guidance or should it be on the face of the Bill?**

The IOL believes there should not be a nationally prescribed age range. Each local authority should be supported to develop a strategic approach and local guidance (via consultation) that reflects its context, needs and priorities. A high quality residential outdoor education experience is incredibly powerful at whatever age it happens.

## **3. The Bill requires the Scottish Government to provide funding for the provision of residential outdoor education. What do you think about this measure?**

The IOL agrees with the Bill's requirement for the Scottish Government to provide funding for the provision of residential outdoor education. An equitable funding model will support a consistent approach across Scotland. The genesis and core purpose of this Bill is to address the financial inequality that Local Authorities, Learning Communities, Teachers and Parents face when choosing to pursue Residential Outdoor Education as part of a child's education. Residential Outdoor Education can supply the most memorable and high impact experiences of a child's time in the school system. A child's access to Residential Outdoor Education should not therefore be determined by the financial security of their parent/carer.

## **4. Do you have any other comments?**

The IOL believes that consideration should be given to the significant social impact and cost recovery from across the Scottish Government financial portfolio. Impacts from increased school attendance, better quality teacher/pupil relationships, enhanced family connections, greater participation in physical activity, strengthened connections with nature and learning for sustainability targets. Evidence and detail of this Social Return on Investment can be found here. The downstream benefits of investing in Residential Outdoor Education should be a priority when reviewing the social and financial value of this Bill.

- It is essential that an educational quality standard is agreed and implemented to Residential Outdoor Education Centres, to ensure the impact and outcomes of this Bill are met. This standard should look to include how the relationship between the Centre and the school is formed, nurtured and developed over time. It should ensure that the Centre individualises its

program to meet the educational needs of the school and its pupils in line with local and national curricular outcomes. It should look to ensure that the Centre makes the best use of its local environment and challenges itself to ensure that every child's experience justifies the expense. Recognising quality for the depth of experience will also be essential when programming school groups throughout the year as opposed to some established models of only going in summer. This standard should be recognised and identifiable by pupils, parents, teachers, local authorities and importantly the HMIE Inspectorate. It is essential that the inspectorate have a map of how to assess the provision of Residential Outdoor Education and can identify its impact on a child's education.