

THE NEED FOR AND FUTURE OF RESIDENTIAL OUTDOOR LEARNING IN SCOTLAND

**Manifesto Proposals for Political Parties and
Recommendations for the Next Scottish Government**

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Introduction

Scotland faces a great challenge. Scotland needs young people who can survive and thrive in the world of rapid change.

Scotland must help young people to develop skills, qualities, knowledge and experiences to enable them to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

It needs young people who can contribute successfully to society and in the workplace despite major changes forced by globalisation. It also needs young people who are connected to the environment; able to adapt in a world of climate change. This must be done against a backdrop of tenacious problems and a pervasive narrative of austerity.



This is a great challenge and we can meet this challenge. It will require that we see things differently and do things smarter and better. But we already have ‘tools in the box’ that can make a significant difference.

Residential Outdoor Learning is a major part of the solution. A new approach to Residential Outdoor Learning can help to project Scotland beyond the barriers of economic downturn, overcome many of the problems young people face, and enable them to develop essential skills, qualities, knowledge and competencies they will need for the world they will inherit.

Background

The world is facing unprecedented change. Drivers of change such as globalisation, a realignment of major economic powers, and climate warming all operate at a scale and intensity that will ensure our children will live and work in a very different world.

Yet 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, young people are disconnected from the wider environment. Research from SNH highlighted 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 'save the planet' if they consider it an irrelevance?

Globalisation will demand new skills and abilities. Scotland has contributed in business and politics throughout the world. But in the future, leading edge teams will be more multinational. It has also been suggested that 40% of jobs today did not exist 20 years ago therefore 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?

Young people should not model themselves on the current generation. Today's decision-makers reflect the wider population in their dislike of change. We are reluctant to adapt to changes in our lifestyles and resist changes in working practices. Young people must see the world differently to us. They must see opportunities in change and not just the threats.

Faced with such a wide ranging and significant 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, skills, knowledge and competencies that young people need.

Following two national strategic advisory bodies, the Government today recognises the potential of the residential experience 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 recognised urgently by the next Government, if it is to be safeguarded and used effectively.

High quality residential programmes develop:

- 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; and hence relating to responsible citizenship;
- team work and strong communication skills;
- leadership qualities and ability to delegate; hence effective contributors.

Developing in young people these qualities, skills and competencies will ensure they are prepared for whatever the future will throw at them. During a 5-day residential, young people develop at a step change from where they were

before. Residential Outdoor Learning can enable Scotland to break free from the inertia of tenacious problems. The remarkable contribution of the residential experience is that it can deliver many of the outcomes simultaneously.



The 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, today Intelligent Outdoor Learning integrates:

- motivating and challenging activities
- with clear learning and PSD outcomes, and
- the immersion of a young person in a friendly and safe, away from home environment;

This is a powerful combination for learning and personal and social

development. While the constituent parts have been around for some time, teachers and other education professionals need to be aware of the powerful efficacy of these factors working in combination. Also, their integration creates added-value and innovation necessary to meet the very specific needs of different schools, youth groups, ages and abilities.



There are many specific outcomes but residential outdoor learning is particularly effective at developing confidence. Through a programme of carefully planned challenges and achievements, young people emerge with an enhanced understanding of their potential. They should all leave, clear in the knowledge, that their potential is far greater than they previously thought.

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 schools grounds, in local green spaces, within their local community for example at scouts and guides, and in expeditions in Scotland and overseas. Young people with this trajectory of multiple

experiences will perform better at school and be better prepared for their future.

Notwithstanding this range of possibilities, the residential experience is an integral 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, in youth groups and the specialisation and award opportunities in secondary schools. It can enable young people to develop all of the qualities identified above. The step toward and the significance attached to going away from home, makes the residential a Rite of Passage.

For success in terms of multiple benefits, it is essential to recognise continuity and progression in different experiences. This highlights the importance of collaborative working between school and centre educators both before and after the residential experience.

Progression is made possible through genuine partnership working between professional educators. The ability of specialist centre tutors 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 use. For the outdoor specialist, regular use results in confident and safe delivery. 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.

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 the essential pre-requisites for partnership working.

The residential is an important element in the progression of outdoor learning experiences. It also contributes to continuity. Many young people are asked at 14 and 15 years if they wish to undertake an award such as the DoE at which point many say no. But had they been involved in a residential experience a year or two preceding the award opportunity, there is an increased opportunity that they will remember having enjoyed the experience and know that there are things they can do and value doing in the outdoors.



A 5-day residential experience equates to 2 full weeks in school. It creates a time 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 may be nearer 6:1 (young people to adults.) Opportunities for in-depth conversations, 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 these children that would have taken 3 months in school.”***

Residential experiences trigger behaviour changes away from those which impede learning and personal development. For example, one primary class included a pupil who had restricted his diet while another pupil had determined to be mute in school. Within a few hours of a residential stay, one was tucking in to a wide range of healthy food types and the other was talking to teachers and outdoor tutors and singing in the shower. People working at residential centres know that such examples are regular occurrences.

However, the notable point is that both pupils had attended meetings with the relevant specialists (a dietician and educational psychologists) for 6 years with no noticeable improvement. Yet being in the outdoors, doing motivating activities, in a friendly, safe environment, enabled these young people to trigger their own fresh starts.



It is important to anticipate that the residential experience delivers not just one or two, but many benefits and outcomes. While the pupils above were making important changes to the benefit of their personal and social development, 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, leads and delivers in all education and youth work policy areas. Being outcome focussed, intelligent outdoor learning delivers 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.

PROPOSAL

This proposal is for the next Scottish Government to continue to recognise the importance, relevance and powerful contribution made by Residential Outdoor Learning to the benefit of young people in Scotland and commit to taking it further.

It is requested that the next Scottish Government take steps to explore the sustainability of Residential Outdoor Learning to secure its place in the delivery

of the Curriculum for Excellence and other policy areas. This is a big opportunity for the next Government.

It is recommended that options be explored such as partnership approaches to funding to make the residential experience 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. A little Government support would make a big difference.

This is not a call for vast additional resources – there already exists a substantial infrastructure and enough residential resource in Scotland for two year cohorts of the school population among existing Third Sector and local authority providers. This is primarily a call for partnership working and leadership. The Government has an essential role in bring this partnership together.

Residential Outdoor Learning has an exciting and significant contribution to make. It will deliver for young Scots in a big way despite the state of the economy. The Government has a vital role in making this happen.



The proposals and recommendations in this document have been drawn up by the major Scottish Local Authority and Third Sector residential providers. This includes:

The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) in Scotland whose members include the Heads of the following educational establishments:

- Abernethy Trust (Ardgour, Ardeonaig, Barcaple, and Nethybridge Centres)
- Ardmay House Outdoor Centre
- Arran Outdoor Education Centre
- Benmore Centre for Outdoor Education
- Lagganlia Centre for Outdoor Education,
- Scottish Outdoor Education Centres (Belmont, Broomlee, Dounans and Loaningdale Outdoor Centres)

It is also endorsed by:

- The Scottish Council the Scouts Association

Together, these outdoor centres provide residential experience for over 70,000 young people every year.

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