

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill - Summary of submissions

Introduction

This paper summarises the submissions the Education, Children and Young People Committee received in response to its call for views on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill. The call for views was opened on 3 July 2024 and closed on 4 September 2024.

The Committee asked the following questions on the Bill:

- 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?
- 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 Bill requires the Scottish Government to provide funding for the provision of residential outdoor education. What do you think about this measure?
- Do you have any other comments?

The Committee received 271 responses [which have been published](#). Of these around 25% were on behalf of organisations and around 75% from people responding as individuals.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the themes of the responses to support the Education, Children and Young People Committee in its consideration of the Bill at Stage 1.

The first section of this paper provides the results of a closed question on the aims of the Bill. This is the only section where quantitative analysis is provided. The remainder of the paper focuses on the issues raised by respondents. It follows the structure of the questions listed above.

Quantitative analysis

All of the substantive questions invited responses in text boxes. In addition, respondents were invited to indicate whether they supported the intention of the bill under the first question, "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?". Respondents had two options:

- Agree or partially agree
- Disagree

260 respondents checked one of the options. 245 (94% of respondents that answered) checked “Agree or partially agree” and 15 (6%) checked “Disagree”.

67 respondents described their response as being from an organisation in the call for views. Of these, 60 respondents checked one of the options. Two selected “Disagree”.

202 respondents described their response as from themselves as an individual. Of these 200 checked one of the options. 13 selected “Disagree” (7%) and 187 (94%) selected “Agree or partially agree”.

The form of the question does not allow us to differentiate between fulsome and partial support for every local authority school pupil and pupils in grant-aided schools to have the opportunity to attend a course of residential outdoor education. Nevertheless, the results show broad support for the aim of the legislation among those that responded to the Committee’s call for views.

Responders to the call for views are a self-selected sample and may not be representative of the wider population. Members should exercise caution in interpreting these results.

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?

Benefits of residential outdoor education

Almost all respondents said that attending a course of residential outdoor education provides benefits to pupils.

Aberdeen City Council’s submission said that the expected benefits can include: confidence building; social skills; mental well-being; environmental awareness; connection with nature; risk-taking; resilience; adaptability; and learning by doing. Similarly East Renfrewshire Council said—

“We believe that outdoor education can be a valuable part of the curriculum and offer a hands-on, immersive learning experience that encourages independence, resilience, problem-solving, teamwork, and practical application of knowledge and skills. These experiences contribute to personal growth that supports not only academic achievement but also long-term success in various aspects of life. For residential outdoor education to be effective, it must be seamlessly integrated into the broader curriculum, with clear links to learning outcomes and assessment.”

Glencoe Outdoor Centre’s submission said that pupils attending its residential learn—

“Respect for & understanding of others & ability to bridge social differences; Improved communication & critical thinking skills; Knowledge of and respect for the environment; Tangible skills: e.g. learn to ride a bike; the value of teamwork & cooperation; and how beautiful Scotland is!”

The Institute for Outdoor Learning said—

“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.”

Frazer Howell from Scouts Scotland said—

“Outdoor education fosters resilience, teamwork, and leadership. It encourages young people to step out of their comfort zones, face challenges, and build confidence. These experiences are crucial for personal growth and can have a lasting positive impact on their lives.”

A teacher from a primary school reflected on their experience of taking pupils from inner city primary schools on residential outdoor education trips. They said—

“Many had never left their estate and the look of awe on their faces when in a woodland setting / on top of a hill/ in a canoe; their glee at climbing a tree or coming down a zip wire; their pure enjoyment of the food at every meal, all of these cannot be statistically measured but the benefits of the experience were clear to see. Those children would not have had these experiences if not for the residential experience offered.”

Another individual said—

“Outdoor education can be life changing. Having accompanied children for 3 decades, the positive mental health benefits, the active and healthy lifestyle approach, the team building, the care and wonder for the natural environment, the facing of and overcoming challenges being supported by friends and the ensuing confidence this brings are life changing. Education is more than a book. It should prepare children for life, teaching the values of respect and kindness.”

Another teacher described the benefits she saw from outdoor education residential to both herself and her class; she said—

“As a Primary 7 teacher who has been in P7 for 5 out of the last 7 years, I have attended 5 residential experiences with my different classes. I can wholeheartedly say that being away for 4 nights and 5 days has massive benefits on the children. They always come back from a residential just a little bit taller. It benefits their resilience as they don't give up on any of the challenge and push themselves further than they would ever do in the classroom. It increases their independence as they have to manage themselves with timings, routines and don't have people to do things for them and they all thrive from the increased independence and ownership they have. It improves their knowledge and understanding of nature and sustainability and they always come back enthusiastic to share their findings with their parents and school community. Outdoor learning provides opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills as they work in teams to complete challenges. The joy that these experiences give the children means so much for them and they are always smiling when participating in different activities. It really does teach them life skills too like making a bed, packing, resilience, communication, time management, nutrition, sustainability and problem solving. The thing that stands out most for me is that

during their end of year assembly all of the children want to share the memories of Ardroy.”

Dr Roger Scrutton said—

“As a research fellow in outdoor education I specialise in evaluating the benefit of residential and other forms of outdoor education using quantitative methods. I can generate numbers, but I can say that there is not one pupil (well, maybe one or two who did not like being away from home) who does not remember their residential visit and can tell you how it has impacted positively on their life, either their development as a person or through their career, and this at a time when personal, transferable and interdisciplinary skills are essential in the job market and for a healthy society and economy.”

Existing provision

NASUWT said—

“The proposals contained in Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill shine a welcome light on the inequality which currently exists in accessing this provision for all pupils in Scotland. There is no dispute that a disparity of access to outdoor education residential experiences currently exists and, further, that our most vulnerable children and young people are often unlikely to be able to participate.”

Local Authorities’ responses often highlighted the existing provision in their areas and how decisions around residential outdoor education are devolved to the individual schools. For example, East Renfrewshire’s submission stated—

“In East Renfrewshire, all of our schools already offer a wide range of outdoor education and residential experiences for children and young people. Our schools are empowered to decide the range of experiences offered and how these are organised, this includes types of residential outdoor trips, stage of those attending, staffing and costs. These are organised in line with our Education Department policies and approaches such as ‘Cost of the school day’.”

Similarly Inverclyde Council said—

“The sentiment behind this bill is welcomed and we agree that outdoor education can be a valuable part of a school’s curriculum. Schools in local authorities do already offer a wide range of outdoor education and residential experiences for young people. This is decided at school level as part of the rationale for its curriculum and its approach to learning outdoors. Residential experiences are not always linked to outdoor education and can be linked to other subjects such as history, the arts and geography. Schools currently identify the types of experience offered, how this will be staffed and how it will be funded.”

Manor Adventure Globebrow Ltd’s submission said that it found some local authorities procurement policies to be bureaucratic and that schools should have more autonomy to choose which outdoor centre to use. Lochranza Centre CiC reported that it had “heard numerous accounts from teachers who are so enthusiastic about bringing their

students away on a trip only to be thwarted by numerous obstacles [for example the cost of cover].”

Fife Council said—

“Currently in Scotland, the availability of outdoor learning providers for schools is growing, but there are still challenges for schools in ensuring sufficient access for all learners. While there are many organisations and initiatives that offer outdoor education, the demand often exceeds supply. If taking this Bill forward, there would need to be consideration given to sufficient provisions to be able to deliver the four nights and five days of residential outdoor education for all P6 – S4.”

An individual who had managed an outdoor centre said, “the demand for outdoor residential experiences are higher than it’s ever been, however the reality is that centres are closing, are having to reduce residential delivery due to staff cuts and costs, this can’t continue.” He said that there should be ringfenced money for Outdoor Education Centres.

Stirling Council reported that “many schools use their pupil equity funding to support excursions where these are prioritised and alternative models have been used in schools where several families would struggle with the costs. eg partnership with Scouting groups / fundraising through parent groups.” Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland said—

“Support is currently inconsistent across schools. Many schools are aware of challenging family finances and seek best value alongside lengthy notice periods, instalments and payment plans. They then draw on a mix of central funding, Pupil Equity Funding, fundraising proceeds, bursaries, trusts, provider discounts and more to cover or subsidise costs for families where they can. This diversity can mean that support varies between schools and across the country. It can also mean that, with the best will in the world, schools do not have the funds required to support all of the families who need it.”

EIS’ submission said—

“Currently, teachers play a key role in the organisation and planning of activities outwith school, including residential trips, and generally play a lead role in such activities in partnership with other school staff and parents. They also liaise with external agencies to create meaningful and joyful experiences which can be transformative for young people. It would be fair to say that such teacher-led out-of-school activities are part of school life in every school in Scotland, and are enthusiastically supported by the profession. However, it is important to highlight that teachers generally are employed specifically to teach their assigned classes the curriculum in their place of work. Whilst many teachers participate enthusiastically in excursions, including residential trips, they do so on a voluntary basis (that is, they opt-in and are not compelled to participate.) It should also be highlighted that many teachers who participate in excursions which take place in whole or in part outwith the school day, including overnight stays, usually do so without any financial remuneration or time in lieu.”

A headteacher told the Committee that it is “increasingly difficult to enlist the huge amount of goodwill and sacrifice needed from staff to accompany these visits [due to] family commitments or huge responsibilities being placed on them to manage increasingly challenging behaviour or pupil support needs.” He continued, “if staff are

unable to support then it falls on already overstretched school leadership to make the sacrifices required". Another teacher said—

"Annually in my school a growing % of learners opt out of the residential trip. Although heavily encouraged, funding sources identified, parents consulted with etc, this number is growing. We are now ending up providing a dual service so that those not going don't feel 'left out'. We appreciate that this is a construct of our own making. In some cases, it would not bother the families if we were not providing day trips, however, in other cases, there is a growing expectation that we do. Again, staffing this is an issue. And there are costs and administration involved."

Length of residential stay

Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre said that 5 day residentials are preferable. It said—

"We see the evidence of the power of a five day residential on a (unsurprisingly!) weekly basis. Pupils need time to settle into their new environment, build up a trust and a relationship with their instructor ... and to allow the learning cycle process to take place. Ideally the week should be leading to a peak experience on the final day, where the learning from the week is realised via a challenge rich day, the success from which can then springboard into the return to home/school, and the successes continue."

Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) Scotland agreed and said—

"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."

Professor Chris Loynes highlighted findings of the [Learning Away Initiative](#); he said that for primary school pupils residentials of 1 to 2 nights were most effective and that "more consecutive nights were no more impactful and could be disruptive for pupils and teachers." Angus Council's submission said—

"Three nights (leaving on a Tuesday) would allow schools to use the Monday to ensure that all preparation is in place and all school staff are available on the Monday to support any issues that have arisen over the weekend (for all of the children and young people in the school). Three nights is enough."

The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) supported residentials to be delivered on consecutive days and that longer (ie 5 days) stays accrue more benefits. However the IOL said that whether the stays were consecutive days or not should be at the discretion of the local authority/school/learning community; it continued, "essentially the process should put the 'pupil at the centre' and the residential should be built around their needs." East Renfrewshire consulted with pupils to inform its response to the Committee. Its submission said—

"Young people highlighted that delivering the experience over non-consecutive days could allow for greater accessibility, as it could reduce the need for extended time away from family or caregiving responsibilities. This is particularly relevant for pupils who may have additional support needs or whose families may be less able to accommodate a longer absence. They also highlighted that for younger pupils or those who may be anxious about being

away from home, non-consecutive days could help ease them into this experience.”

Mount Cook Adventure Centre, which is based in the Peak District, reported that—

“Increasingly we find that 4 night residentials are becoming rarer and 2 night stays have become the norm. Great value still exists in a 2 night 3 day experience especially for primary aged children and arguably the opportunity of two separate trips has greater benefit. We would caution over single night stays as much of the trip value is lost in travel logistics on arrival and departure and any disruption to plans can impact negatively on planned activities.”

PGL Travel Group’s submission said that the length of an individual stay at an outdoor centre can depend on the age of the group. It said, “it may well be that the younger age group would have a provision that was split as three 2d / 1n stays rather than one 5d / 4n stay to allow for the fact that they may not want to be away from home for a whole week at that age.” A pupil who responded to the Committee suggested that there should be several trips from P4-P7 with progressively longer visits. A primary teacher said that a range of options for lengths of stay could be beneficial and shorter stays can suit younger pupils, but she cautioned that “sometimes the location of the Outdoor Education Centres can prohibit this since it wouldn’t really be worth a long journey just for 2 nights”.

An individual argued for flexibility to take account of different schools’ ability to support a trip, for example due to the size of school or composite classes. Stirling Council said that flexibility of approaches is important; it said—

“There are varying approaches within our small local authority ranging from 5 day trips to 2 nights to local trips that are not residential to no provision. This allows for consideration of the cost of the school day, staffing, inclusion and ensuring that families and young people are considered in a dignified and respectful way. Some of this flexibility is required to ensure that all relevant children are able to participate, regardless of disability. Flexibility will continue to be required locally.”

Sport Scotland’s submission said—

“Changing the duration of the residential experience and requirement for overnight accommodation could reduce costs and still have the potential to deliver quality outdoor education. This could also provide an opportunity to limit the environmental impact of travel and associated costs if provision is local. However, we are fully aware that changing the duration of a residential experience and requirement for overnight stay could potentially diminish the experience and not achieve the intended value of the residential experience.”

The Donaldson Trust said that it would be important for neurodivergent young people to be able to leave an outdoor residential trip if they are “unable to participate or no longer feel able to fulfil the entirety of a planned stay”. Its submission continued—

“Though some of the young people we support may be able to participate in outdoor education (with the appropriate support) for four nights and five days, almost all will not be able to. Alternatively, outdoor education programmes could be developed in such a way that they are viable as ‘standalone’ days. This would give flexibility for all, since pupils who wish to participate in a more intensive, residential experience can undertake a series of ‘blocks’, whereas

pupils less comfortable with this could participate in one block, i.e., a full day, without overnight. Young people wishing to experience some residential education might split their entitlement in two and repeat it at a later date, for instance.”

Potential challenges

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s submission said that it is concerned that making residential outdoor education statutory will remove the “goodwill voluntary element” from staff. CnES also said that trips are “are fully dependent on additional volunteers, usually parents or adults from other sectors” and it was concerned that “the willingness of volunteers to undertake such duties will be lost, incurring further expense and logistical challenge on trip organisers.” EIS’ submission said “legislative compulsion would transform the contractual position of the class teacher” and that changes in teachers’ terms and conditions would need to be considered at the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT). EIS continued—

“Any effort to impose such changes through legislation rather than via the established negotiating forum would certainly be damaging to those industrial relations and the principles of fair work. Moreover, it is difficult to see how such a change could be achieved without appropriate remuneration.”

Local Authorities’ also raised concerns about how school staff would support a statutory duty. ADES (among others) said—

“Making part of the curriculum compulsory would necessitate working through the SNCT to revise teachers’ terms and conditions. Currently trips are staffed (and attended) on a voluntary basis but this would change under this Bill’s proposal, making attendance on residential trips compulsory for staff. Obligatory overnights could be written into terms and conditions for teachers but this change to contracts would be required,. This may become especially challenging where a teacher or member of support staff has family or caring responsibilities. Advice from HR specialist lawyers should be sought to identify the implications for terms and conditions as well as unions being consulted.”

Local authorities’ responses said that there are a few areas which require further consideration, which are paraphrased below—

- Composite classes
How would pupils not in the year group attending a trip be supported and cover provided.
- Timing of trips
Currently it is cheaper in the colder months in the year. How would demand be managed across the school year?
- Small rural schools
Small rural schools may have very few staff which may make the provision reliant on one individual. Similarly, there may be very few pupils of a particular year group and providing the experience to one or two pupils may be challenging.
- Pupils who do not wish to go
How would they be supported and if the pupil were to change their mind later

in their school career, would the education authorities be under a duty to provide a residential outdoor education experience?

An individual respondent said that most of the challenges in providing residential outdoor education “are to do with the impact on learning and teaching and the reality of teaching staff having their own families who require their presence at home for various reasons.” EIS’s submission also highlighted a number of “risks” and “challenges” of the proposed legislation; these include—

“...teachers’ contractual duties; their current professional responsibilities in terms of delivery of the curriculum and of extant local and national priorities; the practical implications of enactment on the work and life of a school, including staffing, resourcing and workload implications; and a realistic appraisal of current capacity in respect of appropriate residential outdoors facilities and equipment, and an accurate projection of the investment required to scale up to meet the ambition of the proposals.”

Some respondents (e.g. Argyle and Bute Council) questioned whether there are sufficient places in outdoor education centres to meet the intentions of the Bill, particularly at the times of year when schools may wish to undertake outdoor education. Scouts Scotland’s submission stated—

“Relatively few Scottish outdoor centres would have the capacity to host an entire secondary school year group. Scout Adventures Lochgoilhead is one such centre with around 150 beds but there are only two others we are aware of. The success of the Bill will allow organisations to invest in capacity, however it is important that it does not become a barrier to implementation at any Act’s inception.”

Bòrd na Gàidhlig along with other organisations with a particular interest in Gaelic said that the Bill should be clearer that for pupils in GME, residential outdoor education should also be delivered in Gaelic.

A number of local authorities highlighted concerns about how duties under the bill would be applied for pupils that move schools/local authority areas, or pupils that missed an outdoor residential experience due to ill health.

Pupils with additional support needs

Glasgow City Council said the Bill needs to “take into account children with ASN, who have complex needs and would require significant support, adaptations to centres, specialist equipment and adapted beds, as well as the additional costs associated with both the health and safety requirements and risk assessments required for each visit.”

The Family Fund said that it supports the intention of the Bill; it continued—

“Without sufficient and personalised planning and support taking place, many children and young people will be unable to access this entitlement or a personalised/ preferred alternative provision which delivers the desired outcomes for them. This in turn would further exclude and disadvantage pupils with significant additional support needs, potentially leading to stress and concern experienced due to a lack of good planning and support more generally, which families report experiencing in relation services.”

PGL Travel Group said, “the issue really arises around the ability to house young people with more severe disabilities overnight, facilities simply do not exist in enough numbers currently across the UK to fully cater for this provision.” PGL Travel Group said that should the Bill pass “this would enable businesses to plan with more certainty and be able to adapt or build new facilities to accommodate these guests”.

The Donaldson Trust said that to support neurodivergent pupils, staff and group leaders should receive specific training. It also listed a number of adjustments that may be required to support participation. These were:

- A wide range of both physical and non-physical activities being spread across a stay, designed in conjunction with participants beforehand.
- Clear communication prior to and during the stay, covering responsibilities and opportunities.
- Adaptive equipment, ensuring that young people with physical barriers to access are still able to participate in activities to the greatest possible extent.
- 1:1 support, where this is the arrangement the young person has during their ‘regular’ day.
- Breaks and flexible schedules to counter fatigue and/or sensory overloading.

An individual respondent was concerned about the school staff accompanying trips; she said, “the changing needs of students in schools is becoming increasingly challenging and the expectation of being responsible for students out of school with learning needs or behaviour problems should not be forced on staff who already do not have adequate training to deal with students such as this in classroom.” Another

Quality Assurance

Currently anyone who provides, in return for payment, adventure activities to young people under 18 is required by law to hold a licence. The [licensing scheme](#) is administered by the Health and Safety Executive in its capacity as the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority.

A number of responses argued that the bill should be accompanied by a quality framework for residential outdoor education. An individual said—

“How we eventually evaluate the quality of experience, in my opinion, is critical to the whole proceedings. Funding poor, or low quality, experiences will not look good if millions are spent and little is returned (assessing residential experience outcomes is challenging). Creating and sustaining quality experiences is something that will require care and attention, to prevent organisations taking inappropriate advantage of the funding, and soft or low quality delivery.”

The Institute for Outdoor Learning said—

“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."

Relation to other aspects of outdoor learning

Angus Council referenced [Target 2030](#) the Learning for Sustainability Action Plan. Which it said is "resulting in much more learning outdoors ... linked to local communities and increasingly involves involvement in place planning." Angus Council suggested that "consideration should be given to simply ensuring that each local authority is funded sufficiently to have a specialist team to deliver outdoor education in the model most appropriate to our school communities."

Inverclyde Council said that the definition of residential outdoor education is unclear. It said—

"There appears to be an assumption that this links to outward bound activities but there could be several different interpretations e.g. visiting Kew Gardens and staying in a hotel in London and other cultural trips. Would attendance at Duke of Edinburgh Awards count as nights away? Could pupils camp in their school grounds? In the Bill outward bound experiences appear to be viewed as having a higher priority than trips linked to arts and culture, social subjects and other areas of the curriculum."

NatureScot's submission said that guidance would need to clarify the experiences and outcomes from residential outdoor education. It also said—

"We would in part agree with the Bill's claim that 'significant benefits to children and young people from doing one week's residential outdoor education during their school career.... include self-confidence, empowerment, independence, understanding of risk, awareness of healthy living and social skills.' Residential experiences can have a very positive impact. However, NatureScot would counter that one week is not enough. Investment in regular outdoor learning experiences in nearby nature throughout children and young people's school experiences is equally if not more valuable, cost effective, and arguably more sustainable."

EIS' submission said that it was concerned that "a legislative approach will result in a negative dynamic whereby time and resources are irresistibly directed towards fulfilling the statutory requirement to the neglect of other areas of outdoor education". An outdoor learning specialist, Juliet Robertson said—

"With more flexibility then schools and local authorities could ensure that staff have access to training to better understand the concept of outdoor learning and how it needs to be embedded within the life, work of the school taking full

account of the totality of Curriculum for Excellence. Otherwise there remains a risk that this huge investment becomes an outdoor white elephant and not really appropriate for the needs of all our children and young people.”

Learning Through Landscapes said, “the funding for a residential will lead to a reduction in funds and focus on the other, more regular forms of outdoor learning to pay for a residential.”. It also suggested—

“We should not assume [a residential outdoor education trip] is in an adventurous or rural setting for all. The opportunities may include cities, exchanges, cultural and technology learning. The 'outdoor' bit should be held lightly and interpretation allowed, rather than a narrow experience which we assume all children will benefit from.”

Sally York, formerly Education Policy Advisor at Scottish Forestry, told the Committee—

“There is a lack of learning outdoors in Scottish Schools as defined by the document 'Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning' 2010. ... Before addressing the lack of residential outdoor education as a country we need to address the fact that most of our children and young people have no idea what outdoor space they can walk to locally, they can use to play or that their local community would accept children outside playing. ... Outdoor learning is seen as optional, as a subject to 'do outdoor learning' and as something done by specialist who, for example, wears outdoor gear and takes children up mountains. It is not. It should be built into the school day so young people can experience learning and playing a more active way that encourages children to link their indoor learning to their outdoor learning and back again.”

Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE) said that “residential outdoor education experience occupies a unique and profound space” within wider outdoor learning a pupil should experience through their time at school.

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?

There were mixed views as to when outdoor education residential experiences should take place and whether the stage should be set out on the face of the Bill.

A common suggestion was that residential outdoor education is best placed at the end of primary to better support the transition to secondary school, where pupils are expected to have greater autonomy and responsibility. Brunstane Primary School (Edinburgh) said that its P7s often consider their outdoor education residential experience to be the highlight of their year; it argued that the Bill should specify that the residential take place in P7. Scottish Outdoor Education Centres' submission said—

“For many Young People, the ‘Primary 7 Outdoor Learning Residential’ is a Rite of Passage. The immersive experience that this brings to participants has a profound impact on their learning and development and takes place at a key stage in their learning.”

Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) said that there should not be a nationally prescribed age range but that each local authority should develop

its own approach provision to reflect its own context. AHOEC noted that the age range of pupils undertaking residential outdoor education may have implications for the provision available. It said—

“The current capacity is focused towards the Primary Seven year group. It is important to note that this does not describe the whole picture, with Centres currently providing a range from Primary 4 to Secondary 6. An implementation plan will be essential to allow Centres the ability to adapt their provision to cater for greater numbers in a wider age range beyond Primary seven. This advice includes everything from bed size to staff capacity to work with wider age ranges. The prospect of hosting a whole secondary year group is restricted to a tiny percentage of the current Centre stock across Scotland.”

Midlothian Council said, “each school has a unique context and Midlothian Council believe the school is best placed to decide on the year group that would benefit most.” An individual educator said—

“Guidance is always preferable to stipulating anything as it affords opportunity for tailoring experiences to specific contexts. Each school is located in its own community with its own specific set of needs. For example, a school in the East End of Glasgow with a profile of high SIMD 1&2 will have a very different context than a rural school in Argyll & Bute which could have a full school roll of 13 children. Head Teachers need to be able to assess the needs of their pupils and tailor learning experiences - like residential - to meet these needs.”

An outdoor learning specialist, Juliet Robertson said—

“At present no research exists that I am aware of that indicates at which age a residential is most beneficial. The type of residential, how it is put together, how it fits into the broader purposes of education, the needs of a child or group, and, of course, progression of residential experiences, all need to be considered. Also it seems sensible to take the perspective of children and young people into consideration too.”

SAPOE said that “there should not be a nationally prescribed age range”. SAPOE noted that this may create issues when pupils move between local authorities and/or schools; it said, “there is no simple solution to this and essentially local authorities must seek to mitigate these issues locally”.

Arete Outdoor Centre suggested that the bill should be aimed at secondary pupils. Comunn na Gàidhlig / Spòrs Gàidhlig’s submission said that provision should go further – it argued that residential outdoor education should take place on more than one occasion, eg “senior Primary; junior Secondary; and then senior Secondary”. It said, “pupils would benefit enormously from a series of such experiences in the likes of: personal independence and responsibilities; social skills; team building and team working; problem solving skills; environmental and geographical awareness; physical development and so on.”

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

Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre argued that spending on residential outdoor education is preventative and has the potential to save money in the long run. Scottish Adventure Activities Forum said—

“We see this funding as an investment in the young people of Scotland – it will help to build a resilient and innovative population with a greater awareness of how to protect our environment and look after their own wellbeing.”

The Outward Bound Trust’s submission said—

“Research conducted by Outward Bound International (OBI) highlights the significant social return on investment (SROI) that such programmes can deliver. The global study across eight countries, including the UK, revealed that for every £1 invested in Outward Bound programmes, there is a return of between £5 and £15 in societal value. This value is derived from the positive and lasting impact that these programmes have on young people’s lives, which extends well beyond the duration of the course itself. Although these figures are globally representative, they underscore the substantial long-term benefits that can be realised through investing in residential outdoor education.”

Scouts Scotland’s submission said—

“Funding is essential to ensure the Bill’s success. Currently, many schools do not participate in residential, resulting in numerous young people missing out on the transformative benefits of residential outdoor learning. For Scotland to lead in supporting young people to develop essential life skills while new generations to its landscapes and environments, the opportunity must be equitable and accessible to all.”

EIS’ submission said that within the context of tight budgets for local authorities it is “concerned that without a significant transformation of the resourcing landscape, it will be harder to maintain current provision, let alone extend it in the way the Bill aspires.”

One teacher told the Committee—

“We used to pay all pupils to attend from our PEF budget but with cutbacks and increasing demands we can no longer afford to do this. Most of our pupils are in [SIMD] deciles 1&2 and cannot afford to pay themselves. Subsequently since COVID we have not been able to offer a residential trip to our pupils.”

Children 1st said that families may face a range of financial barriers to accessing residential outdoor educations, such as paying for “travel, clothes or equipment”. City of Edinburgh Council said—

“Experience and evidence show significant non-financial barriers to participation also exist, for example inclusion of pupils with Additional Support Needs and/or a disability and/or anxiety/mental health difficulties. Many hidden costs at local level are currently partially or fully absorbed by schools but not all schools have the capacity to do so.”

The submission from a group of carers organisations said that “consideration needs to be given to the additional financial support that may need to be made available to ensure young carers, and disabled children and young people, are able to have everything that they need to participate.” It also noted that the provision may need investment to ensure that it is accessible.

A number of local authorities criticised the estimates in the financial memorandum. Shetland Islands Council’s submission said—

“Having reviewed the accompanying financial memorandum for this Bill we are concerned that some of the estimated costs for delivery of this opportunity e.g.

staffing in particular and transport cost for island authorities have not been fully captured in the document. Therefore we believe that it under estimates the full costs of the delivery of this entitlement for schools and local authorities. Additionally, it also does not take account of the costs that parents and/ or carers would have to meet in order to prepare their children for the trip e.g. any clothing or equipment required and spending money for food on the travel to the outdoor centre. It is worth highlighting that children from the northern and western Isles of Scotland would have significantly longer travel requirements, including overnight ferry travel to attend mainland outdoor centres, which would increase the length and cost of these trips.”

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar also highlighted that additional costs that could be faced by its schools which it argued was not properly considered in the Financial Memorandum . It said—

“The prime concern we have is the large additional cost we incur for ferries, buses and additional nights of accommodation due to the extra travel required. Costing for a trip for a class in our largest primary school calculated in August 2024 quoted £24,000. This is just one example and there is real concern that funding will not be sufficient.”

Connect’s submission said that there were concerns that funding may be redirected from other services, it said that “it is important that this does not impact on other services”.

The Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland said that while it considers “the opportunity to attend such course is of huge benefit to a great many pupils” it does not support the Bill. It said—

“In a time of significant financial constraint, when schools are losing staff and school leadership time, there are priorities which are far higher up the list than this proposal. Currently, if £34m became available to school education, AHDS would argue for every penny to be spent on better supporting pupils with additional support needs.”

Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres highlighted issues in relation to capital funding for outdoor education centres. It said that current market prices for school residential do not include contribution to capital costs for the centres. It said—

“Local Authority Centres rely on accessing Capital funding in ever increasing challenging circumstances. Many Third Sector Centres rely on separate charitable functions, donations and activities to address all their capital requirements. The absence of these capital income streams causes the biggest threat to the closure of Scotland’s Residential Centres. The Bill will potentially need to consider Capital funding separately to the pupil allocation that will cover revenue costs.”

There were differing views as to the whether parental contribution should support residential outdoor education. Comunn na Gàidhlig / Spòrs Gàidhlig said that he large majority of funding should come from central sources but “there is nothing wrong in principle with seeking parental contributions, but this has to be very sensitively done, in order not to encourage exclusion because of socio-economic circumstances, multiple children etc.”. One individual suggested that funding should be provided on the basis of free school meal eligibility, another teacher/parent said “we would be more than happy to contribute some/all of the cost of a school trip/residential experience

and would not feel hard done-by if other families were fully funded.” SAPOE’s submission said—

“The concept of fully funding the residential should be given careful consideration. Could the value of the residential be devalued if it is free? What are the risks of people’s perception of the educational experience when no cost is attributed to it? These are important questions to consider when deciding if a marginal cost should be retained.”

There was support for the Scottish Government fully funding outdoor residential education, often on the grounds of equitable access. CPAG Scotland’s submission said that school trips can be valuable for young people on lower incomes, but “when parents are required to pay all or some of the cost of a trip, it is children and young people on lower incomes who are most likely to miss out on these opportunities”.

NASUWT said that the Bill, if enacted, could have an impact on the market of providers and affect the prices of residential outdoor education trips.

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