

**Scottish Advisory Panel for
Outdoor Education (SAPOE)**



Mr John Swinney
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG
Tuesday 1st September 2020

Dear Mr Swinney

You will recall that SAPOE wrote to you on the 11th May, in the early days of the Education Recovery Group, with an offer of support and to help plan for the return to learning.

Since then, SAPOE executive committee and members have been working hard, alongside other outdoor and educational organisations, to convey a clear message about the importance of Outdoor Learning in supporting the return to learning for schools and pupils.

We have also delivered very practical responses: the development of an online teacher training module, hosted by Education Scotland, writing national guidance to support schools to return to local Outdoor Learning and developing guidance on the possible route to the re-opening of Outdoor Education Centres (OEC's) and how they could be used by schools.

Alongside this work, we requested two specific areas of support from Scottish Government. A clear directive for Local Authorities to include outdoor learning services in future planning and for SAPOE and outdoor organisations to be included in early stage discussions around supporting schools returning to learning. We believe these interventions have been largely successful, however at this key time in the education recovery plan, there are two issues that require urgent attention.

Many OEC's are in financial crisis, closures and ongoing redundancies already announced. The few Local Authority OEC's that remain are not immune to this risk, but the loss of third sector centres will have a significant impact on the ability of many Local Authorities to deliver a progressive and meaningful outdoor learning programme, including a universal right to a residential experience for all pupils. We would strongly urge the Scottish Government to consider further financial support to safeguard against the loss of this essential resource, both now and for the future. This loss will hit those pupils from social and economically deprived backgrounds the hardest creating further inequity.

Secondly, there is a risk that Local Authorities are making individual decisions about educational excursions which are beyond the guidance issued by Scottish Government. SAPOE intends to write to all Local Authorities, encouraging the use of local outdoor learning opportunities, day visits including use of outdoor centres, and the use of outdoor learning staff in schools and at local sites. We request that Scottish Government support this action by issuing further clarification and guidance on these points, to ensure at this critical time, schools and Local Authorities are not creating unnecessary barriers and preventing pupils from experiencing the many documented benefits of Outdoor Learning.

SAPOE continues to engage through the Outdoor Learning Supporting Education Recovery group which meets weekly with representation from Scottish Government, Education Scotland and sector representatives.

Having successfully completed a number of actions for this group we want to offer ongoing support for the future of Outdoor Learning. As part of the Priestley review of Education we believe it is imperative that Outdoor Learning is included in the process and can offer advice on this. We also suggest it is essential to establish a Scottish OEC estate collaborative between local government and private/voluntary sector (similar to early years capacity planning) coordinated through the Regional Collaboratives model to ensure equity of opportunity, viability and sustainability into the future as well as ensuring educational quality and professional standards.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ali Dreyer', written in a cursive style.

Ali Dreyer
Chair SAPOE

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