

**Education, Children and Young People Committee  
Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill  
4 September 2024**

The NASUWT welcomes the Education, Children and Young People Committee's call for views on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.

The NASUWT is the largest UK-wide teachers' union representing teachers and school leaders in all sectors of education.

**SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

**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? If so, what are your views on the Bill's proposal that this consists of four overnight stays and five days, not necessarily consecutive?**

Outdoor education is an important aspect of a broad and balanced curriculum and should form part of an educational offer available to all pupils. NASUWT recognises that education outside the classroom can provide valuable educational experience and curriculum enrichment, providing it is planned,

properly resourced, linked to the curriculum and has clearly identified intended learning outcomes.

When they are properly organised and relevant to the curriculum, educational visits and learning outside the classroom activities can enable pupils to be more engaged and enthusiastic learners.

The NASUWT is concerned that the level of prescription proposed could negatively impact some young people with additional support needs who currently may be facilitated to engage with residential outdoor experiences in part, as a positive support to accommodate learning needs or as a reasonable adjustment. It would be unfortunate if a well-intentioned time mandate resulted in an inadvertent detriment to any learning experience. The proposal should also make clear what the consequence, if any, to the local authority of failing to provide the prescribed level of residential outdoor education is because at the moment this is not clear.

Equally, the Union is mindful of the current financial context, whereby a number of local authorities are proposing significant education budget cuts: some provision that fell short of the full five days would certainly be better than no provision of any outdoor education.

**2. The Bill does not stipulate what pupils should be entitled to this residential outdoor education as this will be set out in guidance, although the member's preference is that this should apply to all pupils between P6 and S4. 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 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.

The NASUWT believes that all children and young people have an entitlement to access a broad, balanced, relevant and engaging curriculum. As it stands, due to a myriad of factors including cost to individual families, resourcing at council level and suitability of approach to meet individual pupils' needs, not all pupils are able to access residential outdoor education: a fairer and more equitable approach which secures the entitlement of all children, without exception, is preferred but this need not stipulate an age range.

Residential outdoor learning, and indeed outdoor learning more broadly, must be pedagogically grounded and part of an approach to learning within schools which seeks to further the aims of Curriculum for Excellence. Given the curriculum is likely to be subject to ongoing review and enhancement, it makes more sense to place recommendations on age and stage within guidance, rather than within the Bill itself - this will also allow flexibility of approach to accommodate the individual needs of pupils.

The Learning for Sustainability Action plan was published in June 2023 and aims to place sustainability at the heart of Scottish education. One of the actions includes '*a new commitment to take further steps to support Outdoor Learning*'. It also set out clear support from learners for outdoor learning: '*Learners asked for more opportunities to learn outdoors and be in nature and to be empowered to make actionable changes in their educational settings to fully embrace the ethos of LfS. They also wanted the adults in their lives to take a proactive approach to support them to make those changes.*' The Scottish national approach to residential outdoor education needs to dovetail with the LfS Action plan and its aim for every 3-18 place of education to become a Sustainable Learning Setting by 2030.

Looking more closely at the commitments of the LfS Action plan, it is stated that '*The Scottish Government will create a new policy workstream on Outdoor Learning. This work will be supported by a national working group*

*which will report to Scottish Ministers. The Group will be challenged to pursue a range of actions to ensure that all children receive entitlements to outdoor learning in all its forms.'* It would make sense that this national working group had a lead role in shaping the residential outdoor guidance. The NASUWT has and will continue to push the Scottish Government to ensure they provide sufficient support, including financial backing, for schools to implement the action plan.

Certainly in section 6B(7) where it states '*Before preparing any guidance or revised guidance under this section, the Scottish Ministers must consult...*', it is notable that teachers and their representatives are glaringly missing: this omission would require to be remedied in any updated Bill. It is insufficient and inappropriate to lump teachers and their representatives under the heading '*any other persons that the Scottish Ministers think appropriate*'.

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

Funding is certainly a pre-requisite to implementation, not only to local authorities but also in support of individual families and young people. The cost of living crisis continues to have a substantial impact and many families remain deeply affected. Lists of materials required for an outdoor residential experience can be a substantial barrier to participation and approaches which offer targeted funding and support do not always reach families in need. Poverty is not always seen and those experiencing poverty are not always eligible for support, thinking particularly about the many families experiencing in-work poverty or whose income may fluctuate due to insecurity of work. Indeed, of those who are eligible for some support, many do not wish to claim it because of persistent issues around stigma, shame and accessibility.

Funding will also need to take into consideration the increasing number of children and young people with an additional support need. The needs of each child will be widely diverse and additional time and consideration needs

to be accounted for in advance of any excursion in order to plan appropriately to get it right for every child. This may also require additional staffing or physical supports in order to maximise participation. It is notable that, in Wales, finance was raised as a barrier to progress a statutory right to outdoor education and, further, that a similar Bill in the UK also fell.

Even if sufficient funding is able to be identified and passed to education authorities, this would need to be ring-fenced in order to be protected. At the moment, local authorities receive a block grant from Scottish Government that makes up around 85% of their net revenue expenditure, with the remainder coming mostly from local taxation. Over time, the ring-fencing of education spending has gradually been removed and very little remains targeted. While local authorities continue to propose drastic reductions to their education spending and national promises on teacher numbers are under attack, it would be necessary to ring-fence any identified funding as well as to provide long term funding guarantees. It is worth highlighting also that, if staffing levels reduce, even with targeted ring-fenced funding, outdoor residential experiences may not be practicable or feasible.

Given the limited numbers of local authorities that have been able to maintain outdoor education centres, it is of concern that, if enacted, this Bill may generate a rise in private companies flooding the field, siphoning off public funds and profiteering: this approach has been seen elsewhere within Scottish education, for example, in relation to PEF funding or, indeed, by individuals and companies pedalling particular behaviour approaches.

Funding alone may not be the sole barrier to access and schools and local authorities should be guided to ensure that residential outdoor educational experiences are not inappropriately timed to clash with days or weeks of religious or cultural importance to their local communities. For example, during the Holy month of Ramadan, Muslim staff and pupils will be preparing to abstain from food and water during daylight hours: this can equate to around 15 hours in the UK. Feedback from members indicates that schools are adopting a variety of supportive mechanisms to ensure Muslim pupils, and

staff, are best supported during Ramadan, including holding lunch clubs for pupils who do not wish to sit in the canteen watching their friends eat lunch or creating dialogue about Ramadan among the school community. Any guidance on residential outdoor learning must also ensure that schools are engaging with their local communities and are mindful of additional factors such as fasting which could create barriers to engagement.

Diversity must be more than a tick box exercise and within any guidance both schools and providers must be encouraged to meet the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Not only seeking avoid unlawful behaviour that is banned by the Equality Act 2010, including discrimination, harassment and victimisation, but also to advance equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not, as well as fostering good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not. Diversity within the teaching profession remains a key priority for both NASUWT and Scottish education at large, with The Diversity in the Teaching Profession and Education Workforce (DITPEW) subgroup of the Scottish Government's Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP) taking forward actions aimed at supporting the education sector to meet the 4% by 2030 target. Given research has shown that black communities are less likely to engage in nature-based outdoor recreation activities, with historic discrimination being a large underlying factor, it is even more important that an intentional approach is adopted.

#### **4. Any other comments?**

The following is taken from the Learning for Sustainability Action Plan:

*'A key message from both educators and learners is that adults need to learn more about sustainability to be able to share this with learners.*

*Professional learning needs to be better at building confidence and capacity.*

*A focus on "LfS in practice" rather than the theory, is key.*

*Policy makers, education bodies and relevant partners must ensure that there is support for all those progressing on this journey'.*

A joined-up approach to outdoor learning, learning for sustainability and outdoor residential education is required and, further, this must be underpinned by appropriate access to professional learning, practical guidance and sufficient funding.

Finally, it is important to note that, because of the great personal and professional risks involved, our advice to our teacher members is that they should always be advised not to participate in visits and journeys that are non-contractual, do not have clear educational outcomes and do not require the exercise of the teacher's professional skills and judgement.

Further, any such activities which do take place must be approved in accordance with local authority procedures. All visits must be checked to ensure there is a specific and stated objective and, further, that all relevant regulations and guidelines, including the school/authority's own health and safety policy are abided by.

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