

Written evidence submitted by Arete Outdoor Centre

I give you evidence as to why Outdoor Education Residential Centres need urgent funding. I direct you towards the £2million package the Scottish Government put together for centres that are based in Scotland. There is nothing equivalent to this for English, Welsh or Northern Irish centres. See <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/funding/covid-19-residential-outdoor-education-centre-recovery-fund/>

Due to Government guidance advising against education overnights, these residential centres have been closed since March. The restart proposed by the Government is a possibility in Easter 2021. At best this means residential centres will be without income for at least 12 months. I can think of no other sector that technically has not been on the official Government closed list of businesses outside of lockdown, yet they are closed as their school clients have been prevented from attending. Us like many others have 95% of our income from school residential and so have already lost £800k so far and by Easter this will rise to nearly £900k from a normal turnover of £950k.

- 95% drop in income since March 2020 and continuing to Easter 2021 due to Government advice to schools
- £8000 unavoidable costs per month to survive, not covered by Government grants
- 30 outdoor centres have already permanently closed due to covid restrictions alone. More face similar risk. Generations of young people will now miss out, especially under privileged pupils from inner cities who are already documented to be hit hardest.
- Facing reduced capacity when we are allowed to restart and debts to repay throughout 2021 and 2022.
- The problems to reengage pupils in education and the mental health and wellbeing crisis is well documented by the Government. These are education centres with well documented benefits of wellbeing and mental health among others. These centres provide economic value through not having to pay much more in dealing with this health crisis in the future.
- Residential centres are viable businesses and could be operating without the need of Governments grants if guidance to schools changed earlier. Now centres have built up debts as result of being forced to close not because they are zombie businesses.
- Diversification to cover all these costs is not possible. We have been keeping slots available for our schools who know the huge benefits of residential to their pupils, and we don't want them to miss out further. Due to the lack of clarity from Government we have had to keep schools pencilled in, in the hope guidance will change. The end of November review was the first time any datelines were mentioned, forcing us to suddenly cancel all the winter bookings last minute.

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We need furlough to continue beyond March until at least the date Government guidance to schools on overnights changes. Taking into account that our courses will be low next year and furlough needs to be extended sector specific for this reason. This is especially true as we have no idea yet how we can operate in 2021 as the Department for Education still hasn't approved our covid-safe protocols. Schools normally take 6-12 months to prepare for trips and so bookings aren't taking place for 2021 like they should at the moment.

We need a lumps sum of money to cover the current monthly expenses and deal with the ongoing debt from being closed for so long.

I thank you for your time in considering the plight of outdoor education centres, for the sake of the young people that can't speak out about this in the same way.

Regards Gareth Davies

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