

Kirsty Williams AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-1135  
Ein cyf/Our ref: KW/02005/21

Janet Finch-Saunders AS/MS  
Cadeirydd / Chair of the Petitions Committee  
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31 March 2021

Dear Janet

Thank you for your email on behalf of the Petitions Committee regarding targeted funding and support in respect of residential outdoor education centres (P-05-1135). I am pleased to be able to provide an update on the support and funding available, and to address the concerns you have raised.

Firstly, I assure you that we all want to see a return to 'normal' – a time when outdoor education providers are able to support our learners. I know how important outdoor experiences are for our children and young people, and how they can play a particularly important role in learning and in our recovery journey. The outdoors will, we hope, also play a key role in realising the ambitions of our new curriculum.

Officials continue to have regular discussions with other UK Governments and with the sector, and when we believe it's safe to ease further restrictions, we will do so. Safety must remain our priority. As you know, our approach is to ease restrictions in gradual steps, listening to the medical and scientific advice and assessing the impact of the changes we make as we go along. Taking a cautious approach enables us to monitor the effect on rates of transmission and to make changes before hospitality, activity and leisure venues and retail is fully opened once again. We are, however, taking forward discussions on how restrictions might be eased, and the mitigations required to ensure outdoor education visits are able to resume safely, at the appropriate time. We will update our guidance as soon as it is appropriate to do so; with the resumption of domestic day visits in the first instance, and in due course the resumption of domestic residential trips.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am pleased you recognise that the Welsh Government is doing everything we can to support businesses through this very difficult period. Whilst many organisations in the sector have accessed Welsh Government support during the pandemic, we acknowledged a need to ensure support continues to be available when necessary. On 24 March, I jointly announced the establishment of a £2 million fund to support the residential outdoor education sector in Wales, with the Minister for the Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS. Details of the announcement can be found below:

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-welsh-government-statement-establishing-fund-residential-outdoor-education-roe>

The Residential Outdoor Educational Sector in Wales fund will provide funding to the sector with support to cover essential operating costs during the period June to September, when the current Job Retention Scheme closes. If restrictions still apply, the Welsh Government will consider what support is required to support the sector.

Prior to this, many Welsh businesses from the sector received support from non domestic rates grants support introduced to respond to the restrictions as a result of Covid, and the Welsh Government's Economic Resilience Fund that provides extra support to the Welsh economy, businesses and charities experiencing a sharp drop in trading as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. For many Welsh businesses, the Economic Resilience Fund plugged the gaps in the support schemes already announced by the UK Government, including the Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS).

Regarding the Welsh Government's business rates relief to the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors, in 2020-21 the relief schemes have provided over £365m of support in addition to our permanent relief schemes. This means the Welsh Government has provided over £595m in rates relief this year. The targeted schemes are being extended into 2021-22 providing an estimated £380m of additional relief, with total support provided in 2021-22 being over £610m.

Going forward, an additional £200 million for Covid business support in the final budget for 2021-22 has been approved. It is anticipated that the incoming Government will want to take decisions on the appropriate way of utilising this funding.

Throughout our response to the pandemic, I have sought to prioritise the needs of our children and young people, giving full and careful consideration to their rights. We are all very aware of the impacts on physical, mental and emotional health, and fully agree that access to outdoor spaces and opportunities to engage in a range of different activities are critical to supporting the wellbeing of all of us, and children and young people in particular.

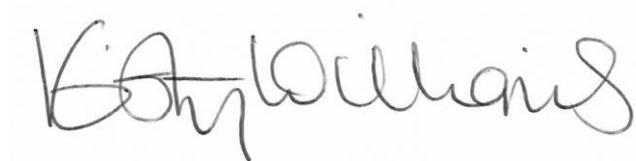
We are looking at what could be done to increase access to these sorts of activities across the summer. As detailed in the updated Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales, we are also looking at how and when we can restart a wider range of organised activities including indoor activities for children and young people, and indoor and outdoor activities for adults.

Currently we continue to advise against educational visits at this time, so unfortunately residential stays such as those that took place historically are not able to restart at this time. However, you will have seen that we were able to restart access to self-contained accommodation from 27 March, but this is on the basis of a single household staying in the accommodation provided. Consequently, I cannot say when we could restart camps, but we are taking steps to restart a wider range of activities which some centres may be able to provide.

Also, as part of the release of the current restrictions in place across Wales, we were able to restart organised activities for children and young people under 18 from 27 March. We have published some FAQs to support that restart, which may be of interest to some outdoor education centres and particularly those able to provide non-residential activities. Decisions on this will hopefully be made in the 22 April review cycle, subject to wider public health conditions. Hopefully this too will increase the opportunities for outdoor education centres.

Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the progress being made, and the funding position for outdoor education centres. I hope this addresses many of the concerns and points raised.

Yours sincerely

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

**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**

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