

Public Consultation on 'Residential and Outdoor Education Centres'.

[Education Authority for Northern Ireland]

Consultation Response from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Authority for Northern Ireland's (EANI) public consultation on the 'Residential and Outdoor Education Centres'.

Brief Background for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The District Council area is home to 114,992 people (as of 30 June 2014). The District Council area is Northern Ireland's largest region in terms of land mass - approximately 3,000km², or 20% of NI - and the smallest in terms of population. As a result, the population density of approximately 41 people per km² is the sparsest in NI. This is a feature of the region which also provides challenges to service delivery.

Consultation Feedback

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes this consultation and in general the goal of EANI to provide improved Residential and Outdoor Education Centres going forward.

The Council fully supports the role of adventure and outdoor education as part of a young person's active learning. It is particularly beneficial in helping young people to learn about assessing and managing risk.

Young people can use such centres to learn through new and exciting challenges, assisting them to improve their leadership and team working skills and ultimately providing significant value to their progression towards adulthood.

The Council believes that Outdoor Education Centres have a distinct identity, providing unique teaching and learning opportunities. However, there are, and should be, significant overlaps and synergies between Outdoor Education, Physical Education, and Environmental Education, with each re-enforcing the other.

Outdoor Education can also complement other activities in the broader school curriculum, such as performing arts, which share some of the same outcomes in relation to personal and social education.

The Council believes that, whether teaching the young people new skills or using different activities as a meaningful way of enabling young people to engage with their own learning, the focus of all courses should be the development of the person, which will ultimately create a more rounded individual.

Visits to Residential and/or Outdoor Education Centres are often the most memorable learning experiences in a young person's school career, providing, for many, their first time

away from home and a chance to see/experience the world in a different way and from a different perspective.

Within the District, we have three very well equipped and resourced Residential and Outdoor Activity Centres, namely:

1. Corrick Outdoor Education Centre.
2. Share Residential Outdoor Education Centre.
3. Gortatole Outdoor Education Centre.

These centres provide a range of programmes including:

- Multi activity outdoor adventure courses, e.g. canoeing, kayaking, hill walking and field studies.
- Subject specific courses,
- Eco Workshops
- Carbon Workshops
- Kingfisher paddles
- Fossil Hunts and Workshops
- Camping and Bushcraft
- 'Leave no Trace' Programme

Outdoor Education Centres can also provide a valuable resource for the local community e.g. The Share Centre provides facilities for local communities to use such as the swimming pool, leisure suite, and various activities. They can also contribute to the development of the local economy by attracting visitors to the area to avail of activity events and activity holidays.

The Council believes that the training provided through the Centres for teachers and for youth leaders is extremely valuable and would benefit from further funding and promotion from EANI. This training ultimately allows more people to be accredited to take young people safely into the outdoors, in order to further their learning and development.

Statistics from a Sport NI assessment in 2013, show that 'Residential and Outdoor Education Centres' are part of a growing sector. Across Northern Ireland in 2013 there were approximately 570 people employed on a full-time basis and nearly 520 on a part-time basis by the Residential and Outdoor Education Centres.

The sector also enlists the assistance of over 1,000 volunteers.

In 2013, the approximate annual income associated with this sector was in excess of £25 million. An analysis of this shows that £15 million was generated from domestic consumption, while 12% of total income was generated from sales outside Northern Ireland, corresponding to almost £3 million. Clearly this is a growing sector which can, and does, benefit the local community.

Going forward, it is vital that the Education Authority continues to encourage schools (both primary and secondary) to attend Residential and Outdoor Education Centres. The Council believes that Outdoor Education can make a significant contribution to the educational

curricula, and therefore make an important contribution to physical, personal and social education for students.

The Council believes that there should be more partnership working between the Education Authority and the Residential and Outdoor Education Centres. During partnership meetings, there should be discussions on the feasibility of future joined up approaches - developing Outdoor Education Centres in line with any future curriculum developments. By sharing information on any upcoming changes in curriculum, the Centres may be able to develop workshops and/or activities to complement the learning process of young people.

The Council, following research on Residential and Outdoor Education from other areas such as England (through the English Outdoor Council and the Outdoor Education Advisor's Panel), believes that Residential and Outdoor Education should have a number of outcomes, not all of which revolve around education.

These outcomes for the young people who partake in Outdoor Education should include:

1. **Enjoyment** (of being outdoors, of the activities, of learning new skills and so on).
2. **Building or improving confidence** through taking part in more challenging activities, team working, and so on.
3. **Development of their Social Awareness** by appreciating their own strengths, the strengths of others, trusting others, leadership skills, encouraging others, etc.
4. **Increasing Environmental Awareness** through understanding the impact of actions on the environment and gaining more of an understanding of natural resources, etc.
5. **Improving their skills base** through participation in activities, expeditions and explorations.
6. Increasing initiative, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance and commitment.
7. **Developing and improving key skills** such as: communication, problem-solving, leadership and teamwork.
8. **Improvement of health, fitness and wellbeing** through the physical activities and learning about healthy lifestyles.
9. **Wider acceptance of those with disabilities.**

The Council believes that Residential and Outdoor Education can, and should, play a huge part in developing young people into more rounded individuals. EANI should provide incentives for schools and youth groups to avail of these resources, either through providing a ring fenced budgetary allocation or by positively promoting the Centres within each locality to local schools, youth groups, and community organisations, with a particular emphasis on the benefits that Residential and Outdoor Education Centres can play in the development of young people.

Conclusion

Fermanagh and Omagh District welcomes EANI's public consultation on the 'Residential and Outdoor Education Centre Review'.

As outlined above, the Council fully supports the role of Outdoor Education as part of a young person's active learning.

However, as stated above, the Council believes that EANI should make a concerted effort to improve its promotion of such facilities within each locality. This promotion should not just be aimed at schools, but should be broadened out to include youth groups, and other groups/organisation with which it interacts, on an ongoing basis.