

1 October 2020

John Swinney MSP

T4.23

The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills,

Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport - Support for #SaveYourOutdoorCentres campaign

We are writing to the Scottish Government to express our collective support for the campaign to ensure that outdoor centres survive the current crisis and continue to provide invaluable life and learning experiences for children and young people across Scotland. Scottish outdoor centres have played a significant part in the provision of both proficiency training and coach education for several decades, and their loss will be keenly felt within the Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport programmes.

105,000 young people are given the chance to try sailing, canoeing, snowsports, cycling, mountain biking, climbing, kayaking and hillwalking every year. The workforce based in these 36 centres are specialists, and it takes considerable time, commitment and expense to train them to deliver these activities safely.

We understand the difficult decisions Government is having to make and have welcomed the additional funding provided by both Scottish and Westminster Governments in some areas, however this funding does not yet address the significant challenge of keeping these centres open. These centres are a resource which is evidenced to help to close the attainment gap, develop resilience, confidence and life skills, whilst improving the physical and mental health & wellbeing of children and young people from all over Scotland.

This year as we have emerged from lockdown outdoor sports have worked together to provide detailed advice and guidance to help people resume outdoor activities safely whilst also working to promote responsible access. It is clear that we have seen an increase in interest in outdoor recreation this summer, a trend which is likely to continue. More than ever we need opportunities for future generations to learn to how to enjoy, appreciate and behave responsibly in the outdoors.

Adventure tourism is also an important part of the Scottish economy, and these centres play a critical role in providing employment opportunities in some of the most rural parts of Scotland.

Centres have already begun to close, and this will accelerate when the furlough scheme ends with 50% of Scotland's 36 Centres likely to close and half of their 600 employees at risk of redundancy in the coming months. Without a support package these Outdoor Education Centres will be lost forever.

There is a history of outdoor centres being closed (including many owned by local authorities) with no opportunity for community buy out, or to look into alternative operating models, the buildings then being demolished or used for housing, or the land sold for redevelopment. There is a significant risk that this trend will continue, and young people across Scotland will be denied the opportunity to access residential outdoor experiences that have been identified by MSPs as being so important for Scottish children and young people.

We understand that representatives from the #SaveYourOutdoorCentres campaign are in the process of arranging to discuss the situation with Ministers and hope this will provide a better understanding of the position of both the centres, and the Scottish Government. We fully support the campaign in their efforts and welcome any assistance that the Scottish Government may be able to provide to ensure this important sector survives the current crisis.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Younie,
CEO, Mountaineering Scotland

For and behalf of the undersigned organisations:

Brendan Paddy - Chief Officer, Ramblers Scotland
Craig Burn – CEO, Scottish Cycling
Graeme McLean – Head of Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland
James Allan – CEO, Royal Yachting Association Scotland
Fiona Keir – CEO, Orienteering Scotland
Stuart Smith – CEO, Scottish Canoe Association
Trafford Wilson – CEO, Snowsport Scotland
Vincent Bryson – CEO, Scottish Fencing and Scottish Archery
Bruce Crawford – CEO, Scottish Curling

cc - Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

- Joe Fitzpatrick MSP, Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing

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