



UK Outdoors

Learning • Health • Adventure

“You can go to boarding school. You can stay in a hostel dorm. But kids can’t go on their outdoor education visits.”

15,000 jobs at risk and half of outdoor education capacity to be permanently lost as Government continues school travel sector closure

5th October 2020 - Today, UK Outdoors, the industry body for outdoor learning and activities representing 5000 individuals and organisations, is warning that the Government’s continued advice preventing overnight educational visits threatens the future of a proud British industry and cultural asset. Despite boarding schools, hotels and hostels all operating on similar guidelines, the school travel sector has been closed by Government since March.

If no action is taken and no support is provided this academic year the sector stands to lose all its 15000 jobs and nearly half its capacity permanently, decimating a vital British industry. The inaction over guidance on travel and overnight visits for educational settings has already cost businesses, from small independent trip providers and local authority centres to larger organisations, an estimated £500m in lost revenue and over 6000 job losses. Since March, children and young people have missed out on over 1.5m educational visits.

Outdoor education is part of British culture with over 2m children a year taking part. It is a vital resource for all schools to allow children to develop their social and teamworking skills in a friendly and safe environment. More so for the thousands of inner city schools, students and parents for whom outdoor education is a lifeline.

With Spring term fast approaching, the sector desperately needs certainty and guidance in place for a phased reopening to protect jobs, businesses and vital community assets that could be lost forever. The sector is calling on the Government to review the guidance in November, in line with recognised science and health and safety protocols, and lay out a roadmap for the reopening of the school travel sector.

Andy Robinson, Chief Executive of Institute for Outdoor Learning (“IOL”) and Member of UK Outdoors, said: “Outdoor education and adventure is engrained in our DNA. It is part of British education. Every child’s first trip away from home is such an important and formative experience. We cannot just let the industry fall by the way side through

negligence and ignorance. The Government to act to protect the industry and ensure its reopening in time for the Spring term or face an economic, social and cultural disaster.”

Health and safety is a priority for the school travel sector. It has continuously reassured Government that it is safe to operate, meeting and exceeding all relevant Government guidelines. Collectively, the sector has developed robust COVID-safe guidelines for providers as well as a detailed COVID protocols handbook for Government and public health authorities. All providers have undertaken to, amongst other initiatives, reduce capacity to meet guidelines, maintain social bubbling – a key Government policy - and increase staffing.

Jim Whittaker, Chair of Association of Heads of Outdoors Centres (“AHOEC”) and UK Outdoors Member, said: “We have put our heart and soul into meeting every challenge the Government has set. It is a bitter pill to swallow keeping our sites closed while we see hotels, boarding schools and hostels delivering the same overnight experiences unabated. The sector is ready and safe to reopen. We have seen nothing, no science, that contradicts that position. We hope the Government will listen, understand the lengths our sector has gone to in ensuring safety and compliance, and restart the sector.”

UK Outdoors represents over 5000 organisations and individuals providing formative educational experiences for schools and students both domestically and overseas. The industry provides over £700m to the UK economy every year, supporting over 15,000 jobs around the UK.