

P-05-1135 Targeted funding for residential outdoor education centres, now unable to operate for 12 months, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 10.03.21

Dear petitions committee.

I thank you again for bringing my petition to the fore and giving consideration to the points raised. I am pleased that the committee agreed that it was a matter of some considerable concern that needed to be addressed.

I am aware that in the committee's last meeting it was stated that I, as the petitioner would be contacted for further information. I remain willing to provide any further details I can to help the committee take informed action. However I have not been contacted at this stage and do feel the information I have already submitted was comprehensive. To this end and given the time sensitivity of this petition I do question why further action is not already underway. This delay will cost more people their jobs and livelihoods and continue to decrease outdoor education provision in Wales.

There is already a shortage of residential outdoor education provision for children in Wales. The past few years have seen the closure of many centres, such as Staylitttle and Ty Gwyn (Powys centres) and as a result many of the remaining centres take a mixture of schools in Wales and schools from over the border. Since writing my statement to the committee I can confirm that out of the 40 centres listed 8 have indeed closed permanently with many more hanging in the balance. I am watching with sadness as buildings go on the market as domestic properties. They will never again be for the use of our children. As a nation outdoor education is an incredible asset, something Wales does fantastically well. I am ashamed that the Welsh Government continues not to see the profession or the people in it recognised and supported.

Furthermore, as I previously stated this as much an economic matter as an educational one. The income that these centres bring into Wales's most rural areas is considerable, as well as the skilled jobs they provide and the supply chains they support. We are yet to be given any recognition as a sector by the minister for Welsh Economy, Ken Skates or indeed any consideration of our situation as businesses. I would state again that these businesses have not been recognised for funding in line with other Welsh businesses. I am also aware that through the winter months the government lockdown grants have been given to campsites. Campsites that would normally be closed at this time of year and in fact their licenses require them to be closed. Still they have received grant funding to maintain their grass fields whereas large residential centres have been given the same to maintain large buildings,

technical equipment, fleets of buses and are losing hundreds of thousands of pounds of income that would have been generated in this period. How can this be fair?

I feel sure that Wales will want to recognise the importance of this sector now as well as the contribution it can make in the future. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland have now provided targeted sector support for outdoor education and continue a dialogue with the sector showing their recognition of the importance.

I reiterate the urgent nature of this petition and the devastating consequences from further inaction.

I am keen to know the timescale of the current deferral and what action or evidence gathering will commence in the interim. I await your response.