

**First Minister of Wales**

Welsh Government

5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear First Minister of Wales,

We are writing to highlight the current plight of outdoor education providers across Wales. The severity of current government guidance and the lack of targeted support is now taking the industry to crisis point.

On the 16th March 2020, residential education centres closed their doors to children and young people on school trips from across the UK. ***Unlike many sectors of the economy, Department for Education and Welsh Government regulations have prevented us from reopening at any stage since.***

As well as an estimated £40 million in lost annual revenue, there have been approximately 500,000 pupil bed nights lost across the period. For many this was their one opportunity to engage in the positive and often life changing world of outdoor education.

Despite having put in place Covid-safe protection measures, our doors remain closed to business. They also remain closed to the myriad employment opportunities within local areas, ***creating a long-lasting impact upon the strength and vibrancy of Welsh communities:*** Cooks, managers, cleaners, outdoor practitioners, trainees and apprentices, site staff, equipment and food suppliers, electricians, plumbers and builders; the list goes on and the connections run deep.

Unfortunately, 15% of our centres have been forced to shut, with many more under immediate threat. Once closed, these valuable assets never reopen to future generations. They leave a permanent hole in local communities and national educational provision. ***The industry is facing the most serious existential threat in its history.*** It is not inconceivable that current UK governments are now overseeing the final throes of a long established and much-loved set of national institutions.

Now, more than ever, the nation needs a strong specialist sector with the skill sets to create positive, life changing developmental opportunities for young people. The effect the pandemic and its control measures are having on the mental and physical health of our school populations is well recognised at all levels of society. The outdoor education industry has the infrastructure and intellectual capacity to play a fundamental part in the reset and recovery process. Resilience, self-confidence, independence and social interaction are our stock in trade, as well as the ability to provide context and vital support for mainstream educational practice.

Whilst we recognise that government funding to local authorities created breathing space for some centres, this did not benefit all and did nothing to help independent providers. For them, there has been no targeted support for the period of closure. The situation will become more critical when central funding to councils for LA centres in England and Wales ends on 31st March. Scotland and Northern Ireland provided £3 million of funding specifically for their Outdoor Education industry, ***which raises a question regarding the importance your government places upon educational provision.***

The question now remains, will the Welsh government recognise the essential role the sector will play as a part of the post-Covid recovery solution, or will it allow the decline of quality educational provision for this and future generations? The sector desperately needs both targeted financial support and constructive dialogue with government on school overnights to enable it to survive the coming months and years.

Arete Outdoor Education Centre
Llanrug, Caernarfon
LL55 4AP

Gweinidog yr Economi, Trafnidiaeth
Llywodraeth Cymru
5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Arete Outdoor Education Centre
Llanrug, Caernarfon
LL55 4AP

Annwyl Prif Weinidog Cymru,

Ysgrifennwn atoch I ddwyn i sylw tynged darparwyr addysg awyr agored ar draws Cymru. Mae'r canllawiau a diffyg cefnogaeth sydd wedi ei anelu yn arbennig at y sector gan y llywodraeth, bellach wedi dod a ni i sefyllfa o argyfwng gwirioneddol.

Ar 16ed Mawrth 2020 bu rhaid I ganolfannau addysg preswyl gau eu drysau i blant a ieuencid ar draws y DU. **Yn wahanol i nifer helaeth o sectorau eraill yr economi mae rheolau Llywodraeth Cymru ac Adran Addysg Llundain wedi ein rhwystro rhag ailagor o gwbwl er hynny.**

Yn ogystal a'r £40 miliwn o incwm blynnyddol sydd wedi ei golli yr ydym yn amcangyfrif fod 500,000 o nosweithiau preswyl wedi eu colli yn ystod y cyfnod hwn. I lawer o blant (yn arbennig y rhai o gartrefi llai-breintiedig) dyma oedd yr unig gyfle iddynt brofi a chymryd rhan mewn gweithgareddau addysg awyr agored a'r holl fanteision corfforol a meddyliol sydd yn deillio o hynny.

Er ein ymdrechion i greu amgylchedd Covid diogel, mae ein drysau yn parhau ar gau. Mae'r canolfannau preswyl hefyd ar gau i'r ystod eang o gwmniâu a chontractwyr yn ein ardaloedd lleol **sydd yn tanseilio cryfder a bywiogrwydd ein cymunedau gwledig a diwylliant Cymreig**, megis cogydion, rheolwyr, glanhawyr, athrawon, hyfforddwyr a phrentisiaid, staff safleoedd, siopau bwyd, trydanwyr, adeiladwyr, cwmniâu trafnidiaeth a garej lleol, mae'r rhestr yn un hir ac yn rhan o wreiddiau ein cymdeithas gwledig.

Yn anffodus mae 15% o'r canolfannau eisioes wedi eu gorfodi i gau yn barhaol ac mae llawer mwy o ganolfannau o dan fygythiad. Wrth i'r canolfannau yma gau maent yn annhebygol i agor eto yn y dyfodol. O ganlyniad i hyn, mi fydd nifer o unigolion a chymunedau yn colli mynediad a chyflleoedd addysg awyr agored gwerthfawr.

Mae ein diwydiant yn wynebu y perygl mwyaf i'w allu i oroesi yn ei hanes.

Mae y sector addysg awyr agored dros y blynnyddoedd wedi chwarae rhan hanfodol ynghlwm a lles ac addysg plant. Mae penderfyniadau Llywodraeth y DU yn peryglu dyfodol y sector ac os yw y cyfyngiadau yn parhau, gall y sector gwerthfawr yma ddiflannu yn gyfan gwbl.

Dyma y cyfnod y mae angen buddsoddi yn y sector addysg awyr agored er mwyn datblygu a helpu ieuencid y DU.

Heb os, mae y pandemig wedi cael effaith negyddol ar iechyd meddwl a chorfforol pobl ifanc ar hyd a lled y wlad. Dyma ble mae y sector addysg awyr agored yn gallu chwarae rhan allweddol er mwyn datblygu iechyd meddwl, lles, hunan hyder, annibyniaeth a sgiliau rhyngbersonol plant trwy weithio ar y cyd a ysgolion a sefydliadau addysgol.

Mae nifer o ganolfannau awyr agored awdurdodau lleol wedi derbyn cymorth ond mae nifer helaeth o ganolfannau annibynnol yn brwydro am eu bywoliaeth ac wedi derbyn bron dim cymorth i oroesi. Does dim cymorth pendant sydd yn targedu y sector yma wedi bod ar gael try gydol y pandemig ers Mawrth 2020.

Mae Llywodraeth Yr Alban a Gogledd Iwerddon wedi darparu £3miliwn i'w sectorau addysg awyr agored gwerthfawr nhw, Rhaid gofyn y cwestiwn, ydi Llywodraeth Cymru yn mynd i gefnogi a blaenoriaethu y ddarpariaeth gwerthfawr yma i blant y genhedlaeth hon?

A yw Llywodraeth Cymru yn fodlon cydnabod cyfraniad sylfaenol y sector addysg awyr agored i'r broses o ddod dros dylanwad Covid ynteu a ydych am weld lleihad yn ansawdd ac amrediad cyfleoedd addysgiadol ar gyfer y genhedaeth hon a'r dyfodol? **Mae'r sector wir angen cymorth ariannol wedi ei dargedu er mwyn goroesi y misoedd a'r blynnyddoedd sydd i ddod ac hefyd y cyfle i drafod yn gadarnhaol dyfodol ein gwasanaethau.**

This letter is endorsed by all the signatories below.

Paul Donovan.
Wales Adventure Tourism
Oraganisation

Steve Rayner OBE
South Wales Outdoor Activity
Providers Group

Andy Taylor
Adventure Activities Industry
Advisory Committee

Simon Patton
Mountain Training Cymru

Dr Neal Hockley
BMC Cymru

Al Crisp
Outwardbound Trust

Gregory Cain
Anglesey Outdoors

Geoff Haden
Clyne Farm Centre

Aled Davies
Expedition Wales

Graham French
AHOEC North Wales
Bangor Prifysgol

Tim Morton
Adventure RMS, Inspection
Services

Craig Armiger
IOL Cymru

Sian Gwenllian
Shadow Minister for Education
and Welsh Language

Dr Loel Collins
Plas y Brenin, National Outdoor
Centre

Paul Kenwright
PGL

Gareth Davies
Arete Outdoor Centre

Mark Downey
CMC Adventure

Ed Abbley
Kilvrough Manor Outdoor
Education Centre

Andy Meek
AHOEC South Wales
Storey Arms Outdoor Education
Centre

Tracey Evans
Partneriaeth Awyr-Agored

Zoe Anthony
Swyddog Gweithgareddau Antur
Awyr Agored, Rhondda

Liz Saville Roberts MP
Dwyfor Meirionnydd

Arwel Phillips
Gwersyll yr Urdd Glan-llyn

Nigel Jones
Adventure Activities Ltd

Anthea Cooper
Bryntysilio Outdoor Education
Centre

Nick McCavish
Conway Centres

Guy Chadwell
Kingswood Colomendy



Graham Burns
Lledr Hall Outdoor Education
Centre



Philip Dale
Marle Hall Outdoor Education
Centre



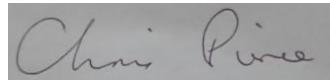
Mike Smith
Parkwood Outdoors Dolglaer



Jeff Handley
Plas Gwynant Outdoor Education
Centre



Ed Jones
Rhos y Gwaliau



Chris Pierce
Woodlands Outdoor Education
Centre



Jez Hayes
Ex Head of Centre, Kent Mountain
Centre now closed since Covid



Phillip Clegg
Learn Outdoors



Peter Croft
Min y Don Christian Adventure
Centre



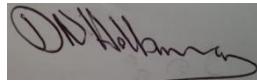
David Owen
Plas Caerdeon Campus



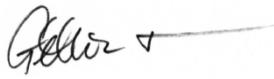
Peter Blackburn
Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education
Centre



Carolyn Cummings
Storey Arms Outdoor Education
Centre



David Holloway
Adventure Kit UK



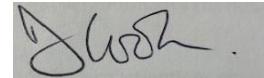
Gethin Thomas
Ex Deputy Head Oaklands OEC



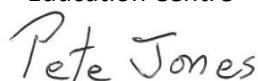
David Hassard
Maes y Lade Centre



Jeff Calligan
Mountain and River Activities Ltd



Deb Cook
Plas Dol y Moch Outdoor
Education Centre



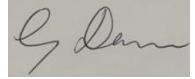
Pete Jones
Red Ridge Outdoor Centre



Abiy Brown
TYF Adventure

Steve Rose
Absolute Adventure

Dave Grimes
Blue Dot Adventure



Gareth Davies
Ex Chief Instructor Towers OEC,
now closed since Covid

**Adran yr Economi a
Thrafnidiaeth
Department for Economy and
Transport**



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

Dear Gareth

Thank you for your correspondence of 1 March to the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales regarding Covid-19 support for Outdoor Education Centres.

Unfortunately, the Minister is unable to reply in person due to the understandable volume of queries he is receiving.

Welsh Government are aware of the impact that Covid-19 is having on the outdoor education sector.

When we believe it's safe to ease further restrictions, we will do so. Our approach will be 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.

On 23 February we announced a further £30m phase of the Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism (HLT) Sector Specific Fund that will provide emergency financial support in 2020-21 targeted specifically at small, medium and larger HLT business and related supply chain businesses has to cover costs falling into February and March 2021. A grant will be provided to eligible businesses based on £1,500 per job safeguarded or fixed operating costs for February and March (whichever is the lowest) with upper limit of grant determined under Covid-19 Temporary Framework (£690k cumulative support).

Please note that the Sector Specific Grant application phase 2 window is now open and will close at 8pm on Friday 12th March or until funds are fully committed.

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/>

Should any restrictions be extended at the 12 March review, a further £150m will be made available for all businesses in the hospitality, tourism, leisure and non-essential retail receiving up to an additional payment of up to £5k regardless of the number of employees they have.

Our packages have been designed to be affordable within the available funding, and we had to take difficult decisions on the eligibility criteria.

The measures we have taken are in addition to those provided by the UK Government, making the support package in Wales the most comprehensive and generous in the UK.

We will continue to do all we can to support Welsh businesses through these incredibly difficult times and consider options beyond the current package of support.

Officials are undertaking a piece of analysis work to understand further the impact on the Outdoor Education sector.

We would encourage you to continue to check the Business Wales website for updates.

Yours sincerely

The Business Wales Team