

# TAKING AWAY TECH

Dr Jack Reed discusses the latest guidance from the UK Government on banning phones in English schools and what impact this might have for outdoor education



## Author profile

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The place and use of young people's mobile technologies and social media in outdoor education environments has seen increased interest over recent years. In February 2024, a new special issue in the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* was published on the topic (1), and we are beginning to see consideration placed on the impacts of social media, the metaverse and artificial intelligence on outdoor education globally.

Looking at education more broadly for a moment, the UK government has just published guidance for schools in England on banning mobile phones. The guidance states "that all schools should prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day – not only during lessons but break and lunchtimes as well" (2). This means that schools in England will be phone-free environments. Interestingly, the guidance also makes mention of residential trips, stating that schools "should determine how they wish to manage the use of mobile phones by pupils on residential trips or trips outside of the normal school day. Schools should ensure that pupils' educational experience on a school trip is not disrupted by the presence of mobile phones and should consider prohibiting or restricting their use" (2). Guidance essentially applies the in-school phone-banning guidance to away-from-school educational visits, including outdoor education.

In response to this guidance, I have just published a critical article with colleagues that draws on the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, and specifically on young people's rights in relation to the digital environment. The UN state that young people have the right to access information through technology and "that the exercise of that right is restricted only when it is provided by law" (3). Given the UK government's stance on banning phones in schools does not constitute legally binding statutory guidance, this raises important questions for all education providers considering banning young people's phones. In particular, does the removal of a young person's phone breach their protected human rights as stipulated by the UN?

The stance in our paper encourages caution on the part of outdoor educators, educators more broadly and policy makers, especially in relation to young people's right to access digital information and their right to culture, leisure, and play. These factors are clearly outlined in UN human rights documentation and suggest that all those involved in decision making around young people's mobile phones consider how banning phones could breach young people's protected human rights. This could be particularly relevant in any outdoor education context where removing young people's phones is considered either standard or desirable practice. Our full article on this topic is [freely available to read](#) (4) ▲

## References

1. Reed, J., van Kraalingen, I., & Hills, D. (2024). Special issue: Digital technology and networked spaces in outdoor learning. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 24(1), 1-6.
2. Department for Education. (2024). Mobile phones in schools: How schools can prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day.
3. United Nations. (2021). General Comment No. 25 (2021) on Children's Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment.
4. Reed, J., & Dunn, C. (2024). Postdigital young people's rights: A critical perspective on the UK Government's guidance to ban phones in England's schools. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 1-10.