

PERSPECTIVES

Increasing sector resilience and relevance



As we feel our way into a more COVID capable and resilient society, I think it's time to reflect and start to identify some of the harder lessons for Outdoor Learning practices and organisations as result of the past 14 months or so. It is time to consider if our evolving sector can be better placed in the future to manage such disruption and effectively support the development of wider resilience.

I suggest that too many of us were not as prepared as we might have been in early 2020. I also suggest that collectively, we were slow to gain traction with government and focus on collective solutions; hindered by our own disparate sector structures and bodies. In addition, I believe there is a real danger we hold onto old models of practice that don't reflect changes driven by COVID-19 and don't identify how our sector becomes more robust and valued as a result of the pandemic.

I also recognise that in individual and collective campaigning such as SaveOutdoorEd and SaveOurCentres we have seen a great spirit and co-ordination that has played a vital role in having existential threats heard. In the work of the school travel sector stakeholder group and other groupings across the home nations, we've seen

differences put aside and genuine dialogue with governments and rule makers achieved. There are lessons here based around the continuation of such co-ordination and unity. I do think though there are other changes required. Some reflect the impact of the pandemic and some reflect the need for the sector to keep evolving.

Providing a sustainable service to learners, clients and beneficiaries has been hard, if not impossible, for many in the last year. The recent report on *Outdoor Learning within Education* (see details below) gave a great insight into the breadth of models and reach of Outdoor Learning in and for schools operating during the pandemic, but alongside the preceding impact reports, it also revealed a number of sector-wide challenges.

The problems associated with protecting school and provider finances, the disconnect between schools and providers leaving limited options for accessing Outdoor Learning and the challenges associated with achieving consistency in guidance and support, are the type of issues we can and should resolve.

The pandemic has also led to some general societal changes that point to both an opportunity and a need for change in Outdoor Learning practices. I'd like to invite a debate about the implications of the following changes for the function and models of Outdoor Learning:

- Rapid growth in online activity; retail, social, work and education, with the associated impact of limited access to digital resources
- Increased community engagement with local services and interest in local identity and heritage
- Diversification of the use of local natural environments and access to those green and blue spaces
- Magnification of disadvantage in access to natural environments and Outdoor Learning activities
- New models for engaging with health services

This is not an exhaustive list. It also points to changes that may not be permanent and may need quick responses to be capitalised on. The issues of resilience and relevance remain. How are you responding to them? Email institute@outdoor-learning.org ■

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IMPACT, IMPLICATIONS AND NEEDS

Download the 'Outdoor Learning within Education' report and access Impact survey findings here:
www.outdoor-learning.org/Covid-19/Covid-19-Impact-Surveys