

# **THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE EDUCATION**

## **A Proposed Statement of Intent**

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### **Introduction**

There are many views as to exactly what Outdoor Adventure Education is. This is not only to be expected in such a broad subject area, it is to be welcomed. Individuality of approach reflects individuality in learning. Internationally the same variety is reflected in cultural diversity. There is, however a great deal of common ground and most practitioners would agree that the process comprises most or all of the following elements.

The educational intention is to stimulate personal and social development. Those who work in this field have learning aspirations for their students beyond physical recreation to the academic, aesthetic, spiritual, social and environmental.

The themes of Outdoor, Adventure and Education are all important to some degree in the process, which should not simply be recreational, nor should it take place without at least some experience of the outdoors. Adventure in this context implies that there is a 'journeying out' (a move onto new ground) to embrace the experience.

The process engaged in is that of learning 'experientially'. To maximise the effect, the experience should be direct rather than mediated, with the facilitator acting as a guide rather than in the usual formal capacity of a teacher.

The result of this approach being applied in the powerful context of the outdoors is that many report the experience to be effective as a means of personal and social development.

Whilst some aspects of the experience may involve the use of settings in which there are apparent or real hazards, the physical and emotional safety of the client is protected through appropriate professional standards.

The natural environment is usually 'the workplace' and professional standards must be applied to ensure it's protection from overuse. Outdoor Education programmes should also encourage participants to develop respect for the environment.

As a result of this experiential process, participants should take increased responsibility for their own learning, and consequently develop increased confidence in their own judgment and ability to direct their lives.

This approach is applied to a broad range of client groups. For example, a school may use a residential outdoor experience to encourage students to draw together a wide range of academic disciplines, whereas a therapeutic worker may focus on developing self respect through increased responsibility in a small group.

### **The Development of Outdoor Education**

In a sense Outdoor Adventure Education had its origins in debates between the philosophers of Ancient Greece over the dominance of the body or the mind in controlling the actions of the individual.

The debate has moved on over the centuries with philosophers and academics from many countries making contributions. In modern educational terms the issue is whether a modern, primarily intellectual form of education is adequate for proper development of the individual, or whether some direct form of educational experience which encourages awareness of self, others and the environment is more appropriate. In therapeutic terms the issue is whether outdoor educational and adventure experiences can address some of the personal and social difficulties we encounter in modern society.

To some extent these issues have been resolved and most practitioners agree on the merits of this form of work. The theoretical base for the process of experiential learning is strong with research and publication now being a feature of the work of Outdoor Educators in Europe, North America and Australasia.

However, as a subject area Outdoor Education is still young, with the bulk of the development taking place over the last 30 years. A great deal of work still needs to be done to develop the underpinning philosophy, techniques and professional standards in the field.

### **The Social Context**

Since classical times philosophers have been aware of the disassociation between people and nature brought about by the civilising process. Today, at a time of rapid change, the individual is increasingly becoming disembedded from society as well. The risk society has generated a feeling of a loss of influence through the political process.

Outdoor adventure has the unique ability to address many of these issues, engaging people with place and community in a lasting way.

Additionally there is increasing evidence of social dissatisfaction, particularly amongst many young people. The tension is generated by a mismatch between the demanding nature of our complex, risk society and our ability to cope with and find fulfilment within it. There appears to be little acknowledgement of the importance (especially in young people) of physical activity and the desire to face 'testing' or 'risk' situations. In some this tension is expressed in various forms of antisocial behaviour which cause great anguish for society as a whole.

Outdoor educators and therapeutic workers use the outdoors to bring their clients back to an involvement with adventure and the natural world and through this process seek to effect some attitudinal and behavioural change.

### **The Environmental Context**

For many 'the environment' seems to be detached from their own personal experience, simply something which environmentalists and politicians argue about. Environmental issues are however of increasing importance in the political agenda, and due recognition has been given through Local Agenda 21 commitments made subsequent to the Rio Summit.

However, the trend towards urbanisation and a form of living which is not connected to the land nor the natural world leaves us with an inability to experience the elements which support life on Earth.

Outdoor educational experiences can provide opportunities for direct contact with the natural world, leading to reacquaintance with these processes. Without the opportunity to draw upon such experiences our opinions and values are formed in isolation and our attitudes and actions may be ill informed. In this area Outdoor Education has strong links with Environmental Education and these should be developed.

## **The Vision**

Outdoor Adventure Education is a common response to disassociation within society. European collaboration will enrich our practice in addressing this issue to the benefit of all.

## **The Mission**

The Institute will promote the exchange of knowledge, experience and techniques, appropriate to the development of Outdoor Adventure Education.

Collaboration on research and development projects will be a key feature, providing opportunities for Outdoor Educators to learn through their own experiences.

Through the development of new frameworks, initiatives and approaches the Institute will enhance provision across the Community.

## **Aims**

Undertake a historical reflection across the Community.

Articulate the current political and cultural contexts for our work.

Develop theoretical foundations specifically for the field.

Develop professional standards of practice that recognise commonality and diversity.

Undertake research and implement projects in order to influence the quality of practice.

## **Outcomes**

Development of networks for academics and practitioners.

Exchange of staff and students within Europe.

Shared research and development focus on identified priorities.

Provision of conference and publication mediums.

Recognition of diversity and community.

Recognition of professional standards, parity of qualification frameworks and lifelong learning opportunities.

Monitoring of impact on quality of provision of Outdoor Adventure Education.

## **Organisational Structures**

Formation of a membership organisation to enable:

Information exchange through electronic media, publications and congresses;

Co-ordination and collaboration on research projects;

Cultural exchange of staff and students;

Networking of practitioners;

Transnational professional recognition and codes of practice;

Development of a core curriculum for degree programmes;

Transnational professional development programmes.

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**University of Edinburgh**  
**Moray House School of Education**  
**Outdoor Education Department**

We offer the following programmes:

Postgraduate Certificate in Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Personal and Social Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Environmental Education

Postgraduate Diploma in Outdoor Education

MSc in Outdoor Education

PhD by research

If you are interested in information on the courses of study we offer please take a look at our web page at

<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/>

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Further publications by the Outdoor Education faculty can be found in the Research section of the web page as well as in each faculty's biographical page under the heading publications.