

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROVISION AT MORAY HOUSE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Peter Higgins, Moray House Institute of Education, Edinburgh

The philosophy of encouraging students to develop physical outdoor activities and personal/social skills within a framework of safety and environmental awareness has been a feature of life at Moray House for almost a quarter of a century. This commitment is manifest in both the range and quality of opportunities available for students attending the Institute. These opportunities are reviewed in this article. This long tradition is being built upon through the introduction this year of a masters degree in outdoor education which is the first of its type in Britain and, as far as we know, Europe. This will be available on a full or part-time basis to professional outdoor educators. Besides being a long awaited development, the specialist masters degree should provide both a professional and academic growth point for outdoor education in the United Kingdom.

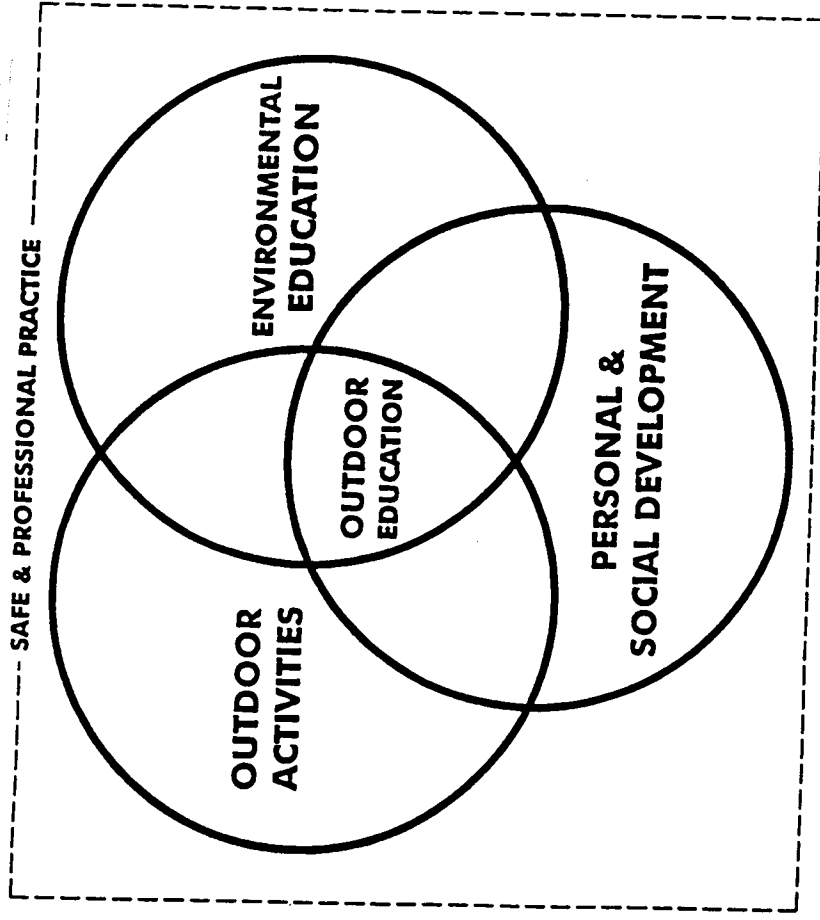
### Introduction

Outdoor education has often been considered an approach to education which can permeate virtually any curricular subject area. In addition, it is used to satisfy the aims of those wishing to encourage outdoor recreation, personal and social development: a role as broad as any subject area within the field of education. This has often left outdoor educators bewildered, being everywhere but nowhere! However, the field has now perhaps 'come of age' and has its own distinct body of knowledge which is reflected in the publication of dedicated journals such as the *Journal of Adventure Education and Leadership* and the *Journal of Experiential Education*.

Outdoor education is now seen within the profession as drawing upon the 3 main areas of outdoor activities, environmental education and social and personal development. A good outdoor educator may well be focusing attention on one or other of these at any given time but will still be sensitive to opportunities to guide experience within the complementary areas. However, all experience must take place within a framework of safety and appropriate decision making and the discrete maintenance of a safe environment within which outdoor experiences take place are a hallmark of professionalism. This view of outdoor education is shown diagrammatically in figure 1.

In the history of outdoor education as a subject area there has never been a time when it has been surrounded by more media attention than at present. Almost every week newspapers carry leader articles demanding qualification checks, centre registration and

Figure 1 The range and scope of outdoor education.



inspection schemes. In June 1995 the Activity Centres (Young Persons Safety) Act received royal assent. The Health and Safety Executive is now charged with the responsibility for administering regulatory procedures and we can expect guidelines to be published in 1996.

The curricular justification for outdoor education and residential experiences has never been stronger eg. Standard Grade and 5-14 National Guidelines in Scotland and the National Curriculum in England and Wales (National Association of Head Teachers, 1990). Those responsible for sending young people on such courses will soon expect guarantees of safety and quality of experience. The postgraduate certificate/diploma/masters courses offered by Moray House will provide course members with the

professional development opportunities and technical competence demanded by our applicants, their potential employers and future clients.

Courses are designed to provide an opportunity for professionals to gain the knowledge and skills to enable them to plan and implement safe and relevant outdoor learning experiences, including those based in residential settings. Throughout the courses there is emphasis on the underpinning philosophy of experiential outdoor education.

#### A brief history

Since 1972, Moray House Institute of Education (formerly Moray House College of Education) has provided a diploma in outdoor education each academic year. Normally 12 to 14 students have been accepted for the course which was designed to meet the needs of qualified and practising teachers who wished to enter, or further develop, careers in outdoor education. In addition, individuals from other professions with relevant backgrounds, such as community education and social work, have been admitted. As with practising teachers, it was anticipated they would wish to further develop their careers through outdoor education.

In 1987 when Moray House College of Education and Dunfermline College of Physical Education merged, both had long traditions of involvement in outdoor education: formal courses both pre-service and in-service having been features of life since 1970. The original concern was largely to ensure the safe conduct of parties on school excursions but subsequently the broader responsibilities of outdoor education teachers became recognised. The emphasis in training has, for some time now, been on encouraging teachers and instructors to extend their aspirations for their students beyond the physical to the academic, aesthetic, spiritual, environmental and social. This is a very broad definition, but one supported by all professional outdoor education organisations. Similarly, it has been the clear belief of the Institute since the 1987 merger that, by using the wide and varied resources of the countryside, educational objectives in most areas of child and adult development could be approached with success.

In 1990 this well established course was modularised, validated internally and by Heriot-Watt University, and subsequently approved by the Scottish Education Department. The course has been running very successfully since then with a similar number (12 to 14) of full-time and around 4 part-time course members.

Throughout the 22 year history of our involvement in outdoor education there has been an emphasis on practical experience in the field. This reflects an experiential approach to education which has always been the fundamental underpinning philosophy of all those involved in this type of work within the Institute. During this period around 250

students have graduated from the diploma course and thousands of others have, through the years, received some experience of outdoor education as part of another course at Moray House or Dunfermline College. This represents a very high proportion of those trained in this field, and through that period many have made their own impact with students throughout Britain and other parts of the world. There have, of course, been periodic staff changes but the recent retirement of John Cheesmond and Neville Crowther marked the end of an era as both had been in post and committed to outdoor education for around 20 years.

#### Philosophy

The recent review of the post-graduate diploma in outdoor education provided a formal opportunity to reflect on our philosophy and attitude towards our courses. The review process and masters programme development required both internal and external scrutiny - resulting in many fruitful discussions with field professionals, academics, and diploma graduates.

We were pleased to find broad general support for our view that outdoor education offers, perhaps uniquely, broad opportunities for educational development. Different aspects of the programme may be oriented to encourage the physical, environmental, aesthetic, spiritual, social and personal development of the student. Amongst others, Naess (1989), Mortlock (1984) and Hopkins & Putnam (1993) have supported and promoted this view. More recently the importance of adventure in personal development has been reiterated by others (Hunt, 1989; Miles & Priest, 1990).

As the majority of our students are training for posts as teachers or outdoor education instructors, the message is clear that the development of physical outdoor skills lacks depth unless it is focused on personal and social skills of an ethic of 'sustainable' use of the countryside. Course staff are united in their belief in experiential education and whenever possible this philosophy is applied to course delivery. Any other approach to teaching would be less effective and would, we feel, contradict the essence of outdoor education which is experiential in nature.

#### Course provision

#### **Post-Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education**

The financial rigours of the modern educational world and course modularisation have had their effects. However, staff and institutional commitment remain high and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education, now in its twenty third year, remains essentially practical and experiential in nature. Throughout its long history, it has held

a special place in outdoor education provision in Britain. Its reputation has been built on the basis of course content and staff commitment - a recipe which still finds favour with those wishing to train as outdoor educators. The practical nature of the course requires that numbers are strictly limited - a policy which staff feel reflects current fairly limited employment prospects. However, the great majority of graduates do secure positions within the field and a substantial proportion of outdoor centre principals and others holding positions of responsibility have received part of their professional training through this course. The course therefore remains the one in greatest demand from prospective applicants and the one staff attach most importance to.

#### Masters Degree in Outdoor Education

For some years now there has been a feeling amongst staff and field professionals that there was a need for a course which extended professional and academic consideration of outdoor education to masters level. A recent review of our previously modularised post-graduate diploma afforded both the formal opportunity to reflect upon the role of such a course and a framework upon which to base a programme. Our masters degree has now been validated and has, without any real attempt at promotion, attracted considerable interest from appropriately qualified outdoor educators and enrolment well above our intended level. Whilst we expect some of our diploma graduates to progress at a later stage to masters level, a direct entry route is possible for those with suitable professional experience together with academic qualifications and national governing body awards. It is our hope and expectation that it will provide an important growth point for research and publication. Certainly those currently enrolled on the programme have the professional background and abilities to make a real contribution.

#### Certificate in Outdoor Education

This course, which has been available for some years, provides the opportunity for those wishing to gain an introduction to the theory and practice of outdoor education. Its 4 modules represent the core of the diploma and masters degrees. Progression from certificate to diploma or masters level is therefore possible as a course member's interest and experience develop (Figure 2).

#### Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Secondary)

Those following the one year PGCE course at the Institute are able to elect to take outdoor education as a supplementary subject. The course is followed on approximately one day a week throughout the academic year. The course has run for many years and has proved to be very popular with a wide range of trainee teachers. Practical experience is underpinned by the theory of experiential education, group leadership and

Figure 2 Outdoor education opportunities at Moray House.

Course and Qualification	Requirements/Comments	Full/Part Time
Postgraduate Certificate in Outdoor Education	4 'core' modules	FT/PT
Postgraduate Diploma in Outdoor Education	4 'core' plus 6 elective modules and a 'competency programme' <sup>1</sup>	FT/PT
Masters (MSc) in Outdoor Education	As Diploma <sup>2</sup> plus dissertation	FT/PT
PGCE (Secondary)	Supplementary subject (optional)	FT
BEd (Physical Education)	Year 1 - Skiing (Residential) Year 2 - Introduction to Outdoor Activities (Summer) Year 4 - Up to 4 elective modules	FT
BA (Recreation Management)	Year 1 - residential Years 3 & 4 - elective modules	FT FT

1 The 'competency programme' is a requirement at this level and offers course members the opportunity to develop personal and teaching skills in a full range of outdoor activities. In some cases this leads to instructional awards of the national governing bodies which are assessed externally.

2 Exemption from the competency programme is possible for those with substantial practical and professional experience.

safety considerations.

### **BEd (Physical Education)**

Opportunities to take outdoor education modules have been available for many years. With the recent modularisation of the physical education degree, the first year students now take a skiing module in the winter term and second year students have a short introduction to other outdoor activities in the summer term. Fourth year students can choose to specialise in outdoor education and can select up to 4 modules from a wide range of activities including mountaineering, rock climbing, kayaking and windsurfing. The modules all focus on practical experience together with consideration of teaching, leadership and safety. The value of outdoor education and residential experiences in personal and social development is also considered. All modules find favour amongst students and are inevitably oversubscribed.

### **BA (Recreation Management)**

The growth in the leisure industry has led to some re-orientation in the recent modularisation of this course. Consequently, the proportion of time spent on outdoor education has been reduced somewhat. However, opportunities are still available for those who wish to gain an introduction to the skills required to travel safely in the countryside in summer or winter.

### **Staffing**

Staffing of the range of courses outlined in the previous section falls primarily to 5 members of staff. Of these, 2 were originally physical education specialists, who moved to Moray House in 1987 to join the newly established Scottish Centre for Physical Education. Both are now well qualified in a range of outdoor activities. The other 3 staff share several aspects of their background - with some experience of national or local government outdoor education centres together with training and qualification in the area of environmental science. These 5 are supported by staff from the departments of environmental and social studies who provide input for certain modules. Staff share certain personal philosophies: a love of the outdoors and a belief in its value for personal development through experiences together with a strong environmental ethic. The large amount of time spent away from home on residentials and the intensive nature of experiential education requires great commitment from all staff (and their families and friends!) and support from other colleagues at Moray House.

Safety has always been an important consideration for outdoor educators but the recent fatal canoeing accident in Lyme Bay has increased public media interest. All staff

involved in practical outdoor activities at the Institute are highly experienced and qualified in the relevant national governing body awards. Members of staff hold positions on national outdoor education advisory panels and technical committees, particularly in mountaineering, rock-climbing, orienteering, skiing and canoeing.

### **The Future**

Moray House continues to demonstrate its support for outdoor education through the range and substance of the courses available. With the increasingly high profile of the outdoors for recreational activities and an awareness of the importance of good and safe practice, growth in interest in our courses is almost inevitable. The valuable role of first hand experience of the outdoors in developing environmental awareness and responsible attitudes is now well accepted. It is our view that our profession will come of age through the integration of outdoor skills with environmental awareness and personal and social development. However, an experiential approach to education does not come cheap. In every professional outdoor education forum, there is pressure to reduce costs through less practical time and higher student/staff ratios. At Moray House, we cannot expect to be protected from such pressures. Like our colleagues in so many fields, we will have to maintain our commitment despite the pressures and hope to weather the storm. Students enrolled on courses at Moray House range from those who wish simply to 'taste' one or more activities through to those whom we can expect, through masters degree work and beyond, to make a substantial contribution to this professionalisation and academic underpinning of our field.

### **References**

- Hopkins, D. and Puttnam, R. (1993) *Personal Growth Through Adventure*. London: David Fulton.
- Hunt, J. (ed) (1989) *In Search of Adventure*. Guildford: Falbot-Adair Press.
- Miles, J. and Priest, S. (eds) (1990) *Adventure Education*. PA, State College: Venture.
- Mortlock, C. (1984) *The Adventure Alternative*. Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press.
- Naess, A. (1989) *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Association of Head Teachers (1990) *Outdoor Education and the National Curriculum*. Haywards Heath: National Association of Head Teachers.

**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/>

You can also email us at:

Prof. Pete Higgins, [pete.higgins@ed.ac.uk](mailto:pete.higgins@ed.ac.uk)

Dr. Peter Allison, [peter.allison@ed.ac.uk](mailto:peter.allison@ed.ac.uk)

Dr. Robbie Nicol, [Robbie.nicol@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Robbie.nicol@ed.ac.uk)

Dr. Simon Beames, [simon.beames@ed.ac.uk](mailto:simon.beames@ed.ac.uk)

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.