



**PhD Studentship  
Moray House School of Education  
University of Edinburgh**



**The value of outdoor education for people with disabilities: an in-depth case study based on the work of the Calvert Trust**

Applications are invited for a 3-year full-time PhD Studentship to commence in January 2008 (or earlier), sponsored by the Zurich Community Trust UK in association with the Calvert Trust.

The Calvert Trust is one of the country's leading providers of outdoor activities for people with disabilities, with a reputation for excellence and specialist expertise in providing accessible land and water based activities for people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. The student will be jointly supervised by Professor Peter Higgins (Professor of Outdoor and Environmental Education) and Professor Jennifer Wishart (Professor of Developmental Disabilities in Childhood). The project has an interdisciplinary focus and offers training in, and use of, a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies within a supportive and vibrant research environment.

This opportunity would suit a committed and enthusiastic individual with a 1<sup>st</sup> class or 2.1 degree in a related field (e.g. special education, outdoor education, health/rehabilitation, medical/sports sciences, childhood studies, psychology, sociology). Relevant research training and experience is desirable and familiarity with interdisciplinary working would be an advantage.

The studentship covers all academic fees (for UK/EU nationals) and a stipend above ESRC rates commensurate with research experience (initially between £12,600 and £16,000). Whilst non-UK/EU nationals may apply, the University overseas tuition fee would have to be paid by the successful applicant.

Further information can be found at  
<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/es/index.html> (Educational Studies)  
<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored> (Outdoor Education)  
<http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk/> (Calvert Trust)

Informal enquiries may be made to Lesley Scullion (lesley.scullion@ed.ac.uk or 0131 651 6678).

A completed application form (available at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/applications/index.html>), including an initial draft research proposal (one side A4), should be returned to College of Humanities and Social Science Postgraduate Office, 1st Floor, David Hume Tower, Edinburgh EH8 9JX by Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September.  
Proposed interview date: early October

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### **The value of outdoor education for people with disabilities: an in-depth case study based on the work of the Calvert Trust**

#### **Supplementary Information**

##### **Summary of proposed research**

The research will examine if the standard residential and adventurous activity programme offered by the Calvert Trust leads to self-reported 'enrichment' in the lives of participants and if any such benefits are 'transferred to everyday living'. Whether any such perceived benefits are corroborated by peers, carers or family will also be explored. The PhD student will contribute significantly to the final project design but in order to maximise reliability and validity of findings, it is anticipated that converging methodologies will be required in gathering views from a range of sources on the efficacy and value of the Trust's activities.

##### **Significance of the study**

In general, in the UK and internationally, the effectiveness of residential and outdoor adventurous activities programmes has received very little academic research attention. Outcomes are typically not monitored by providers, routinely or in any depth. The limited information which is gathered and reported may well be specific to group type, with findings differing from one country to another. It is consequently difficult to know if programmes of outdoor education really 'make a difference' for the majority of the participants and even for those programmes that demonstrably do so, assessing the relative effectiveness of specific programme components can be problematic.

This research is important to the Calvert Trust, its sponsors, as the findings will allow decisions to be made about programme design. The project will provide the Trust with an indication of the success of their programmes for their particular client groups, and also a means of interpreting the underlying rationales of these for clients and funders alike.

The Calvert Trust has a national profile for its work (see <http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk/> for further information). There are also other UK and international providers of outdoor education for those with disabilities and it is therefore anticipated that this study will both draw on and inform practice in the broader community. One outcome of the project may be the development of a range of measures to gauge effectiveness which can then be incorporated into routine use at the Calvert Trust and within other related organisations.

##### **Additional background information**

The University of Edinburgh is a research-led institution. In practical terms, this means that in Edinburgh there is not only a breadth of coverage in terms of educational research but also in-depth expertise in specialist areas. Moray House is one of a only relatively small number of UK education schools holding ESRC recognition for its PhD training programmes. (See <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk> for further information).

*Specific expertise:* The proposed study will draw on two areas of expertise in which the School of Education has a well-established, international reputation: outdoor education (OE) and special educational needs (SEN). The Outdoor Education Section is one of the leading providers in the world and has the longest tradition of OE provision in Higher Education in the UK. For over 35 years, it has provided courses which balance theory and practice. The central focus of its work is on encouraging positive relationships between individuals and the environment through learning outdoors, and it aims to foster high-level, critical thinking in all of its OE students. The research of the OE team is inherently interdisciplinary. It addresses relationships between people and place; it explores themes such as cultural heritage, health and well-being, environmental and sustainability issues; and it asks how these relationships and themes influence affective and intellectual

development, policy and culture. Recent funders have included the Economic and Social Research Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Venture Trust, and the Department for Education and Skills (see <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored> for further information).

The SEN grouping within Moray House has equally strong academic credentials. It is also inherently interdisciplinary in its research activities, bringing together psychologists, sociologists, educationalists, policy experts and health professionals. Its work is predicated on recognition that learning and development entail many interrelated processes of change, including cognitive, emotional, physical and social change, all of which can influence each other in complex ways. There is a particular emphasis on extending knowledge of these processes in ways that will be useful to users - teachers, parents, education managers, policy makers and, of course, children and young people with disabilities themselves. The team's work is highly regarded internationally, with funding coming from ESRC, MRC, a range of government bodies and both major and smaller charities (see <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/es/index.html> for further information).

Within OE and SEN there have been a number of contract research projects and recent successful PhD studies on topics closely related to the proposed study. There is also a cohort of current PhD students working on related topics and using comparable methodologies. The Calvert Trust student would therefore be located in a lively and enthusiastic research community which comprises more students and researchers working in this specialist field than anywhere else in the UK. This research culture will be extremely valuable in providing information, advice and support to the successful candidate at all stages in his/her PhD studies.