

Minister Norma Foley,  
Minister's Office,  
Department of Education & Skills,  
Marlborough Street,  
Dublin 1, D01 RC96

**Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

**URGENT REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE**

Dear Minister Foley,

Firstly, congratulations on your new role and we wish you the very best with the challenge ahead.

While fully supportive of the recent decision to close all Irish schools as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are writing to make you aware of the significant knock-on effect the decision has had on all outdoor educational centres across Ireland. The outdoor education industry is on the brink of collapse and in urgent need of help. We believe that immediate action from your office is required to rescue the sector.

**Background**

Outdoor Educational Centres (OEC) have been working on outdoor educational programmes with the educational authority for over five decades delivering experiential learning programmes. OECs have just come out of a five-month loss-making winter period. This is the usual seasonal cycle for this industry and additionally most businesses will have invested in upgrading and repairing their facilities during the winter months. It is standard practise for an OEC to request a deposit from schools to retain their booking - such deposits are necessary cash flow which the industry relies on to sustain itself.

**Action needed from you:**

1. **Educational deposit voucher**

We are asking you to send a direction to all Irish schools instructing them to retain their deposits with OECs, and to reuse them on their next booking.

- All school deposits are guaranteed by the providers
- Bookings can be moved to later dates
- All deposits taken in 2020 will be valid in 2021 and 2022
- Deposits taken for overnight trips can be converted to day trip excursions

- Schools to refund students from their existing working capital where applicable
  - Schools to be reimbursed by 2021 school excursion deposits
  - State guarantee for deposits in the case of any provider closing-down due to economic pressures (similar to that already enacted for travel agents and tour operators)
2. **A 5% VAT rate** for IAAT outdoor educational providers for 2021 and 2022
  3. **Holiday on Mortgages and Company loans** until March 2021 in line with Germany
  4. **€50,000 cash flow grant** in line with Germany \*Immediate action needed
  5. **Tourism recovery** grants instead of three-year loans
  6. **Provide our Centre members access to state-run OEC insurance cover for twenty-four months.** We would also ask you to review the policy of insuring only the state run OEC's as insurance issues are crippling the sector.
  7. **We recommend the extension of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme** until March 2021 in order to help support businesses in the sector to recover from losses and survive until the next income season.

Private OEC providers are a vital service to the education authority and the students of Ireland. The members of IAAT service a large majority of the students in Ireland. There is a real concern that if action is not taken, we will no longer be in a position to provide this service to the detriment of schools and students. We appreciate your urgent action on the concerns highlighted above.

Yours sincerely,

[The Board](#) of Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism