

Statement for Schools on Coronavirus Wednesday 13th May 2020

This statement is to ensure all schools due to visit the centre are up to date on the present situation at Plas Pencelli.

Plas Pencelli is open from Monday 6th July 2020.

Our thoughts are with those particularly hard hit by the current crisis. The centre was closed at the end of March until mid May as it was clear that we wouldn't be able to operate during that time. Since then we have moved the closure period back a step at a time, as government guidance has been released and giving reasonable notice. We want to reopen Plas Pencelli, for the benefit of all, as soon as guidance allows.

Why was Plas Pencelli closed between June 15th and July 5th?

The UK government's Plan to Rebuild published recently stated that the 3rd stage would be no earlier than July 4th, which is the time that providers of meals or accommodation can open. It means that Plas Pencelli, which involves travel, catering and overnight accommodation, wouldn't be able to open until after July 4th.

Furthermore, Welsh guidance and legislation at present has maintained a firmer stance than England, so that outdoor activities for groups aren't allowed in Wales right now. This is supported by the various National Governing Bodies which provide guidance on many activities that we use at Plas Pencelli, such as canoeing, climbing and caving. Schools in Wales won't be opening on June 1st unlike in England. Swindon Borough Council haven't allowed staff to return to the work environment at present. For all these reasons, at this time and to give reasonable notice, we were obliged to cancel courses in this period.

We were due to visit Plas Pencelli between now and 5th July 2020. What should we do?

If you haven't done so already, it's best to contact the office (note new contact details below) as soon as you are able. We'll talk through further options. For some, you may consider transferring your booking until later in the year from September 2020 onwards. This is unlikely to be possible for some students. Year 6 students, who are due to move schools, for example. We do have some vacancies and remember, for bookings between December and February, there is a £20 reduction per student. We have effective central heating and lots of warm personal protective clothing to loan, so visiting in the winter isn't as arduous as some may imagine. There are just the same benefits. Some schools have decided to bring two school years for their visit next year instead (2021). If this isn't possible then we will request that if you have a booking next year at the same time that you transfer your deposit to this course as it will now be due. If you aren't able to do this due to internal financial arrangements then we will refund all monies paid on this occasion.

We would like to cancel our upcoming booking due to coronavirus concerns. What happens next?

We respectfully remind schools that booking conditions do apply. They are set out on the back of the booking form. For any booking a deposit is non refundable within 12 months of the course start date. For those cancelling within 3 months of the course date the full course fee is chargeable based on minimum numbers of students. These are typical booking conditions for providers allowing commitments to be made with staff and suppliers to guarantee that courses go ahead safely and to a good standard.

We understand that school finances are always a concern as Plas Pencelli has similar concerns. We would not want schools to face financial difficulty and that is why you are urged to contact the centre to discuss alternative arrangements. These are set out above. We do have to point out though that deposits are non refundable within 12 months of the course start date. Where we can't link this to a future booking it will likely be forfeited. I recognise the financial pressures all schools are under and so urge all that contact be made so that we can ensure that penalties can be avoided. Thanks for your understanding.

We have a booking for Plas Pencelli in the July 6th to end of August period. Is that cancelled?

No it isn't. **The centre is due to be open from July 6th onwards.** We want to remain available for schools who have bookings in that period. We all rely on government decision making for which there is limited notice. This then restricts the notice we are able to offer and this may be a shorter notice period than has been the case in the past..

We have a booking for Plas Pencelli from September onwards. Will this still go ahead?

We certainly expect it to. As with all we can only react to the government advice we receive. There is no indication at present that we wouldn't be operational from September onwards.

When Plas Pencelli opens will it be back to normal?

No, there will be many changes and adaptations. Social distancing will still be an important control measure along with other steps. As will be the case in schools, it's likely that we will ensure that there are less people in a room at one time, one way entry and exit systems and enhanced hygiene arrangements. Furthermore, we will be adapting other parts of our operations. It's likely that outdoor activities, whilst retaining their value, will be adapted. There will be a changed programme, though it will be in a similar format with students engaged throughout the day in the outdoors and with an evening programme. Minibus transport will be adapted and there are likely to be less people transported at one time in one vehicle.

Groups will probably spread out across larger accommodation areas than usual with less people in each room to achieve distancing. We will look at each week separately, but we may have to restrict the 130 bed centre, arranged in 3 separate areas, to just one school at a time. There may be other changes to arrangements also. We will consult the latest advice as we approach any week and ensure that we are making suitable arrangements.

Prior to each week these arrangements will be mapped out in more detail and this information will be supplied to schools. Schools will have the opportunity to influence and clarify these plans. Parents will be able to decide if they are content with these arrangements and allowing their child to attend. As with all areas of risk we will be risk assessing the effects of coronavirus in line with standards set by the Health and Safety Executive. These risk assessments will be available on the centre website at that time.

Will it be safe?

Young people will be as safe at Plas Pencelli as they would be in their home environment. As outlined, precautions and systems will be established to ensure a safe environment. It has been established that coronavirus is less likely to survive outdoors, so the risk of spread is reduced when engaged in outdoor activities, provided guidelines are followed. Students will have a degree of responsibility to follow guidance and directions. They will be supervised and monitored and where standards slip this will be addressed. Any student persistently unable to follow social distancing guidelines may have to leave the course, unfortunately. Plas Pencelli staff will work with visiting staff, who retain a pastoral role and some supervisory responsibilities.

Is the future of Plas Pencelli secure?

Sadly, although no schools or parents/guardians have faced any financial penalty, the centre has suffered significant financial losses, as many costs apply even when the centre is vacant. We have given good notice of closure and waived booking conditions, unlike much of the commercial sector. However, this does put the centre's existence at risk. If any school decides to cancel a course that is due to run because of the outbreak of coronavirus, the costs of the trip are likely to be covered by your school's insurance. We would welcome schools who are considering canceling for this reason, that they look into this possibility, so that some of the costs could be recovered by Plas Pencelli without penalty to the school.. We are happy to talk to you about this. The support of schools in accessing insurance funding, rescheduling bookings, "doubling up" next year and transferring deposits will all help. Thank you for your continued support and do hope we are able to secure the future.

Contact Details until Further Notice:

Office hours: Monday to Friday 9am-3.30pm

Email: Office@plaspencelli.co.uk

Post: Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre, Pencelli, Brecon, Powys LD3 7LX

Telephone: Office number 01874665241 (maybe a message). Alternative mobile number: 07507 963127

The centre is closed but occupied for administration & security purposes. Staff and centre resources have been made available to assist with the well-being of Swindon residents and the local community at this time.

Thank you