

Statement Update for Schools booked in the Autumn Term 2020 Thursday 9th July 2020

This statement is aimed at those schools booked into Plas Pencelli in the Autumn term and is in relation to recent government (UK) advice to schools.

Recent Government Statement to Schools.

*"We continue to advise against domestic (UK) overnight and overseas educational visits **at this stage.**"*
and

"In the autumn term, schools can resume non overnight domestic educational visits."

We have Fallen through the Cracks.

As an outdoor education centre for young people and as part of the non-profit making outdoor sector, we are very disappointed that this area of activity has been singled out for restriction. The centre environment is heavily controlled in health and safety terms, not unlike a school. At a time when it is OK to visit a pub, travel on an airplane, attend school, visit a restaurant and stay in a hotel it isn't clear why a visit to Plas Pencelli is considered to represent additional risk.

A Safe Environment at Plas Pencelli.

On return we intend to have controls in place, as within the school environment. All transport, activities, catering and accommodation are allowable in the way they will be set out. We will of course risk assess each area. We will only have one school on site at this time. The 130 bed centre with 2 dining areas and numerous showering facilities with 17 acre grounds provides a great deal of area for groups to socially distance within.

What do the Government Statements Mean?

We recognise that we can't operate outside of government guidance, just as schools won't be able to visit contrary to government advice. There is some ambiguity. It's not clear how long this guidance will stay in place. "At this stage" suggests the advice will change in the not too distant future. During the 4 months since the lockdown many areas of guidance have evolved and changed. The advice appears to be directed at the Autumn Term which stretches 5 months into the future. That's a very long time for guidance to continue in relation to the Coronavirus epidemic. If progress continues in the same way, I think that the guidance would likely change in the next period of time and certainly well before the end of the autumn term.

What are we doing about it?

The whole outdoor sector is lobbying hard for ministers to look at this area. We along with many other outdoor centres are writing to MPs and ministers. There has already been a reaction and questions are being raised within parliament. The sector has launched a petition aimed at raising a debate in parliament. This petition is being circulated via social media and will shortly appear on the Plas Pencelli facebook page. Many messages of support have been received from politicians. We are hopeful that this lobbying will lead to a proper examination of this area and may allow centres such as Plas Pencelli to be able to offer courses to schools during the autumn term. I shall keep all up to date with the reaction. Look out for further statements on our website (www.plaspencelli.co.uk).

Are there any risks?

As outlined above, we are confident that we can provide a safe environment for students and staff visiting Plas Pencelli for a residential course of outdoor education. The big risk is to the survival of outdoor education centres, including Plas Pencelli. The centre is generating a significant deficit whilst it stands serviced but unoccupied. This brings increasing threat to the continued existence of the centre as each month passes by with no income. Resuming activities is the only way to bring confidence in the future.

We have a booking for Plas Pencelli in the autumn term. What should we do?

We have made it clear in previous statements that we wouldn't penalise schools for canceling due to a coronavirus related reason. This still stands. So if you have doubts about your forthcoming trip to Plas

Pencelli, I would urge you not to cancel at this stage unless you feel that you absolutely need surety right now. There is a reasonable chance that government guidance will change in the short term. Of course if your trip is in September, and mindful that the summer break is fast approaching, you may feel that cancelling now is the best course of action. A small team will be active at Plas Pencelli throughout the summer break and will provide updates over the next month or so if you are able to access these. If you have an October booking or later in the term, you may be willing to wait until the start of the summer break or even until the start of the new term before making a decision. As stated above, it's likely that the government's position will change. Plas Pencelli will need 3 to 4 weeks notice to be up and running, so for any school trip that had to be cancelled there would always be a month's notice at least. We have maintained this position throughout this period of time.

Is it worth the stress of waiting for now?

Plas Pencelli is in prime condition. The hills are green, the rivers and canals are clear and the grounds are in a great state. A week at Plas Pencelli for a student right now would probably be the ideal experience mentally, socially and intellectually to 'kick start' their school year. The staff are motivated to provide a memorable and life changing experience for each individual and there is probably no better time to visit Plas Pencelli. Every school's circumstances are different but if you are able to maintain the option on your visit in the autumn term at this stage I don't think you will regret it.

Contact

I'm happy to chat directly to help clarify if you have any questions. Please contact the office for direct contact details.

Thank you

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.