

THE PIVOT

Positives can still come from the changes we are experiencing in these challenging times



I have worked full time in the Outdoor sector for over 25 years. I have never wanted to do anything else and I think everyone who knows me would say I am very passionate about the Outdoor sector. My long-term aim was always to be a centre manager or a similar type of role. Like many people in our sector seem to be, I am gifted with dyslexia and I do believe this has been an asset over the years, but it has meant I have had to work hard and be driven. I have worked in commercial, charitable and educational settings in the past; I spent 10 years running a large Outdoor Education department in a college delivering further and higher education courses.

In February 2019 I was the Southern Regional Chair of AHOEC and the Deputy Head of a large Outdoor adventure activity centre five minutes from my home, preparing to train over 40 seasonal staff for the busy season ahead. The centre manager was planning to retire in a couple of years. I felt part of our sector; I felt I was making a contribution and things were heading in the right direction.

As the COVID-19 outbreak developed, like so many in centres at the time, we scrambled to keep abreast of the constantly changing situation. The AHOEC Executive was meeting virtually weekly and this was certainly a very busy time. It was clear that the future was going to be very challenging, but it was also inspiring to see how the sector was pulling together and working with the information available. I engaged with many ventures and ideas to support my colleagues and received praise for my intuition and efforts with this.

Telling 40 seasonal staff there would be no work for them, cancelling training and training providers, really brought home the situation for me. I knew times would be difficult, but at that point I believed I would keep my job and would be part of the rebuild after it was all over. I spent huge amounts of time supporting my colleagues, going through their furlough agreements and then their redundancies, and trying to help them to look for other work opportunities.

I was extremely disappointed when I found myself furloughed; a few weeks before I hadn't even heard of the term! I am not naive and knew that difficult decisions had to be made, but if I am honest I was left not feeling valued. I was still involved with AHOEC and was seeing how well some organisations were managing the situation. I knew that my organisation wasn't doing as well.

I have three children, a mortgage and everything that goes with that. I knew I could not afford to sit around on furlough and wait for everything to sort its self out. In our sector we teach resilience, adaptably, the ability to improvise and overcome, and transferable skills; we understand the need to be dynamic and embrace change. What I hadn't realised was that I hadn't really truly been challenged in a long time. I had remained on the same trajectory with the same target for most of my life. My ambition and my target had been my constant, and now this was gone. I was a long way out of my comfort zone and felt quite lost and quite alone.



So whilst my wife, who had just begun her first year in a senior leadership role continued to work daily in her school, helping to lead her teachers and parents through the crisis, I became a home-schooling dad and a whirlwind of house and gardening renovation and work. I volunteered at two local Outdoor centres helping with site work and cleaning out a pond, and I connected with neighbours and our community. As a result, during June I found some work assisting a clerk of works on building sites. He was brilliant and he understood the transferability of skills from my sector. I was able to do this work whilst still on furlough, it felt great, it was completely different and I knew if (when) I was made redundant, I had another job in place that I would be able to continue with until the Outdoor sector re-opened and I could return to a role there. I still held out hope that my precious Outdoor sector would reopen in early 2021.

I had performed a pivot, I had managed to use the fantastic skills and knowledge that working in the Outdoor sector gives you to embrace a completely different opportunity. I know that route is still open to me if I wish to fall back on it. This gave me huge confidence. I knew my skills were valued by other sectors that I would never have considered before lockdown, I could make a major turn, and enjoy the challenge.

In July I learnt of a maternity cover teaching position at a 6th form in a special needs school close to home. I was enjoying assisting the clerk of works, but wanted to work in education if possible and try to apply some of my experience and skill to continue working with young people. This was pivot number two in less than a year and this is where my article for *Horizons* comes in. I wanted to share some positive news in challenging times about what can happen when, an AHOEC member and POL (Professional of Outdoor Learning) is made redundant, looks for new employment opportunities, meets with an inspirational, forward-thinking, open-minded Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at a special needs

BE PART OF THE IOL COMMUNITY

The past year has most definitely been a challenging time so here's a reminder that there's a whole network of Outdoor professionals at your fingertips. Find out about regional groups, the freelance co-operative, events and more here: www.outdoor-learning.org.

Communities can be great, but if you feel like you need a different type of support, this is a good place to start: <http://bit.ly/NHS-mental-health-links>

school and is given the opportunity to return to teaching. Grove Park School caters for students from reception to 19 years of age. The school creates a positive learning environment for students with a range of complex needs. The school's curriculum already offered appropriate opportunities for pupils to engage in practical activities, both on and off site, but the school's SLT were keen to go further. All students at the school have EHCPs and the school remains open for students throughout lockdowns. Obviously COVID-19 throws up a number of challenges, but the drive is to see how things can be delivered as safely as possible instead of avoiding or removing opportunities for the students.

I consider myself extremely lucky to have been given this opportunity. Initially my contract was only until January, teaching a class five days per week. This has since been extended until July and I have taken on other responsibilities; it is now likely my contract will be extended beyond July. I now have three days per week working with my students and two days per week to develop Outdoor Learning and community links across the school. I am also the school's Educational Visits Co-ordinator.

I have to confess to being quite daunted initially. Although I have taught in FE and HE and have worked with many special needs groups in the past at Outdoor centres, this was going to be completely different to anything I had experienced in the past. I have, so far, really enjoyed the challenge and there is so much to learn, I still feel like I am completely new to teaching all over again. I have a small class, some students are non-verbal, some have complex behavioural issues, and some require one-to-one support. Students are at mixed ability levels of learning from P levels to 'end of Year 2' nationally expected attainment. When the students returned to school in September some had not been in school since March. Due to the nature of their needs some had very little to no engagement with online learning and so returning to school for some was a challenge. Although I was new to the school I was trusted and given the brief to deliver a fun and engaging programme of learning.

Naturally, I reverted to my previous experience and my passion for Outdoor Learning. The work can certainly be very challenging and I have a new level of respect for all who work in Special Education. The sense of reward and the interaction with the students is very special. Being able to organise a wide range of Outdoor Learning experiences for these students is a real pleasure. Part of our Outdoor Learning delivery now includes; sixth form students visiting two Outdoor centres for one day per week each. Secondary and primary students also visit an Outdoor centre one day per week.

The Outdoor centres are getting a little much needed income during these challenging times. Their staff are also keeping up-to-date with activity provision and the students are benefitting from accessing fantastic facilities and highly skilled and motivated Outdoor Educators. Student learning and development is being enhanced. For example a student who can exhibit highly challenging behaviour is escorted around a high ropes course, with Outdoor Educators working with him as he overcomes his fear and realises what he is capable of. Or, seeing a student who has communication

challenges asking for another go on a tube on a dry ski slope. These are life-enriching and life-changing opportunities that fantastic Outdoor centres (that are under threat) can deliver and I sincerely hope they will be able to continue to do so in future.

So, what about the future for me and for the school? As an advocate of Outdoor Learning I believe that almost any subject at any level can be taught outdoors, from pre-school to masters' level and beyond. After all, the concept of a school and a classroom is still a relatively new one, as a species we have been learning outdoors for thousands of years. Students respond well and retain learning delivered outdoors. Outdoor Learning can be the spark that lights the desire to learn in some students.

Essentially, I see Outdoor Learning as one of the keys that will help us all recover from this pandemic. For as long as I am in place in a school I will work hard to source funding and create outdoor and community learning experiences for all students, with the aim of leaving a long term legacy of Outdoor Learning and learning in the wider community in place. None of this would have happened without the COVID-19 crisis, for me. This journey has changed me. It has made me stronger and more resilient and although I thought I was adaptable before, I am even more so now. Before I had one final career aim, one objective; now I am not so sure where I will end up and unexpectedly I am fine with that. I always wanted to do good and feel I was making a contribution, but I always had a final target in mind. What I have realised now is that the final destination is not so important, I can pivot, I can make changes and use the experiences, skills and knowledge I have developed in the Outdoor sector in many ways.

Hopefully the Outdoor Sector will reopen in the near future and there will be future opportunities. Maybe one day I will end working in a centre again, maybe I won't, but Outdoor learning is part of me and I

will always find a way to share this with others. I may not be part of the AHOEC Executive anymore but I will always support AHOEC and UK Outdoors in any way I can.

I know so many in our sector have lost their jobs, faced life-changing challenges as a result of this pandemic. We are a tight-knit sector and we can support each other. So if you need to pivot, then pivot, it can lead to positive things ■



AUTHOR

Ivor Lewis

Ivor feels he is a product of our fantastic sector. (That school trip changed his life!) His career spans over 25 years and he has a strong belief in the power of young people to reach their potential if they are supported and have access to the right resources and education.



IMAGES

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WHAT NOW?

Life after leaving university

After a very strange year where plans have been changed for everyone, there is a generation of individuals leaving education to embark on adult life. University is said to be *"the best years of your life"* but for this group of people half of their university experience has been decimated by the pandemic.

As we are all aware, COVID-19 has put the Outdoor industry in an extremely vulnerable position; many outdoor centres and the jobs that these establishments provide are at risk. I am about to graduate from the University of Central Lancashire on the Outdoor Adventure Leadership course. My next step is to decide on my future career path and to find work following the completion of my degree.

Although leaving university and starting a working life is a very exciting time, it is also a very worrying period for many people who are heading into the working world for the first time. I left college and went straight to university; I have never experienced a full-time working environment. The current situation, and the position that the

Outdoor industry finds itself in, has made me reassess my career path and my future goals. Previously my aims, like the majority of those on my degree, was to become an Outdoor instructor and an international expedition leader. COVID-19 has made me reconsider my career path. I am now thinking of becoming a university lecturer on an Outdoor Leadership degree.

The idea of leaving university gives a sense of hopefulness alongside the sense of achievement. Many who have experienced this transition, state that this can change into a sense of helplessness and a feeling of being completely lost. Leaving university during a global pandemic adds extra stresses to university students; the rules are constantly changing, and no future plans can be guaranteed. As we enter spring, and the final semesters of university, light is visible at the end of the tunnel, for many. But with the Outdoor industry struggling, how many of those enrolled on Outdoor courses across the country will have to rethink their career plans? How many will fail to enter the industry where their passion lies? How many will end up seeing the last three years as a waste? ■



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Ethan is an Outdoor Adventure Leadership student at the University of Central Lancashire. He is an aspiring academic with passions for both photography and Scouting.