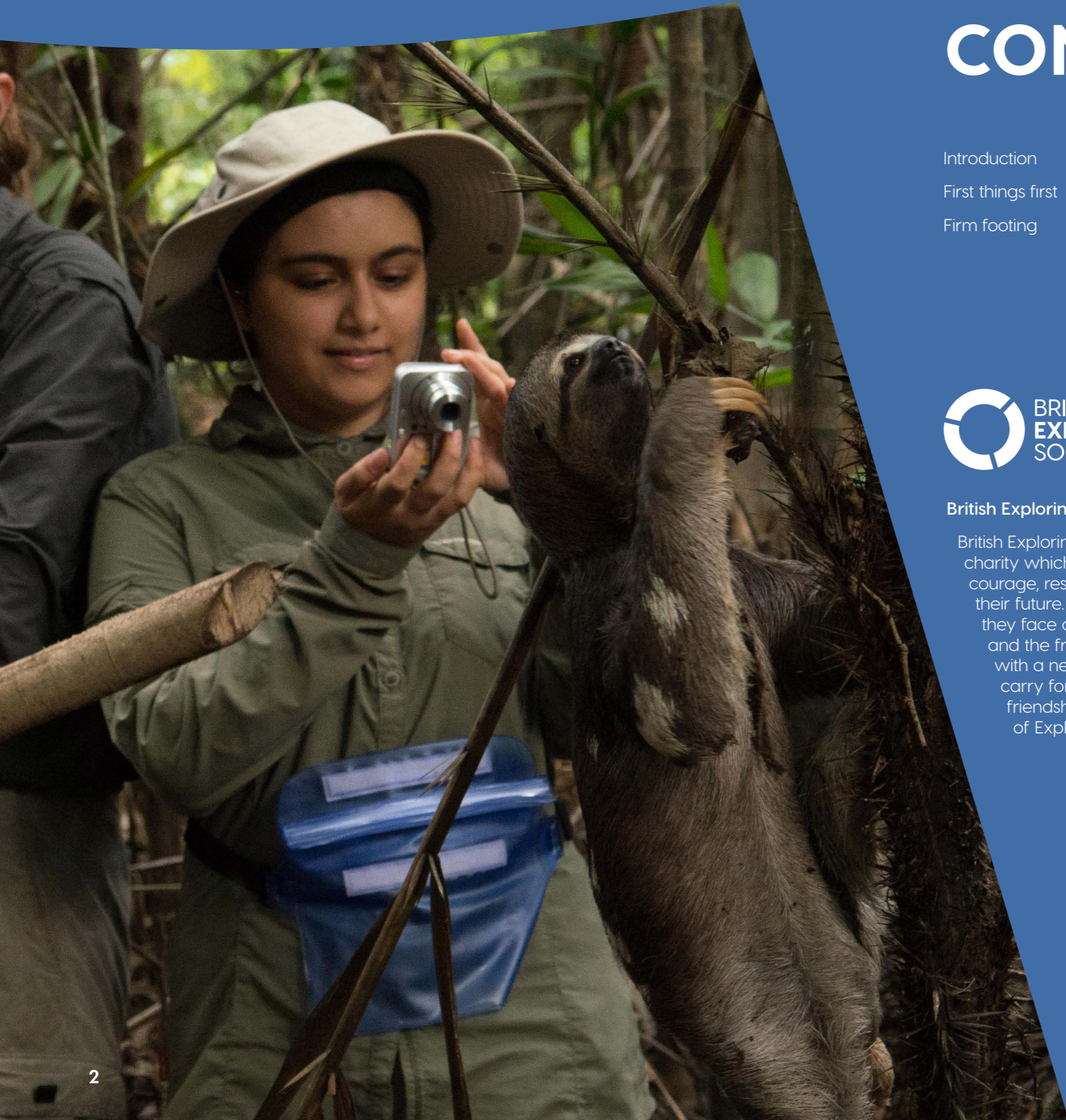


# FROM ADVANCE AND ASCEND TO FIRM FOOTING

A summary of our strategy  
2019 – 2022

# FIND YOUR FIRE





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## British Exploring Society

British Exploring Society is a world class youth development charity which empowers and equips young people with the courage, resilience and determination to make the most of their future. We take young people to remote locations where they face challenges, gain skills and learn about themselves and the fragile environments that they explore. They return with a new-found confidence and self-belief which they carry forward to their future life. More than this, they forge friendships for life and become part of a unique community of Explorers with shared perspectives on the world.

# INTRODUCTION

We are an enduring organisation. We have been in operation for over 8 decades – long enough to witness, document and adapt to significant changes in the needs and aspirations of 11,000 young people – and to respond to significant shifts in approaches to parenting, education and in public attitudes towards challenge and risk. Using the same core programme approach, we know that we can continue to respond through our work to deliver life-defining benefits to a diverse range of young people.

**But review, learning, adaptation and change is also critically important.**

‘Advance and Ascend’ is the 5-year strategy we put in place in 2016 to direct organisational change.

In 2016 we said that we would:

- Create a programme of expeditions based on the needs of a diverse range of young people.
- Plan and deliver ambitious expeditions to engage wider audiences.
- Invest in our corporate systems and our staff.
- Establish an approach to fundraising to safeguard our future.
- Communicate our values, mission and the quality of our work.
- Develop a leadership programme to diversify access to adventurous outdoor learning.
- Develop partnerships to help us improve.
- Foster our network of volunteers and members.
- Embed evaluation to underpin our work.

Since 2016 we have achieved a great deal. Advance and Ascend still provides a good strategic framework for us. We’re only 3 years into our plan, and we still aim to be working with 1000 young people each year within the next decade. This is the headline goal we set ourselves in 2016. But – not everything has been easy. During the review of our progress in June 2019 we considered our vision and mission, our long-term goals and looked at any changes in the external landscape.

We used our latest review to refine our priorities, and to set ourselves some new challenges to help tackle changes in the external environment and to ensure that we’re responding to what we’ve learned in the last 3 years.

We are ready for further change, to grow, to reach more young people, and to challenge ourselves as an organisation as we consider how to tackle the challenge of providing genuine wilderness experiences in a world facing unprecedented environmental and technological change.

We’re calling this refinement of Advance and Ascend **‘Firm Footing’**.

**Firm Footing** will steer our priorities until 2022. This document tries to explain how, captures what we have achieved through Advance and Ascend and the challenges we have faced along the way.

**“We spent two weeks braving the wind, the rain and the waves. We laughed, we cried, we smiled... We became anti-fragile. Our confidence soared through the roof... I became better at talking to people. I became a better person.”**

Niamh Baker Dangoor Infinity 2019





# FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Our vision – what we still want

We want all young people to have equal access to challenging learning and adventure in wild, remote locations as an essential preparation for a confident adult life.

## Our mission – what we do

We deliver exceptional learning through exploration with life-defining impact to an increasing number and diversity of young people.

## What is the problem we are tackling?

Society is failing to ensure equal or sufficient access to the right skills, behaviours and confidence young people need to tackle contemporary challenges and seize opportunities as they approach adulthood, and throughout adult life. They need resilience, mental toughness and the tools to stay motivated. They need to be able to solve problems, work together and communicate well.

## How do we help?

Through our programmes we share our unique mix of adventure, knowledge and personal development with young people who can benefit most. With us, they acquire empowering real-life knowledge, ideas and understanding about the world and we introduce them to different perspectives on the world and their place in it.

## What immediate difference do we make?

Our work helps those young people develop greater maturity, sense of purpose and confidence and impacts on their choices and success in education, training and employment.

## How we work

Our focus is on small-scale, high-impact work with those who can benefit most.

**Our effectiveness** comes from enduring expertise developed over 87 years and from a commitment to learn from every programme we deliver now.

**Our scale** comes from the life-long community and economic contribution of our members and from the social action and volunteering which participants undertake as part of their programme with us.

**Our young people** increasingly come from trusted partners who introduce us to, and continue to support, young people who most need access to our programmes.

## What's next?

Working with young people with very diverse experiences of life has provided infinite rewards for us and driven rapid change in the organisation; **But** we need to ensure that those changes are embedded, sustainable and manageable in the long term.

- We are now working against a backdrop of increasing child and youth poverty and reduced funding for the poorest households and communities - and where there is reducing funding for the services that support them, including in school.
- Continuing to tackle these external challenges requires us to build capacity in key areas of the organisation.

**"I don't want to treat the world we live in like that; since returning I have definitely paid more attention to my personal impact on the environment and tried to stay much more aware of what's going on in the world..."**

Hafiz Onitolo Yukon 3W Land



# FIRM FOOTING

Over the next 3 years we will focus on supporting young people who will benefit most, but also on building long-term organisational durability

We will:

- Invest further in systems and training to create capacity for more work with young people in future.
- Continue to invest and further innovate in fundraising to safeguard our future work.
- Underpin our work with compelling communications.
- Refine and focus on contracted partnerships to deliver our strategy.
- Invest in our volunteers and mobilise our membership community.
- Prioritise evaluation to drive improvement and demonstrate impact.
- Change how young people demonstrate their commitment to taking part on a programme.

Over the next two years, we intend to move away from providing a 'pay to participate' model as part of access to our programmes. 76% of our Explorers are already on fully or heavily subsidised places. We already expect every young person to demonstrate their commitment to joining us – through volunteering, taking part in training, and/or fundraising. In future, the fundraising that our Explorers undertake will be to help give other young people the chance to benefit from our programmes – rather than towards the 'cost' of their place.

We will support all our young fundraisers with a Professional Skills Coach, in order to learn the presentation, financial and communication skills

at the heart of successful fundraising – so that they succeed in reaching their goals, and to set them up with these skills for life.

We are applying simple and transparent means-testing through our applications process to set fair fundraising challenges for our Explorers. These Challenges are named after other inspiring contemporary Explorers.

## How will we measure our progress with Firm Footing?

Each year we establish programme and organisational performance targets. In the next 3 years we will continue to track:

- Programme impact data and qualitative feedback from young people, partners, parents and carers and leaders.
- Progression data from Explorers and our partner organisations.
- The number and profile of Explorers and Leaders we work with.
- Fundraising against strategy and annual targets.
- Levels of engagement with our members.

**"I have learnt that the taking part, giving 100% and being a good, reliable team member are what matters, not necessarily the end result. The challenges of life on expedition have also made me stronger, more resilient and more prepared to take on life's challenges and obstacles as a visually impaired person"**

Joshua Hopkins Dangoor Infinity 2019





# ADVANCE AND ASCEND SINCE 2016 –

Achieving what we want

## Our community of explorers

Our community of explorers now represents a cross section of young people from a wide and inclusive range of experiences of adolescence. We work with more young people in foster care, leaving care, and those living with disabilities.

In 2018 66% of our explorers joined us from deprived communities across the UK.

Those describing themselves as BAME has increased from 20 – 24% from 2018 – 19.

Those describing themselves as disabled has increased from 7% to 13% from 2018 – 19.

Many of our programmes are fully funded for our participants. For those that aren't, we provide significant financial support to ensure fairer access. 76% of our explorers are now fully or partially subsidised. The ratio of leaders to young people has intensified from 1:4 to 1:3 – in recognition of the needs of the young people we work with.

## Working in partnership

72% of our explorers came to us through partners in 2019.

We have achieved much greater focus on partnership-based recruitment, and on our work with organisations who understand explorer needs. We have new and evolving partnerships with the National Fostering Association, the Scouts, Jubilee Sailing Trust and our enduring partner Catch-22.

We also have 23 schools and 14 other charities working with us.



# PARTNERSHIPS

## Providing programmes which deliver greatest benefit

In 2016 we ran 6 programmes. In 2019 we ran 8.

We've trialled (and reviewed) programmes to meet the needs of the young people we serve:

- Landmark – for Care Leavers and young people facing challenges in the London area.
- Expeditionary Year – for young people struggling to settle in the classroom .
- UK Explorers – for young people unable to access an overseas programme.
- Dangoor Infinity - for both disabled and disadvantaged non-disabled Explorers .
- Pinnacle – for promising young leaders with some expedition experience.
- An updated Trainee Leader programme with more technical training.

## Improving our training

In 2016 we ran 1,431 days of training – in 2019 that increased to 1,559 days.

We've developed more and better training for staff and volunteers:

- More technical training.
- Mental health first aid for all Leaders.
- More Explorers undertaking longer UK programmes.
- Training on the use of our assessment tools and coaching.
- The introduction of more professional skills into our trainee Leader programme to support progression into employment in the outdoors.

## Diversifying and increasing our fundraising

Our income has increased from £1,225m to £1,576m.

We're diversifying our income for a more secure future – with a strategy focused on slowly growing corporate, regular giving, a major donor programme alongside our Trusts and Foundations. This offsets the drop in income from Explorers as we reach out to young people who need our support to participate. We have also established a dynamic, active Development Board to support our fundraising.

The in-kind contribution of our Leaders continues to grow. Our volunteers contributed £224,000 worth of their time in 2016 – this rose to over £318,000 by 2019.

## Working more closely with our members

We are proud to have appointed Marvin Rees, one of our Members, as our new President. We have a Membership Officer for the first time. Their role is to support our 11,000+ members to be as active a part of our community as possible. We are producing a magazine with and for members – The Campfire. We have introduced Fellowship of British Exploring Society to recognise extraordinary contributions to our work, and as we connect with more of our members, they generously contribute back through their stories, professional advice, volunteering, advocacy and financial support.



# IN SUMMARY

British Exploring Society is only 13 years away from its centenary. We have achieved a considerable amount over the last 3 years, in an increasingly challenging external environment, but are determined to continue the process of improvement and development. Firm Footing is part of our commitment to ensuring that the charity will celebrate its birthday in good health, able to excel in its purpose, providing life-defining adventures that meet the needs of future generations of young people.

If you want to know more:

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