

Outdoor and out of classroom learning in Hampshire.

Stuart Nundy, Outdoor Activities Officer at Hampshire County Council, explains how they are improving their LOtC provision

Hampshire County Council has long recognised the importance of learning outside the classroom. It established a network of outdoor centres decades ago – Calshot Activities Centre, one of the largest outdoor centres in the UK, was opened in 1963 – and the county has maintained them through the barrage of closures of such centres during the 1980s and 1990s.

Thousands of school children and young people visit Hampshire County Council's own centres and others throughout the year, and the current agenda around LOtC has focused attention on activities beyond the norm of 'adventure activities' or 'fieldwork'. Hampshire seems to have continually bucked the trend over the past 20 years for many teachers and schools becoming wary of taking children off site. Despite the increased focus on risk management and the emergence of such barriers as travel cost or supply cover costs, LOtC continues to be a form of teaching and learning adopted by the vast majority of teachers within the authority.



So how has this happened? Is it something in the water supply? A local 'statute'? The real answer would seem to lie in the areas of commitment and resources – commitment from the local authority at all levels to try and provide or facilitate access to the outdoors, and the provision of resources to enable this to happen.

Hampshire has always had a loud voice within the Education Department (now Children's Services) in acting as an advocate for outdoor learning, training teachers to 'manage' risk in the outdoors rather than be put off by it, and providing support and advice at all times.

For example, the 'Open Country Leadership Award' is Hampshire's home grown certification for teachers – a day of training to enable teachers to gain confidence in their own abilities to lead groups outside the school. It started way back in the 1970s

and today is our single most requested course. Many hundreds of Hampshire teachers take part each year and the evidence is that they really do use it to get their kids outside – with over 100,000 youngsters out on residential courses annually and at least 200,000 - 300,000 day visits per year.

Parallel to the professional advice and guidance provided by the Children's Services team, Hampshire has always maintained support for its own outdoor provision. We have never shut a centre and in 2011 will be opening a brand new outdoor centre in Farnborough to meet the needs of our schools in the north of Hampshire. The centres do receive funding support to some degree, but all operate on a basis of earning their own income and to do so they need to deliver high quality outcomes that meet the expectations of schools.

They do this by ensuring that what they deliver is what schools want – managed through a close working relationship with our teachers and schools. Furthermore, we have worked hard to ensure that venues such as our centres deliver what our politicians want – services that offer opportunities to the wider community. As a consequence, political support for our outdoor provision is unwavering – from the Leader of the County Council, through his cabinet and amongst the ordinary members of the Council.

As a consequence of the commitment and resources available, real opportunities have emerged to develop and expand our offer to schools. Back in 2001 we set up the Hampshire Outdoor Service – a partnership between Children's Services (where the County Inspector sits) and the Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs Department (CCRA), where all our centres, libraries, country parks, museums, arts centres and sports opportunities are located.



Following on from this we developed the Trailblazer programme, based on the Nottinghamshire model but adapted to our own needs. There are now over 300 schools involved in this accreditation and support project for outdoor learning. The service contributed heavily to the manifesto process – developing projects locally to champion High Quality outdoor learning. Most recently, the CCRA has developed a

coherent offer for LOtC to our schools, modelled on the national manifesto and bringing together myriad opportunities and facilities available from within the department.

This is clearly just a snapshot of what's going on in Hampshire and we wouldn't claim to be unique. Many other Local Authorities have developed their own exciting ways forward in support of LOtC. However, we are pleased to be able to report that LOtC is very much alive and well in Hampshire. It's been here for a long, long time and we work to ensure that it continues for a long, long time into the future.