Residential outdoor education is a recognised and powerful learning and developmental experience, the English Outdoor Council believes that:

- **There should be a formal entitlement for all young people to a progressive range of learning outside the classroom opportunities, including at least one residential experience.**

- **There should be a ring-fenced source of funding to support those young people who would not otherwise be able to afford this.** *(May be move towards guidance on use of funding such as Pupil Premium? FOR DISCUSSION)*

- **Initial Teacher Training should incorporate how outdoor education opportunities benefit child development and learning and that training opportunities should be available as a part of ongoing professional development.**

**Executive Summary:**

- There is crystal clear and incontestable evidence in support of learning outside the classroom in that it raises educational standards in schools, often leading to a dramatic change in self-confidence,

- Within the broad sphere of learning outside the classroom, challenging outdoor activities and environmental studies are particularly powerful learning opportunities. They contribute to a range of important societal targets across education, health, anti-social behaviour and community cohesion.

- There is ‘evidence that the number of schools that offer residential experience is increasing but fewer opportunities are available for schools with more deprived catchment areas’ *(1)* and as a result, not all young people benefit from these.

- To redress this unfairness, there should be an entitlement to a progressive range of learning experiences outside the classroom, including at least one residential experience, for all young people.

- This view is shared by much of society, including many MPs.

- There is a clear economic case that the entitlement should be publicly funded.

- However, in the current climate, it is recognised that this is unrealistic.

- Nevertheless, an entitlement is achievable without additional net government funding.

- Parents recognise the benefits and are willing to contribute. This is justifiable.

- But there is a need to support those young people who would not otherwise be able to afford the experience.
The modest cost of such support would be balanced by savings resulting from the societal benefits.

This document lists the evidence and explains how the government can, even in the current economic climate, create fair access for all by creating a simple entitlement to a range of progressive outdoor learning opportunities.

## The Evidence

There is in fact incontrovertible evidence for the effects of outdoor education. It

- raises educational standards
- helps to address health problems and enhances wellbeing,
- offers for many pupils their first contact with the natural environment,
- builds cross-cultural understanding,
- helps reduce anti-social behaviour, disengagement from education and the proportion of NEETS,
- helps young people to manage risk and encourages them to welcome challenge,
- is a significant employer of young people, providing “starter” jobs and training.

That evidence is laid out in the appendix to this document.

Politically, there is substantial support for outdoor education. There was a massive response to an Early Day Motion in 2010. The Education Select Committee is strongly supportive – it considers there should be an entitlement and financial support - some of its recommendations are quoted in the text below. However, the priorities of the coalition government do not allow direct support, either in financial terms or in terms of clear guidance to schools.

Ironically, both the coalition government and the previous administration have committed substantial resources to outdoor-based personal development for 16 year olds, targeted on social rather than educational objectives. The Labour government launched several large programmes, including U project and Do It 4 Real. In turn, the National Citizen Service programme is one of the coalition government’s flagship policies. All these programmes have or had at their heart a residential adventure-based personal development experience. Clearly, there is cross-party consensus that it works.

However, there is a strong argument that leaving an intervention until age 16 is too late for many and that an earlier intervention would have far greater pre-emptive effect. Successive governments have resisted creating any form of entitlement within the curriculum in England. In contrast, Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning provides explicit guidance on outdoor learning and, in Wales, adventurous activities are an integral part of the National Curriculum up to and including Key Stage 3.

Although outdoor education is a powerful developmental tool, it is not a single identifiable subject but is more an approach to learning and teaching, which can be applied across all subject areas. This may be one reason why it has not yet become embedded within the curriculum – why there is not yet an expectation that all pupils will experience it – why it remains a Cinderella.

A taste of the evidence follows. For more information, the reference section gives a series of one click links to a wealth of comprehensive and convincing documentation.

### Learning outside the classroom raises educational standards

OFSTED published a thematic report on learning outside the classroom in October 2008 (2). Among its key findings was:

"When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils’ personal, social and emotional
development."

It recommended that schools and colleges should:

"ensure that their curriculum planning includes sufficient well structured opportunities for all learners to engage in learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of their experience"

and "ensure equal and full access for all learners to learning outside the classroom"

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme, which is a large-scale research programme (3), concluded as one of its ten principles for effective teaching and learning that:

"Informal learning, such as learning out of school, should be recognised as at least as significant as formal learning and should therefore be valued and appropriately utilised in formal processes."

Outdoor learning makes a powerful contribution to curriculum aims

The DfE has published a set of aims for the curriculum (4). These are that it should enable all young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve,
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives,
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Outdoor learning, especially through a residential experience, contributes particularly powerfully to the second of these aims. The DfE references the following elements, developed originally by the QDCA, as part of that aim. Outdoor learning helps young people to achieve these far more effectively than they could in a school context:

- have a sense of self-worth and personal identity,
- relate well to others and form good relationships,
- are self-aware and deal with their emotions,
- become increasingly independent, are able to take the initiative and organise themselves,
- make healthy lifestyle choices,
- are physically competent and confident,
- take managed risks and stay safe,
- are willing to try new things and make the most of opportunities,
- are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world …

These are exactly the range of outcomes that outdoor learning delivers so well. A meta-analysis of 96 studies (5) shows that there are significant improvements in independence, confidence, self-efficacy, self-understanding, assertiveness, internal focus of control and decision-making as a result of outdoor adventure programmes. This work, supported by John Hattie, has been further developed and in a recent presentation to the New Zealand Treasury identified Outdoor/Adventure interventions as one of the ‘must have’ influences on pupil progress (6).

More recently the RSPB called for government to “enshrine the value of outdoor learning and environmental responsibility into the national curriculum” (7) following their research into the important issue of childhood experiences of nature (8)

Outdoor activity helps to address health problems and enhances wellbeing

In support of the Department of Health’s publication “Be Active, Be Healthy” the four home countries Chief
Medical Officers reported in 2010, that the annual cost to the NHS of physical inactivity is £1.06 billion (9) for 5 conditions linked to inactivity. This is likely to a conservative figure as it excludes the cost of other diseases and health problems.

Within the “Be Active, Be Healthy” report (10) it recognized the importance of the outdoors:

“Natural environments offer important settings for health-enhancing physical activity.” “Contact with nature has been shown to improve people’s physical and mental health.”

While in “Start Active, Stay Active” the Chief Medical Officers stated that:

“Activity also provides benefits for well-being, for example improved mood, a sense of achievement, relaxation or release from daily stress.”

There is an increasing emphasis on wellbeing as a key indicator of societal progress (11). The New Economics Foundation emphasises five actions to enhance wellbeing – connect with others, be active, take notice of what is around you, keep learning and give to others (12). Outdoor activity is a superb way of enhancing wellbeing in this way.

DEFRA’s review of evidence (13) made the point that:

"The natural environment provides physical, mental and social wellbeing benefits. There are synergistic effects between these benefits."

While in the 2012 White paper ‘The Natural Choice’ (14) DEFRA states that:

“Nature is good for human health”

A recent literature review on children in the outdoors (15) states:

"It is generally reported that being outdoors contributes to higher levels of wellbeing bringing physiological benefits such as stress reduction.”

The Countryside Recreation Network (16) finds that:

"There is substantial evidence that links the natural environment with good physical health and psychological wellbeing."

It offers for many their first real contact with the natural environment

Arguably the single most important lesson for the future is an understanding and respect for our environment and our responsibility to behave towards it in a sustainable way. There is no better way of developing such understanding and respect than first hand experience . This is particularly so for those who live in towns and cities.

Natural England’s research (17) shows that today’s children spend substantially less of their time in a natural environment, in comparison with the previous generation. It points out that

“Traditional outdoor activities are as popular now as they were in the past”

but argues that there is a need to make natural spaces more available for children today, an argument that has gathered more recent support in both the Natural Environment White Paper (14) and by Natural England (18).
92% of people agree that young people should experience the outdoors and nature at first hand (8). Similarly in recent publications by both the RSPB (7) and the National Trust (19) there is a strong call to provide opportunities “for children to develop a personal connection with the natural world.”

**It helps to reduce disengagement, anti-social behaviour and crime**

A recent DEMOS report (20) shows how serious the problems of disengagement in our schools is and considers that

"there is a good deal of research linking participation in out-of-school activities characterised by high quality adult-child relationships with better outcomes."

A New Philanthropy Capital report (21) highlights the success of outdoor activity in helping to re-engage the one in ten 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training.

“Sport, outdoor activities and creative activities such as dance, can all be used as a ‘hook’ to motivate young people to participate. As many young people have had a bad experience of formal education, alternatives need to be different.”

A DCSF report on attitudinal barriers to engaging young people in positive activities (22) reports the views of young people themselves:

“Sports and outdoor activities, in particular, were seen as the most fun and helpful in developing confidence.”

**It builds cross-cultural understanding and can change communities**

In terms of community cohesion, the contribution that outdoor recreation can make to combating discrimination and promoting cross-cultural understanding has also been highlighted in a report by the Countryside Agency and the Black Environment Network (23).

A National Trust study (24) also showed the impact on communities:

'We looked at whether school children’s learning about their local environment would influence the way they treat it. We found that not only was this the case, but high quality, out-of-classroom learning also influenced how children behave and the lifestyle choices they make. It shows the potential for schools trips not just to change individual lives, but the lives of whole communities.'

The National Trust has since gone on to further support the wider community benefits of reconnecting children with nature in a Natural Childhood, by Stephen Moss (19)

**It helps young people to manage risk and encourages them to welcome challenge**

There is a growing groundswell of media and public opinion that recognizes that risk is an inescapable aspect of life and that, instead of wrapping our children in cotton wool, we should help them to take greater responsibility for managing their own safety. The Risk and Regulation Advisory Council has published a very positive report (25), which deplores disproportionate responses to risk and regulatory creep. We endorse the Council’s efforts to signpost the way to achieving a consistently balanced societal response to risk.

Within our own sector, we have published guidance to teachers (26), which encourages them to take a reasonable and proportionate approach to safety and reassures them that a degree of risk, properly managed, is positively desirable in helping young people to learn to manage their own safety. A risk-averse approach is discouraged. Instead, readers are encouraged to balance the risks and the benefits from an activity.
Unnecessary risk aversion is an insidious influence, which is damaging to enterprise and initiative. Sociologist Frank Furedi (27) considers that:

“The worship of safety represents a profoundly pessimistic attitude towards human potential.”

Outdoor education teaches young people to face real risk in a sensible way and encourages a “can do” attitude.

A powerful impact but far from equal opportunity

While all forms of learning outside the classroom are valuable, challenging outdoor activities and environmental studies have a particularly powerful impact on young people, especially when delivered through a residential experience.

Despite the current economic situation, there is still a healthy extent of outdoor provision, possibly because many school staff and parents recognize the unique contribution it makes to personal development. A total of 66% of pupils take up the opportunity of a residential experience during their time at school (28). However, in only 21% of schools do all the pupils attend a residential.

This disparity of opportunity is described in detail by Professor Power et al (29). Their research shows a clear link between the level of provision of outdoor education and the proportion of pupils in the school who are eligible for free school meals - the greater the level of disadvantage, the less provision. This is particularly tragic in that most disadvantaged pupils have potentially most to gain from the transformative impact that outdoor education has for many young people.

Power et al emphasise the potential inequality:

“If high quality out-of-school learning is to become an entitlement rather than an ‘add-on’ that only some can afford, it will be important to invest significant resources, develop structured support and clarify strategic direction at school, authority and national level. Unless this happens, the uneven distribution of high quality out-of-school learning both between and within schools may well exacerbate educational inequalities.”

A powerful impact but an opportunity missed

In recent years, the potential of the outdoors has been clearly recognized in Early Years provision (30), for example:

“Outdoor learning has equal value to indoor learning.”
“Outdoor learning has a positive impact on children’s wellbeing and development.”

However, even in Early Years settings “it is suggested that the teachers missed many of the opportunities afforded by the outdoor environment to enhance children’s learning” (31). If this is the case in a situation where outdoor learning is an inherent part of the educational process then there must also be concerns regarding primary and secondary education where outdoor learning is not embedded.

In a recent report by Natural England (32) there was a clear recognition that many teachers lack confidence in the delivery and integration of outdoor learning opportunities. This is backed up by a larger national survey (18), which found that:

“The challenges facing schools include those frequently mentioned such as the risk of accidents, cost and curriculum pressures. However, another set of challenges exist, at local, institutional and
personal levels. These challenges include teacher’s confidence, self-efficacy and their access to training in using natural environments close to the school and further afield.”

In an effort to address such concerns the RSPB (7) has called on Government to:

“Ensure the whole teaching profession is confident, competent and committed to teach outside the classroom by including the necessary skills and understanding across the repertoire of practices included in initial teacher training and early career and ongoing professional development.”

An entitlement – public and political support

The unfair disparity in access to Outdoor Learning would be eliminated by a simple entitlement - to a progressive range of learning experiences outside the classroom, including at least one residential experience, for all young people.

There is widespread support for such an entitlement. It is a key ‘Call to Government’ by the RSPB (7) and forms the focus of the Countryside Alliance Foundation’s aspirations for outdoor education (33). Their report contains survey evidence from teachers and pupils, which reveals huge enthusiasm for outdoor education.

In its 2010 follow-up report (34), the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee noted the very strong body of evidence that has been established to show the benefits of learning outside the classroom and expressed concern that children are spending less and less time outside. It expressed disappointment in the lack of progress made in the previous five years, recommending that:

“Learning outside the classroom is important, and the Department must provide adequate funding to achieve maximum impact.”

“We call on the Department to ensure that families’ ability to pay is not a deterrent to schools offering or pupils participating in school trips and visits.”

“There should be an individual entitlement within the National Curriculum to at least one out of school visit a term.”

During the 2009-2010 parliamentary session, the following Early Day Motion was tabled:

“That this House notes the conclusion of an Ofsted report that learning outside the classroom contributes significantly to raising standards; recognises that learning through experience is a powerful educational tool; applauds the work put into the Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom; regrets that despite this work, its aspiration to provide all young people with a wide range of quality experiences outside the classroom, including one or more residential visits, is not yet embedded in all schools; and calls on the Government to find a way of making this a reality for all young people, including those who need financial support.”

Despite the fact that the Conservative Party understandably advised its MPs not to sign (because it could have financial implications), there were nevertheless no fewer than 104 signatories, clear evidence of breadth of support from MPs.

Support for the Conservative and Lib Dem manifesto commitments

We strongly support proposals for a National Citizen Service. We have actively contributed to the development of the pilot scheme and are convinced from direct experience of such provision that it will make a major contribution towards building the big society that is the government’s vision. As a sector, we will work to deliver high quality, high impact adventure provision as part of this scheme.

One of the key benefits of residential adventure experience as an element of this programme is its ability to develop trust. We wholly agree that the erosion of trust in society must be tackled. Outdoor
programmes excel in developing trust.

We welcome the Conservative proposals to develop a measure of well-being and argue that regular access to the natural environment and to outdoor activity should be part of that measure.

Volunteers are vital to the new vision of society. They make up a very large part of outdoor provision: the Sector Skills Council estimates that no less than 70% of the outdoor workforce is made up of volunteers. We welcome the Lib Dem proposals for the youth service and the suggestion that services are provided in partnership with the voluntary sector.

While the National Citizen Service proposals are extremely positive, it is important that this excellent initiative should not be at the expense of outdoor provision in schools. We are right behind smaller government but there is a point beyond which the quality of young people’s educational experience will suffer. Some young people do currently suffer from the lack of opportunity to participate in outdoor activity and, in the light of the Lib Dem commitment to hard-wire fairness into our educational system, this must be redressed.

We support the Lib Dem proposal to slim down the National Curriculum but consider that the evidence for learning outside the classroom is so strong that the minimum curriculum entitlement proposed must include that opportunity. We note that the Scottish Lib Dems (35) have proposed that

“Every child will be entitled to two weeks of outdoor activity during their time at secondary school, allowing them to learn new skills and better understand their environment.”

and we commend that confidence in the value of the outdoors.

Finally, we will continue to support the coalition government in it’s drive for a common sense approach to health and safety. We contributed to the Conservative Party review of health and safety that was carried out by Lord Young of Graffham and will be happy to comment further on health and safety issues that are relevant to outdoor provision. We are particularly concerned that safety measures should be balanced and proportionate and that unnecessary ratcheting up of regulation should stop; we therefore welcome the proposal for regulatory budgets.

An entitlement makes economic sense

There is a huge amount of evidence, which brings home the cost of doing nothing. Backing the Future (36) demonstrates vividly that proactive investment in pre-emptive measures to tackle social problems could save £1.5 trillion spent on picking up the pieces after it is too late. For every £1 invested in targeted services designed to catch problems early, the authors estimate that society would benefit by between £7.60 and £9.20.

Of course, outdoor activity is only one of the range of interventions that can be used to contribute to solving these social problems. However, its effectiveness is clearly recognized: the Sutton Trust (37) notes that summer camps that mix learning with fun:

“have shown substantial improvements in participants’ reading scores ... which disproportionately impacts on those from lower socio-economic groups”

The report concludes that there is a cost-benefit ration of 13:1 for such camps.

In a similar manner, in 2012, Social Evaluator undertook an evaluation of the Social Return On Investment (SROI) of residential outdoor learning programmes run by Scottish Outdoor Education Centres (SOEC). The report (38) showed that for every £1 invested in this activity brings a social return of £11.02.
“The benefits of using SROI, to SOEC’s 5-day outdoor residential learning programmes, include being able to demonstrate the change experienced by young people as a result of attending programmes, which contributed to culmination of the above ratio.

The evident development of confidence and resilience in young people by attending the programmes, development capability can be enhanced when demonstrating their delivery of objective and national outcomes.”

Further evidence of the economic and social impact of learning outdoors was highlighted in the Natural England Commissioned Report, Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers, 2012 (18). The report recommended that the benefits of learning outside the classroom should be made clear to schools and teachers and that they should be supported in the effective integration of such learning opportunities to improve learning outcomes for young people. The report also highlighted that:

“through its contribution to greater lifetime earnings associated with educational qualifications in relevant subjects” the estimated “annual value of environmental knowledge in 2010 was £2.1 billion.”

Quite apart from the developmental impact of the outdoors, the sector makes a substantial contribution to rural employment and regeneration. With an estimated £430 million output (39), it a significant employer of young adults.

In short, there is a clear economic argument that there should be a publicly funded entitlement to a progressive range of learning experiences outside the classroom, including at least one residential experience. However, it is recognized that the current economic climate is not one in which new spending commitments are likely. Therefore, we propose an alternative.

A feasible alternative

It is possible to propose a combination of steps that will make it possible to create that all-important entitlement, without significant new central government funding.

Parents are very supportive of outdoor education and seem to have an intuitive understanding that challenge is a very positive developmental experience. As a result, they are perfectly willing to contribute to the costs of the experience, particularly the costs of a residential. We consider that, for those parents who can afford it, this is acceptable.

However, it is essential that there is a safety net for those whose parents cannot afford to contribute. Schools are able, to a certain extent, to support such pupils through their existing delegated funding but, if an entitlement is to be achieved for all young people, some further support to schools is necessary.

There are currently a number of different sources of central government funding. These include:

- The Extended Services Disadvantage Subsidy
- Local initiatives such as London Challenge, Black Country Challenge and Greater Manchester Challenge

Each of these sources of funds has been set up for a good reason and each provides valuable opportunities. In a review of the London Challenge programme (40) it was very clear that without such funding the programme would not have been available for all:

“The children that need the life experiences are normally the children who cannot afford to attend these types of trips” Teacher, Heathcote School
“Each year there are a number of students who are excluded from trips because of family difficulties, cultural barriers and financial restrictions. This funding enabled inclusion for all.” Teacher, Norbury Manor Business and Enterprise College.

However, these opportunities were limited to specific geographical areas and left many young people unsupported. To create a national fund that schools could draw on to subsidise learning outside the classroom for those pupils who could not otherwise afford it would cost no more than the combined resources currently committed. Such support could be further enhanced by the government actively raising the profile of the impact of such experiences as part of the Pupils Premium funding. We recognise that the funding is in place to support local decision making in relation to what may be best for improving the attainment of such disadvantage pupils. However, we would be happy to work with Government, alongside colleagues, to help raise the profile of Outdoor Learning and the impact of residential experiences. The evidence is clear for all to see. There is already a clear recognition in Government that the pupil premium can be used to support outdoor learning. In a recent letter to the EOC, from Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, stated that:

‘I do take your point that children from poorer families may have fewer residential experiences. It is important that we continue to trust the professional judgement of school leaders and teachers in providing relevant and accessible opportunities for all their pupils. The Government has supported schools to do this in many ways, for example, through introducing the Pupil Premium. This is funding aimed specifically at improving the academic attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The funding is given directly to schools to use as they see fit, because they know best the needs of their individual pupils. This can include expenditure on outdoor activities.’

This is indeed a welcome statement, however, we would like to invite the Government to take this further and work with us to ensure that there is equity of opportunity for all in accessing residential and outdoor learning experiences. We know that schools know best how to use the Pupil Premium for the benefit of their pupils, but let us give them some options!

In addition, the cost of this would be more than recouped by the savings illustrated in the economic section above and would be dwarfed by the human, financial and social cost of doing nothing. Moreover, it would end the unfairness caused by unequal access and would allow an entitlement to a range of progressive outdoor learning opportunities, including at least one residential, to become a reality for all young people.

In summary, we propose that:

– There should be a formal entitlement for all young people to a progressive range of learning outside the classroom opportunities, including at least one residential experience.

– There should be a ring-fenced source of funding to support those young people who would not otherwise be able to afford this and guidance to schools on the benefit of using Pupil Premium to supplement this.

– That initial teacher training should incorporate how outdoor education opportunities benefit child development and learning and that training opportunities should be available as a part of ongoing professional development.

Only in this way will learning outside the classroom be embedded on a sustainable basis into our educational system.
References

If you have a paper copy of this document, for ease of accessing the hyperlinks below, you might like to download a pdf copy from www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org/publications.


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