



**DfE Curriculum and
Assessment Review
- IOL Response**

Introduction

The DfE Curriculum and Assessment Review has been set up to review the national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England from ages 5-19, including qualification pathways. The call for evidence asks for answers to be supported by evidence, specific examples, and, where possible, solutions that consider feasibility. The Review seeks to identify the most significant and pressing issues facing curriculum and assessment. DfE will 'focus on addressing these without destabilising the system, making changes where things are working well, or where there is insufficient evidence to warrant change. In short, we seek to bring about evolution, not revolution.'

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference for others. IOL is driven by a vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society, and our Members have a shared vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society. The IOL response below is written from an outdoor learning perspective but with the clear intention of reinforcing similar messages from other sector organisations.

If you would like to join with us in the IOL, in championing outdoor learning in its full breadth and depth, and support practitioners in the sector please [click here](https://www.outdoor-learning.org/join-us.html) (https://www.outdoor-learning.org/join-us.html) or use this QR code.



Content sections

- 11. Page 3
- 12. Page 5
- 13. Page 6
- 14. Page 7
- 15. Page 8
- 22. Page 9
- 24. Page 10
- 25. Page 11
- 26. Page 12
- 27. Page 13
- 28. Page 14
- 44. Page 15
- 47. Page 16
- 49. Page 17
- 51. Page 18
- 54. Page 19
- About the IOL. Page 21



11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

[Note: This submission reflects the Institute for Outdoor Learning's area of interest, specifically outdoor learning. It incorporates both pedagogical approach and the basis for subject content.] As well as supporting the needs of the economy we have increasing evidence of the challenges facing children, young people and the natural environment around mental health, wellbeing, biodiversity loss and climate change.

IOL believes that the curriculum should more overtly recognise these challenges by:

1. Legitimising outdoor learning approaches across the whole curriculum.
2. Focusing on developing opportunities for nature connection that leads to pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.
3. Incorporating consideration for the natural environment across the curriculum as statutory where possible

Legitimising outdoor learning approaches

Providing students with regular opportunities to engage in Outdoor Learning has been shown to increase their academic attainment as well as their attitude towards learning [1,2]. Trials with teachers have also shown that "...all subjects; Maths, English, D & T, History, Art can be delivered very effectively in an outdoor setting. This means that the whole school can benefit" [3]. Despite this, research shows that 39% of children do not spend any lesson time outside [4].

Although the current curriculum provides opportunities for outdoor learning (also referred to as learning in the natural environment), it rarely prescribes them, the statutory / guidance structure of the curriculum influencing both pedagogy and approach. Currently, opportunities for outdoor learning in KS 1/2 are explicitly suggested in Science, Geography, Design and Technology and PE (through outdoor and adventurous activities). At KS 3/4, explicit opportunity exists through Biology, Chemistry (ecosystems), Geography and PE. Where guidance suggests strategies, multiple factors will influence how a school approaches the curriculum content. Research has identified multiple barriers to taking learning beyond the classroom and into the natural environment but in order to capitalise on the opportunities an essential first stage is to legitimise these approaches through the curriculum [5,6].

Opportunities (see also section 22)

The primary phase offers the best opportunities to develop nature connection, an essential precursor to pro environmental behaviour, an emotional response to the natural environment being a significant factor in developing such a connection [7].

Research into the relationship between knowledge acquisition and emotional connection has shown that knowledge of how and why to adopt pro environmental behaviours is less likely to



predict pro environmental behaviours than direct experience through spending time in nature [8,9]. Although knowledge of pro environmental behaviour is a prerequisite of action, simply increasing knowledge and raising awareness of issues does not in itself lead to action. What is also required is knowledge of how to go about taking action, and knowledge of the impact, or effectiveness, of one's actions [10]. Through the Secondary phase, students can begin to develop their connection with nature into meaningful action, whether in their personal day to day life, in their communities or later as they enter green jobs and develop careers related to the green economy.

References

- [1] Canal and River Trust (2024) Waterways, Wildlife and Wellbeing. School Impact Report Available at: https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/document/XnTH9n9zLyp3LAedMWR9Zw/Gr0DXxYIws_jZoPF7_L1OpNafQvb_1Qda2SgiJ4SnNg/aHR0cHM6Ly9jcnRwcm9kY21zdWtzMDEuYmxvYi5jb3JlLndpbmRvd3MubmVOL2RvY3VtZW50Lw/01903b40-5747-7618-a0fe-31b7235941c8.pdf. [Accessed 18/11/24]
- [2] Harvey, Rankine and Jensen (2017) Outdoor Learning Hubs-a Scottish attainment challenge innovation fund project. Available at: <https://itl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/outdoor-learning-hubs.pdf> [Accessed 18/11/24]
- [3] Natural England Commissioned Report NECR488 (2024) The Children and Nature Programme 2019-2022 Learning Report. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6158381531004928> [Accessed 18/11/24]
- [4] Natural England (2023) The Children's People and Nature Study for England: 2022 update. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-childrens-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-2022-update/the-childrens-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-2022-update> [Accessed 18/11/24]
- [5] Higgins, P., Nicol, R. and Ross, H. (2006). Teachers' approaches and attitudes to engaging with the natural heritage through the curriculum. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 161 (ROAME No. F04AB04).
- [6] Lumber, R. and Richardson, M. (2017) Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection. PLOS ONE, 12(5), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186>
- [7] Natural Resources Wales (2021) A natural progression. Available at: <https://naturalresources.wales/media/686626/eng-single-natural-progression-page.pdf> [Accessed 17/11/24]
- [8] Kuo, M., Barnes, M. and Jordan, C. (2019) Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship. Front. Psychol. 10:305. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305
- [9] Collado, S., Rosa, C. D., & Corraliza, J. A. (2020) The Effect of a Nature-Based Environmental Education Program on Children's Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors: A Randomized Experiment with Primary Schools. Sustainability, 12(17), 6817. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/su12176817>
- [10] Siegel, L., Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A., & Bellert, A. (2018) Still 'Minding the Gap' Sixteen Years Later: (Re)Storying Pro-Environmental Behaviour. Australian Journal of Environmental Education, 34(2), 189–203. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2018.32>



12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

When the current curriculum provides for opportunities to engage with the natural environment / learning beyond the classroom, learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage have been shown to have less access to opportunities. Access to field studies residential at KS3/4, for example, requires additional funding, and opportunities for more advantaged pupils may well be of longer duration (and potential impact) than for those with less resources. Additional funding sources (eg from Defra or private enterprises) may be postcode dependent and therefore exclusive, marginalising families and schools that do not meet the funding conditions yet are unable to afford the opportunity.

With regard to visits (including residential) more generally, research shows that pupils in disadvantaged areas have fewer opportunities to participate [1]. While not specifically mentioned in the curriculum they form an important part of most children's school careers and are noted as part of the Ofsted inspection framework. These opportunities should be available to all pupils

Evidence continues to suggest that positive learning, behavioural, health and emotional outcomes as well as health benefits are related to the quantity of natural environments in or educational settings [2]. Where access to the natural environment is a critical aspect of the curriculum, the proximity of suitable venues, from school grounds to further afield, has a significant impact [3]. Transport costs become an increasingly significant factor. The free transport offers in London for school children and the range of free venues, for example, makes a significant difference in terms of access to educational opportunities.

References

- [1] Menzies, L., Bowen-Viner, K. and Shaw, B. (2017) Learning Away: The state of school residential in England 2017. LKMco.
- [2] Dillon, J. & Lovell, R. (2022) Links between natural environments, learning and health: evidence briefing. Natural England Evidence Information Note. EIN063.
- [3] Holland, F. (2021) Out of Bounds: Equity in Access to Urban Nature. Groundwork UK.



13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Access to outdoor environments is subject to multiple intersecting factors. While schools may provide opportunities (subject to some of the challenges outlined in **Section 12**), any combination of factors relating to the characteristics above may influence participation in learning experiences. Attitudes to the outdoors or going away on overnight stays for example can vary according to culture, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, and participants can face additional challenges through external providers' (often unintentional) attitudes and behaviours [1]. Evidence from the Monitor of Engagement in the Natural Environment survey found clear inequalities of access to the natural environment between children from white and minority ethnic backgrounds [2]. Although this evidence is representative of out-of-school experiences, it emphasises the need for in-school experiences that at the very least introduce children from all backgrounds to the benefits of the outdoors.

Concern over equal access as mandated through the Equality Act 2010 can have the unintended consequence of teachers not organising a visit because of the difficulties associated with inclusion, highlighting further barriers relating to teacher confidence, competence, knowledge and resources [3]. Socioeconomic disadvantage can have the same effect [4].

References

- [1] Gendered Intelligence (2022) Trans Inclusive Residentials. Available at: https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/page/trans-inclusive-residentials/download_pdf [Accessed 16/11/24]
- [2] Natural England (2019) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: Children and Young People report. London: Natural England.
- [3] King, M. (2020) Making outdoor learning work. Available at: <https://senmagazine.co.uk/content/activities/play/7918/making-outdoor-learning-work/> [Accessed 16/11/24]
- [4] Scrutton, R. A. (2015) 'Outdoor adventure education for children in Scotland: quantifying the benefits', *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 15(2), pp. 123–137.



14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

In addition to **Section 13**, there are challenges for children with SEND around access to green spaces, both getting there and once inside the provision [1]. Work carried out for the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill in 2024 found that the potential requirement for specialist transport, high staffing ratios and a higher degree of supervision results in costs being double those for non-disabled children to access residential experiences [2].

References

- [1] Holland, F. (2021) Out of Bounds: Equity in Access to Urban Nature. Groundwork UK.
- [2] Welsh Government (2024) Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill Explanatory Memorandum. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/kdzlomeq/pri-ld16167-em-e.pdf> [Accessed 16/11/24]



15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Outdoor learning itself is an enabler, supporting attainment by encouraging positive behaviour and attitudes to learning. It also enables learners to move towards their potential by allowing for different ways of learning that may be more suited to their needs [1].

Schools provide the opportunity for equality through mandated provision, providing opportunities for large populations to experience the natural environment. As such, they may be the only chances that some young people get to engage with the natural environment and offer the potential to develop longer term nature connectedness. Schools themselves are therefore an enabling mechanism to tackle inequality. However, significant inequalities exist regarding proximity to public green space, access to gardens, and time spent outdoors, affecting those from ethnic minorities and experiencing socio-economic disadvantage [2].

Students who struggle in a traditional classroom environment often thrive when given an opportunity to take part in Outdoor Learning [3]. The direct reference to outdoor experiences (as detailed in **Section 11**) legitimises approaches to learning beyond the classroom, offering opportunities for learning that are different to those found in the classroom. This legitimisation needs to be expanded to create the policy level conditions necessary to encourage greater engagement with the natural environment.

Support through Pupil Premium, Sport Premium, and external funding grants are essential enablers, necessary to offset the cuts to school visits being made as a result of budgetary restrictions [4]. The proposed Nature Premium would be an additional enabler.

References

- [1] Canal and River Trust (2024) Waterways, Wildlife and Wellbeing: School Impact Report. Canal and River Trust. Available at: <https://bit.ly/48TZNX6>
- [2] Holland, F. (2021) Out of Bounds: Equity in Access to Urban Nature. Groundwork UK.
- [3] Natural England Commissioned Report NECR488 (2024) The Children and Nature Programme 2019-2022 Learning Report
- [4] Sutton Trust (2023) School Funding and Pupil Premium 2023. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2023/> [Accessed 16/11/24]



22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects* where: a) there is too much content; not enough content; or content is missing; b) the content is out-of-date; c) the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy); d) there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)? Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate. *This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

The challenges we have outlined in Section 11 suggest that it is imperative to raise the awareness of both the issues that exist and constructive ways to mitigate them. While there are references to climate change and biodiversity in the current curriculum, the level of challenge now faced suggest that these should be more prevalent. Age-appropriate opportunities to address these issues, relevant to all key stages (except where stated), include:

- Consideration of environmental impact in Design and Technology (including cooking) for example should be essential at all phases of the design process, not just in the evaluation stage.
- Outdoor and adventurous activities (OAA) in PE should consider the needs of the natural environment as an equal partner rather than merely as a venue.
- Art and design should make explicit the opportunities for an emotional response, one of the five pathways to developing a nature connection.
- In Geography, there is scope to specifically include the impact of climate change at KS2 and 3, although we believe that this needs careful thought to avoid developing eco-anxiety.
- In Biology at KS3, stronger/explicit reference can be made to the impact of climate change and biodiversity loss on ecosystems.
- Citizenship can be expanded to include reference to the roles and responsibilities related to caring for the natural environment.

See also Section 24.



24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Studies show that students who have an opportunity to take part in regular Outdoor Learning sessions show improvements in their behaviour and their relationships with others [1,2]. The current curriculum provides opportunities for outdoor learning, but these are not explicitly signposted, and teachers do not have sufficient training in outdoor learning methods to be able to confidently identify opportunities and plan suitable activities. Future curriculum guidance should highlight opportunities for curriculum to be delivered outdoors.

The current guidance on Relationships Education is human – human focused, with mention of the outdoors as being valuable for mental health and physical wellbeing.

Relationships education also offers a specific opportunity for students to explore and understand the benefits of positive and respectful relationships with nature throughout all phases of the curriculum. The current guidance should be expanded to incorporate human - nature relationships as well as human – human, linking to respect and appropriate behaviour (para 55). The importance of developing a respectful relationship with nature for physical health and mental wellbeing should be included in the ‘By the end of ...school’ statements. Direct reference to environmental projects could be added to the opportunities for community service identified in para 100; reference to NCS can be removed.

See also Section 11.

References:

- [1] Canal and River Trust (2024) Waterways, Wildlife and Wellbeing. School Impact Report Available at: https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/document/XnTH9n9zLyp3LAedMWR9Zw/Gr0DXxYlws_jZoPF7_L1OpNafQvb_1Qda2SgiJ4SnNg/aHR0cHM6Ly9jcnRwcm9kY21zdWtzMDEuYmxvYi5jb3JlLndpbmRvd3MubmV0L2RvY3VtZW50Lw/01903b40-5747-7618-a0fe-31b7235941c8.pdf. [accessed 18/11/24]
- [2] Natural England Commissioned Report NECR488 (2024) The Children and Nature Programme 2019-2022 Learning Report. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6158381531004928> [accessed 18/11/24]



25. In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, and what could we change to better support this?

The curriculum in school must reflect individual, community, societal and global needs. We need learners who are not just effective contributors to the economy, but who are:

- Healthy, confident individuals.
- Self-directed, capable and creative learners.
- Sociable, connected and confident people.
- Effective contributors to their communities, workplaces and society.
- Active, responsible, global citizens, capable of making ethical and sustainable choices.

These goals are broadly shared across multiple countries [1]. Outdoor learning can provide opportunities to contribute to them by addressing health, social capital and aspirational outcomes [2].

The current omission of the importance of human nature relationships and nature connection in the curriculum leaves a gap in the knowledge and skills children need in order to engage meaningfully and in a healthy way with issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss. Outdoor learning approaches offer opportunities to develop a wide range of skills including problem solving, communication and teamworking, as well as personal characteristics such as initiative, tenacity and social and emotional regulation, all of which contribute to the development of resilience and resourcefulness [3]. These skills can mitigate the development of eco-anxiety and other mental health conditions, as well as providing a foundation of social capital that enables pupils to thrive when transitioning to secondary school.

References

- [1] IOL (2024) High Quality Outdoor Learning: a guide for policy and decision makers. IOL. Available at: <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/standards/high-quality-outdoor-learning-2025.html>
- [2] Malone, K. and Waite, S. (2016) Student Outcomes and Natural Schooling. Plymouth: Plymouth University.



26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

The current knowledge-rich curriculum with an emphasis on end point assessment leaves considerable opportunity to support the development of essential life skills elsewhere. Reports from industry [1,2] repeatedly ask for school leavers to arrive with a set of skills that include many of those attributed to outdoor learning (see **Section 25**), but that which appear to be lacking in school leavers.

Field/ecological study skills are limited due to their status within qualification specifications and the access issues described in **Section 12**, and the limited provision of Outdoor and Adventurous Activities (OAA) at KS4 leaves very few opportunities - and time - in which to develop technical competence in - and a love for - outdoor pursuits.

Ofsted surveyed 25 primary and 25 secondary schools and found that

Many schools do not match the ambition of the national curriculum. In two thirds of the schools, dance is not taught to all pupils, or the dance content being taught is not well organised. Furthermore, in three quarters of schools, outdoor adventurous activities (OAA) are either not taught effectively or not taught at all. [3]

The future jobs market, whether green or otherwise, will by necessity need to engage with environmental issues. This can be achieved in part by increasing the explicit content of the curriculum that values nature, fosters pro-environmental behaviours and develops the skills and knowledge necessary to action environmental choices. By offering opportunities for meaningful activities in the natural environment, students can learn the life skills that will help them to flourish in society and the world of work.

References

- [1] Grimes, A. (2019) Education and learning for the modern world: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report 2019. CBI.
- [2] Grimes, A. (2019) Educating for the modern world. CBI.
- [3] Ofsted (2023) Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report. HM Government.



27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

The list of vocational qualifications includes a very limited number directly related to outdoor learning, and the last few years have seen a steady reduction in outdoor related programmes in England. Where outdoor adventure (OA) is provided at a qualification centre, its status within a programme depends on the qualification provider. Pearson, for example, incorporates OA within the wider subject of Sport. Entry to the outdoor sector via a level 3 pathway (leading potentially to level 4,5,6 qualification) is thus limited, being largely dependent on whatever is available where a student lives.

There should be greater support for 16-19 provision. In Wales, Agored Cymru offer a suite of qualifications (Learning in the Outdoors) that develop the skills and knowledge relevant to a career in the outdoor sector. IOL believe that consideration should be given to a similar suite of qualifications in England which should be available at Entry Levels as well as Levels 1-3. Research shows that outdoor learning programmes can support resilience and wellbeing development during transition to college from school [1,2].

References

- [1] Davidson, C. and Ewert, A., 2020. College student commitment and outdoor orientation programming. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 43(3), pp.299-316.
- [2] Ribbe Jr, R., Cyrus, R. and Langan, E., 2016. Exploring the impact of an outdoor orientation program on adaptation to college. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 39(4), pp.355-369.



28. To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

A broad and balanced curriculum depends on wider provision than the formal curriculum. Opportunities for outdoor learning (and more broadly, beyond the classroom in general) enhance significantly the development of social and cultural capital (see **Section 54**). The current curriculum offers breadth across subject areas but could be enhanced with the addition of stronger reference to the natural environment and more explicit signposting to opportunities beyond the classroom.

Increasing opportunities for outdoor learning /learning beyond the classroom.

There is strong and consistent evidence that outdoor learning and learning beyond the classroom (LBTC) in general delivers multiple benefits for health, learning and skills, for all students, especially for those groups experiencing inequalities (**see previous sections**). Alternative learning environments found beyond the classroom provide the opportunities for learning, but schools and teachers need support to develop their confidence to take learning outside and to embed LBTC approaches across the curriculum [1,2,3].

References

- [1] Waite, S. (2010) 'Losing our way? The downward path for outdoor learning for children aged 2-11 years.', *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 10(2), pp. 111–127.
- [2] Waite, S. et al. (2016) *Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final Report*. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 215.
- [3] Marchant, E. et al. (2019) 'Curriculum-based outdoor learning for children aged 9-11: A qualitative analysis of pupils' and teachers' views', *PLOS ONE*, 14(5), pp. 1–24. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0212242.



44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

While Ofsted's approach to evaluating the quality of education allows for different approaches, the emphasis on classroom teaching and the situating of outdoor related activity and visits under the extra/curricular / personal development heading does little to demonstrate support for it as an approach.

Research shows a relationship between Ofsted ratings and the degree to which alternative approaches to teaching and learning involving learning beyond the classroom are encouraged and embedded [1,2]. Schools with more positive gradings can feel less pressure and have more capacity to develop their curriculum approach. For those with less favourable Ofsted outcomes, workforce resistance, perceived priorities and fears over accountability mean that implementation of outdoor learning / wider learning beyond the classroom initiatives can require a significant element of bravery [3].

The integration of outdoor learning approaches into the curriculum requires a shift from an emphasis on the measurement of core subjects alone. Outcomes from outdoor learning experiences can be regarded in terms of purely curricular goals and measured accordingly, but such opportunities also offer the chance for a range of additional outcomes that were not the academic focus to be achieved. This is what makes the outdoors such a rich learning environment, but for the full value to be gained a shift of thinking is necessary to focus what we value, rather than value what we currently measure [4].

References

- [1] Kemp, N. and Pagden, A. (2019) 'The place of forest school within English primary schools: senior leader perspectives', *Education 3-13*, 47(4), pp. 490–502.
- [2] Pimlott-Wilson, H. and Coates, J. (2019) 'Rethinking learning? Challenging and accommodating neoliberal educational agenda in the integration of Forest School into mainstream educational settings', *The Geographical journal*, 185(3), pp. 268–278.
- [3] Prince, H. E. and Diggory, O. (2023) 'Recognition and reporting of outdoor learning in primary schools in England', *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 24(4), pp. 553–565. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2023.2166544.
- [4] Waite, S. (2010) 'Losing our way? The downward path for outdoor learning for children aged 2-11 years.', *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 10(2), pp. 111–127.



47. To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners? a) Level 3 b) Level 2 c) Level 1 and entry level

For learners interested in a career in the outdoor sector there is currently little on offer in the 16-19 curriculum. The focus on academic subjects in school settings and variation in practical subject availability means that if learners want to follow a more practical route, such as one in the outdoor industry, it may not be available to them. Many entry level programmes in outdoor skills are not available in school settings and can therefore only be accessed by school leavers.

The National Careers Service suggests that a relevant qualification, such as a Level 2 or 3 Diploma in Skills and Activities for Sport and Active Leisure (Outdoor Education) is one route into becoming an outdoor activity instructor. Qualifications at all levels linked to the outdoors require access to additional resources and expertise. Supporting learning centres to provide these opportunities would help those learners with an aspiration to enter the outdoor industry to access these courses through school.

Outdoor related qualifications empower learners to succeed academically and personally while fostering a deeper connection with their surroundings. Accredited pathways enable more learners to reach their potential. However, the reduction in the number of centres offering outdoor related qualifications in England has the potential to affect subsequent take up of Level 4 courses.

See also Section 27.

The benefits of outdoor learning outlined in **Section 54** also provide a valid means of supporting government objectives for supporting the mental health of college students [1].

References

- [1] DfE (2024) 6 ways we're supporting children and young people with their mental health. Available at: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/05/supporting-children-and-young-people-mental-health/> [Accessed 19/11/24]



49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

The outdoor sector in the UK is significant, offering numerous roles and development opportunities [1]. The sector hosts over 15,000 jobs, contributing around £700m to the UK economy [2]. Developing links between the outdoor sector and 16-19 provision is one way of developing learner understanding, but it is also through exposure to experiences with a variety of providers that enables learners to see firsthand the variety of roles in the sector that are open to them. Engaging with sector professionals / role models can provide the stimulus to explore these career pathways. Work experience opportunities offer a further way of developing insight and experience. Careers guidance needs to be informed about opportunities in the outdoor sector, be they apprenticeship routes or academic routes.

References

- [1] IOL (n.d.) Working in Outdoor Learning. Available at: <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/workforce/working-in-outdoor-learning.html> [Accessed 19/11/24]
- [2] IOL (2022) Outdoor learning Sector Survey. IOL. Available at: <https://www.activitiesindustry mutual.co.uk/outdoor-learning-survey-report-summer-2022/> [Accessed 19/11/24]



51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

As with the 5-16 curriculum, IOL believe that all learners and courses should make reference to and engage with the natural environment as a matter of course. Experiences in the outdoors have been shown to engender care for the environment and develop the life skills required in the workplace (see **Sections 11, 22 and 54**).

Getting outdoors and exploring nature can have profound benefits for a person's wellbeing and emotional development. Outdoor learning provides opportunities for learners to strengthen bonds with their peers, using teamwork to problem solve and build on their knowledge of the natural world.



54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Outdoor learning is not an addition to the curriculum. It is both an approach to teaching and learning, often employed in the primary phase, and the basis for subject content in upper secondary and 16-19 education. It provides opportunities to contextualise learning and promote academic achievement, develop loving and respectful relationships with nature that can lead to pro environmental behaviours and actions, and instil a love for the outdoors that can lead to a range of healthy recreational activities, jobs and careers.

We know from research that only 23% of children spend lesson time outside at school that is not PE [1]. The same research shows also that 83% of children are concerned about the environment and want to do more to look after it, but only 47% felt a connection with nature. 87% said they feel happy in nature, suggesting that there is a clear imperative to increase outdoor lesson time, focusing on developing a nature connection that has positive benefits for mental health, wellbeing and long term, the natural environment.

The curriculum sits within the wider context of family and community, and IOL believe that any curricular reform should be discussed in relation to the proposed National Youth Strategy.

The evidence for the benefits of outdoor learning

Outdoor learning (OL), also referred to as learning in the natural environment (LiNE), is an approach to delivering the curriculum that offers numerous well evidenced benefits. A summary of the evidence base supporting outdoor learning in the UK [2] found that nearly all interventions had a positive effect. Evidence supports positive impact on building social capital, fostering pride, belonging and community involvement [3], while a growing number of Social Return on Investment Studies (SROI) are showing a significant return on investment in relation to wellbeing and preventing poor mental and physical health [4], and positive learning outcomes [5].

Outdoor learning has been shown to improve health and wellbeing, engage students and develop personal competencies [6]. Numerous studies demonstrate that experiences in nature promote learning, fostering nature connection leading to pro environmental behaviour and develop leadership, communication, problem solving and critical thinking skills [7].

Academic performance has been shown to be positively affected by repeat outdoor learning experiences over multiple weeks [8,9]. Evidence of the long-term benefits of outdoor learning in school settings was established through the Natural Connections Demonstration Project which ran for four years with 125 schools in the south-west of England from 2012-2016. Benefits for children included improved enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, engagement with learning, health and wellbeing, behaviour and attainment. Significantly, the project also showed that there were benefits for teachers as well in terms of positive impacts on teaching



practice, health and wellbeing, professional development, job satisfaction and teaching performance [10]. While increasingly acknowledged as an approach to effective teaching and learning that is incorporated into formal education through national curricula, outdoor learning also offers an alternative pathway for those who might struggle with mainstream approaches, with improvements seen in behaviour, peer to peer relations, cooperation, enjoyment and student-teacher relations [11].

References

- [1] Natural England (2023) The Children's People and Nature Survey for England: 2022 update. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-childrens-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-2022-update/the-childrens-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-2022-update>. [Accessed 17/11/24]
- [2] Fiennes, C. et al. (2015) The Existing Evidence-Base about the Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning. London: UCL Institute of Education. Evidence for Policy and Practice: Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) and Giving Evidence.
- [3] Dillon, J. & Lovell, R. (2022) Links between natural environments, learning and health: evidence briefing. Natural England Evidence Information Note. EIN063.
- [4] Makanjuola, A., Lynch, M., Hartfiel, N., Cuthbert, A., Edwards, R.T. (2023) Prevention of Poor Physical and Mental Health through the Green Social Prescribing Opening Doors to the Outdoors Programme: A Social Return on Investment Analysis. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 20, 6111. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20126111>
- [5] Social Value Business (2022) Social & economic benefits of learning in natural environments: A study of learning outside the classroom in natural environments (LINE) in primary school settings to provide a forecast of social value. NECR442. Natural England
- [6] Mann, J., Gray, T., Truong, S., et al. (2022) Getting Out of the Classroom and Into Nature: A Systematic Review of Nature-Specific Outdoor Learning on School Children's Learning and Development. *Front. Public Health* 10:877058. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2022.877058
- [7] Kuo, M., Barnes, M. and Jordan, C. (2019) Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship. *Front. Psychol.* 10:305. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305
- [8] Quibell, T., Charlton, J. and Law, J. (2017) 'Wilderness Schooling: A controlled trial of the impact of an outdoor education programme on attainment outcomes in primary school pupils', *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(3), pp. pp572-587.
- [9] McAnally, H., Robertson, L. and Hancox, R. (2018) 'Effects of an Outdoor Education Programme on Creative Thinking and Well-being in Adolescent Boys', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 53(2), pp. 241–255.
- [10] Waite, S. et al. (2016) Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final Report. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 215.
- [11] Davis, K. (2022). The Freedom to Have Fun, Play, Make Friends, and Be a Child: Findings from an Ethnographic Research Study of Learning Outside in Alternative Provision. In: Cutting, R., Passy, R. (eds) *Contemporary Approaches to Outdoor Learning*. Palgrave Studies in Alternative Education. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85095-1_10



About the IOL

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference for others. IOL is driven by a vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society, and our members have a shared vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society.

Response written by:

Dr Dave Harvey

Anna Thompson

Dawn Thomas

Dan Playford

