

***Outdoor education:  
the countryside as a classroom***



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## **Executive Summary**

Outdoor learning is good for children and young people. It helps them gain a practical understanding of the world around them, build self-confidence, test their abilities, take sensible risks, and develop a sense of responsibility and tolerance to places and people.

The body of research showing the considerable health and well-being benefits of spending time in natural green spaces is growing. In addition, outdoor learning can help children and young people understand subjects, like maths or science, through real world examples and first hand experience. While academic achievement is important, outdoor education can play a significant role helping pupils develop soft skills like good communication, team work and leadership that are essential to a well rounded education vital for life beyond the classroom. Yet the countryside still remains an enigma for far too many.

The reasons for this are complex but include a lack of opportunity to visit the countryside and parental fears around child safety. It is understandable that every parent wants their child to be safe, but reluctance to let them explore natural places in their leisure time is limiting their exposure to the countryside and reducing their hands on knowledge of the natural world around them.

For these reasons The Countryside Alliance Foundation (TCAF) believes outdoor education must be included in the National Curriculum to give all children the chance to experience the considerable health, personal development and educational benefits of outdoor learning. We also believe outdoor education has a major role to play in reconnecting children and young people with the countryside and the many food and natural resources it provides. By gaining a practical understanding of the countryside, they are engaged in protecting its future.

Over the past year the TCAF has uncovered huge enthusiasm for outdoor education among children and teachers. In fact of the children surveyed by TCAF, 85 per cent want to take part in countryside activities through their school, and 97 per cent of the teachers surveyed in a National Teacher Voice Survey believe it is important for children to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum.

Yet this level of demand and enthusiasm is not matched by delivery on the ground and as a result generations of children are missing out. Over 60 per cent of children polled felt they didn't learn enough about the countryside at school. While 76 per cent of teachers said concerns about health and safety is the main barrier to outdoor education. Therefore it is not surprising that 53 per cent of children did not go on a single school visit to the countryside in 2008.

Well managed outdoor education visits pose a low risk to student welfare. Our research on the numbers of legal claims made in relation to children injured on school visits will ease fears around health and safety and inspire greater confidence among teachers to use the countryside as a classroom. 138 local authorities in England and Wales responded to a Freedom of Information request by TCAF. We discovered that only 364 legal claims were made over a ten year period and under half of the cases were successful and resulted in a payout. In fact, on average just over £290 was paid out per year by each local authority.

Arguably, media fervour and misinterpreted teacher union guidance following rare incidents has unintentionally led to a climate of fear surrounding health and safety legislation. This has resulted in children missing out on valuable learning experiences.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation does not think this is adequate. Our five point plan shows the way ahead to ensure outdoor learning forms a part of every single child's education.

- **An entitlement to outdoor learning should be created within the National Curriculum to ensure the countryside becomes part of every child's education.**
- **The Qualified Teacher Status standards should include the provision for practical training of teachers in delivering learning outside the classroom.**
- **The Government should take steps to prioritise the funding allocated for outdoor learning and direct resources to helping schools that struggle to fund outdoor education visits for children.**
- **A renewed effort is required by Government and education stakeholders to raise awareness among teachers of the low risks and high rewards of well managed outdoor learning.**
- **The decline in small grants must be halted if charities are to play a continuing role in developing innovative programmes to increase access to the countryside for children and young people.**

## Part One- an introduction to outdoor education and its benefits

In this section we explain the extent of natural space available for all to enjoy, the positive effects of natural spaces on health, behaviour and learning outcomes for children, policy progress on outdoor learning and why children's exposure to and understanding of the countryside remains low.

### 1.1 Natural spaces for all

Britain is blessed with some of the most beautiful, rugged and unique countryside in the world. Instantly recognisable, the UK's landscapes have evolved as a result of natural geological change and thousands of years of human activity such as agriculture, land management and development. Today, the activities of farmers and land managers still play a central role in providing food and maintaining and preserving the landscapes and species that live in them for everyone to enjoy.

Despite the UK being one of the most densely populated countries in Europe<sup>1</sup>, Britain has thousands of acres of mountain, moor, down and coast to enjoy through National Parks, public rights of way, open access land, country parks, local nature reserves and many other forms of access. Britain has 15 National Parks, covering around 22,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 190,000 km of public rights of way, 100,000,000 hectares of open access land, 400 country parks, 35,000 hectares of local nature reserves and many other areas of accessible land. This land is available for everyone to take part in a variety of outdoor activities, from mountain biking and fishing, to walking and horse riding. While much of this land is found primarily outside metropolitan areas, even those who live in the most built up areas of England have to numerous relaxing green spaces.

London, with roughly 7.2 million residents, is the largest and one of the most densely populated cities in Western Europe but has an extensive network of parks and woodlands. London has eight Royal Parks, covering 5,000 acres and numerous others parks and green spaces, many of them within a few kilometres from iconic central destinations. For example, Hampstead Heath, located 6 km from Trafalgar Square, consists of 791 acres of woodland, meadows and ponds that are home to kingfishers, reed warblers and all three species of British woodpecker. Birmingham has over 200 parks and claims to have more than in any other European city. Its premier green space, Cannon Hill Park, located 3 km from the city centre covers 120 acres and contains a designated woodland conservation zone. In Yorkshire, Leeds City Council manage over 4,000 hectares of park land and one of its seven main parks, Roundhay Park which covers 700 acres, is located 4 km north of the city centre and can be accessed easily by public transport. These figures only provide a snap shot of the amount of green space available to members of public in cities across Britain, but they highlight an important point - that access to nature is not exclusive. Even in the most built up parts of country anyone can access some form of green space if they want to.

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Question, 10<sup>th</sup> September, Column 1831W.  
[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080910/text/80910w0010.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080910/text/80910w0010.htm)

## 1.2 Natural healing

It is widely recognised that spending time outdoors in green spaces, such as parks or nature reserves, can be restorative or calming, improve health outcomes through higher levels of physical activity<sup>2</sup> and can improve mental health in both children and adults<sup>3</sup>. The body of research demonstrating the beneficial effects of spending time and learning in green spaces is growing, and various observational and empirical studies confirm the feelings of freedom and calm many of us have felt if we've walked through sunlight dappled woodland, over rock scarred crags, or even taken a lunch time stroll in a park away from the office.

Nature can reduce our stress levels, as evident when researchers took the blood pressures of adults that completed stressful tasks after being subjected to two recovery situations. Adults that recovered from the task in a room with a green outdoor view before being taken to a nature reserve had significantly lower blood pressure than those that recovered in a windowless room before spending time in an urban environment<sup>4</sup>. Although children share many of the same types of health benefits from outdoor use as adults, there are some aspects that are particular to, or more important to, children.

In the UK, pioneering research has also shown the restorative effects that outdoor environments can have on the anger levels in groups of children aged ten to 13, with different behavioural states. In a recent study, (the first in the UK to quantify mental health outcomes of a Forest School in young people with varying emotional health) the cognitive restoration of children, whose behavioural state ranged from 'no behaviour problem' to 'significant behaviour problem' to 'mental disorder' was measured using a mood scale before and after a typical day at school and a Forest School. The forest setting was advantageous to mood in all three behaviour groups, but the restorative experience was most intense in the 'mental disorder' group. A key finding was the ability of forest settings to stabilise anger across all three groups<sup>5</sup>.

Anger in young people is linked in the literature with reduced physical and mental health, depression and increased anti-social behaviour<sup>6</sup>. Therefore the ability of outdoor environments to stabilise anger in young people is particularly relevant in a school context where it could play a key role in reducing the number of permanent and fixed exclusions for physical and verbal abuse in schools, an estimated 391,960 in the 2007/08 school year<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illness will become the greatest source of ill-health by 2020. Based on the role of outdoor environments to improve mental health, the increased use of the outdoors in

<sup>2</sup> Children in the Outdoors – A literature review. Sustainable Development Research Centre, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Review of the environmental dimension of children and young people's well-being. A report for the Sustainable Development Commission, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Hartig T, Evans G W, Jammer L D, Davis D S and Garling T (2003). Tracking restoration in natural and urban field settings. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23, pp. 109-123.

<sup>5</sup> Roe J, Aspinall P and Ward Thompson C. (2009) Forest School: evidence for restorative health benefits in young people. Forestry Commission.

<sup>6</sup> Kerr, M. A. and Schneider, B. H. (2008) Anger expression in children and adolescents: a review of the empirical literature, *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(4): 559-77.

<sup>7</sup> Permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England 2007/08. The Department of Children, Schools and Families. July 2009.

schools could contribute to reducing the levels of mental health problems in school age children. In this context it is vital that outdoor learning in natural or outdoor settings is given priority as a preventative measure within government health strategies.

While further research may be required to establish the longer-term behaviour and learning outcomes in different groups of children, the breath of evidence available on the restorative effects of outdoor educational is considerable and there has been a continuing policy interest in the health and wellbeing outcomes associated with the use of outdoor spaces in education.

In relation to specific behavioural problems there has been particular focus on the link between contact with nature and the alleviation of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms.

ADHD can be a debilitating condition, characterised by a persistent pattern of impulsiveness and inattention with or without a component of hyperactivity. Although no central figures are held on the number of children in Britain with mixed behavioural diagnoses, it is estimated that one in 20 may suffer from ADHD<sup>8</sup>. In children with attention deficits, their performance on tasks involving attention is generally substantially below same-age peers, but it is also occasionally good and sometimes excellent. What is evident from recent research in America are the clear improvements in the symptoms of ADHD in children that spend time in natural environments or green spaces.

Parents of children who suffered from ADHD were asked to nominate the activities that had the best and worst effect on their child's symptoms. In activities categorised as 'green', which included fishing and football, some children's symptoms improved by 40 per cent<sup>9</sup>. This research was consolidated recently when the same researchers quantified the effect of green space on the attention of children with ADHD. They showed that children scored significantly higher on a Digit Span Backwards (DSB)<sup>10</sup> test after completing a puzzle designed to fatigue the child's attentional capacity and then subsequently walking through a park, compared to walking through two other urban environments. In fact the mean DSB score after children spent time in a park was 22 per cent higher than when they spent time in urban neighbourhood<sup>11</sup>. But the most significant result was that the effect of the park walk observed in the experiment was roughly equal to the peak effects of two typical ADHD medications. In this case nature really can provide a solution which doesn't involve a visit to the pharmacy.

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<sup>8</sup> BUPA health fact sheet. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children. May 2009. [http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact\\_sheets/html/attention\\_deficit.html?print#1](http://hcd2.bupa.co.uk/fact_sheets/html/attention_deficit.html?print#1)

<sup>9</sup> Taylor A F, Kuo F E, Sullivan W C. (2001). Coping with ADD. The surprising connection to green play settings. *Environment and Behaviour*. 33 (1): 54-77.

<sup>10</sup> Digit Span Backwards is a widely used, standardised measure of concentration. It involves listening to a sequence of numbers from two to eight digits long (e.g. 2-5-1) and repeating the sequence aloud in reverse order (1-5-2).

<sup>11</sup> Taylor A F, Kuo F E. (2009) Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park. *Journal of Attention Disorders*. 12 (5):402-9

### 1.3 Policy initiatives encouraging outdoor learning

Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto Pledge 2006

“To enhance our children’s understanding of the environment we will give every school student the opportunity to experience out-of-classroom learning in the natural environment.”

Learning outside the classroom has been defined, in its broadest sense, as any structured learning experience that takes place outside a classroom environment, during the school day, after school or during the holidays (Department for Education and Skills, 2005). It can include, amongst other activities, cultural visits, science and geography fieldwork, environmental and countryside education, outdoor and adventurous group activities, learning through outdoor play and, visits to museums and heritage sites<sup>12</sup>.

In response to the growing body of research suggesting that good quality outdoor education can add depth to the curriculum and promote cognitive, personal and social development in young people the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto in 2006. The manifesto formally recognised the benefits of outdoor education not just to health and well being, but also to self-esteem, motivation and learning outcomes. It centres around seven pledge points that the Labour government, in collaboration with parents, teachers and outdoor education providers would focus on to make outdoor education an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever a child’s age.

Nearly 1700 organisations have signed up to the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. The responsibility for Learning Outside the Classroom was handed over to the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, a company limited by guarantee in 2009, but receives support from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The DCSF and The Council have made progress in a number of areas to encourage the delivery of outdoor education. This can be accessed through their useful online resource which brings together information on the benefits of outdoor education, health and safety guidance, linking outdoor education to the National Curriculum, accreditation schemes for providers and case studies to encourage the uptake of outdoor education in all schools<sup>13</sup>. Guidance on health and safety and new accreditation schemes for providers now give schools more confidence to encourage children to ‘get their hands dirty’.

The Manifesto has brought focus to delivering outdoor education and acted as a spring board for a number of government and non-government initiatives. From Growing Schools, a Government initiative designed to encourage schools to take part in growing activities and outdoor exploration teaching children how food is grown and where it comes from, to Open Farm Sunday a non-government initiative giving children the chance to meet a farmer and understand the role they play in producing food and

<sup>12</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An Assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O’ Donnell, L. Morris, M and Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.lotc.org.uk/>

managing the environment. But despite increased efforts to promote outdoor education and make delivery easier, the priority given to it remains low.

Of the 1698 organisations that signed up to the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, only 199<sup>14</sup> schools have pledged support for the manifesto – under 1 per cent of schools in operation in 2006<sup>15</sup>. In addition, only 12 per cent of the 25,018 maintained and independent schools in England<sup>16</sup> registered to take part in the Year of Food and Farming, a government backed national industry initiative, designed to promote healthy living by giving young people direct experience of the countryside through farm visits, growing and cooking activities. While research suggests that outdoor education activities delivered on site in schools have increased recently, there has been a reported decline in off-site visits to places such as the countryside. The main reasons for this are the cost of transport to these sites and concern about health and safety and risk assessments.<sup>17</sup>

Even outside of school children have fewer chances to enjoy and experience the countryside. A recent survey found that less than 10 per cent of children play in natural places such as woodlands, heaths and the countryside in general compared to the 40 per cent of adults that did when they were young. The most popular place for children to play is in their home. In fact 62 per cent of children said they played at home indoors more than any other place<sup>18</sup>, suggesting that they rarely have an opportunity to go to natural places. One of the main reasons for this is parental concern about child safety. Even though the vast majority of parents would like their children to be able to play in natural spaces (85 per cent), three quarters of them are concerned about their safety. Parents think the countryside poses a greater risk to their child's safety than playing on the streets. Despite the fact that around 3,000 children were killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2007<sup>19</sup> compared to the six people killed by falling trees<sup>20</sup>, over 30 per cent of parents would allow their children to play unsupervised on the streets, but nearly 90 per cent would not let them play unsupervised in woods<sup>21</sup>.

It is understandable that every parent wants their child to be safe, but reluctance to let them explore natural places limits their child's exposure to the countryside. Given that many parents may not have access to the countryside, or the time to supervise their children in it; generations of children are missing out on the benefits of spending time in the great outdoors. Children are interested in the countryside when they have an opportunity to be in it - building a den, visiting a farm with animals and exploring rock pools are among their favourite activities when they are there. Children say they want

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<sup>14</sup> Hansard, 30 June 2009, Column 233W.

<sup>15</sup> DCSF. Schools and Pupils in England: January 2006 (final)

[www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000682/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000682/index.shtml)

<sup>16</sup> Schools and Pupils in England, January 2007. Department of Children, Schools and Families

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000744/index.shtml>

<sup>17</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An Assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local

Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M and Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006

<sup>18</sup> Childhood and Nature: A Survey on changing relationships with nature across generations. March 2009 Natural England.

<sup>19</sup> Child casualties in road accidents:2007. Road Accident Statistics Factsheet No. 5. – 2009. Department for Transport

<sup>20</sup> Mortality Statistics. Death registered in 2007. National Statistics. Deaths from falling trees were confirmed in personal communication as they are located within the cause category: Exposure to forces of nature [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_health/DR2007/DR\\_07\\_2007.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/DR2007/DR_07_2007.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Childhood and Nature: A Survey on changing relationships with nature across generations. March 2009 Natural England.

more freedom to explore natural spaces (81 per cent)<sup>22</sup> and if they are less likely to experience it at home it is imperative that children get the chance to do this at school – the educational benefits of doing so are considerable.

Providing children the opportunity to access and learn about the countryside in their early school years is not only valuable to their education, it is also vital if we want to secure a life long interest for the natural world from childhood through to adulthood. Research suggests a reduced affinity for the natural environment during teenage years<sup>23</sup>. However by allowing children to engage with nature early on it can help them develop an enthusiasm for the countryside they will return to as adults (post 18) and hopefully pass on to their children. There is also evidence to suggest that childhood participation in “wild” nature activities such as hiking, camping, and fishing is a stronger predictor of the development of pro-environmental attitudes in adulthood. On this basis, all children should have the opportunity to take part in these activities. In addition, they should have access to balanced information on how the countryside is managed because it could help shape positive future attitudes and behaviours toward the natural environment. This would be a proactive first step in encouraging them to value it and, in time, potentially motivate behaviour change to help ensure its future.

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<sup>22</sup> Childhood and Nature: A Survey on changing relationships with nature across generations. March 2009 Natural England.

<sup>23</sup> Natural Thinking. Dr. William Bird. RSPB. Investigating the links between the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Mental Health.

## Part two – The Countryside Alliance Foundation research

In this section we highlight the levels of opportunity children around the UK have to visit the countryside with their school and their demand for outdoor education, and reveal the latest results on teacher’s views about the role of the countryside within the national curriculum and the barriers they believe exist in delivering outdoor education.

### 2.1 Levels of opportunity and demand for outdoor learning among children and young people

The Countryside Alliance Foundation conducted a survey of children across the UK to investigate the level of opportunity to visit the countryside with their schools and demand for outdoor education among children. Between 28<sup>th</sup> May and 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009, 2,127 children between the ages of six and 15 across the UK responded to an online survey<sup>24</sup>.

Just over 53 per cent of children, between the ages of six and 15, did not go a single trip to the countryside with their school in 2008. These results suggest that the Government has fallen short of its 2006 manifesto promise:

*“to enhance our children’s understanding of the environment we will give every school student the opportunity to experience out-of-classroom learning in the natural environment.”*

This figure provides the only indicative insight into the numbers of children that did not go on a trip to countryside to experience outdoor learning with their school last year. The DCSF do not record such figures and have not since they launched the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto in 2006<sup>25</sup>. While the National Foundation for Educational Research conducted research into the extent and nature of provision of outdoor education (2006), it was based on a survey of teachers rather than official figures and therefore no definitive assessment can be made on whether the Government is delivering on its manifesto promise.

However, over 80 per cent of children would find lessons more fun if they involved a trip to the countryside. These results aren’t surprising given the significant body of research showing how natural spaces improve attention and cognitive skills, nor is it surprising that children have the self-awareness to identify that outdoor learning could help them engage more enthusiastically with their school work.

Over 60 per cent of children feel they don’t learn enough about the countryside at school. Given that only an estimated 13 per cent of England is developed<sup>26</sup>, yet over 80 per cent of people live in urban areas<sup>27</sup>, many children are missing out on knowledge

<sup>24</sup> Survey hosted by specialist youth pollsters YoungPoll. [www.youngpoll.com](http://www.youngpoll.com)

<sup>25</sup> Ms Diana R. Johnson: “The Department does not collect data on how many children experience learning outside the classroom.” Hansard, 30 June 2009, Column 233W.

<sup>26</sup> Living Working Countryside. The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing. P 39.

<sup>27</sup> People and Migration – Urban areas.

about large swathes of England that provides much of our food and resources, as well as being home to some the UK's most iconic landscapes and wildlife.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation believes that one of the most effective and engaging ways of learning about the countryside is by participating in countryside activities and meeting people that work in the countryside – and demand for these experiences is high. In fact, nearly 85 per cent of children would like the chance to enjoy countryside activities like fishing, falconry and farm visits through school. We believe these experiences are invaluable in allowing children to understand first hand why it is so important to engage with and care for the countryside which produces many of products and services needed for a good quality of life. In addition, giving young people the chance to meet people from different communities to learn about the work and activities they take part in facilitates community cohesion.

While this new research is important in highlighting demand for outdoor education among children, which should be considered within education policy, facts and figures can't convey how much children get out of exposure to the countryside at a grass routes level. Through the events attended by TCAF, or the projects run through them, children have made their feelings clear about why they enjoy learning in the countryside.

#### **Feedback from pupils about why it is fun learning in the countryside**

You can actually smell and touch the animals when you learn about them – you can't do this in the classroom – Toni Aged 11

Being outside, seeing, smelling and touching different things makes learning more real – Ellie Aged 9

You get to see so many different things that you wouldn't if you were inside – Tyler Aged 8

Learning outside makes things feel more real – Kyle Aged 8

It is fun to learn about the people and wildlife in the countryside - Rob Aged 10

The birds of prey are amazing and you can hold them when your outside – Daniel Aged 5

You can see some of the wild animals that live in the countryside – Rosie Aged 7

It's clear from the survey results and feedback that children want more opportunity to learn in, and about, the countryside through school. However, the solution, in part, also relies on understanding the enthusiasm of teachers for outdoor education and how to make it easier for them to deliver it – which is considered in parts three and four of this report.

## 2.2 Teacher survey on the role of the countryside in the National Curriculum

In June 2009 TCAF commissioned four questions on the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Teacher Voice Survey. The NFER is the UK's leading independent research organisation and the Teacher Voice Survey is widely recognised as a respected and representative tool for eliciting accurate information on teacher's views on a range of subjects. Between the 19<sup>th</sup> June and the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 726 teachers in primary schools and 705 teachers in secondary maintained schools in England responded to the survey.

According to the results the vast majority of respondents (97 per cent) felt that it was 'very important' or 'quite important' for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum. However, the value placed on outdoor learning differed by sector: a greater proportion of primary (57 per cent) than secondary respondents (46 per cent) felt that it was 'very important' for pupils to learn about the countryside. Responses broken down by senior leaders and classroom teachers were found to be largely similar.

Nearly all (89 per cent) respondents felt that the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning in the future. When analysed by school sector, proportionally more primary respondents than their secondary counterparts expressed such a view (94 per cent compared with 83 per cent). There was little difference in the responses of senior leaders and classroom teachers.

Over half of all respondents (55 per cent) felt that teachers do not receive enough advice or resources to enable them to use outdoor educational visits to the countryside in cross-curricular learning. Just under a quarter of respondents (24 per cent), however, believed that they receive adequate advice but not enough resources. Just six per cent felt they receive both adequate resources and advice and a further six per cent felt they receive adequate resources but not enough advice. These results suggest that resources for enabling educational visits to the countryside are a greater limiting factor than advice about such visits<sup>28</sup>.

When teachers were asked about the barriers to delivering outdoor education the three most frequently identified responses were: concerns about health and safety (76 per cent); lack of funding (64 per cent) and insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum (53 per cent). Encouragingly, two of the barriers least frequently mentioned by teachers were lack of support from school leaders (12 per cent) and lack of support from the local authority (seven per cent). This suggests that, in most cases, there is sufficient managerial and administrative support available for teachers to undertake outdoor activities in the countryside if they could overcome other more dominant barriers.

When responses were analysed by sector, a number of differences emerged which included:

- insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum was identified by 69 per cent of secondary teachers compared with 38 per cent of their primary counterparts

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<sup>28</sup> Southcott, C. Pyle, K. NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus June 2009 Survey. The Countryside and the National Curriculum.

- time required to fill in the necessary forms/administration was identified by 59 per cent of secondary respondents compared with 34 per cent of primary respondents
- difficulties in undertaking risk management was a barrier identified by 51 per cent of secondary respondents compared with 38 per cent of primary respondents
- the cost being too high was identified by 58 per cent of primary respondents compared with 39 per cent of their secondary counterparts.

These differences would suggest that time pressures are more of a concern for secondary teachers than their primary counterparts. While not one of the most frequently mentioned responses overall, it is also worth noting that a greater proportion of secondary teachers than primary teachers identified a lack of support from senior management as a main barrier (19 per cent compared with 6 per cent).

Some differences also emerged when responses were analysed by seniority. The most notable differences between senior leaders and classroom teachers were:

- The cost being too high was noted by 57 per cent of school leaders compared with 47 per cent of classroom teachers
- Insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum was identified by 56 per cent of classroom teachers compared with 39 per cent of school leaders
- Time to fill in necessary forms/administration was noted by 47 per cent of classroom teachers compared with 41 per cent of school leaders<sup>29</sup>.

## **2.3 Conclusions from survey research**

The vast majority of teachers believe that it is important for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum. More primary than secondary teachers felt it was 'very important' for pupils to learn about the countryside.

Just over half (55 per cent) of all respondents commented that teachers do not currently receive enough advice or resources to enable them to use visits to the countryside in cross-curricular learning. This finding suggests the need to promote and raise awareness of existing resources and practical advice that are available to teaching staff.

Encouragingly most teachers felt that the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning in the future; however at present, there are a number of barriers which are preventing teachers from implementing such activities. The most frequently reported barrier was concern about health and safety.

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<sup>29</sup> Southcott, C. Pyle, K. NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus June 2009 Survey. The Countryside and the National Curriculum.

Other frequently mentioned barriers included a lack of funding and insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum; both of which could prevent teachers being able to obtain the training and support they require in order to ensure that the countryside becomes a more integral part of cross-curricular learning.

## **Part Three – The Countryside Alliance Foundation recommendations for outdoor education**

**In this section we discuss the barriers to delivering outdoor education identified by teachers' and suggest ways to address these issues. In addition, we discuss why outdoor education should be included as an entitlement within the National Curriculum and how the voluntary sector could play a greater role in provision.**

### **3.1 Easing the fear of health and safety**

The most frequently cited barrier to outdoor education highlighted in the NFER Teacher Voice survey (June 2009) was concerns about health and safety. This finding reinforces previous research undertaken by the NFER<sup>30</sup> in 2006 where concerns about health and safety, risk management, as well as costs appeared to be the main factors inhibiting current or future learning outside the classroom developments. Risk assessment and implementing appropriate health and safety procedures to ensure the safety of pupils on school visits is a statutory requirement. The key role health and safety procedures play in protecting children on school visits is irrefutable. But the myths, misconceptions and anxiety which surrounds them might contribute to a culture of fear, which when examined against the numbers of incidents occurring on school visits and prosecutions against teachers is wholly disproportionate especially when weighed against the benefits of outdoor education.

The risk to student welfare as a result of school visits is very low. Despite a series of high profile tragedies on school trips<sup>31</sup>, between the years of 1996 and 2008 there have been 42<sup>32</sup> pupil deaths, 20 of which occurred abroad. In the context of the estimated 10 million school age children all of whom might spend on average one or two days on out-of-school activities, the average of 3 deaths per year gives a statistically insignificant fatality rate<sup>33</sup>. Although of course any death is an unimaginable loss for those personally affected and it is essential to do everything possible to prevent such tragedies. Despite the low risks associated with taking children on school visits, the issue of health and safety procedures and fear of litigation remains a key concern among teachers. Our result research on the numbers of legal claims will go some way to reassure teachers that the risk of being at the sharp end of litigation is low.

In response to teacher concerns about health and safety and fear of litigation, TCAF sent a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to all local authorities with responsibility for education in England and Wales. We asked each local authority for: the number of legal claims made against them as a result of school age children (5-16 years old) injured on school visits between the years 1998 and 2008; the number of successful legal claims

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<sup>30</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An Assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M and Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006.

<sup>31</sup> The most recent school visit incident was the Glenridding Beck incident which resulted in the death of Max Palmer and the subsequent prosecution of his teacher.

<sup>32</sup> Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA). Anonymised Fatalities on Visits. These data are the best available estimates as no official, centralised data on school trip fatalities is held. For source data contact the AALA.

<sup>33</sup> Outdoor activities, negligence and the law. Julian Fulbrook. 2005. Ashgate publishing.

made against them for school age children injured on school visits and the amounts awarded.

Of the 138 local authorities that responded, only 364 claims were made over a ten year period and of these 156 were successful and resulted in a payout - well under half of all claims made. The total amount of compensation paid out was £404,952, meaning on average each local authority paid out just £293 per year in compensation between 1998 and 2008. These results challenge the widely held assumption that school trips are inherently dangerous and result in huge numbers of compensation claims.

When it comes to risk assessments schools have a duty to undertake them and implement comprehensive health and safety procedures to ensure the safety of pupils as far as is practically possible. In addition, employers have a statutory duty to ensure the safety of staff and pupils within schools and outside the classroom. This means that local authorities or school governing bodies, as employers of teaching staff and bodies responsible for children, have a duty to ensure that the risk assessments and health and safety policies of schools with regards to school visits are comprehensive. Risk assessment is the process of systematically and logically identifying actual or potential risks and putting in place comprehensive health and safety procedures to manage those risks as far as is practicable to ensure the safety of people taking part in an activity or job.

Health and safety guidance, albeit substantial, exists that clearly documents the roles and responsibilities of both local authorities and schools in carrying out risk assessments and implementing health and safety procedures for school visits. The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA), a body established as part of the Activity Centres (Young Persons Safety) Act 1995, has played a valuable role in developing guidance on risk assessment and health and safety procedures for different activities. This can be found in the comprehensive Health and Safety of Pupils of School Trips. While comprehensive, this document is being revised by the Government into a shorter, clearer and more succinct document called the Health and Safety of Learners Outside the Classroom (HASLOC). This document should help reassure teachers of the protection afforded to them under the law and allow them to follow the process of risk management more easily.

As a result of recommendation from the Department of Children, Schools and Families most schools now have an Educational Visits Co-ordinator (EVC) who acts as a point of contact between the school and the local authority. The local authority Outdoor Education Advisor is employed to liaise with EVC to provide advice and guidance on risk assessment and ensuring robust health and safety procedures are in place for outdoor visits. This interface between schools and local authorities seems to be working well, and based on available evidence the majority of teachers appear to be satisfied with the usefulness of the health and safety advice they receive from local authorities<sup>34</sup>.

Despite the best efforts of schools and local authorities to manage risk and protect children on school visits, incidents happen. But contrary to popular belief the law actually protects teachers that have carried out comprehensive risk assessments and implemented robust health and safety procedures. This was made clear in the

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<sup>34</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An Assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M and Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006

Government's response to the Second Report from the Education and Skills Committee (now the Children, Schools and Families Committee), Session 2004-05:

“The Secretary of State also announced new forthcoming guidance to remind employers how they must treat employees fairly in investigating any rare but unfortunate case of pupil injury: the law protects from liability all school staff who take reasonable care.”

This point was reinforced by Judith Hackitt, Chair of the Health and Safety Executive, in an address to the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) said:

“Risk cannot be completely eliminated in any workplace and the law is very clear that that is not what is required. The law calls for risks to be managed and reduced as far as is reasonably practicable.”<sup>35</sup>

If the Government and the Health and Safety Executive recognise that risk can not be completely eliminated and that the law protects teachers from prosecution provided they manage and reduce risk as far as is reasonably practicable, why is it still at the forefront of teacher concerns? It is possible that responses in the form of legislation and media coverage of tragedies occurring on school visits are likely to have contributed to a 'culture of fear' among teachers about taking children out of the classroom.

The infamous Lyme Bay tragedy in 1993 in which four teenagers lost their lives on a sea kayaking visit resulted in the passing of the Activities Centre (Young Persons Safety) Act 1995, a custodial sentence for the owner of the activity centre, and sparked a public debate on the safety of outdoor pursuits<sup>36</sup>. Under this legislation the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) was established to inspect and license all outdoor activity centres that cater for those less than 18 years old. Very few things in the UK are licensed but they include some of the most dangerous activities or sectors such as asbestos removal, oil refineries, nuclear reactors and explosives where licensing, the most stringent form of regulation, is appropriate.

The investigation into the events at Lyme Bay uncovered a catastrophic series of failures which resulted in four fatalities. While the charges of manslaughter brought against Peter Kite, the activity centre owner, were entirely justified there is less agreement on whether the licensing of all activity centres was an appropriate response. The legislation has undoubtedly improved safety standards at activity centres (a number failed inspections and subsequently closed), but they only represent a small proportion of the outdoor education providers. In fact, the outdoor education visits organised by many schools and volunteer groups are not undertaken in activity centres and remain outside the remit of the AALA but are, in the vast majority of cases, successful and safe. All the legislation did, in effect, was to single out one outdoor education provider and improve the safety standards of their operations – which was arguably a knee jerk reaction to appease those seeking retribution for such a terrible tragedy.

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<sup>35</sup> Speech given by Judith Hackitt at the NASUWT conference 2008:  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/speeches/pdfs/hackittiosh250308.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Outdoor activities, negligence and the law. Julian Fulbrook. 2005. Ashgate publishing.

However, it was the tragic death of a young boy at Glen Ridding Beck in 2003 that brought the safety of outdoor visits back into the spotlight. The incident resulted in the prosecution of a teacher and opened up a debate on the ‘fear of litigation’ among schools with regards to school visits<sup>37</sup>. The subsequent inquiry into the fatality was damning, and found not to be a genuine accident. However, the National Association of Schoolmaster Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), one of England’s largest teacher unions, went on to issue guidance advising its members against certain school visits and to consider very carefully organising them.

In 2005 Chris Keates, the current General Secretary of the NASUWT went on to tell the House of Commons Select Committee on education that, “there was a huge fear of litigation in schools.” There is no doubt the Glen Ridding Beck incident incited the anxiety of every teachers’ worst nightmare, but it is also likely that sensationalist media and misinterpreted NASUWT guidance on school trips<sup>38</sup> have contributed to the ‘fear of litigation’ which still exists among teachers today.

It is right that teachers should take ensuring the safety of their pupils seriously, but fears around health and safety should not become a barrier to outdoor education, to do so would result in many school children missing out on beneficial educational experiences. Hopefully raising awareness on the low risks to student welfare of school visits and the low risk of litigation resulting from injuries occurring on them will go some way to alleviate teacher fears around health and safety issues. In addition, teachers should also take comfort in advice from Judith Hackitt, Chair of the Health and Safety Executive:

“Teachers are not personally sued and in the very small number of cases where teachers have been prosecuted it has happened because teachers have ignored direct instructions and departed from common sense.”

In response to health and safety concerns among teachers, the DCSF launched the Quality Badge in November 2008. This is a national accreditation scheme for providers of outdoor education combining the essential elements of provision – learning and safety – into one easily identifiable and trusted badge. Providers with the badge have been recognised as being safe and capable of delivering quality outdoor learning experiences. Teachers that use Quality Badge facilities do not have to conduct their own risk assessments or implement health and safety procedures at the facility. This is because by having the badge the provider has been recognised as being safe and having robust health and safety procedures in place. The badge is not statutory but a growing number of providers are opting into the scheme. The scheme is still in its infancy and therefore excellent facilities that offer safe and quality outdoor learning experiences may not yet have entered the scheme. However, whatever facilities are used to deliver quality learning experiences, it’s recognised that a 40 page risk assessment is overly burdensome and unlikely to add to the safety of a visit. What is recommended is a 3 to 4

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<sup>37</sup> Glen Ridding Beck investigation report. Health and Safety Executive. 2005.  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips/pdf/investigation.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> NASUWT. Personal Communication, 2009. The NASUWT does not advise teachers not to take children on school trips. This is a popular misconception of our advice. The Union advises that members should consider carefully whether or not to participate in non-contractual educational visits because of the great personal and professional risks involved. Non-contractual trips are trips that occur outside normal school hours or ones which are not linked to learning outcomes in the National Curriculum.

page document clearly outlining risks and the robust ways to manage them to ensure safe visits for students and teachers<sup>39</sup>.

### **Recommendation**

- **A renewed effort is required by Government and education stakeholders to raise awareness among teachers of the low risks and high rewards of well managed outdoor learning.**

### **3.2 Fair and consistent funding**

In contrast to the £332<sup>40</sup> million of funding announced by the Government in 2007 for the Music Manifesto over three years, the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto attracted just under £4.5 million between 2006 and 2009<sup>41</sup>. Not only is there a massive inequality of funding but there has been an actual halving of investment in outdoor learning from £1.7 million in 2006 to a mere £740,000 in 2009<sup>42</sup>. This cut significantly reduces the support and resources available to help children and young people benefit from outdoor education.

While recognising the constraints on public sector spending, the difference in funding for learning outside the classroom between 2006 and 2009 represents a small amount in the context of the overall education budget. However this funding is vitally important in helping children experience outdoor learning and the benefits related to it. Therefore we believe it should be reinstated to 2006 levels at the very least.

Cost alone is not the only barrier, but the ability of schools to deliver outdoor education depends heavily on the amount of money allocated within their budget. The cost of school visits can vary from between £5 - £15 per pupil for a day and £250 - £350 per pupil for residential visits<sup>43</sup>. While local authorities have discretion in allocating central government school funding according to local priorities, it can result in disparities of per capita funding between different schools within the same area.

Most schools allocate their budget in accordance to their own priority areas and the difference in the amount of per pupil funding could mean the difference between taking students on an outdoor learning visit or not, depending on the priority given to curriculum-based outdoor education in the school.

In order to cover the cost of visits, schools often rely on voluntary contributions from parents to be able to cover the cost of these visits. In the current economic climate household incomes generally are under increased pressure. However for some families the cost of contributing to a school visit is impossible, which often means schools either

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<sup>39</sup> Health and Safety of Learners Outside the Classroom (draft being consulted). 2009.

[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/HASLOC%20%20tone%20of%20voice%20version%2028%20Oct%20\(2\).doc](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/HASLOC%20%20tone%20of%20voice%20version%2028%20Oct%20(2).doc)

<sup>40</sup> The Music Manifesto. [www.musicmanifesto.co.uk/about-the-manifesto](http://www.musicmanifesto.co.uk/about-the-manifesto)

<sup>41</sup> Hansard 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008: Column 927W. Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

<sup>42</sup> Hansard 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009: Column 233W. Outdoor Education.

<sup>43</sup> Adding up – The range and impact of school costs on families. Citizens Advice Bureau, 2007.

have to change the types of outdoor learning offered or find money from the school budget to cover the cost of pupils from low income families.

If money isn't available within school budgets planned visits are often cancelled and alternative activities arranged so that no child is excluded from an outdoor learning experience. Encouraging, this has led many schools to develop outdoor learning spaces within their school grounds, or making greater use of parks or green spaces near them.

Evidence suggests that onsite education outside the classroom has remained stable over the years but that visits to natural environments may have declined, mainly due to the cost of accessing these locations. There is real value in school site based outdoor education. However, enabling children to engage with the natural world beyond the school gates will help broaden their horizons and help improve their health, personal development and academic outcomes. In addition, it has a significant role to play in giving them a practical understanding of managing the countryside in the context of future environmental challenges.

Many schools already engage in fund raising activities to ensure all children benefit from school visits. However the awareness of existing and new funding streams to increase provision of learning outside the classroom varies across schools. The Government must do more to raise awareness in schools of funding sources available to increase children's access to the natural environment. In addition support should be offered to schools that require help with applications for such funds. For example, Grants4schools<sup>44</sup> aims to provide information on grant funding and sponsorship sources relevant to primary, secondary and special schools within both the state and independent sectors. Break4Kids<sup>45</sup> is a charitable fund which can help to fund youth group and school visits for children from low income households, by contributing up to 50% of the cost of their accommodation and food. This funding can help ensure all children have an opportunity to go on a visit with their school. While these are just two specific examples, Growing Schools, the Government's online resource to support teachers in using the "outdoor classroom", lists over 20 award and grant funding sources.

Given that 89 per cent of teachers surveyed in the Teacher Voice Survey said the countryside could play a greater role in learning within the curriculum, we believe the funding and priority the Government now dedicates to learning outside the classroom is derisory. All pupils should be offered a range of outdoor learning experiences as part of their education, including visits to the countryside. With 64 per cent of teachers surveyed citing funding as a barrier to outdoor education, the Government must take steps to meet the needs of schools.

## ***Recommendation***

- **The Government should take steps to prioritise the funding allocated for outdoor learning and direct resources to helping schools that struggle to fund outdoor education visits for children.**

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<sup>44</sup> Grants4schools [www.grants4schools.info/portal/index.asp?sP=index.html](http://www.grants4schools.info/portal/index.asp?sP=index.html)

<sup>45</sup> Break4Kids – Youth Hostel Association fund. [www.breaks4kids.co.uk/](http://www.breaks4kids.co.uk/)

### 3.3 Advice and training on outdoor learning within the National Curriculum

Encouragingly nearly all teachers believe that the countryside can play a greater role within cross-curricular learning (89 per cent). However, inadequate advice about how to link outdoor education to the National Curriculum and how to deliver it practically may also be a barrier.

Teachers' value the benefits of outdoor education, yet the latest research indicates that many believe they don't receive adequate advice to use it to deliver cross-curricular learning (55 per cent). This finding builds on the results of a teacher survey undertaken in 2006, by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), in which teachers said that more support on curriculum integration would help them in the future provision of outdoor education<sup>46</sup>. While government guidance on how to link outdoor education to areas of learning within the curriculum exists, awareness of it remains low. Worryingly, this is prevalent even among schools with a good record in delivering outdoor education. Only six of the 27 schools and colleges inspected by Ofsted in October 2008 showing *good, outstanding or improving* outdoor education provision had detailed knowledge of the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. However, even these six schools were unsure of how it linked to other national guidance and programmes.<sup>47</sup> If these schools are unsure of how outdoor education links to wider programmes it's no wonder over half of teachers in the Teacher Voice Survey 2009 felt they needed more advice on how to use the countryside in the curriculum.

While the survey results provide solid evidence on the lack of advice for teachers to link countryside visits to the curriculum, The Countryside Alliance Foundation response has been to develop our own education resource Countryside Investigators<sup>48</sup>. Launched in 2009, all schools were made aware of this new resource - an interactive website where Key Stage Two children can access balanced information about the countryside through the jobs of ten people in different employment sectors. This resource is curriculum linked and demonstrates to teachers how the countryside can be used to deliver curriculum outcomes. It intends to inspire them to take children out of the classroom so they get first hand experience of the countryside and all the student development and learning benefits it can offer. We believe government must do more to raise awareness of balanced curriculum linked resources to inspire schools to use the countryside as a classroom and to help teachers locate suitable facilities in which to deliver learning in the outdoors.

The Countryside Investigators resource can help teachers use the countryside within the curriculum, but the practical delivery of outdoor education relies, in part, on teachers' ability to organise and lead visits. There is evidence to show that at secondary level a positive correlation exists between levels of training and levels of confidence in undertaking all aspects of learning outside the classroom activities. While this relationship is less clear at a primary level it suggests that teachers that receive more training across a range of learning outside the classroom activities, (such as preparing

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<sup>46</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M. Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Learning outside the classroom – How far should you go? Ofsted. October 2008

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.countrysideinvestigators.org.uk/>

pupils, planning, running and evaluating activities and managing risk) are more confident and therefore more likely to deliver outdoor education<sup>49</sup>.

However, in a survey of Initial Teacher Training Institutions in 2006 on the extent and nature of training provision for teachers on outdoor education the picture that emerged was mixed. Some of those training to become teachers encountered a comprehensive training programme enabling them to organise activities, link them to the wider curriculum and evaluate the learning and personal development outcomes achieved. Others received a less inclusive programme leaving them under prepared for managing and leading learning outside the classroom<sup>50</sup>. This is not surprising given that statutory standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and requirements for Initial Teacher Training do not include a requirement for student teachers to spend time with pupils outside the classroom as part of their training. The QTS standard, Q30 only requires that trainees should be able to identify opportunities for children and young people to learn in the school grounds and in out-of-school contexts such as museums, theatres, field centres and work settings<sup>51</sup>. Being able to identify opportunities for outdoor learning is valuable, but not half as valuable as teachers being able to deliver on those opportunities by possessing the skills, knowledge and confidence, through training, to make learning outside the classroom a reality not an academic exercise.

The issue of teacher training was recently raised in the House of Lords by Baroness Walmsley in the context of its role in encouraging the use of fieldwork in teaching biology<sup>52</sup>. The Baroness believes increasing the opportunities to take part in field work would play a major role in inspiring enthusiasm and increasing the uptake of the sciences among students. She states that the lack of practical experience during teaching training inhibits teachers from delivering outdoor education because of low confidence<sup>53</sup>. Her views are supported by research conducted by the NFER in 2006 in which only five per cent of local authority outdoor education advisers felt that teacher training was not a challenge in increasing provision<sup>54</sup>. The Countryside Alliance Foundation would advocate that the review of the QTS standards in April 2010<sup>55</sup> presents an opportunity for government to re-energise a commitment to learning outside the classroom by prioritising practical outdoor education skills within teaching training to give all new teachers confidence in delivering learning in this context.

## **Recommendation**

- **The Qualified Teacher Status standards should include the provision for practical training of teachers in delivering learning outside the classroom.**

<sup>49</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M. Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Kendall, S. Murfield, J. Dillon, J. Wilkin, A. National Foundation for Educational Research Education Outside the Classroom: Research to Identify What Training is Offered by Initial Teacher Training Institutions. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Hansard 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009: Column 1454W

<sup>52</sup> Hansard 21<sup>st</sup> July 2009: Column 1517

<sup>53</sup> Epolitix News: [http://www.epolitix.com/latestnews/article-detail/newsarticle/inspire-pupils-with-the-natural-world/?no\\_cache=1](http://www.epolitix.com/latestnews/article-detail/newsarticle/inspire-pupils-with-the-natural-world/?no_cache=1)

<sup>54</sup> Education Outside the Classroom: An assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities. O' Donnell, L. Morris, M. Wilson, R. National Foundation for Educational Research. 2006

<sup>55</sup> Hansard 21<sup>st</sup> July 2009: Column 1517. The review will be conducted in April 2010 by the Training and Development Agency for Schools.

### **3.4 Making outdoor education an entitlement within the National Curriculum**

Given the considerable health, personal development and education benefits of being in the outdoors, and the demand and enthusiasm among children and teachers for outdoor education, we believe an entitlement to outdoor education should be created within the National Curriculum.

The National Curriculum is the framework for teaching and learning across a range of subjects and the associated assessment arrangements, laid down by Statute for all pupils of compulsory school age (5-16) attending state schools. It is currently undergoing reform.

The National Curriculum is changing. The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) accepted the recommendations of two independent reviews, which included reforming the primary curriculum and making Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education statutory. At the time of writing, Parliament was considering The Children, Schools and Families Bill, brought forward by the DCSF, to bring the recommendations into law.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation believes the countryside is a powerful medium in which to deliver cross curricular learning and PSHE. An entitlement to outdoor education within the curriculum would ensure every child has access to the significant learning and well-being benefits the countryside offers. We believe future legislation should be used as an opportunity to create an entitlement to outdoor learning within the curriculum to allow practical learning opportunities to be fully realised. Such an entitlement would place a duty on schools to ensure all children have the chance to visit the countryside, improve personal development and academic outcomes through linking subjects real life examples. Not only would such an entitlement deliver many of the aims of the PSHE area of learning and encourage greater use of cross-curricular learning, it would be an opportunity for government to prioritise resources and funding towards increasing its use across all schools.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation believes that the countryside offers teachers myriad opportunities to deliver significant components of discrete subjects and cross curricular studies. Resources such as the Countryside Investigators<sup>56</sup> can facilitate this. This resource can help strengthen ICT skills, through research and analysis, and teach children about protection, conservation and enjoyment of the countryside through practical and fun activities and links to on-going work across the curriculum in Geography, Citizenship, English, Science, ICT and Art & Design.

However TCAF believes the potential to exploit the countryside as a powerful medium to facilitate cross-curricular studies, consolidate learning in the classroom and broaden children's understanding of natural environment through direct contact has not been fully realized. By taking children on visits to countryside to meet a river keeper in person, teachers can expose children to environments never before experienced, set practical tasks for the children that test their skills (investigating, recording, analysing, presenting), help consolidate their knowledge through practical examples (scientific, geographic or

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<sup>56</sup> [www.countrysideinvestigators.org.uk](http://www.countrysideinvestigators.org.uk)

historic) and improve their enthusiasm and motivation to learn. An estimated one million children have no contact with the British countryside<sup>57</sup> and around half of school age children did not visit the countryside with their school in 2008<sup>58</sup>. We believe Government action is needed to reverse this inadequate access to outdoor learning because the benefits of doing so are considerable.

We believe visiting the countryside and taking part in outdoor education activities could play a key role in delivering major components of the PSHE education area of learning, such as: healthy living; physical competence and performance; identifying risk and developing self awareness and team skills.

British children have notoriously poor diets and particularly high rates of obesity with one in three year six children (age 10) being either overweight or obese<sup>59</sup>. Within this context, visits to the countryside through schools could be used to tackle this health issue in a two pronged approach. By taking children to a farm they can learn first hand about where their food comes from and how it is produced – this practical knowledge can be brought back to the classroom and linked to areas of learning within the curriculum. In taking children to the countryside, schools can capitalise on the thousands of kilometres and hectares of public rights of way and open access land and other publicly available nature spaces for children to be active in. Countryside activities such as walking, cycling, fishing and horse riding can burn up to 380 per hour<sup>60</sup> and wider access to them should be part of public health strategies to keep children fit and healthy.

While the countryside can play a key role in improving physical health outcomes, its role in improving mental health and behavioural problems could be better used by schools as part of PSHE education and improving educational outcomes across the curriculum. Having good mental health and the ability to concentrate on tasks allows children to make sensible decisions that enhance their well-being, form positive relationships with their peers, teachers and parents and perform well in practical and academic tasks – key outcomes within PSHE education and across the curriculum. Recent research has shown that natural environments can stabilise anger in young people and alleviate the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Disruption caused by anti-social behaviour not only reduces the educational outcomes of those excluded but those of their peers. Including outdoor education in the curriculum should be considered by the Government as a tangible way of reducing the numbers of exclusions (an estimated 391,960 in 2007/08<sup>61</sup>) for physical and verbal abuse in schools and driving up educational standards through improved teaching environments.

In Wales changes have already been introduced in embedding the outdoors within primary education. From August 2008 to August 2010 the Foundation Phase Framework for Children's learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales supersedes the national curriculum for Early Years and Key Stage 1 (ages 3 to 7). The Foundation Phase is statutory in Wales and is strongly focused on experiential learning within the curriculum and

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<sup>57</sup> Year of Food and Farming.

[http://www.face-online.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1037&Itemid=850](http://www.face-online.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1037&Itemid=850)

<sup>58</sup> Young Poll. Country Life survey 2009. Commissioned by the Countryside Alliance Foundation.

<sup>59</sup> National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08 school year headline results. December 2008.

Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.nutristrategy.com/activitylist4.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England 2007/08. The Department of Children, Schools and Families. July 2009.

promoting children’s development and natural curiosity to explore and learn through first hand experience. The Foundation phase curriculum is organised into seven areas of learning, and unlike the proposed areas of learning in the English primary curriculum, it specifically mentions that children should be offered opportunities to learn in both outdoor and indoor environments within each learning area. Outdoor education has not been specified as an entitlement in the Foundation Phase. However, the fact that outdoor environments are specified as places in which children are entitled to learn, across all seven areas of learning, represents an important shift in embedding the outdoors in the curriculum and pedagogy which is likely to lead to more frequent use of it.

An entitlement to learning in the outdoors should apply within the English curriculum, as part of cross curricular learning or PSHE education. We believe such an entitlement would be a vital step in creating a culture among schools of using the outdoors more widely within the curriculum and would focus government resources to help schools deliver it. Our proposals are ambitious but they are not unreasonable and are supported by the Council of Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC). John Stevenson, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Council said:

“we want to encourage a schools policy on educational visits. We want to move away from the idea of “let’s go out once a year” to a situation where visits are embedded in the curriculum and in the way that a school operates’<sup>62</sup>. Like the council, we understand that such change is unlikely to happen overnight, but the creating an entitlement to outdoor education within the National Curriculum represents the first step in making the outdoors a part of every child’s learning experience.”

### ***Recommendation***

- **An entitlement to outdoor learning should be created within the National Curriculum to ensure the countryside becomes part of every child’s education.**

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<sup>62</sup> A trip out of school brings world close up. The Guardian. 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2009.  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/schooltrips/world-close-up>

### **3.5 Helping charities play a bigger role in delivering outdoor education.**

A number of organisations provide countryside based outdoor education opportunities, these range from local authority or private activity centres, farms, country estates, to a range of third sector organisations such as TCAF. The funding that underpins them varies from central and local government finance, charitable donations and foundations and the European Union. Outdoor education has the proven ability to improve, health, education and social outcomes in children and young people and can deliver on major elements of the Every Child Matters Agenda. While national programmes and major funding streams exist, we believe priority should be given to increasing the number of small grants available to help charities deliver outdoor education opportunities for children at a local level.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation funded Fishing for Schools programme is a short course for children with special educational needs between the ages of 14 and 16. Children with low self esteem, behavioural problems or who find mainstream education particularly challenging are especially vulnerable to disengaging from education altogether - which can have serious consequences for their future. Fishing can increase self-esteem in children<sup>63</sup> and improve their attention capabilities, therefore making it a powerful medium for helping children achieve their potential and engage in learning linked to the National Curriculum. The course is run in accordance with the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network and contributes to the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness which is a GCSE alternative for some children.

Fishing for Schools is a genuinely innovative programme teaching pupils with a range of emotional, mental and physical disabilities about fish biology, entomology, river health and conservation in a safe and restorative environment. So far 350 children have benefited from a highly personalised course helping them to engage and achieve through alternative learning. We believe small charities delivering innovative outdoor education programmes to help hard to reach young people stay engaged in education require further support in the form of lightly specified government grant funding.

Funding for programmes using outdoor based activities to engage young people with learning difficulties, anti-social behaviour or low physical activity levels should be viewed as an investment. This is because preventing academic disengagement, anti-social behaviour and obesity will save the government money instead of having to pay for the consequences of them. The estimated cost of youth crime was £1 billion in 2004<sup>64</sup>. In addition, obesity currently costs the National Health Service £1 billion per year and the UK economy a further £2.6<sup>65</sup> billion in indirect costs. With 30 per cent of nine year olds classed as obese<sup>66</sup> and levels forecast to rise, intervention programs designed to help young people avoid crime and obesity represent excellent value for money given the measurable costs of remediating the problems.

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<sup>63</sup> A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise. The Countryside Recreation Network.

<sup>64</sup> The Princess Trust. The Cost of Exclusion – counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK. 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Tackling Childhood Obesity – First Steps. Audit Commission. The Healthcare Commission. The National Audit Office. 2006.

<sup>66</sup> National Child Measurement Programme. 2007/08 Headline results. December 2008. Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families.

However, we believe that in order for charities to help achieve positive outcomes for children and young people, attention and action is needed around government grant funding to enable charities to continue delivering innovative projects.

Charities rely on funding from individual donors, charitable trusts, foundations and the Government and come in a variety of forms, from gift aid and donations to unrestricted grants and contracts. To ensure financial viability charities aim to secure a diverse funding base and for small charities grant funding is often a vital part of this mix. However there is evidence to suggest a decrease in statutory grant funding and a shift towards increased use of contract based funding, that can often favour larger charities, to deliver public services. Such a trend is a threat to the financial security of many small charities.

Evidence from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations show that contracts for the delivery of public services now account for a greater share of the voluntary sector's income than statutory grant funding<sup>67</sup>. In addition, figures also show that there has been an absolute as well as relative decline in grant funding<sup>68</sup>. According to the Directory of Social Change many small community groups are finding it difficult to get any grant funding. With the phasing out of small grants programmes like Community Chests, Community Champions, Local Network Fund and the gradual dissolution of ring fenced budgets as part of Local Area Agreements, small charities are starting to feel the effects of a paucity of smaller funding sources<sup>69</sup>.

While the use of contracts where government essentially 'buys' from the sector the delivery of public services, is appropriate in certain situations, they mustn't reduce or replace the use of grants, where the government gives to the sector. The shift towards contracting will damage smaller charities because the process of tendering and contract delivery often favours larger charities that can afford to dedicate time to the process and bear any losses in cost recovery of contracts. The declining number of lightly specified grants means many small charities are either losing out on funding or are risking their independence and financial security<sup>70</sup> by accepting contracts often more closely aligned with government objectives than charity ones.

The decline in small grants is concerning and is compounded by increasingly tightly specified terms and conditions. Grant giving is about giving money to charities and trusting that they might be better placed to use public resources to deliver positive outcomes for people and communities. However according to the Audit Commission there has been a trend towards grants being contract based arrangements in all but name<sup>71</sup>. The Directory of Social Change also notes that unrestricted funding through non-prescriptive programmes at a local level seem to be declining<sup>72</sup>. According to the

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<sup>67</sup> National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The UK Civil Society Almanac 2008.

<sup>68</sup> National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The UK Civil Society Almanac 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Directory of Social Change.

<http://www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/Newsarchive/Commissioningonecharitysmeatisanotherspoison>

<sup>70</sup> According to the Charity Commission report, Stand and Deliver: the future of charities delivering public services, only 12 per cent of charities achieve full cost recovery all of the time. For small charities this can lead to a gradual depletion of assets as money accounted for in other budgets has to cover the short fall created by inadequate Government contract funding.

<sup>71</sup> Audit Commission. Hearts and Minds: Commissioning from the voluntary sector. July 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Directory of Social Change. The interplay between state, private sector and voluntary activity: A vision for the future. 2007

Charity Commission only 26 per cent of charities delivering public services feel they are free to make decisions without pressure to conform to their funders' wishes. While the tightly defined conditions attached to contracts may be appropriate for delivering core services which Government has a duty to provide, grants given to support wider social objectives should not come with conditions that can undermine the independence, integrity or financial viability of charities.

In the context of charities involved in delivering outdoor education opportunities we would advocate that their distinct difference from the state and private sector must be respected to allow them to innovatively respond to social issues and improve outcomes for children and young people. We recognised that Government must obtain maximum value from funding decisions and ensure charities are accountable in the use of any funds. However, tightly specifying the terms of grants can eliminate the innovation and flexibility that makes charities so well placed to respond to improving outcomes for young people.

Charities can deliver good value innovative programmes, but overly burdensome grant restrictions must be lifted if the UK is to retain the diversity of the third sector and the solutions they offer to tackle social issues.

### ***Recommendation***

- **The decline in small grants must be halted if charities are to play a continuing role in developing innovative programmes to increase access to the countryside for children and young people.**

## Appendix – full research results

### Results of Young Poll survey of children aged 6 to 15 years old

Question	Response percentage	
	Yes	No
Have you been on a trip to the countryside with your school in the last year?	46.56	<b>53.44</b>
Would you find school lessons more fun if they involved going to the countryside to learn about your school subjects?	<b>80.92</b>	19.08
Do you feel you learn enough about the countryside at school?	36.13	<b>63.87</b>
Would you like the chance to be able to enjoy activities like fishing, falconry and farm visits through school?	<b>84.73</b>	15.27

### Results from National Foundation for Educational Research Teacher Voice survey June 2009

Question 1: How important do you consider it is for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum? (single categorical question)	All	Primary	Secondary
Very important	52%	57%	46%
Quite important	44%	42%	47%
Of little importance	3%	2%	6%
Of no importance	<1%	0%	<1%
Don't know	<1%	0%	1%
Local base (N)	1403	725	676

Question 2: Do you think the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning within the National Curriculum in the future? (single categorical question)	All	Primary	Secondary
Yes	89%	94%	83%
No	4%	2%	6%
Don't know	7%	3%	11%
Local base (N)	1399	725	672

Question 3: Do you feel that teachers currently receive adequate advice and resources to enable them to use outdoor educational trips to the countryside in cross-curricular learning? (single categorical question)	All	Primary	Secondary
Yes, they receive both adequate advice and resources.	6%	8%	4%
They receive adequate advice, but not enough resources	24%	26%	22%
They receive adequate resources, but not enough advice	6%	6%	6%
No, they do not receive enough advice or resources	55%	55%	56%
Don't know	8%	4%	13%
Local base (N)	1402	722	678

Question 4: What are the main barriers in taking school pupils to the countryside to facilitate cross-curricular learning?	All	Primary	Secondary
Concerns about health and safety	76%	74%	79%
Lack of funding	64%	65%	63%
Insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum	53%	38%	69%
Fear of litigation in the unlikely event of an accident	49%	45%	55%
The cost is too high	49%	58%	39%
The time required to fill in the necessary forms/administration	46%	34%	59%
Difficulties with undertaking risk management	43%	38%	51%
Lack of teacher confidence	37%	38%	38%
Lack of training	28%	26%	31%
Lack of support from senior management	12%	6%	19%
Lack of support from the Local Authority	7%	6%	7%
Other	10%	9%	11%
Local base (N)	1403	726	676

**Break down of results on claims made against local authorities  
 between 1998 and 2008**

	Number	Percentage
Total number of English and Welsh borough, county and city councils contacted	288	100%
Total number of English and Welsh borough, county and city councils that responded to FOI	138	48%
Total number of English and Welsh borough, county and city councils that provided details on claims	127	
<b>Of those 138 councils that responded the results are broken down as follows:</b>		
Number of local authorities receiving claims	82	60%
Number of local authorities not receiving claims	45	33%
Total number of claims made against local authorities between 1998 and 2008	364	
Total number of successful claims made against local authorities	156	
Average number of claims made against local authorities over a ten year period between 1998 and 2008	2.6	
Average number of successful claims made against local authorities over a ten year period	1.1	
Total Compensation paid out	£404,952.14	
Average each local authority paid out in compensation per year over a ten year period	£293.44	