

## Education and Culture Committee

### Outdoor Learning

#### Submission from Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education

##### Introduction

Firstly, the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence for the 'The Education and Culture Committee' of the Scottish Parliament.

The request for a SAPOE written response to the questions provided required a response not from its representative or Chair but from the SAPOE membership in my opinion. I felt that to respond with any single view concerning the 'state of the nation' in matters relating to Outdoor Learning without consulting first would have been inappropriate. Therefore although time scales have been short I am very pleased to state that representatives from some twelve authorities have made returns to me with little more than a few days to complete the task. I am indebted to these colleagues as these returns give this submission credibility that it could not have otherwise.

This submission reflects the position from our representatives perspective from as far north as Highland Council to the Ayrshire's in the south west and ten other councils throughout the country.

It was originally my intention to merge these responses and by doing this remove duplication, harmonise the language and so make it more readable. However as I attempted to do this I soon found that some of the impact of the responses was lost in translation. Therefore it became clear to me that to list the responses to the questions as comments rather than a single definitive answer would be a better option. By doing this I'm certain that I have retained the author's original message and at the same time answered the question as comprehensively as possible.

I hope this is acceptable.

Nigel Marshall

Chair of the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education

1 December 2013.

##### **The benefits, for pupils and others, of outdoor learning;**

###### Comment 1

OUTDOOR LEARNING AND EDUCATION PEDAGOGY BENEFITS

Curriculum for Excellence recognises that learning is embedded in experience. By taking learning outdoors we remove some of the barriers that the traditional classroom can put up between children and young people and develop first-hand, real-life experiences.

Outdoor learning is 'hands-on' and direct, and the knowledge that pupils gain from it is sustained. Contextualised, applied learning outdoors often stimulates and intrinsically motivates learners to engage with learning longer and with less disruptive behaviour. Outdoor learning can be the space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that learners can make connections between different areas of learning. Through interdisciplinary activities of this kind, children and young people can develop their knowledge, understanding, enterprise, citizenship, organisational and leadership skills, creativity, teamwork and the ability to apply their learning in new and challenging contexts. The wealth of opportunities for personal achievement, associated with outdoor learning enriches the life experience of learners. Taking part in these activities plays an important part in widening a child or young person's horizons and develops their confidence and sense of achievement. These achievements must be recognised for the significance they have to learners, their families and communities.

Direct experience of the complex interdependence of life on Earth enables reinforcement of the link between cognitive and affective learning, providing a bridge to advanced understanding. This gives learners a real context to explore, understand, develop and apply the values of wisdom, compassion, integrity and justice.

Research demonstrates that outdoor learning can add significantly to children and young people's learning experience and their achievements and this can be closely linked to the four capacities as summarised below:

#### *Developing 'successful learners'*

Outdoor learning can have a positive impact on long-term memory.

Outdoor learners develop their knowledge and skills in ways that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom

There can be reinforcement between the affective and the cognitive, with each influencing the other and providing a bridge to higher order learning

Outdoor learning has the potential to raise attainment and improve attitudes towards the environment

Outdoor learning fosters the development of specific academic skills, as well as improved engagement, achievement and stronger motivation to learn

#### *Developing 'confident individuals'*

Outdoor learning can impact positively on children and young people's attitudes, beliefs, and self-perceptions, for example: independence, confidence, self-esteem, locus of control, self efficacy, personal effectiveness, coping strategies.

There are examples of outdoor learning programmes yielding benefits in the promotion of positive behaviour and improved physical self-image and fitness.

#### *Developing 'responsible citizens'*

Outdoor learning brings a renewed pride in community with greater sense of place, of belonging and responsibility

There is significant evidence of the effect of outdoor learning on social development and greater community involvement

In outdoor learning, pupils develop more positive relationships with each other, with their teachers and with the wider community

Outdoor learning increases knowledge and understanding of the natural world and environmental systems and processes, and that this knowledge and associated affective development are related to responsible attitudes to the environment

#### *Developing 'effective contributors'*

Outdoor learning can impact positively on children and young people's interpersonal and social skills such as: social effectiveness, communication skills, group cohesion and teamwork

### OUTDOOR LEARNING AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING BENEFITS

There is increasing evidence of the influence of the environments that we experience throughout our lives on both our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Quality, accessible greenspaces can be shown to have important effects on individual and community health and wellbeing.

Outdoor recreation is increasingly being seen as beneficial to physical and mental wellbeing. We are also now much more aware of the importance of outdoor play in children's development, and the corresponding need to provide proper space for play, sport and recreation. Accessible urban greenspace, including parks, gardens, urban woodland and community orchards, green transport corridors and allotments, provides many people with opportunities to get close to nature, become more active and improve their quality of life. Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland 2011, Scottish Government

Further international and UK research provides evidence that children engaged in learning outside the classroom have greater levels of physical fitness and motor skills development.

### OUTDOOR LEARNING AND MANAGING RISK BENEFITS

The UK Government Better Regulation Commission 2006 report called for recognition that risk can be creative and exhilarating, whilst also acknowledging that risk needs to be managed.

The report concluded that 'childhood is a time for learning and exploring, and wrapping children in cotton wool, or minimising all risks, however small, for fear of litigation, was having a negative impact on children's play opportunities and their more general freedom to explore and encounter the world, appropriate to their age.' ('Staying Safe': 2008 Department for Children Schools and Families). Further to these references it would be important to note the vision statement from Scottish Parent Teachers Council which includes the following statement when communicating with the Scottish Government:

'That the key issues of health, safety, and risk are re-balanced to ensure that our children are encouraged first and foremost to be active and to grow in independence, learning (by the example of teachers, parents and carers), to balance risk and benefit as they do so'.

Outdoor learning aims to offer children and young people the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. This risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequence in a controlled environment.

Curriculum for Excellence encourages young people, across all levels, to have the skills to assess and manage risk and protect themselves and others by reducing the potential for harm.

The Early Years Framework similarly outlines a vision of the best start in life for children where they are entitled to take part in physical activities and to play, including outdoors, and have an opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk.

#### OUTDOOR LEARNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS

Getting the best from our land: A land use strategy for Scotland 2012 notes "Scotland's land and its communities depend on each other. Yet in today's predominantly urban society many people have become disconnected from the land and from land-use considerations which tend to be seen as a concern for the rural minority. We need to address this disconnection." "Re-connecting young people to the land should be the first place to focus effort. Through the Curriculum for Excellence and initiatives ... we have the opportunity to explain concepts of sustainability to school children, and to put these in a Scottish context to show how our actions affect our environment." Outdoor learning is an excellent medium, possibly the only medium, to strategically ensure all urban young people positively experience rural Scotland.

'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's In Your Hands' (2004) noted that 'greenspace' comprises between 10% and 40% of the area of the major Scottish towns and cities. This is a huge resource, potentially rich in biodiversity and is close to the majority of the people in the country. There are tremendous opportunities to combine increased biodiversity with better access, learning facilities and promote healthy living more generally. One of our challenges is to raise awareness across the community of the importance of biodiversity. Outdoor Learning programmes need to be constructed to help ensure that young people are aware of the significance of biodiversity to our cultural, social and economic well-being. This will help to ensure that this generation can pass on their knowledge and understanding as well as an environment still rich in biodiversity to the next generation. Outcome 2030 "more firsthand learning about biodiversity in the open spaces around them, ..... enjoy the complexity and beauty of their environment and take steps, through actions small and great in their daily lives, to conserve and enhance it. Enhance the place of biodiversity in formal education....

Encourage and facilitate first hand learning about biodiversity in the natural environment....

More outdoor learning should be encouraged..."

#### Comment 2

It provides a venue where real challenge, interaction with environment, understanding of fundamental forces, acquisition of skills, undertaking of personal and shared responsibility can be fully embraced, rather than studied at remote distance in the classroom.

#### Comment 3

For my pupils I have seen many benefits, some directly related to curricular area learning - interest / motivation / deeper learning from real life active, inspiring contexts. Writing has benefitted particularly this term as we have been involved with story telling and poetry sessions outdoors, using the experiences we have had and the environment around us to help develop rich vocabulary and ideas. I find working outdoors also promotes a relaxed, low stress atmosphere where the pupils are happy to work with each other, discuss ideas and make mistakes. They have also enjoyed being involved with community projects outside of the school boundaries, working with a range of groups and having a real audience and genuine purpose for their work (e.g. conservation project at the local Lorgy Burn - they have revisited since the work was done and seen salmon coming to spawn - possibly a direct result of their work). I also see health benefits - one or two of my boys are fairly unfit and they have really challenged themselves in terms of activity level and confidence through learning outdoors. My class of P5,6 & 7s recently completed a challenging hill walk in snowy conditions as part of a maps and navigation project.

#### Comment 4

As a general response I would say that whilst curriculum for excellence has been positive for outdoor learning, along with the work carried out by LTS/ES, that we still have some way to go.

There exists a degree of threat to the continuity of specialist services which support outdoor learning within local authorities and I believe that this threat is being heightened by the view that OL has become successfully embedded (which I don't believe to be fully the case). Personally I think a lot of positive things have been taking place at a Primary level however much of that is within the school grounds and the progressive elements of OL seems to be marginalised. At Secondary level there is still a long way to go in terms of OL within Curriculum for Excellence. Some teachers seem to believe because they have been on a few courses that they have OL 'down to a tee' but the reality doesn't necessarily reflect this.

The benefits of OL I don't need to go over and it has much to offer in terms of the Scottish Government's national priorities as well as the educational aspects. But we need to ensure that we get across the message that OL is progressive and that it requires a degree of specialist support in terms of advice, guidance, training and at times direct involvement to ensure that we enable local action within schools, promote learning activity and ensure that we sustain the work carried out so far.

#### Comment 5

amongst many others...

Develop awareness, understanding and respect for their local environment which can also help build a sense of place and community. Further innovative teaching methods increasing motivation and attainment in pupils education. Long term health benefits helping to tackle the more recent issues surrounding childhood obesity and mental health issues. Develop a healthy understanding of risk and risk management

#### Comment 6

In Fife we have seen great results from many of the outdoor learning programmes that have been introduced. These can be grouped under the following 3 headings

Engaging - young people who weren't previously engaging in learning and socially (e.g Hooked on Learning)

Health and Wellbeing - inactive young people being inspired to be more active (e.g Munro Challenge)

Achievement - experiencing and celebrating success through Award programmes and Competition. Recognising commitment and effort through the Natural Connections Award.

As well as these tangible benefits we shouldn't forget the strong belief that "Adventure is worthwhile in itself" and the many broader benefits that can be gained from spending time outside and challenging young people in the amazing Scottish Countryside.

#### Comment 7

'Taking learning outdoors' provides opportunities for more effective teaching and learning. The very nature of how teachers have to work in an outdoor environment (being responsive to the environment and how the pupils are engaging with it, allowing opportunities for pupils to lead their own learning, using active methodologies to engage learners, making learning relevant and 'real') reflects the ethos and aims of CfE.

Outdoor learning offers more scope for young people to become resilient and confident, to be able to assess and manage risk, to be able to communicate and work with others, to develop a sense of responsibility – all essential life skills that young people need to develop.

OL increases opportunities for young people to feel connected to their natural, local and wider environment. Feeling connected to, and part of something, is essential if a person is to respect and protect it. A sense of 'belonging' is an important aspect of childhood development.

There is a lot of medical evidence that being outdoors has many physical and mental health benefits. Developing a love of being outdoors in the early years can develop life-long habits and have long term health benefits.

#### Comment 8

In the absence of an active research project our evidence is limited to the feedback from participants and observations that we have gathered from events we have been involved with, mostly from our own practice.

The group however feel passionate about the important impact of outdoor learning and are committed to working with Aberdeenshire to improve our current provision. Feedback from pupils from recent events and programmes strengthens these beliefs, as even the most disengaged young people report favourably on their Outdoor Learning Experience.

There is a significant amount of academic work (Higgins, Nicol and Allison) to support our own chalk face findings.

#### Comment 9

Outdoor Learning has been effectively contributing to pupils and our communities for many years. It has positive influences on pupils learning by providing real world experiential learning opportunities that connects them with both curriculum and wider themes. Outdoor Learning has the ability (all be

it intangible, due lack of data and published study) to enhance their school performance and often shape and encourage lifelong learning and healthy lifestyles - a few examples;

- Outdoor learning provides opportunity for health and wellbeing through outdoor based experiences that can be differentiated to encourage a range of physicality and abilities
- Outdoor Learning provides opportunities for linking individuals with different learning environments that connects them to real life outcomes.
- Schools and communities can engage through quality experiential experiences that can encourage lifestyle choices & positive destinations.
- Schools can connect through outdoor learning to a range of curriculum learning and provide relevance and depth by learning from experience.
- Outdoor learning provides experience for our pupils and citizens to appreciate and respect the landscape, cultural and natural heritage of Scotland and in turn influence responsible citizenship through responsible access and use.

## **The extent to which all schools across Scotland are consistently implementing outdoor learning approaches and realising associated benefits;**

### **Comment 1**

In 2012-13 East Ayrshire Council's 82 Educational establishments provided off site visits (which include but are not exclusively outdoor learning):

Total of 10,034 visits, amounting to 269,061 participant days, increased from 7,400 in 2011-12.

5 Special Schools 2289 visits, amounting to 13,194 participant days.

43 Primary Schools 3670 visits, amounting to 173,680 participant days.

9 Secondary Schools 2635 visits, amounting to 48,080 participant days.

16 stand alone Early Years establishments 1263 visits, amounting to 35,694 participant days.

29 Overseas visits

119 Residential visits

149 Adventure activity visits

Establishments in East Ayrshire are not yet consistent in their implementation of their Education Social Services Department's Curriculum Outdoors Strategy 2012-15; neither within sectors or across sectors. They have varying starting points, resources and legacy priorities, though all are now orientating improvement towards the strategy.

#### Comment 2

I can only comment on the provision in a residential setting. There is no consistency in the provision of residential outdoor activity courses within the Scottish Local Authorities. Some authorities provide opportunities for all pupils at some point in their academic career, some offer a limited percentage, some appear to offer none at all. The level of funding for residential courses also varies across the board, with each authority deciding on it's own level of support for this provision.

#### Comment 3

I think this is definitely a gradually improving picture. I have been involved with the Highland Outdoor Learning Group for the past 3 years and organised 2 outdoor learning festivals over that time. We have seen participation at these events increase and those that come are enthusiastic and do follow up the event with implementation of outdoor learning to various extents within their own contexts. Whether those we are connecting with are "new converts" to outdoor learning or those that would be doing it anyway is debatable, but at least those who are keen are being equipped and inspired to do it and hopefully enthuse others in their establishments. However I do see that this can still be an uphill battle, the school I work at is a small village school with 3 classes, despite the fact that I take my class out most weeks for at least half a day (out of the 3 days a week that I work) to do a whole range of learning, and my colleagues see the quality results and enthusiasm from the children and parents, they still do not take their classes out on a regular basis (maybe a couple of times a term). I have delivered training at my school with the teachers on outdoor maths and provided resources / links for ideas at all levels for outdoor literacy, but these have not been widely taken up in the school as a whole. The nursery have got involved with forest schools, mainly because the staff were keen to be outside themselves. This to me seems to be the crux of the matter - if teachers don't want to go out themselves, either because they see it as extra work, they are not comfortable in that environment or don't see the benefits, then it's not going to happen, even though it is promoted so much as part of CfE. It's great that HMIE are looking for evidence of OL through the inspection process and this may help to move it forward as they encourage and support developments.

#### Comment 4

There are many great examples from all over Scotland about how learning outdoors is increasingly being used in a wide variety of learning contexts. However, there is a long way to go before it is

consistent across all schools. There is still a huge dependency on the ethos and willingness of individual schools and particularly the school management as well as the varied support from within Local Authority. There are still big differences between how regularly there are opportunities to learn outdoors and how progressive these opportunities are.

#### Comment 5

‘Taking learning outdoors’ provides opportunities for more effective teaching and learning. The very nature of how teachers have to work in an outdoor environment (being responsive to the environment and how the pupils are engaging with it, allowing opportunities for pupils to lead their own learning, using active methodologies to engage learners, making learning relevant and ‘real’) reflects the ethos and aims of CfE.

Outdoor learning offers more scope for young people to become resilient and confident, to be able to assess and manage risk, to be able to communicate and work with others, to develop a sense of responsibility – all essential life skills that young people need to develop.

OL increases opportunities for young people to feel connected to their natural, local and wider environment. Feeling connected to, and part of something, is essential if a person is to respect and protect it. A sense of ‘belonging’ is an important aspect of childhood development.

There is a lot of medical evidence that being outdoors has many physical and mental health benefits. Developing a love of being outdoors in the early years can develop life-long habits and have long term health benefits.

#### Comment 6

Excellent levels of Outdoor Learning in Early Years Establishments. Significant recent investment in play and outdoor learning facilities.

- Increasing implementation at Primary School level. Where teachers are receiving significant CPD support they are moving outdoors with confidence and leading other staff in this approach. Still issues around provision of equipment. Partnerships with John Muir Award and support of Forest Schools has also had impact. Residential Outdoor Learning opportunities are still limited by parents ability to pay.

- Secondary schools are starting to adopt outdoor learning as an approach, but they seem to be most keen where additional recognition is available (DOE). They face significant resource challenges, particular around timetabling and staff availability. There is a preference towards longer structured blocks of time (Outdoor/Activity Weeks). We are starting to engage on a subject level and are looking at tailored CPD for each subject area.

#### Comment 7

In our opinion this is inconsistent across Aberdeenshire and Aberdeenshire would reflect the National picture. Those that have implemented outdoor learning approaches are seeing just some of the benefits, for example happier, healthier, more active, more engaged, more confident young people who work better together as part of a group. An opportunity to access good OL practices fosters a strong sense of belonging to and empathy with the environment and local community in its widest sense. This work would involve a number of partnership organisations supporting the curriculum and delivery.

## Comment 8

Within our own community arena a range of provision is encouraged through school education & community learning.

Primary schools are active in providing outdoor learning experiences through, play the immediate school grounds and wider a field adventures that include residential experiences and Secondary schools also provide & encourage when possible Expedition work through D of E and other programmes. Fieldwork elements are also important in connecting learning in certain curriculum areas. A range of community learning programmes often involve an outdoor learning element.

Often these experiences however powerful, are not linked or coherent (i.e. through strategy) or consistently available within all schools or communities as they rely on the enthusiasm of community members, outdoor learning staff, senior management teams and teachers (often through additional discretionary effort) to drive their passion & ambitions for outdoor learning and provide resources for it to be achieved.

LTS through work on developing Outdoor Learning Networks has helped in developing strategy and supported outdoor education teams in signposting media that communicates many of the opportunities and benefits of Outdoor Learning This has I believe manly been influenced by SAPOE members and practitioners working in the field.

## **How any barriers to increasing and improving the provision of outdoor learning are being addressed;**

### Comment 1

Barrier 1- Lack of Baseline for monitoring. Lack of standard definition/ measurement tool. Lack of Curriculum for Excellence guidance of what constitutes "Regular and Frequent".

Professional groups have defined this in/for EAC.

Evolve tool used in some authorities to monitor volume and purpose to enable accurate baseline and improvement planning.

Barrier 2- Health and Safety

GOT website launched

Local Authorities reviewing practice towards national guidance

SAPOE scoping agreed training for Education managers and Visit Leaders

SAPOE Generic risk assessments provided

SAPOE network maintain local and national leadership across range of visit safety matters, advise Directors of Education

Barrier 3- Teacher/Staff competence

Generic visit leader, overseas visit leader, challenging environment specific (forest/coastal) leader, adventure tasters, adventure leader mentoring/training/assessment for staff provided in house or in partnership with vast range of government, governing body, third sector partners.

GTCS new standards recognition of outdoor learning.

GTCS professional recognition for outdoor learning.

Lead/promoted teachers with remit for whole school outdoor learning.

#### [Comment 2](#)

Within North Lanarkshire all Early Year establishments are expected to deliver outdoor learning sessions as part of their normal programme. Funding has been released for all Early Years to purchase outdoor footwear and clothing. One of the Early Years Quality Improvement Officers has outdoor learning as the main part of their remit.

Primary and Secondary Head Teachers are being encouraged to release more of their activity budgets on Outdoor Learning. Unfortunately within North Lanarkshire there is no Quality Improvement Officer or education Officer with outdoor learning as part of their remit.

#### [Comment 3](#)

Within Highland there have been various initiatives / developments to address barriers: Highland Outdoor Learning Group was set up as part of the partnership with Education Scotland and the Outdoor Learning in the National Parks Project. Through the work of the group a biannual newsletter is published and circulated to all Highland Schools and beyond now through Education Scotland, the newsletter aims to showcase good practise, suggest sources of support and funding for schools and provide information about OL developments in Highland. We have also held 2 OL festivals in Highland to help develop OL networks and supportive links as well as providing training from experts in the field and showcasing good work happening in Highland Region. My post has just been created to ensure that this work continues and is sustainable and OL CPD is developed further across the region. Through the work of George Reid in Highlife Highland, the burden of paperwork has been reduced through the introduction of the evolve system and he has produced a number of helpful, readable, short documents to support the safety and planning aspects of OL excursions. Cairngorms National Park, along with various other local providers / national organisations (e.g. Historic Scotland) offer funding for transport to sites that they are responsible for which is becoming more widely publicised - I found this particularly helpful on a recent hillwalking trip with my class into the Cairngorms. Without the funding we would have found it very difficult to pay for the transport and the trip may not have gone ahead.

#### [Comment 4](#)

At the moment I feel that there is a risk that OL dumbs down and that it loses some of the benefits that made it so appealing and worthy of support in the first place.

#### Comment 5

At a local level one of our main focuses is trying to increase training and availability of resources to teaching staff.

#### Comment 6

In Fife we implemented a number of initiatives to support outdoor learning. We have placed a strong emphasis on CPD running programmes like Taking Learning Outdoors and the Outdoor Learning Cards to encourage and support staff to plan more outdoors.

We also provide CPD at a more technical activity level running Trek Leader, Cycle leader and Paddlesports training. This encourages activity to take place at a more progressive level and supports the DofE Award programme.

Across the council staff are looking for additional funding opportunities to support outdoor programmes.

An up to date strategy endorsed at the highest level that supports learning outdoors and makes specific recommendations as to how this may be achieved. Similar to the Scottish Government endorsement, there are not necessarily the resources to implement the suggestions so staff have to be creative with their activities or find additional funding.

#### Comment 7

At a local area/school ground level the main barrier is developing understanding, skills and confidence of staff – this need to be addressed through long term quality CPD. There is no consistent approach to how this barrier is being addressed across all LAs but there are examples of good practice.

The main barrier to increasing access to adventure activities (including quality residential ‘outdoor education’ experiences) is financial. Access to adventure activities should be an entitlement for our young people but the reality is that the provision has been diminishing gradually and is in danger of being lost completely.

The risk averse attitude of some staff/Headteachers and the perceived ‘paperwork barriers’ stop some schools and teachers taking pupils going off- site. The publication of ‘Going Out There’ should help to address some of these issues.

#### Comment 8

- Internalising the training of staff in NGBs to remove high course fees
- Cost of residential Outdoor Learning experiences
- Cost of adventurous activities – volunteer programmes and are setting up city based clubs
- The Outdoors and Orienteering will feature in the next physical activity plan for the city.

- All of our provision in schools and residentials are set in the context of CfE. Centres are managed by Head Teacher. The Principal Teacher has an overview of the course development at our centres and Outdoor Learning in the city.
- Need to continue programme of CPD to inform teaching profession about outdoor learning being an approach for delivery of CfE rather than an add on.

#### Comment 9

Just as the provision is inconsistent, so to are the measures being taken to address this problem. Many of the barriers have been mentioned in previous bulleted points above. To move away from our current traditional delivery (secondary) would require a refocus on current teacher training methods ensuring that future staff have acquired the skills and confidence to address the challenges and reap the benefits of Outdoor Learning. This may require a fundamental change in current practice. Nursery and primary staff are better placed and more able to embrace the opportunities of outdoor learning and therefore have made greater progress towards achieving these goals than their secondary colleagues.

#### Comment 10

As stated above much of outdoor learning is driven by individuals who have an understanding of how outdoor learning can provide positive benefits. Barriers to enabling a consistent approach to outdoor learning include;

Lack of staff with appropriate qualifications who can lead and teach in the outdoors.

A general reduction in resources available in local government i.e. outdoor staff, equipment and teaching resources including outdoor residential centres has been affected by resource decisions in many authorities.

Resources to fund and release staff for outdoor learning training to encourage more sustainability at a local level

Resources to fund posts that support strategic approaches.

Sustainable opportunities for existing, new and probationer teachers to experience outdoor learning to help influence their teaching approaches.

Some of these barriers can, have and will be addressed by examining new ways of providing sustainable resources through smarter lean approaches, partnership working and volunteering that may help sustain services but there is a limit to be realised when valuable outdoor learning can no longer be provided sustainably and safely by establishments.

## How Curriculum for Excellence will affect the provision of outdoor learning;

### Comment 1

CfE has opened the door for all staff to take learning outside, and created the expectation that all children and young people should have broad, deep, progressive learning in the outdoor context.

This requires that outdoor learning will be provided by a much wider group of staff than the previously small group of specialised staff (rangers, outdoor instructors, knowledgeable keen teachers, third sector specialists, etc). This is more akin to the outdoor learning of the 1960's/70's. It appears that much of the current workforce are unable to immediately engage this teaching environment due to wider social changes, initial teacher education experiences, previous curricular expectations, lack of competence, lack of confidence, lack of time, lack of resource, senior phase conflicting priorities, lack of leadership, etc.

Assuming schools are not allowed by Education Scotland, Employers and parents to ignore the expectations of outdoor learning through CfE we are at an interesting point in the development of outdoor learning in Scotland. Two models of provision are developing post Pre5; 1 schools who are striving to do it for themselves, developing in-house competence and resources and 2 schools who are outsourcing to specialists. A mixed model probably being the ideal.

The imminent economic situation may determine a shift either way as some schools pass responsibility and additional cost to parents contrary to the broad general ethos of CfE, and others provide what outdoor learning they can with the competence of existing staff.

Government should prioritise a strategic transition period of years where statute staffs' competence and confidence is enhanced through professional development teaching outdoors alongside existing outdoor specialists. Otherwise outdoor learning will become very limited to keen teachers in school grounds and safe local contexts.

Substantial Outdoor Learning assets, providing regional centres of excellence should be valued along the lines of small rural schools. These being easier targets for local authorities in difficult short term budget decisions. All options of community asset transfer should be considered prior to the loss of resources of such specialist national significance. A national overview strategy of the provision of regional outdoor learning centres of excellence would be valuable to aid local financial decision making.

### Comment 2

There has been a marked increase in enthusiasm for outdoor learning within schools with the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence. Heads of establishments are recognising the value of outdoor learning in fulfilling the requirements of CfE.

### Comment 3

It is increasing, but it's a slow process. OL profile has been raised, there is more awareness of benefits and opportunities, now the question is how to move it from head knowledge to regular practise.

#### Comment 4

Outdoor Learning has fast become an integrated part of the CfE ...but at present the level of skills, knowledge and confidence of teaching staff is not yet at the required level to fully utilise the outdoor classroom.

#### Comment 5

CfE has definitely created the opportunity and freedom for staff to plan more opportunities to learn outdoors. It has made good recommendations and provided suggested pathways for different outdoor experiences. It has also provided very strong justification and explanation of the impact of learning outdoors. It hasn't provided any additional resources and this is where LA's and staff need to be creative in how they plan activities and also seek additional funding.

#### Comment 6

CfE not only justifies but demands that teaching and learning takes place out-with the confines of the classroom.

#### Comment 7

“The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.”

CfE should ensure that the provision of OL becomes a reality for all pupils throughout their school career but unless support is provided to make this happen we will continue with the ‘postcode lottery’.

#### Comment 8

CFE should have literally opened the door for learning outdoors to become a delivery method, especially in the younger stages. Secondary schools have always had a greater number of limiting factors and therefore they tend to rely more on curriculum inserts. There are some excellent examples in Aberdeenshire Schools from 3-18 where the outdoor environment and outdoor learning is being used very effectively to enhance the ethos of CFE. The OL strategy group have made some coordinated effort to improve practise through authority wide CPD and this has also been supported by clusters organising their own in-house training. This again lacks consistency across the authority but has been a focus for the group. A further CPD Authority event is planned for March 2014.

#### Comment 9

The capacities for the CfE are an excellent framework to attach many of the intangible benefits of outdoor learning that people experience. This will have a positive effect on the visibility of outdoor learning.

The C f E provides direction and makes further links for current Outdoor Providers & outdoor learning teams to signpost the many benefits. Changes to curriculum should encourage more fieldwork and opportunities to learn outdoors.

Work by LTS has highlighted the CfE and its links to taking learning outdoors.

## Whether current levels of resource for outdoor learning are adequate.

### Comment 1

NO!

### Comment 2

My impression is that there is a significant lack of resources; financial, leadership, staffing and experience in Local Authorities generally; however there are some authorities providing excellent, well resourced examples of good practice. Unfortunately there is little consistency nationally.

### Comment 3

I could easily work full time as an outdoor learning development officer, but the funding is not currently available. We can always use more!

### Comment 4

No not adequate and not consistent across Scotland.

### Comment 5

No. The resourcing varies hugely across Scotland. At a time when there is so much evidence about the benefits of learning outdoors there are still centres closing and outdoor specialist staff being reduced. There should be some element of entitlement built in to the framework but not falling into the trap of putting all resources into one pot at the expense of other experiences. The real benefits of learning outdoors are progressive experiences throughout a lifetime from Nursery children exploring a local woodland to Senior pupils on a multi-day wild journey.

### Comment 6

The current levels of resource for outdoor learning are inadequate and inconsistent. If Scottish Government is serious about the value of outdoor learning there has to be a financial commitment.

- The protection of outdoor centres and adventure activity provision still in LA control should be a priority.
- There should be a commitment to support LAs in the consistent implementation of OL approaches – in the same way money has been provided to support 2 hours of quality PE.

### Comment 7

More support need in delivery of CPD and allocation of basic equipment to schools

- Package of support to enhance pupils ability to attend residential opportunities

### Comment 8

The level of resources are Aberdeenshire's single most limiting factor. Mainly because:

- no full time adventurous activities staff or equipment
- no staffed outdoor or environmental residential educational centres

- no admin or clerical support for the OL strategy group
- no OL support officer (s)
- inadequate budget
- no official policy or strategy on Outdoor Learning

#### Comment 9

There are some examples of excellent practice, across all age groups. Equally there are areas where it is virtually non-existent. This is inconsistent both geographically and across sectors and in many cases the good practice is due entirely to enthusiastic staff who literally see the benefits in the young people they teach. The OL group would like to see Authorities have ring-fenced money to support Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning in its widest sense, similar to the DTS money in previous years to support Enterprise in Education. Some Authorities have entire departments to support outdoor learning and others have no resources other than private providers to call upon. This inequality of provision does not reflect the ambitions of CFE.

#### Comment 10

Resource needs to be improved if Outdoor Learning is to become a sustainable commodity that is recognised and used by Scottish schools, communities and authorities on a regular and strategic basis.

Many centres have been closed and valuable staff released over decades within the Outdoor industry as difficult decisions have been made within many authorities at varying times of fiscal challenge due to its non-statutory nature. The level of enquiries that our service receives indicates that schools and communities clearly have an appetite for outdoor learning and more provision.

Investment in staffing has however recently been made in Midlothian for Outdoor Learning delivery, but new ways of funding will need to be identified if outdoor learning is to grow. Further resources would be needed to increase opportunities for schools and communities to experience consistent and sustainable outdoor learning.

## Progress being made by Education Scotland on the Learning for Sustainability recommendations.

### Comment 1

We believe Education Scotland have made little progress towards the 5 overarching recommendations;

All learners should have an entitlement to learning for sustainability

This has not been effectively communicated to local authorities or schools.

In line with the new GTCS Professional Standards, every practitioner, school and education leader should demonstrate learning for sustainability in their practice.

GTCS have made and communicated progress well; though significant exemplification of what this looks like is required for ITE's, teachers and leaders.

Every school should have a whole school approach to learning for sustainability that is robust, demonstrable, evaluated and supported by leadership at all levels

Not aware of strategic leadership of this at all.

School buildings, grounds and policies should support learning for sustainability

Investment through third sector Ground for Learning in 30 school grounds as been showcase of outdoor play. Little evidence of impact on estate management other than energy saving/carbon reduction focus, food waste and some increase in planting/growing practice.

A strategic national approach to supporting learning for sustainability should be established.

Not aware of any progress other than establishment of Regional Centre in Edinburgh Uni.

Recommendations specifically for outdoor learning and Education Scotland:

1. As part of this entitlement, outdoor learning should be a regular, progressive curriculum-led experience for all learners	Accept Outdoor learning is a key approach to learning within the curriculum and practitioners are encouraged to make outdoor learning a natural and normal part of practice. The frequency with which outdoor learning activities take place in schools should be determined by the needs of the curriculum and learners. The Learning for Sustainability (Lfs) Implementation Group should consider an appropriate and proportionate means of capturing practice.
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Not aware of this being communicated with local authority or school leaders or any progress towards an "appropriate and proportionate means of capturing practice."

<p>Education Scotland, in partnership with stakeholders and other education bodies, should develop resources, guidance and support for schools, and those that support them, to enable schools to develop a whole school approach and self-evaluate the progress they are making towards implementing this approach. See also 5.4</p>	<p>Accept National guidance on self-evaluation of schools and reflection tools on global citizenship and outdoor learning strengthen the place of learning for sustainability within schools. Consideration will be given to future resources, guidance and support to reflect these developments.</p>
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This has been progressed though outdoor learning self evaluation is not strategically or consistently communicated by Education Scotland in inspection support at school or authority level.

#### Comment 2

Cannot comment - do not have access to information on development of these.

Much of this is just observations and my own experiences and feelings, not measured hard evidence, but I hope some of it is useful to add to the big picture. Hope the session goes well. Do get in touch again if you want any more information.

#### Comment 3

Not aware of any progress?

#### Comment 4

Relatively early days to comment on this. It is very positive that the Government accepted all the recommendations in the report. Very positive that learning outdoors has been included very specifically in this comprehensive report.

The current structure within Education Scotland seems to be creating a framework that is seeking to strongly support outdoor learning.

The success of this agenda will rely on close partnership working particularly between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SAPOE, GTCS as well as other providers.

#### Comment 5

There is little evidence in LAs that any progress has been made by Education Scotland to deliver the Learning for Sustainability recommendations.

#### Comment 6

The OL strategy group are not in position to comment on this section

#### Comment 7

For Education Scotland to respond to.

## Other Comment

With regards to the request for comments/information that may be of use in the evidence session with the Scottish Government I have attached a draft copy of the Angus Council Education Department Outdoor Learning Strategy. I am not sure if this will help as some of it is fairly general. I have attempted to save you some time by highlighting (colour coded) the parts that I think may be relevant to the bullet points that we were asked to comment on.

I think the fact that Angus Council now has this strategy is good evidence that Outdoor Learning in Angus is progressing and that the benefits are being recognised.

Along with the strategy document we are also currently providing CPD activities for staff. Through this CPD we are looking to increase awareness of what can be done; change perceptions and remove barriers; provide ideas and inspire staff; raise awareness of what can be provided by the Outdoor Education Team, Ranger Service, or through the Active Schools Team.

This Strategy and CPD is also helping to highlight the range of outdoor learning and create an understanding of the distinction between outdoor learning in a more general sense and the more adventurous activities. I agreed fully with a comment made at a fairly recent SAPOE meeting that we should ensure that the more adventurous activities do not decline due to a greater focus on other types of outdoor learning. We cannot afford to lose the benefits that the more adventurous activities provide and others do not. eg. increased resilience, increased judgement and ability to assess risk, provision of legitimate risk.

It is difficult to assess how adequate the current resources are. Angus is rich in outdoor spaces and good venues for outdoor learning. What we need is for staff to be more aware and pro-active. More CPD as a resource would be very useful. Lack of staff is also often a barrier when the complete class is not attending an activity. Lack of affordable transport can also be restrictive in accessing less local venues and activities.

The Outdoor Education Team has recently lost staff due to the Council looking to make savings. We receive more requests for activities and service than we are able to provide. We, therefore, have to prioritise, and the service we provide is perhaps not as equal as we would like!

In short we could do with:

More support staff in schools.

More CPD for outdoor learning.

More/cheaper transport options.

More Outdoor Education Workers.

## Conclusion

There is a mixed message coming from across the country. In some council's there is a well organised and resourced service being provided while in others there is little evidence that lip service is being paid to Scottish Government Policy.

There appears to be a 'disconnect' between policy as it is promoted at Government level and how it is implemented at local authority level.

The general excuse is that there is no funding!

Authenticity and progression are other important elements which seem to be under question. There appears to be two different types of 'Outdoors' being delivered. The first and original outdoors was 'Outdoor Education' which is now understood as all things associated with adventurous activities and residential outdoor education centres. The second is 'Outdoor Learning' which is all things done around the immediate area of the school and local environment.

Some would prefer to keep these as separate 'Outdoors' whilst SAPOE views them as the same but that one is only a natural progression of the other.

It is inconceivable to us that any child's view of the outdoors would be restricted to the school grounds and the local park. We view these areas as important stepping stones along an exciting and stimulating path which will ultimately lead us to enjoy the magnificent natural environment of Scotland and beyond.

Adventure and Residential Outdoor Learning (Education) and are extremely important in our view but it is evident that their provision is diminishing in favour of other less demanding forms of outdoor learning.

I look forward to the opportunity of expanding on the above when I give evidence to the Committee on the 10<sup>th</sup> December.

## Contributors

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