

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 82

Ymateb gan : Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru

Response from : Natural Resources Wales

Question 1 – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

Natural Resources Wales welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. In terms of education and skills our aim is to highlight the importance of the sustainable management of our natural resources now and in the future, the need to embed the environment and sustainable development in the widest sense within the curriculum and the importance of out of classroom learning opportunities and real life experience for all key stages, highlighting its contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda.

With this in mind we would like to see the Children, Young People and Education Committee consider how to raise the importance of learning in and about the natural environment and of connecting children and young people to the natural environment. This is a priority in order that they can learn to understand and appreciate the importance of sustainably managing our natural resources now and in the future, to improve Wales' well-being, and provide a better future for all. This needs to be embedded in the new Successful Futures curriculum to ensure that the current push for digital literacy, whilst recognised to be extremely important, does not overshadow the sustainability, physical literacy and health agendas.

There is much evidence and regular reports to show that children and young people are spending less time in the natural environment, with children's roaming range decreasing from 6 miles in 1915 to 300 yards in 2015. It is acknowledged that in today's modern childhood, 11-15 year olds spend around 7.5 hours a day looking at screens. Reports also highlight the detrimental effect this can have on both mental and physical well-being, development, learning and for Wales, the linked concern regarding the lack of ownership of the environment and therefore the understanding of the need to manage its natural resources sustainably:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/connecting-with-nature_tcm9-354603.pdf

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/read-our-natural-childhood-report.pdf>

Opportunities to learn in and about the natural environment, including field work and residential stays, are essential to provide memorable experiences, increase physical activity (learning outdoors can lead to lifelong recreation habits), and provide opportunities:

- to gain experience from hands on, experiential learning tasks which help to develop leadership, communication, team work, problem solving skills and confidence
- consider future career paths
- for those who do not as well in a classroom setting, to succeed in a less formal environment
- to improve physical development, outside the usual sport related physical activity
- to provide opportunities which contribute to positive mental well-being
- to develop skills to assess and manage risk when making decisions.
- to connect with the natural world, built heritage and culture
- to develop child led play experiences (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- to gain skills in field survey and practical scientific experimental techniques (contributing to STEM)
- to explore and develop an enhanced understanding of how the world works, how to interact with it and Wales' position within the global context

“Outdoor learning experiences are often remembered for a lifetime. Integrating learning and outdoor experiences, whether through play in the immediate grounds or adventures further afield, provides relevance and depth to the curriculum in ways that are difficult to achieve indoors”.

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning – page 5

“Well-constructed and well-planned outdoor learning helps develop the skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection necessary for our children and young people to meet the social, economic and environmental challenges of life in the 21st century. Outdoor learning connects children and young people with the natural world, with our built heritage and our culture and society, and encourages lifelong involvement and activity in..... outdoors”.

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning – page 7

*A review by the **National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Kings College London** found substantial evidence that fieldwork and out of classroom learning, providing it was properly conceived, adequately planned, well taught and effectively followed up, not only improves students' knowledge but also teaches skills that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom.*

In answer to research showing the down side of limited connection with and time spent in the natural environment, many reports highlight the benefits and the strong links between the environment, learning, and health.

Research by [NeF](#) reported the benefits of outdoor learning as:

- **Confidence:** children had the freedom, time and space to learn and demonstrate independence
- **Social skills:** children gained increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on peers through team activities such as sharing tools and participating in play
- **Communication:** language development was prompted by the children's sensory experiences
- **Motivation:** the woodland tended to fascinate the children and they developed a keenness to participate and the ability to concentrate over longer periods of time
- **Physical skills:** these improvements were characterised by the development of physical stamina and gross and fine motor skills
- **Knowledge and understanding:** the children developed an interest in the natural surroundings and respect for the environment

Further focused research by Forestry Commission Scotland on [physical activity](#) found that during a day spent learning in a woodland environment, children were 2.7 times more active than on a normal inactive school day, but more surprisingly 2.2 times more active than a day with timetabled P.E. A further report looked at the [restorative health benefits](#) of woodland based learning concluded that the environment was advantageous to mood and helped stabilise anger.

It can be seen from the brief description above that outdoor learning has a key role to play in improving outcomes for children and young people in Wales and can help establish positive behaviours into adulthood.

The links between the natural environment, learning and health are obvious and increased collaboration between these agendas within Welsh Government, other public bodies and agencies has the ability to contribute to a wide range of prevention agendas from obesity to decreasing literacy and numeracy levels.

Natural Resources Wales held a conference in March 2014 entitled "Environmental Education and Out of Classroom Learning – where do we want to be in 5 years' time?" Following a presentation by Professor Peter Higgins of Edinburgh University and discussion at the event the consensus of the 85 delegates was that Wales could learn much from the developments in Scotland including:

- To consider that Health and Well-being and Learning for Sustainability should have equal priority to Literacy and Numeracy within the curriculum
- To highlight areas of the curriculum that could be delivered in the outdoors in all curriculum literature
- To include a core element of teaching outside the classroom in

all ITT courses (and as a requirement of teacher registration if that should ever be adopted in Wales)

- To consider the recommendations accepted by the Scottish Government in March 2013
 - all learners should have an entitlement to Learning for Sustainability;
 - every practitioner, school and education leader should demonstrate Learning for Sustainability in their practice;
 - every school should have a whole school approach to Learning for Sustainability that is robust, demonstrable, evaluated and supported by leadership at all levels;
 - school buildings, grounds and policies should support Learning for Sustainability;
 - a strategic national approach to supporting Learning for Sustainability should be established.

Question 2 – From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

Natural Resources Wales would be happy to expand on any of the points made in question 1 and provide more evidence (both formal and anecdotal) and research links if required. From the issues discussed we feel the three priorities are:

1. To embed the sustainable management of natural resources as a cross-curricular thread throughout the new Successful Futures programme during its planning stage. NRW recognises that the term “sustainable management of natural resources” is new (Environment Act 2016) in relation to the curriculum, however this approach maps easily to the existing Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) curriculum. The teaching of this subject also supports topics across the curriculum.

NRW is happy to see in the detail on Page 31 of the Successful Futures report, that ethical and informed citizens will be expected to “show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet”. This should include how they can contribute to a more sustainable local and global society and environment, by developing an understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the services it provides (the ecosystem approach), by developing an understanding of the need to manage our natural resources sustainably now and in the future and the essential contribution this will make to a more resilient Wales.

In future the ESDGC curriculum (or its replacement) will be the main vehicle to embed this thinking to ensure longer-term outcomes for children and young people and by using outdoor learning as a vehicle to do this the added benefits outlined in question 1 can be realised. Embedding SMNR into the curriculum will also contribute to the achievement of the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future

Generations Act and the delivery of the Environment Act and contribute to future generations of skilled workforce (including green jobs) and knowledgeable policy makers, ensuring a resilient and sustainably managed environment,

2. It is essential that initial teacher training courses and ongoing CPD for teachers includes developing the skills and knowledge to teach about and foster an understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the services it provides. Linked to Professor John Furlongs report, all practitioners also need to be competent and appropriately trained to facilitate the process of learning in the natural environment including field survey skills, ID skills, group management and risk benefit analysis. This also includes the development and use of school grounds e.g. planting for biodiversity, outdoor classroom areas, vegetable growing and water collection and recycling. There is a need to be explicit about this, as the children this new curriculum will benefit are those most likely be facing significant environmental issues in later life related to degradation of ecosystem services and the pressures on the sustainable use and management of our natural resources. This fact increases the importance of connecting young children with nature and their local natural environment as early as possible and maintaining that contact through their school life in order to foster positive behaviours into adult life.

Identifying and resolving barriers to accessing learning “in and about” the natural environment for all key stages within LEA’s is also required to ensure teachers have the support to provide balanced opportunities for pupils and understand how a wide range of curriculum subjects including literacy and maths can be taught *and* assessed in the outdoors.

3. To encourage links between the environment, education and skills and health departments and to increase joint working (programmes and projects), shared budgets and more use of the links to maximize the contribution to a range of prevention agendas.