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Education and Skills Committee

Education Outside the Classroom

Second Report of Session 2004–05

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written evidence*

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The Education and Skills Committee

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Footnotes

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated in the form 'Ev' followed by the page number.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
1 Summary	3
2 Introduction	5
3 Context	6
The value of outdoor learning	7
The decline of education outside the classroom	9
4 Barriers	11
Risk and bureaucracy	11
Teacher Training	16
Schools	19
Cost	21
Centres and operators	22
5 The Role of the DfES	25
6 Conclusion	28
7 Conclusions and recommendations	29
Formal minutes	33
Witnesses	34
List of written evidence	35
List of unprinted written evidence	36

1 Summary

During this inquiry, the Committee has become convinced of the value of education outside the classroom in its broadest sense. Outdoor learning supports academic achievement, for example through fieldwork projects, as well as the development of ‘soft’ skills and social skills, particularly in hard to reach children. It can take place on school trips, on visits in the local community or in the school grounds. Yet outdoor education is in decline. Provision by schools is extremely patchy. Although some schools offer an active and well-planned programme of outdoor education, which contributes significantly to teaching and learning, many are deterred by the false perception that a high degree of risk attaches to outdoor education as well as by cumbersome bureaucracy and issues of funding, time and resources. Neither the DfES or local authorities have done enough to publicise the benefits of education outside the classroom or to provide strategic leadership or direction in this area.

Risk is often cited as the main factor deterring schools from organising school trips. We have found no evidence to support the perception that school trips are inherently risky. Visits organised in accordance with health and safety guidance should not lead to avoidable accidents or unfounded legal claims against teachers. The DfES needs to work with teacher unions and schools to ensure that teachers do not feel vulnerable to vexatious litigation and that they are aware of the law as it now stands. We also strongly recommend that the NASUWT reviews its advice to members not to participate in school trips.

In contrast, the bureaucracy now associated with school trips is a major problem. Some schools and local authorities are demanding excessively lengthy risk assessments and we have found evidence of needless duplication in the system. The Government claims to be actively reducing public sector bureaucracy in general and specifically the burden on schools. We are therefore extremely surprised that it can allow the current situation to persist.

In order to realise its full potential, outdoor education must be carried out properly, with sessions being prepared by well-trained teachers and in accordance with good curriculum guidance as well as health and safety regulations. Teacher training is therefore a vital aspect of outdoor education. We are concerned that out-of-classroom activities should be led by well-qualified people who know how to get the most out of these experiences. We recommend that the DfES engage professional bodies to ensure that teachers have access to appropriate programmes of continuing professional development, which should include curriculum design. We also urge the department to review the place of outdoor education within Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes.

Educational Visits Co-ordinators (EVCs) have recently been introduced into schools. An EVC is a teacher who provides advice on the organisation of school trips and ensures that best practice guidance is followed. We welcome this step, which provides a champion for outdoor education within schools, and look forward to EVCs being present in all schools.

Specialised centres for outdoor education are provided by a number of bodies including private companies, voluntary or charitable organisations and LEAs. In recent years, LEA provision has generally declined and this trend looks set to continue as the Government

increasingly devolves funding directly to schools. The DfES and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport need to develop a strategy for the long term viability of activity centres, addressing staff retention and links with schools and developing expertise.

School grounds are a vital resource, but our evidence suggests they are sometimes poorly designed. The DfES should ensure that its capital projects, for example, the Building Schools for the Future and Academy programmes, devote as much attention to the “outdoor classroom” as to the innovative design of buildings and indoor space.

Main recommendations

The Department should issue a ‘Manifesto for Outdoor Learning’, giving all students a right to outdoor learning. This Manifesto should attract a similar level of funding to the Music Manifesto (£30 million) in order to deliver real change. In particular, schools in deprived circumstances should be enabled to enhance their facilities, to offer professional development programmes to their teachers and to fund off site visits.

We further recommend that the DfES set up a structure to champion education outside the classroom at all levels. Within the Department, a dedicated team of officials should have responsibility for outdoor learning across curriculum areas. A high profile ‘champion’ for outdoor learning should be appointed to lead this team. In each LEA, an Outdoor Education Adviser should be in place, promoting and co-ordinating outdoor learning locally and liaising with the Department. Each school should have a well-trained Educational Visits Co-ordinator, whose role should be strengthened and expanded to act as the local champion for outdoor learning. A nationwide network of support, guidance and innovation would move outdoor education forwards from its current, patchy position to a more uniform provision of high quality opportunities throughout the country.

2 Introduction

1. The Committee announced its inquiry into Education Outside the Classroom on 22 September 2004. We took evidence on a wide range of outdoor learning experiences, from lessons held within the school grounds to residential expeditions abroad, and the place of outdoor learning in the curriculum from the Foundation Stage to Higher Education.

2. During our inquiry, we examined the barriers that deter schools from teaching outside the classroom. These range from the perception of risk associated with school trips, through the resources and curriculum time available for out-of-classroom learning and for teacher training, to the availability and cost of facilities and activity centres. We analyse these difficulties in this report. We also consider how schools could best be encouraged to improve and expand their outdoor education and what action the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) could take in this area. Options include the publication of a 'Manifesto for Outdoor Learning' (suggested by departmental officials, amongst others) or the creation of a curricular entitlement to a certain number of hours outside the classroom. We also consider the funding implications of these alternatives.

3. In the course of our inquiry, we took oral evidence from the Outward Bound Trust; the Real World Learning Campaign; the RSPB; the Field Studies Council; the Secondary Heads Association; the National Association of Head Teachers; the NASUWT; the NUT; Ofsted; Ms Helen Williams and Mr Stephen Crowne, DfES officials and Mr Stephen Twigg MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, DfES. We received written evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals, a selection of which is printed with this report. We received a very large number of submissions in connection with this inquiry, which is a measure of the diversity of the sector and the strength of feeling on this subject. We have used the information and opinions expressed in these memoranda to inform the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

3 Context

4. We publish this report at a time when outdoor education is the subject of significant media attention, particularly with regard to school trips. Over the past decade, accidents on school trips have been prominently reported in the press. In 1993, four pupils died in a canoeing accident at Lyme Bay. It was subsequently found that the students were not properly supervised and the activity centre had not provided adequately trained staff. The managing director was prosecuted and convicted of manslaughter. In 2000, two pupils died whilst river walking with a school party in Stainforth Beck, Yorkshire. A case against Leeds City Council was brought by the Health and Safety Executive. The Council was found guilty of failing to ensure the safety of the pupils and fined. In 2002, a teacher was jailed for manslaughter following an accident near Glenridding, Cumbria, when a 10-year-old boy was swept away and drowned in a flooded river. The teacher involved was a member of the NASUWT, who, for the past four years, have advised their members against accompanying school trips due to the danger of litigation if something goes wrong. Many of those who contacted us described these accidents as tragic but isolated incidents. They reported that the adverse publicity generated in these cases has seriously deterred schools from organising off-site visits and has led to a decline in education outside the classroom.

5. School trips have been the focus for much media attention, but our inquiry was not confined to off-site visits. We wished to consider education outside the classroom in its fullest sense. Outdoor learning takes place in many different settings within walking distance of the school, such as neighbourhood parks and green spaces, local buildings and community resources as well as within the school grounds themselves. A lack of access to these spaces is as important in the provision of outdoor learning as the decline of school trips.

6. We also recognise the cross-curricular nature of out-of-classroom learning. Outdoor education contributes to learning in a range of areas, including:

- science and geography fieldwork;
- physical education;
- learning through outdoor play, particularly in the early years;
- history and citizenship, through visits to museums and heritage sites;
- art and design, through visits to galleries and experiences of the built environment;¹
- environmental and countryside education, and education for sustainable development;
- practical or vocational skills that cannot be practised in a classroom environment;
- group activities that build self-confidence and social skills; these may include adventurous activities that teach students how to deal with an element of risk;
- the use of the environment as a tool to enrich the curriculum across subject areas.

¹ See particularly evidence from CABE, Ev 157.

The value of outdoor learning

7. The conclusions of this report stem from our belief in the value of outdoor learning. Evidence taken by the Committee strongly indicated that education outside the classroom is of significant benefit to pupils. Academic fieldwork clearly enhances the teaching of science and geography, but other subjects such as history, art and design and citizenship can also be brought to life by high quality educational visits. Group activities, which may include adventurous expeditions, can develop social skills and give self-confidence. Furthermore, outdoor education has a key role to play in the social inclusion agenda, offering children who may not otherwise have the opportunity the simple chance to experience the countryside, or other parts of our heritage that many others take for granted.

8. In some cases, the value of outdoor education and the skills students develop outside the classroom is very directly linked to the employment market. For example, The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) has identified biological recording, survey and monitoring as a growing area that depends greatly on specialist skills being taught in schools, colleges and universities.² This link is also in evidence in the bioscience and ecological sectors and the growing environmental protection sector as well as in the numerous other areas of the labour market which require training involving direct contact with the natural world or vocational preparation which cannot be delivered in classrooms.

9. The broad extent of this inquiry has convinced the Committee that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. We are convinced that out-of-classroom education enriches the curriculum and can improve educational attainment. Whilst recognising this cross-curricular scope, we conclude that in order to realise its full potential, outdoor education must be carried out properly, with sessions being prepared by well trained teachers and leaders and in accordance with good curriculum guidance as well as health and safety regulations.

10. Our view of the value of education outside the classroom is supported by research evidence. Ofsted's recent report, *Outdoor education: aspects of good practice*, finds that "outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students' physical, personal and social education".³ The recent *Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*,⁴ published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and King's College London, found that:

"Those with a statutory and non-statutory responsibility for policy relating to outdoor education should be in no doubt that there is a considerable body of empirical research evidence to support and inform their work [...] Policy makers at all levels need to be aware of the benefits that are associated with different types of outdoor learning. The findings of this review make clear that learners of all ages can

2 Ev 192

3 *Outdoor education: aspects of good practice*, Ofsted, September 2004, page 2.

4 *A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*, Mark Rickinson, Justin Dillon, Kelly Teamey, Marian Morris, Mee Young Choi, Dawn Sanders and Pauline Benefield, (April 2004). The review synthesised the findings of 150 pieces of research on fieldwork/visits, outdoor adventure, and school grounds/community projects, published internationally in English between 1993 and 2003. It was funded by the Field Studies Council, DfES, English Outdoor Council, Groundwork, RSPB, and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

benefit from effective outdoor education. However, despite such positive research evidence and the long tradition of outdoor learning in this country, there is growing evidence that opportunities for outdoor learning are in decline and under threat.”⁵

Dr. Peter Higgins of the Outdoor and Environmental Education Section, University of Edinburgh, agreed with these conclusions:

“The weight of evidence from MSc and PhD theses, projects supported by small research grants and Government commissioned studies does generally show benefits in out-of-classroom experiences. Perhaps more importantly this evidence points to a latent and undeveloped potential in relation to both curricular studies and lifelong learning.”⁶

11. Many countries, both in Europe and elsewhere, achieve a significantly higher level of outdoor learning in their schools than the UK. Dr Higgins’ evidence, quoted above, goes on to cite Australia, Norway and Canada as examples of good practice and notes that:

“in many cases the countries we are familiar with developed their national approach to outdoor learning after detailed consideration of the approach taken in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. In particular the carefully constructed and wide-scale provision in the Lothian Region of Scotland was widely regarded as the ideal model. Several decades of erosion have left such provision in a poor state, not dissimilar to the rest of the UK, whilst several of those countries which adapted the model to suit their own situation now have extensive curricular provision.”

Recent Committee visits to Denmark, Finland and Norway have convinced us that there is much to learn from the provision of outdoor education in these countries. We were particularly impressed by the Danish ‘Forest Schools’ initiative, which uses the environment as a tool to enrich the curriculum, whilst enabling students to experience a carefully monitored element of risk and to become more familiar with the natural world.

12. There are, however, a number of gaps in the research that could usefully be filled by further studies. Most of the data collated by NFER was published abroad and the report notes that “there is a particular need for more UK-based research into a number of aspects of outdoor learning”.⁷ It also observes that there is relatively little research on the comparative educational benefits of different approaches to education outside the classroom and warns that this is particularly important as “poor fieldwork is likely to lead to poor learning. Students quickly forget irrelevant information that has been inadequately presented.”⁸

13. The Department for Education and Skills told us that it is currently undertaking research into outdoor education.⁹ We look forward to seeing the results of this study and hope that the data will go some way towards filling the gaps in current research. **Like all**

5 *ibid*, p 5.

6 Ev 112, para 1.5.

7 *A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*, p 5.

8 *ibid*, p 2.

9 Ev 59

educational processes, the benefits of education outside the classroom should be rigorously researched, documented and communicated. Positive and reliable evidence of the benefits of outdoor activities would help schools determine the priority to afford to such work.

The decline of education outside the classroom

14. The recent Ofsted report on Outdoor Education, which concludes that education outside the classroom can be of significant benefit to students, notes that many students do not have access to this form of learning: “Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students’ physical, personal and social education. However, not all students in schools benefit from such opportunities”.

15. There has been a general decline in opportunities for education outside the classroom. This decline seems to be affecting all types of outdoor experience. The Committee has received evidence from professional bodies, including the Royal Society and the Field Studies Council, on the diminishing opportunities for fieldwork. It has also heard from organisations such as Learning Through Landscapes, Play Wales and the Children’s Play Council that children’s day-to-day access to the outdoors is being increasingly restricted.¹⁰ In the past ten years, twenty local authority outdoor education centres have closed. Nonetheless, the DfES asserted that: “most LEAs tell us outdoor activity in their schools is stable or increasing”.¹¹

16. Perhaps more worryingly still, the Committee has received some evidence to show that education outside the classroom is declining not only in quantity, but also in quality. In oral evidence, Dr Steve Tilling of the Field Studies Council described “a much closer, much more prescribed content than certainly was the situation ten years ago [...] driven by skills and techniques and things which are easily measurable, or measurable in a predictable and, some would say, sanitised way”.¹² Dr Anthony Thomas of the Real World Learning Campaign added that in some schools “it is not particularly well planned [...] it is seen as maybe a prize at the end of the year”.¹³

17. Despite these generally discouraging trends, the Committee has also heard of much good practice. High quality outdoor education centres run both by LEAs and private or charitable operators have told us that they are regularly oversubscribed and have to turn schools away.¹⁴ Museums and galleries cannot accommodate all those who wish to visit.¹⁵ Many schools are committed to outdoor learning as an integral part of their students’ education and put in place what Dr Rita Gardner of the Royal Geographical Society described as:

¹⁰ Ev 131, 162, 165.

¹¹ Ev 61, Annex A.

¹² Q 4

¹³ Q 4

¹⁴ Ev 106, 168, 187.

¹⁵ Ev 125, 187.

“a programme of development that is an educational development over a period of years, [...] embedded in the culture of the school and the curriculum, a passionate teacher and a really committed head who sees and understands the values, and can convince their governors too, of the values of out-of-classroom learning”.¹⁶

18. This evidence paints a picture of extremely patchy provision. Individual good practice in many schools and local authority areas is set against a more negative national situation. **It is clear to the Committee that outdoor education is a sector suffering from considerable unexploited potential.** In the remainder of this report, we will explore the barriers that prevent schools from developing opportunities for their pupils to benefit from education outside the classroom and make recommendations for action to spread existing good practice amongst all schools.

4 Barriers

Risk and bureaucracy

19. Many of the organisations and individuals who submitted evidence to our inquiry cited the fear of accidents and the possibility of litigation as one of the main reasons for the apparent decline in school trips. It is the view of this Committee that this fear is entirely out of proportion to the real risks. High-profile reporting of isolated incidents and some tabloid journalism misrepresents the incidence of serious accidents on school trips, which is actually very low indeed. There have been 57 fatal accidents on school visits since 1985 (this figure includes adults accompanying visits and road traffic accidents en route to or from off-site visits).¹⁷ In England in 2003, there were between seven and ten million ‘pupil visits’ involving educational or recreational activity, but only one fatality.¹⁸ Whilst every fatality is clearly tragic for those involved, these statistics compare extremely favourably with other routine activities such as driving or being driven in a car, or simply the likelihood of an accident at home or in school.

20. Over the past decade, the DfES has issued new guidance on health and safety on school trips in reaction to accidents that have occurred. A 1998 good practice guide, *Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits* (HASPEV) has been supplemented with new material in 2002 aimed at specific audiences: *Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits*, *Standards for Adventure* and *A Handbook for Group Leaders* as well as *Group Safety at Water Margins* (published in 2003 with the Central Council for Physical Recreation).¹⁹ In addition, adults working with under-18s are now subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks.

21. Written submissions and correspondence associated with this inquiry have in general welcomed this new guidance, but some concerns have been expressed that there is still not enough clarity in guidance regarding visits involving children with special educational needs (SEN). Concerns relate specifically to uncertainty over the correct staffing ratios and the right of children with SEN to attend. The NUT publishes additional guidance for the organisation of school trips involving SEN pupils and some have suggested that the DfES should issue a similar document.²⁰

22. We welcome the DfES health and safety guidance which clearly sets out what is expected of all those involved in organising school trips. There remain some concerns relating to guidance on trips involving children with special educational needs, where there could be more specific recommendations on levels of staffing and the right of children to attend. This area is likely to be affected by the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Bill and we recommend that the DfES review its guidance in this context.

17 Ev 137

18 ‘Pupil visits’ is a measure of the number of visits multiplied by the number of pupils participating. Ev 144.

19 Ev 44, para 111.

20 Ev 66, para 33, Ev 70 and unpublished correspondence.

23. Despite new DfES guidance on health and safety, the fear of accidents is still a significant barrier for some. The Committee took evidence from representatives of teacher unions, including Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT, a union which now advises its members against participating in school trips. She told us that the risk of litigation, should an accident occur, was now too great:

“For things that we would all in a sensible world simply dismiss as being a genuine accident that has occurred schools are now getting solicitors’ letters as a minimum and then finding they are subject to some sort of investigation, and so on, leading up to potential litigation as the end point on that”.²¹

24. When pressed on this point, Ms Keates admitted that cases of teachers being taken to court were actually quite rare, but emphasised that the threat of legal or disciplinary action could still be extremely stressful.²² In oral evidence, she advised us that the number of false allegations made against her members in connection with school visits has remained roughly stable since 1991, when her union began monitoring it.²³ It is important to distinguish between false allegations (claims of an incident which are untrue) and unfounded claims (where an incident has taken place, but there has not been negligence and there is no basis for litigation). It would also help greatly if teachers were given clear guidance about current law in this area. In subsequent communications, the NASUWT were unable to provide us with a statistical breakdown of cases according to these categories, or even between cases on visits and those in schools.²⁴

25. The guidance issued by the NASUWT has not been adopted by any other teaching union and many of those who gave evidence to our inquiry spoke out against it. David Bell, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools and head of Ofsted, told the Committee that the union’s position was unhelpful and contributed to the unjustified culture of fear surrounding school trips:

“I have the utmost respect for the new general secretary of the NASUWT but I disagree with her on this and I disagree with the advice that she has given her members. Our evidence suggested that the teachers—and it was the teachers and the outdoor instructors who were doing this—said that it [school trips] is still do-able [...] I just worry a bit about that advice being given because are we not just fuelling precisely that risk averseness that [we have] been talking about?”²⁵

26. The logical consequences of the NASUWT advice to its members not to participate in school trips would be the cessation of any out-of-school activity. Yet Ms Keates acknowledged that her members do continue to participate in school trips despite her advice, as they believe in the educational value of such experiences.²⁶ **We do not believe that the NASUWT wishes to see the end of all school trips. We therefore recommend**

21 Q 206

22 Q 153

23 Q 139

24 Ev 89

25 Q 225

26 Q 147

that the union seriously reviews its advice to members not to participate in school trips, which is not a helpful attitude.

27. We acknowledge that teachers can feel vulnerable to unjustified allegations or the threat of disproportionate legal action. Dr Fiona Hammans, Head of Banbury School, Oxfordshire and representative of the Secondary Heads Association, told us that her school successfully organises a wide-ranging programme of educational visits and outdoor activities, whilst recognising that an element of risk is involved:

“If I am honest, the fear is still there sometimes. Certainly when you are getting to the end of a month's expedition in Madagascar, for instance, and you get a phone call at 3.30 in the morning and they are saying, ‘Actually things are okay; we had forgotten the time difference’, there is always a moment of panic then, but it is about as a school we do believe we should be doing it. It is about something special and distinct that we can offer our students. There is a risk there, but our parents have opted into the fact that we will do everything we can and more to minimise that risk, but there is no learning without some risk.”²⁷

Dr. Hammans went on to describe the positive support her school provides to teachers:

“I think it needs the head teacher's backing, because that is the person who is likely to end up in court. So if we are talking about that fear, if the head is going to say quite clearly, ‘These are valuable educational activities which we will run at minimum risk for the very best interests educationally of our students’, then you are going to take your staff with you. You inevitably will have the backing of your governors anyway for that. If the LEA supports it, plus there are national initiatives and agendas to support it as well, then it is a winning situation, but I think it has to start with the school, much as the evidence from the DfES officials earlier on saying that it is for the school to determine its priorities locally, but, if it can link in with other national priorities, including Ofsted, then that is a stronger argument.”²⁸

28. It is clear to us that the fear of accidents and subsequent litigation (whether justified or not) is discouraging some schools from organising school trips. This situation can only be resolved through co-operation and collaboration between teaching unions, schools, LEAs and the DfES. When we asked Stephen Twigg MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DfES and Minister with responsibility for this area, what he was doing to promote this kind of co-operation and to persuade the NASUWT to change its cautious stance, he told us, “We want to persuade them and we think we can persuade them. We are in discussions with them right now on this issue”.²⁹ We look forward to seeing the department's attempts at persuasion bear fruit.

29. Teachers should be able to expect support from their employers in the case of genuine accidents or unfounded claims. To help achieve this, a consistent approach to vexatious litigation must be developed. Frivolous and unfounded claims should be discouraged. **We recommend that the DfES makes it clear to schools and LEAs that it is unacceptable to**

27 Q 196

28 Q 193

29 Q 231

settle frivolous and unfounded claims out of court simply to get rid of the problem. By working with teacher unions, including the NASUWT, the DfES should be able to address their concerns and persuade the unions to move forward from what is in our view, a needlessly obstructive attitude.

30. The fear of accidents in itself is not the only barrier to the expansion of outdoor education. The Committee has also received evidence to show that the risk assessment bureaucracy associated with out-of-classroom education has increased considerably in recent years. Mr Andy Simpson of the RSPB told us that one teacher organising a visit to a reserve was required to fill in 16 different risk assessment forms (for parents, governors, school authorities, LEA, etc.) in order for the visit to go ahead:

“RSPB is a professional organisation. We take risk assessment very seriously. We automatically send out risk assessments on our sites and for our activities when schools book with us. Sadly the teacher that I am referring to came back to me and said, ‘We would like to have used your risk assessment, but it is not in the format that my local authority wants, so I have to dismantle the whole thing and rebuild it’. Can you blame her for not going?”³⁰

31. Representatives of the Outward Bound Trust supported this view. Mr William Ripley told the Committee of the large amount of duplication in the system:

“We have a licensing system and yet a school will apply to come and do a course with us and so there is a process that they go through whereby they will send us their Local Authority forms, ‘Will you fill these forms in’. The first question is: ‘Do you have an adventures activities licence?’ to which the answer is yes. Instead of saying: ‘Go to the bottom of the form, because we have had an external agency do all that work’, it then says, ‘answer all the questions that you have already answered for the licensing authority’. That is the kind of reaction and process that we are in amongst. [...] it is relatively easy for [teachers] when they ask an organisation like us to do that service, but when you are looking at trying to do that in the school as well it just compounds the issue. It just compounds the difficulty.”³¹

32. Many witnesses made reference to the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA), which has inspected adventure activity centres for compliance with health and safety regulations since 1996 (its remit does not cover foreign operators, voluntary organisations or schools themselves). Set up in the wake of the Lyme Bay tragedy, AALA is a cross-departmental and cross-border public authority, sponsored by the DfES and operating under the written guidance of the Health and Safety Commission. No child has died at a licensed centre since the AALA was formed. **Given that AALA-licensed centres have undertaken significant risk assessment processes in order to gain their licence, it seems absurd to us that this should have to be repeated at the demand of local authorities.**

30 Q 31 and Ev 31.

31 Q 28

33. The burden of bureaucracy is greatest where local authorities require schools to complete lengthy risk assessment forms and where there is duplication between a number of bodies requiring risk assessments. Dr Fiona Hammans described this situation:

“There needs to be something which is definitive. So if you are looking at the bureaucracy that everybody has to fill in there is the DfES guidelines which need to be met, there is then the local authority set of guidelines which, as has been indicated earlier on, will change and will change somewhat, then you have got again schools’ interpretations, plus whichever group you may be going with, whichever partner you will be working with, so you have got a huge amount of bureaucracy”.³²

34. A number of our witnesses called for the DfES to provide generic risk assessments appropriate to each activity in order to reduce the amount of bureaucracy associated with risk assessments. In supplementary written evidence, the DfES said that this is already provided: “DfES guidance contains model assessment forms for risk assessment, which take up just two sides of A4. It is up to LEAs and schools whether they use our forms. Activity providers can, if they wish, encourage schools to use standard forms.”³³

35. Clearly, it is important for school trips to be the subject of a full risk assessment and to be carried out in accordance with Health and Safety Executive guidelines, but in some areas the number of forms that have to be filled in for the simplest activities is unreasonable. **The Government claims to be actively reducing public sector bureaucracy in general and specifically the burden on schools. We are therefore extremely surprised that it can allow the current situation to persist. We recommend that the DfES takes action to streamline the risk assessment system surrounding school trips, promoting its standard forms more vigorously and deprecating bad practice. We further recommend that AALA licensed centres be subject to a much streamlined risk assessment process, and that the DfES consider expanding the AALA licensing scheme to include other sectors, such as foreign and voluntary operators.**

36. Some schools and activity centres have also described difficulties in securing insurance for visits, either because of unaffordable premiums or, in some cases, because no company has been willing to offer cover.³⁴ On occasion, this seems to have been caused by local authorities ‘over-insuring’ or requiring a level of insurance cover that is not appropriate to the level of risk involved.³⁵ Nevertheless, the insurance industry has submitted evidence to the effect that the cost of liability insurance generally has gone up in recent years, due to legal changes like ‘no-win no-fee’ arrangements and legal judgements increasing the scope of liability. The insurance industry also notes that cover is generally provided to LEAs for all activities under one premium: “in pricing the cover offered to Local Authorities and schools, insurers do not differentiate between in-school activities and those outside the classroom.”³⁶ Overall, claims for accidents on school trips represent a very small proportion of local authority insurance claims (claims from the education sector as a whole

32 Q 179

33 Ev 59

34 Ev 164, para 17: Qq 63–69.

35 Q 68

36 Ev 147

total only 3%).³⁷ The price of premiums therefore seems to bear very little relationship to the level of risk involved in outdoor education.³⁸

37. When we asked DfES officials about this issue, Mr Stephen Crowne, Director of the School Resources Group at the DfES, agreed that it was a symptom of more general problems securing affordable insurance cover for public bodies:

“I think there is an issue there. It is frankly part of a wider issue to do with school insurance where we have a current position which is of concern, that it is difficult and expensive to get insurance cover for a wide range of school activities and so we are working across government and also commissioning some studies on possible options for the future. [...] We have a study in progress now which we hope by the end of this year will illuminate some of the options that might be available. [...] There are market development options using private sector employers, but there are also options around developing local authorities’ capacity to insure for themselves.”³⁹

The Minister confirmed that his Department was holding talks with insurers on this issue. Although he admitted that these were “at quite an early stage” he expressed his confidence in the process: “I think we have good evidence to present to them in terms of the levels of risk on the basis of the statistics that the Committee will be aware of in terms of the very, very small numbers of accidents that do happen.”⁴⁰

38. Our evidence on the extent to which insurance is a problem for schools is largely anecdotal. We therefore look forward to learning the results of the current DfES consultation on this subject. Given the small scale of the risks involved, we can see no reason why a market-led solution to school insurance should not exist. **We recommend that the DfES thoroughly investigate the extent to which difficulties securing insurance cover are a barrier to education outside the classroom and develops options to resolve any problems.**

Teacher Training

39. Our evidence has underlined the importance of teacher training to the provision of high quality education outside the classroom. Andy Simpson of the RSPB told the Committee that this was the top priority for the sector:

“Nearly every workshop that we have convened and brought together practitioners irrespective of where they have come from [...at] the top was teacher training and support for teachers, both continuing professional development of the teachers but also initial teacher training because I think we all recognise that whatever bureaucracy emerges or whatever curriculum changes emerges, what funding emerges, we have had to take the teaching profession with us.”⁴¹

37 Ev 191

38 Commercial or voluntary activity centres that require their own insurance may also experience difficulties and would not be covered by blanket LEA premiums.

39 Qq 109, 110.

40 Q 233

41 Q 54

40. When we spoke to teacher unions about this issue, they agreed. Kathryn James of the NAHT said:

“I would strongly support the notion of teachers receiving training and all staff receiving training in terms of actually running, planning and moving forward with any outdoor education activity. I think that is absolutely essential. We mention in our evidence the OCR training course, which is actually very valuable, and I think the more people that undertake this the better, or something similar.”⁴²

41. Despite this general support, many teachers are not specifically trained in teaching outside the classroom. Written evidence submitted by the English Outdoor Council stressed the inadequacy of Initial Teacher Training (ITT):

“While in-service training has been very effective in recent years, we are not convinced that initial teacher training does a good enough job in terms of giving trainee teachers the confidence they need to take their pupils out of the classroom. Standards for Qualified Teacher Status require trainees to be able to plan out-of-school experiences but, in the context that so much needs to be crammed into so little time, we are not convinced that this is in practice being delivered consistently and effectively”.⁴³

42. When we asked the Minister about this issue, he agreed to reconsider the status of outdoor learning within ITT, saying “the concern you have expressed is one that the organisations have raised recently with the Secretary of State, and I understand the meetings are due with Ralph Tabberer at the TTA [Teacher Training Agency] to look at this”.⁴⁴ **We welcome this review.**

43. Initial Teacher Training programmes must incorporate a diverse range of subjects and operate under significant time constraints. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned to hear that the amount of time devoted to education outside the classroom has become so limited. Training may be confined to purely theoretical explanations with practical experience only offered on a voluntary basis.⁴⁵ Trainee teachers cannot be expected to prioritise outdoor learning or take up opportunities for continuing professional development in this area later in their career unless its value is explored in ITT. **We recommend that the DfES work with the Teacher Training Agency to ensure that Initial Teacher Training courses demonstrate the potential benefits of education outside the classroom and point teachers towards ways to develop their skills in this area as their career progresses.**

44. The Committee has heard of many excellent in-service training courses on education outside the classroom (including the qualification offered by OCR) that are available to teachers as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The range and diversity of these courses, from mountaineering to risk assessment, have led the DfES to state that “there is no evidence of lack of opportunities” for teachers to develop their

42 Q 173

43 Ev 143

44 Q 245

45 Q 17

skills.⁴⁶ Despite this assertion, DfES officials admitted that the department holds no data on the volume of CPD in outdoor learning and keeps no records showing how many teachers hold qualifications obtained as a result of courses carried out at school or LEA level.⁴⁷ **Any attempt to raise the quantity and quality of outdoor education depends crucially on the skills and motivation of the teachers involved. We therefore recommend that the DfES give an explicit commitment to support Continuing Professional Development in this area. Any Departmental Manifesto for Outdoor Learning that may emerge should include an entitlement to training for teachers. Networks such as Teachers TV can also be of significant benefit in spreading good practice and should be engaged in this project.**

45. The Committee has also taken evidence on the teaching of fieldwork in science subjects. Witnesses have maintained that younger science teachers are not always well prepared to lead fieldwork activities, as many have themselves suffered from the decline of outdoor education as students.⁴⁸ Dr Rita Gardner, Director of the Royal Geographical Society said that this deficit is not necessarily remedied in ITT:

“Many of those that we have consulted suggest that there are issues in the professional training of teachers with limited capacity in very tight PGCE programmes to include training in fieldwork inquiry and skills, and even if a geographer has come through a graduate programme where they are taught fieldwork and taken in the field, that is very different from then taking a group of kids out in the field and teaching them inquiry learning and skills.”⁴⁹

46. Dr. Steve Tilling of the Field Studies Council said that fieldwork skills used to be passed on in schools as part of an informal ‘mentoring’ process, but voiced concerns that the skills could be lost entirely as older teachers leave the profession:

“there has been an increasing dependence on, if you like, in school training, mentoring within schools, and even within the schools an age and cohort, if you like, perhaps of teachers who had these skills are dropping out the other end [...] So if a new teacher comes into a school and is looking for that sort of support within the school, then the chances are it is no longer there so unless it is delivered through the college then it will not be delivered, and the stance that we have at our fingertips suggests it is also disappearing from college provision.”⁵⁰

47. Both Dr Tilling and Dr Gardner suggested that training in fieldwork skills could be provided to new teachers by engaging subject or professional bodies (such as the Association for Science Education, the British Ecological Society or the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers). They reported that courses have been run by organisations such as these, with high levels of take-up and good evaluations, but that access has been limited due to a lack of funding.⁵¹ **We recommend that the DfES engage**

46 Ev 62

47 Q 79, Q 83.

48 Q 17

49 Q 4

50 Q 17

51 Q 17

teachers' professional bodies and subject associations in the provision of fieldwork training for science and geography teachers, ensuring that appropriate programmes of professional development are on offer to all those teachers who might benefit.

Schools

48. Outdoor learning works best where it is well integrated into school structures, in relation to both curriculum and logistics (for example, the organisation of timetables and supply cover where necessary). In this context, we welcome the establishment of Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVCs) in schools. The EVC role was introduced by the DfES in 2002. Its principle functions are to liaise with the LEA's Outdoor Education Adviser and to ensure that school staff taking pupils on any kind of educational visit are competent to do so and trained as necessary in pupil safety outdoors. All LEAs in England participate in the programme and some now have an EVC in every school in their area.⁵²

49. Our evidence suggests that EVCs are working well in schools,⁵³ but we would reiterate our comments on training. In order to be effective, educational visits co-ordinators must have access to high quality programmes of Continuing Professional Development. We also consider that the EVC role should be developed further into that of a champion for outdoor learning within a school. This should include not only the promotion of off-site visits but also the benefits of using the school grounds as a resource.

50. Education outside the classroom does not have to mean education outside the school—school grounds are a vital resource. This is particularly true of primary schools, where opportunities for outdoor play can have a significant positive effect on a child's personal and educational development. The Committee was therefore concerned to hear that many school grounds do not provide suitable environments for this development to occur. Learning Through Landscapes, the national school grounds charity, told us that grounds are often inadequate, even in new schools:

“The new capital spend under Building Schools for The Future and the Academies programme does not guarantee that LEAs and their schools can or will address this chronic school grounds problem [...] some of the new schools, and particularly some of the new Academies, are coming on stream with school grounds that are still substantially below the standard that would be expected of a modern educational establishment.[...]There appears to be a significant presumption in favour of high tech indoor learning provision which leaves little scope for investment in the outdoors. [...] PPP consortia often appear to have a poor understanding of the teaching and learning potential of school grounds and there is a tendency for them to design expensive aesthetic landscapes of little educational value.”⁵⁴

51. We were particularly anxious to hear that the new capital building projects initiated by the DfES (including Building Schools for the Future and City Academies) do not

52 Ev 42, paras 94–97.

53 Qq 187–189.

54 Ev 133

necessarily exploit the school's outdoor space to its full potential. When we put this concern to the Minister, he responded:

“We clearly want to get new schools, be they academies or other new schools, to have the very, very best facilities and I have certainly visited schools where that is the case so clearly the picture is a mixed one [...] I would have to study the evidence that they have given to the Committee in more detail to then see whether there is a basis for what they are saying and whether something can be done about it in terms of the guidance we give for the development of new schools. Certainly for academies which are directly our responsibility as a Department I think it is critically important that they do include those opportunities, particularly as these are schools focused in areas of great need and generally areas of educational under-performance and under-achievement.”⁵⁵

52. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has given the Committee persuasive evidence to suggest that students' experience of the built environment has significant and unexploited potential for learning:

“The built environment is a resource that is perennially available to all, and one with which everyone has a relationship. It has an immense physical and intellectual range that can provide rich, shared learning experiences. Since the built environment is outside of the windows of classrooms and surrounding streets its learning applications are simple to access and need to be promoted more widely.”⁵⁶

Visits to buildings and public spaces can benefit students, but the most immediate built environment available to schools is their own grounds.

53. It appears that some new schools are being built without due regard to the educational potential of school grounds. This is a result of the lack of leadership and strategic planning from the DfES with regard to outdoor learning. We urge the Department to take action to ensure that new capital projects incorporate good design of outdoor spaces into their plans.

54. The Government is currently encouraging schools to become 'extended schools', providing 'wraparound' services such as breakfast clubs and after school activities and hosting other youth services on their site. There is a potential to increase outdoor education as part of this programme. Schools could enhance students' experience of the outdoors by offering additional activities and linking up with community groups outside their core hours. The DfES should ensure that schools are aware of these possibilities so that this opportunity is not missed.

55. Finally, children spend more time at home than in school and any strategy intended to increase children's access to a variety of environmental settings needs to engage parents and carers. In this context the Government's extended schools initiative has a vital role to play. By reaching out to parent and community groups, schools can link up with wider

55 Q 251

56 Ev 158, para 2.2. The Chairman also had a meeting in a representative capacity with Sophie Andreae, Chair of the CABE Education Foundation.

community activities and make the most of children's learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom.

Cost

56. **Much of our evidence cited cost as a significant barrier to the organisation of educational visits, yet we do not believe that cost alone is responsible for the decline of education outside the classroom, or that simply throwing money at the problem would provide a solution.** This conclusion is supported by evidence from the DfES London Challenge programme. As part of this initiative, the Field Studies Council offered full funding to schools to support an off-site educational visit.⁵⁷ One third of schools did not take up this offer despite it being effectively free of charge. It seems therefore that an increase in funding alone would not be enough to persuade schools to change their behaviour, but it is clear to us that certain difficulties do exist in this area, which we discuss below.

57. The cost of arranging good quality supply cover for teachers who are absent on a school trip is one area that has been highlighted in evidence. Some have suggested that the recent National Agreement on Workforce Reform may have led to an increase in costs.⁵⁸ The Agreement limits the amount of time teachers can be asked to cover for absent colleagues and may therefore mean that supply cover needs to be secured more often. When we asked the Minister about this issue, he gave his view that the Workforce Agreement was having a "mixed" effect, but declined to quantify the scale of the problem:

"I think the reality is that it is probably a mixed picture on workforce reform. There is the protection that is given in terms of the maximum contact time, so that could have a negative effect, but, on the other hand, part of the reason that workforce reform can happen is that there are all these other adults working in schools or with schools that were not there ten years ago, and that clearly does give opportunities both in terms of people to cover when trips are happening but also for those people to help with the organisation of the trips. I think workplace reform, in all honesty, will have a mixed impact, in some places positive, in some places it could have the negative effect you have described."⁵⁹

We urge the DfES to monitor any unintended consequences of the Workforce Agreement to determine whether it has led to an increase in the cost of arranging supply cover during school trips.

58. A more significant cost is that of arranging transport to and from off-site visits. This cost has also increased in recent years due to the requirement for minibus drivers to hold a PCV licence if they gained their licence after 1997. This means that young teachers coming into the profession are unable to drive school minibuses and drivers must be hired at extra expense.⁶⁰ **Parliament is currently legislating on school transport, an area we considered during our previous inquiry into the draft School Transport Bill. As we recommended**

57 Q 8

58 Q 46, although Steve Sinnott, General Secretary of the NUT, said he was unaware of any problem in this area.

59 Q 253

60 Ev 130, para 6.5.

in that report, we would expect the DfES to strongly encourage local authorities trialling alternative arrangements for school transport under the new legislative framework to include transport for school trips in their pilot schemes.⁶¹ This should lead to a reduction in costs.

59. Educational visits that cannot be funded by a school's budget are generally subsidised by 'voluntary' parental contributions. Parents or carers cannot be required to contribute and their children must not be excluded from a trip if they cannot or do not wish to contribute.⁶² Nevertheless, schools often make it clear at the outset that a visit might become unviable if a number of parents who were unable to contribute financially insisted that their children take part. This can result in poorer families struggling to find the money for school trips, or their children missing out. On a larger scale, schools in affluent areas are likely to be able to call upon a much larger reserve of parental contributions, allowing them to organise more adventurous residential visits away from schools, whereas those in deprived areas are confined to their locality.⁶³ Although there is much to be gained from outdoor learning activities conducted within the school grounds or in the local area, those children who might arguably be said to have the most to gain from experiencing an environment away from their home area are actually less likely to be given the opportunity to do so through their school.

60. It is this potential disparity that has led campaigners to call for ring-fenced funding to be provided for outdoor learning. We tend to agree with this proposal. As we noted earlier in this report, the DfES has mooted the possibility of a 'Manifesto for Outdoor Learning'. Departmental officials suggested that this would be similar in format to the Music Manifesto.⁶⁴ We therefore noted with interest the recent announcement by David Miliband, the then Minister of State for School Standards, of a £30 million three-year funding package associated with the Music Manifesto. **Given the strong evidence for the benefits of education outside the classroom, we recommend that a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning should be issued by the DfES, giving all students a right to outdoor learning. This Manifesto should attract a similar level of funding to the Music Manifesto in order to deliver real change. In particular, schools in deprived circumstances should be enabled to enhance their facilities, to offer professional development programmes to their teachers and to fund off site visits.**

Centres and operators

61. Historically, LEAs have been major providers of facilities for school trips through their networks of activity centres. In recent years, many of these centres have closed and the balance of provision has shifted towards private and voluntary operators.⁶⁵ This is not a universal trend: the Committee has heard of some local authorities that have expanded

61 Education and Skills Select Committee, Third Report of Session 2002–03, *The Draft School Transport Bill*, HC 509.

62 A charge cannot be made for a trip taking place wholly or mainly during normal school hours, or one which is connected with the National Curriculum or religious education, or meets the requirements of the syllabus for a public examination. Extra-curricular residential trips can be offered at a charge.

63 Qq 46, 47.

64 Q 99. The Music Manifesto promises every primary school child the opportunity to learn an instrument.

65 Ofsted, *Outdoor Education: Aspects of good Practice*, paragraph 41.

their provision. This has often been achieved through a process of financial and organisational restructuring, as in the example of Hampshire county council:

“During the 1980s and 1990s Hampshire bucked the trend of LEAs that sold off or privatised their outdoor centres in the face of budget pressures and protected its centres from changes to educational funding arrangements by moving its centres into a department outside of education. Thus protected from pressures created by the increasing devolution of funding directly to schools, the county was able to grow and develop its outdoor learning opportunities. Additionally, a dedicated staff of experienced professional instructors and teachers have developed at each centre, able to fully support teachers working in the outdoors. A centrally based Outdoor Activities Officer is also employed to ensure consistency of service, operation and risk management across the centres.”⁶⁶

62. In the course of this inquiry, private operators have contacted us, advocating an expansion in private provision. They have stated that private operators remove the burden of risk and of bureaucracy from schools. For example, in their evidence, World Challenge Expeditions Ltd challenge the traditional relationship between schools and LEAs, stating that school trips are “widely inaccessible due to restrictive practice and public sector bureaucracy rather than issues of funding”:

“DfES guidance on school trips can allow a teacher or Head to believe that they are personally liable for any incident, and fails to recognize that much provision, and much of the liability, can be outsourced—as with school transport [...] Further difficulties arise over the allocation of funding, where the tendering process for numerous central government initiatives obscures any reasonable chance of a level playing field. Funds are distributed by Connexions partnerships heavily weighted towards local relationships, with no obligation to assess the quality of provision, innovation or particularly the ability of the provider to recruit children. As a result vast sums of money go unspent, except on a limited range of local opportunity – and at much higher cost to the taxpayer because the public sector adds in administration fees, whereas the private sector bid with a fixed inclusive price. The result, apart from being chaotic, also heavily penalizes innovation or private-sector involvement.”⁶⁷

63. In oral evidence, Andy Simpson of the RSPB described the way in which voluntary providers had been affected by the decline of central LEA provision:

“Whilst we want to do more we are very cognisant of the fact that the money has to be raised from somewhere. If one was being critical of Government over the years, one would say that since local management of schools and the demise of many of the local authority field study centres which offered subsidised visits to children—which is how I started—Government has had pretty much of a free ride. It is the NGO sector and other providers that have stepped in to fill that vacuum. We want to do more. We would appreciate some help.”⁶⁸

66 Ev 105, para 1.

67 Ev 105, para 4.

68 Q 43

64. The provision of activity centres and other facilities is closely linked to the way in which outdoor education, and education more generally, is funded. Some LEAs have cut central services, including school activity centres, in order to comply with Government pressure to delegate more and more funding directly to schools. The recent *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* published by the DfES suggests that this pressure will continue and even increase as control over budgets shifts to schools rather than LEAs. In this document, the Government proposes that local authorities will take on a more ‘strategic’ planning and collaboration role rather than providing services centrally.⁶⁹ **In its *Five Year Strategy*, the Government proposes that all secondary schools should become independent specialist schools and that LEAs should lose control over school budgets. We recommend that the DfES give serious consideration to how it will structure funding for central outdoor activity services under this new system, or help schools access private and voluntary provision, so that students still have access to high quality outdoor education.**

65. The DfES has funded some initiatives intended to assist schools in organising trips, which we discuss later in this report. These include the Growing Schools project, which is designed to support teachers using the ‘outdoor classroom’ as a curriculum resource, GetREAL, which offers residential visits to teenagers over the summer holidays modelled on the US camp experience, and project funding for museums, galleries and activity centres to facilitate school visits. Here too, funding issues have been highlighted as a barrier to expansion. Witnesses have complained that these initiatives are generally only supported by short term project-based funding. Activity centres participating in these initiatives found it difficult to plan for the future and:

“were only able to employ additional staff on a temporary or casual basis, which meant that skills and expertise were lost when the projects ended. They were not able to develop such strong relationships with schools as a longer-term programme of investment would offer”.⁷⁰

It is essential that the DfES and Department for Culture, Media and Sport develop a strategy for the long-term viability of activity centres, helping them to retain staff, build strong links with schools and develop expertise.

69 Department for Education and Skills, *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, CM 6272, July 2004.

70 Ev 127, para 2.6. Q 46.

5 The Role of the DfES

66. Our inquiry has revealed that there is currently a very patchy provision of outdoor education in schools. Some schools do well in organising a carefully planned programme of educational experiences outside the classroom, whereas others are put off by perceptions of risk, time-consuming bureaucracy and cost. The good practice of some schools in this area suggests that it would be possible for others to follow suit and that the DfES could expect to be successful in an attempt to share good practice across schools. When we expressed this view to the Minister, he agreed:

“We want schools to make the very, very best use of the various opportunities that are available and what we know is a lot of schools do but a lot of schools do not. What that says is there is the potential within the framework we have got at the moment to get there. Our role needs to be to see what can be done to encourage all schools to take up the opportunities that are available to them.”⁷¹

67. We conclude that the DfES has a vital role to play in demonstrating the value of out-of-classroom learning to schools and spreading best practice across all schools. The future of outdoor learning depends on clear direction and leadership from the DfES that has so far been woefully missing.

68. A key role for Government is the provision of advice concerning the conduct of visits and of health and safety guidance. As we noted earlier in this report, the DfES has recently updated its guidance on a number of occasions. This clear health and safety advice is to be welcomed, but **the Department as well as LEAs should take care to ensure that schools and activity centres are not becoming overloaded with risk assessment bureaucracy from different, overlapping organisations, as this can be a significant deterrent.**

69. We are also concerned that the recent overwhelming focus on risk and health and safety issues may have meant that opportunities for curricular development have been missed. For example, in a written submission to the Committee, Dr Pete Higgins states:

“The response of the outdoor education sector on issues of safety has been, since the Lyme Bay incident in 1993, to focus almost exclusively on safety-related issues in their professional practice. Whilst such a response is entirely understandable, it has meant that curricular change has gone largely unnoticed and the resulting opportunities unexploited. This has led to a situation where although many experiences outside the classroom can be deemed to be ‘safe’ they have little or no locus in a curriculum.”

The DfES needs to take the lead by demonstrating the low levels of risk attached to school visits. This could perhaps be achieved via a statistical comparison with other everyday activities. Given the relatively low levels of risk attached to outdoor activities, the Department should now give a clear steer to schools that educational innovation outside the classroom is to be welcomed and even to be expected.

70. The DfES has set up some initiatives aimed at encouraging outdoor learning. Chief among these are GetREAL and the Growing Schools programme. These have been supplemented by projects from other departments, for example Defra's Countryside Access schemes, as well as some innovative work by the Welsh Assembly.⁷² In oral evidence, the Minister particularly stressed the importance and success of the Growing Schools project, terming it "a really, really powerful instrument of improvement"⁷³ and claiming: "We have got 10,000 schools signed up to Growing Schools. Almost half the schools are already part of this. What that means in practice in most schools is going to vary. They are not all at the excellent end of the spectrum but it is pretty impressive to have that number of schools already part of a network."⁷⁴

71. Although the Minister boasted that 10,000 schools have signed up to Growing Schools, we have some concerns about the limitations of this project. Growing Schools was specifically set up to teach children about food, farming and the environment, to explain how food travels from the farmyard to the dinner table and explore healthy eating and environmental impacts in this context. The Real World Learning Campaign describes the Growing Schools project as a programme "shackled if not dominated by a food and farming agenda", which cannot therefore be expected to resolve the wider problems facing outdoor education, described in this report.⁷⁵ In addition, an independent evaluation of the programme by the Council for Environmental Education and Bath University's Centre for Research in Education and the Environment notes the good resources supplied via the Growing Schools website, but questions whether the scheme recognises, or significantly addresses, barriers to effective learning outside the classroom.⁷⁶ **The Committee believes that current Government initiatives do not go far enough in overcoming the barriers to outdoor learning. What is needed is a coherent strategy for education outside the classroom that brings together good practice from around the country, rather than a small number of limited, if worthy projects.**

72. Throughout this inquiry, we have been impressed by the number and variety of voluntary, commercial and professional organisations involved in the provision of outdoor education. These include charitable foundations in the heritage and environmental sectors, local and national companies that bring schools into their businesses, commercial providers of educational and adventurous activities and teachers' professional bodies. In developing a strategy for out-of-classroom education, the DfES needs to more effectively engage these partners, exploiting and developing the resources that already exist.

73. In order to reverse the decline of outdoor education, some of our witnesses have called for a national entitlement to a certain amount of hours of outdoor learning within the school curriculum. The National Curriculum already lays down some limited statutory entitlements to outdoor learning, particularly in the Foundation Stage for nursery children, in PE and recently in Geography, where there is now a requirement for an element of fieldwork. Our evidence on the extent to which this requirement is being met or exceeded

72 Ev 192, Ev 163.

73 Q 226

74 Q 248

75 Ev 101

76 *Growing Schools—The Innovation Fund Projects (2002–2003): an External Evaluation*; Council for Environmental Education, University of Bath Centre for Research in Education and the Environment, 2003. Ev 176.

varies. The Field Studies Council told us that “the statutory requirement to carry out fieldwork has had a major positive impact on levels of geography fieldwork”,⁷⁷ yet other witnesses complained that provision is patchy with some schools struggling to reach the bare minimum.⁷⁸ We are particularly concerned that these subject-specific requirements do not sit easily with the cross-curricular nature of much outdoor learning and its ability to raise achievement across subject areas.

74. In oral evidence, DfES officials opposed the idea of a cross-curricular statutory entitlement to outdoor learning, saying that an entitlement “does not offer any assurance about the quality or the relevance of the experience. It is an input measure”.⁷⁹ This response surprised us, as the department has used the concept of an entitlement successfully in the past (for example, with the ‘Literacy Hour’). Nevertheless, we would agree that the simple imposition of an entitlement is unlikely to improve matters by itself. It would need to be accompanied by other measures enabling the entitlement to be delivered.

75. As an alternative to an entitlement, DfES officials suggested that education outside the classroom could be expanded and improved by means of a ‘Manifesto for Outdoor Learning’. Campaign groups have called for such a commitment, most recently through the Real World Learning Campaign, an alliance of organisations involved in outdoor education. Any manifesto should be part of a national strategy. **The Committee supports the idea of a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning, but it must be more than ‘warm words’.**

76. Whatever mechanism is used, the Department’s role must be expanded from its current reactive work to a more proactive function, championing the benefits of outdoor education. We regret that too often in education, the General Teaching Council and professional organisations do not have the will or the capacity to promote best practice effectively and so the Government is left with the responsibility of driving change.

77. We recommend that the DfES set up a structure to promote education outside the classroom at all levels. Within the Department, a dedicated team of officials should have responsibility for outdoor learning across curriculum areas and should tap into other Departmental initiatives, such as the extended schools programme and the provision of before/after school activities. A high profile ‘champion’ for outdoor learning should be appointed to lead this team. In each LEA, an Outdoor Education Adviser should be in place, promoting and co-ordinating outdoor learning locally and liaising with the Department. Each school should have a well trained Educational Visits Co-ordinator, whose role should be strengthened and expanded to act as the local champion for outdoor learning. A nationwide network of support, guidance and innovation would move outdoor education forwards from its current, patchy position to a more uniform provision of high quality opportunities throughout the country.

77 Ev 11, para 3.

78 Q 4

79 Q 97

6 Conclusion

78. In recent years much of the discourse surrounding outdoor education has been focused on issues of risk and safety. Whilst this is clearly a very important issue, we believe that the debate has now become unbalanced and that not enough has been done to publicise the benefits of education outside the classroom. This is a great pity as there is a growing body of research evidence (supported amongst others by Ofsted) to show the potential of outdoor learning to raise standards in all schools, including amongst hard-to-reach children.

79. The decline of outdoor education impoverishes students' learning and represents a missed opportunity for curricular enrichment. Whilst the DfES has set up some small initiatives and voluntary organisations have contributed significantly, the sector is burdened by excessive bureaucracy, a low profile and a distorted perception of risk that is not supported by the facts. Despite this, many schools do continue to offer a varied and positive programme of events. This is an encouraging sign and leads us to conclude that a proper national strategy for outdoor learning would have a positive effect on many schools.

80. The DfES should act to spread good practice by setting up a network of champions at local, regional and national level, by supporting training for teachers and by conducting research into the benefits of different types of out-of-classroom learning. It should also do more to link outdoor education into its other initiatives such as the 'extended schools' programme and its wider youth services policies.

81. The DfES should publish a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning, giving all children a right to education outside the classroom. This Manifesto must be more than 'warm words'. It must be the expression of a coherent national strategy and should be accompanied by a package of measures and funding enabling change to be delivered across the areas of teacher training, access to facilities and curricular innovation.

82. In order to reverse the decline of education outside the classroom, the Department needs to commit appropriate resources to the sector. Further, the Department should review its current funding of activity centres, museums and galleries and other facilities offering educational services to schools. The current short-term funding structure is hampering development in these areas and the DfES should consider how these facilities can be supported over a longer period of time.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

The value of outdoor learning

1. The broad extent of this inquiry has convinced the Committee that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. We are convinced that out-of-classroom education enriches the curriculum and can improve educational attainment. Whilst recognising this cross-curricular scope, we conclude that in order to realise its full potential, outdoor education must be carried out properly, with sessions being prepared by well trained teachers and leaders and in accordance with good curriculum guidance as well as health and safety regulations. (Paragraph 9)
2. Like all educational processes, the benefits of education outside the classroom should be rigorously researched, documented and communicated. Positive and reliable evidence of the benefits of outdoor activities would help schools determine the priority to afford to such work. (Paragraph 13)

The decline of education outside the classroom

3. It is clear to the Committee that outdoor education is a sector suffering from considerable unexploited potential. (Paragraph 18)

Risk and bureaucracy

4. Many of the organisations and individuals who submitted evidence to our inquiry cited the fear of accidents and the possibility of litigation as one of the main reasons for the apparent decline in school trips. It is the view of this Committee that this fear is entirely out of proportion to the real risks. (Paragraph 19)
5. We welcome the DfES health and safety guidance which clearly sets out what is expected of all those involved in organising school trips. There remain some concerns relating to guidance on trips involving children with special educational needs, where there could be more specific recommendations on levels of staffing and the right of children to attend. This area is likely to be affected by the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Bill and we recommend that the DfES review its guidance in this context. (Paragraph 22)
6. We do not believe that the NASUWT wishes to see the end of all school trips. We therefore recommend that the union seriously reviews its advice to members not to participate in school trips, which is not a helpful attitude. (Paragraph 26)
7. We recommend that the DfES makes it clear to schools and LEAs that it is unacceptable to settle frivolous and unfounded claims out of court simply to get rid of the problem. By working with teacher unions, including the NASUWT, the DfES should be able to address their concerns and persuade the unions to move forward from what is in our view, a needlessly obstructive attitude. (Paragraph 29)

8. We recommend that the DfES takes action to streamline the risk assessment system surrounding school trips, promoting its standard forms more vigorously and deprecating bad practice. We further recommend that AALA licensed centres be subject to a much streamlined risk assessment process, and that the DfES consider expanding the AALA licensing scheme to include other sectors, such as foreign and voluntary operators. (Paragraph 35)
9. We recommend that the DfES thoroughly investigate the extent to which difficulties securing insurance cover are a barrier to education outside the classroom and develops options to resolve any problems. (Paragraph 38)

Teacher training

10. We recommend that the DfES work with the Teacher Training Agency to ensure that Initial Teacher Training courses demonstrate the potential benefits of education outside the classroom and point teachers towards ways to develop their skills in this area as their career progresses. (Paragraph 43)
11. Any attempt to raise the quantity and quality of outdoor education depends crucially on the skills and motivation of the teachers involved. We therefore recommend that the DfES give an explicit commitment to support Continuing Professional Development in this area. Any Departmental Manifesto for Outdoor Learning that may emerge should include an entitlement to training for teachers. Networks such as Teachers TV can also be of significant benefit in spreading good practice and should be engaged in this project. (Paragraph 44)
12. We recommend that the DfES engage teachers' professional bodies and subject associations in the provision of fieldwork training for science and geography teachers, ensuring that appropriate programmes of professional development are on offer to all those teachers who might benefit. (Paragraph 47)

Schools

13. Our evidence suggests that EVCs are working well in schools, but we would reiterate our comments on training. In order to be effective, educational visits coordinators must have access to high quality programmes of Continuing Professional Development. We also consider that the EVC role should be developed further into that of a champion for outdoor learning within a school. This should include not only the promotion of off-site visits but also the benefits of using the school grounds as a resource. (Paragraph 49)
14. It appears that some new schools are being built without due regard to the educational potential of school grounds. This is a result of the lack of leadership and strategic planning from the DfES with regard to outdoor learning. We urge the Department to take action to ensure that new capital projects incorporate good design of outdoor spaces into their plans. (Paragraph 53)

Cost

15. Much of our evidence cited cost as a significant barrier to the organisation of educational visits, yet we do not believe that cost alone is responsible for the decline of education outside the classroom, or that simply throwing money at the problem would provide a solution. (Paragraph 56)
16. We urge the DfES to monitor any unintended consequences of the Workforce Agreement to determine whether it has led to an increase in the cost of arranging supply cover during school trips. (Paragraph 57)
17. Parliament is currently legislating on school transport, an area we considered during our previous inquiry into the draft School Transport Bill. As we recommended in that report, we would expect the DfES to strongly encourage local authorities trialling alternative arrangements for school transport under the new legislative framework to include transport for school trips in their pilot schemes. This should lead to a reduction in costs. (Paragraph 58)
18. Given the strong evidence for the benefits of education outside the classroom, we recommend that a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning should be issued by the DfES, giving all students a right to outdoor learning. This Manifesto should attract a similar level of funding to the Music Manifesto in order to deliver real change. In particular, schools in deprived circumstances should be enabled to enhance their facilities, to offer professional development programmes to their teachers and to fund off site visits. (Paragraph 60)

Centres and operators

19. In its Five Year Strategy, the Government proposes that all secondary schools should become independent specialist schools and that LEAs should lose control over school budgets. We recommend that the DfES give serious consideration to how it will structure funding for central outdoor activity services under this new system, or help schools access private and voluntary provision, so that students still have access to high quality outdoor education. (Paragraph 64)
20. It is essential that the DfES and DCMS develop a strategy for the long-term viability of activity centres, helping them to retain staff, build strong links with schools and develop expertise. (Paragraph 65)

The role of the DfES

21. We conclude that the DfES has a vital role to play in demonstrating the value of out-of-classroom learning to schools and spreading best practice across all schools. The future of outdoor learning depends on clear direction and leadership from the DfES that has so far been woefully missing. (Paragraph 67)
22. The Department as well as LEAs should take care to ensure that schools and activity centres are not becoming overloaded with risk assessment bureaucracy from different, overlapping organisations, as this can be a significant deterrent. (Paragraph 68)

23. The DfES needs to take the lead by demonstrating the low levels of risk attached to school visits. This could perhaps be achieved via a statistical comparison with other everyday activities. Given the relatively low levels of risk attached to outdoor activities, the Department should now give a clear steer to schools that educational innovation outside the classroom is to be welcomed and even to be expected. (Paragraph 69)
24. The Committee believes that current Government initiatives do not go far enough in overcoming the barriers to outdoor learning. What is needed is a coherent strategy for education outside the classroom that brings together good practice from around the country, rather than a small number of limited, if worthy projects. (Paragraph 71)
25. The Committee supports the idea of a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning, but it must be more than 'warm words'. (Paragraph 75)
26. Whatever mechanism is used, the Department's role must be expanded from its current reactive work to a more proactive function, championing the benefits of outdoor education. We regret that too often in education, the General Teaching Council and professional organisations do not have the will or the capacity to promote best practice effectively and so the Government is left with the responsibility of driving change. (Paragraph 76)
27. We recommend that the DfES set up a structure to promote education outside the classroom at all levels. Within the Department, a dedicated team of officials should have responsibility for outdoor learning across curriculum areas and should tap into other Departmental initiatives, such as the extended schools programme and the provision of before/after school activities. A high profile 'champion' for outdoor learning should be appointed to lead this team. In each LEA, an Outdoor Education Adviser should be in place, promoting and co-ordinating outdoor learning locally and liaising with the Department. Each school should have a well trained Educational Visits Co-ordinator, whose role should be strengthened and expanded to act as the local champion for outdoor learning. A nationwide network of support, guidance and innovation would move outdoor education forwards from its current, patchy position to a more uniform provision of high quality opportunities throughout the country. (Paragraph 77)

Formal minutes

Monday 31 January 2005

Members present:
Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Jeff Ennis

Mr Nick Gibb

Mr John Greenway

Helen Jones

Jonathan Shaw

Mr Andrew Turner

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Education Outside the Classroom), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 82 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

Several Memoranda were ordered to be reported to the House.

The Committee further deliberated.

[Adjourned until Wednesday 2 February at 9.15 am

Witnesses

Monday 18 October 2004

Page

Ms Sarah Henwood, Chief Executive and **Mr William Ripley**, Operations Director, Outward Bound Trust UK, **Dr Anthony Thomas**, Chair, Real World Learning Steering Group, **Mr Andy Simpson**, Head of Education, RSPB/Real World Learning, **Dr Rita Gardner CBE**, Director, Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and **Dr Steve Tilling**, Director of Communications, Field Studies Council.

Ev 13

Monday 1 November 2004

Ms Helen Williams, Director, School Standards Group and Mr Stephen Crowne, Director, School Resources Group, Department for Education and Skills.

Ev 50

Mr Steve Sinnott, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers, **Dr Fiona Hammans**, Secondary Heads Association, **Ms Kathryn James**, Senior Assistant Secretary, Professional Advice Department, National Association of Head Teachers and **Ms Chris Keates**, General Secretary, NASUWT.

Ev 77

Wednesday 3 November 2004

Mr David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, **Mrs Miriam Rosen**, Director, Education, **Mr Robert Green**, Director, Corporate Services, **Mr Maurice Smith**, Early Years Directorate and **Mr Jonathan Thompson**, Director, Finance, Ofsted.

Ev 90

Wednesday 8 December 2004

Mr Stephen Twigg, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, **Mr Andrew McCully**, Director of School Standards Group and **Dr Kevan Collins**, National Director, Primary National Strategy, Department for Education and Skills.

Ev 92

List of written evidence

The Outward Bound Trust	Ev 1
The Real World Learning Campaign	Ev 3: Ev 31: 98
The Royal Geographical Society	Ev 7
Field Studies Council	Ev 10
RSPB/Real World Learning Campaign	Ev 31
Department for Education and Skills	Ev 33: Ev 59
National Union of Teachers	Ev 63
Secondary Heads Association	Ev 68
National Association of Head Teachers	Ev 70
NASUWT	Ev 72: 89
World Challenge Expeditions Limited	Ev 104
Hampshire Outdoor Service	Ev 105
Roger Lock, University of Birmingham	Ev 107
Farming and Countryside Education	Ev 108
Dr Peter Higgins, University of Edinburgh	Ev 110
British Ecological Society	Ev 123
Museums Association	Ev 125
Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres	Ev 128
Learning Through Landscapes	Ev 131
Adventure Activities Licensing Authority	Ev 137
English Outdoor Council	Ev 142
Health and Safety Executive	Ev 144
Association of British Insurers	Ev 146
National Association of Head Teachers	Ev 150
National Foundation for Educational Research	Ev 152
William Scott, Alan Reid and Nick Jones	Ev 156
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment	Ev 157
Play Wales	Ev 162
Children's Play Council	Ev 165
The National Trust	Ev 168
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Ev 173
British Activity Holiday Association	Ev 175
Council for Environmental Education	Ev 176
SkillsActive	Ev 179
Heritage Lottery Fund	Ev 182
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council	Ev 187
Zurich Financial Services	Ev 190
Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management	Ev 192
Countryside Stewardship Scheme	Ev 192
The Royal Society	Ev 193

List of unprinted written evidence

Additional papers have been received from the following and have been reported to the House but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library where they may be inspected by members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1. (Tel 020 7219 3074). Hours of inspection are from 9:30am to 5:00pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Blackpool Local Education Authority (EOC 1)
 Outposts Ltd (EOC 3)
 Anne White (EOC 4)
 Birmingham City Council (EOC 5)
 Young Explorers' Trust (EOC 7)
 Leeds City Council (EOC 11)
 Fairbridge (EOC 13)
 Shirley Ali Khan and Mike Fawcett (EOC 14)
 Smallpiece Trust (EOC 15)
 Wilderness Expertise Ltd (EOC 16)
 CLEAPSS School Science Service (EOC 18)
 Sayers Croft Field Centre (EOC 20 and EOC 33)
 Severn Trent Water (EOC 21)
 Magilligan Field Centre (EOC 23)
 Julia Welchman (EOC 24 and EOC 110)
 National Association for Environmental Education (EOC 25)
 The Soil Association (EOC 26)
 OCR (EOC 27)
 Ty'r Morwydd Environmental Study Centre (EOC 28)
 RSPCA (EOC 29)
 Norfolk County Council (EOC 32)
 The Independent Schools Council (EOC 34)
 CCPR (EOC 35)
 Oxfordshire County Council Learning & Culture Directorate (EOC 37)
 Royal Academy of Engineering (EOC 38)
 Buckinghamshire County Council (EOC 39)
 Flatts Nursery School (EOC 40)
 The Woodland Trust (EOC 41)
 ISAAA (EOC 42)
 Chris Johnson (EOC 43)
 Gloucestershire County Council (EOC 45)
 Bedfordshire County Council (EOC 46)
 Medway Outdoor Education (EOC 47)
 Weymouth and Portland Borough Council (EOC 50)
 Alan Childs (EOC 51)
 Institute for Outdoor Learning (EOC 52)

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (EOC 53)
National Council for School Sport (EOC 54)
University of the First Age (EOC 55)
CRAC (EOC 57)
Norwich Union (EOC 58)
Biosciences Federation (EOC 60)
Forest Schools in England (EOC 61)
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (EOC 64)
Sport England and Arts Council England (EOC 68)
Bradfords Countryside Service (EOC 69)
Northamptonshire County Council (EOC 72)
Play Matters (EOC 75)
Groundwork (EOC 76)
Education Services of the National Park Authorities of England and Wales (EOC 78)
Chalmers Smith (EOC 79)
Suffolk County Council (EOC 80)
Mersey Basin Trust (EOC 81)
Barnardo's (EOC 82)
Wildlife Trust (EOC 84)
Association for Science Education (EOC 85)
Whitehorse Leadership Training (EOC 86)
Cambridgeshire Environmental Education Service (EOC 87)
RWE npower (EOC 90)
National Youth Agency (EOC 91)
Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (EOC 92)
National Museum Directors' Conference (EOC 94)
Institute of Biology (EOC 95)
Engineering Education Scheme, Wales (EOC 100)
Shropshire Wildlife Trust (EOC 102)
Outdoor Industries Association (EOC 103)
School Journey Association (EOC 108)
Mr NG and Mrs JR Thorne (EOC 115)