

ELL2 16-04 (p.1) Annex B

House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee inquiry

Education outside the classroom

Submission from The Welsh Assembly Government Advisory Panel for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESD&GC)

1. Importance of the outdoor environment

The ESD&GC Advisory Panel recognises the value of first-hand experience of the natural world in enhancing people's understanding of and interest in the natural world. Although children do learn about environmental issues at school, it is clear from a number of reports and research findings (NFER 2004) that they gain richer learning from direct experience. Evidence points to the fact that children gained their most powerful understanding through self-exploration in the natural environment.

2. The remit of The Welsh Assembly Government EDS&GC Advisory Panel

We are facing some of the greatest environmental challenges in terms of climate change, biodiversity declines and natural resource management, whilst at the same time children have less opportunity to engage and connect with the natural environment.

Welsh Assembly Government set up the Advisory Panel on ESD&GC in March 2001, to ensure that learning which can help to develop understanding, attitudes and values and lead to a more enlightened commitment and action in areas such as conservation, biodiversity, citizenship and sustainable development is made available through our formal education system. We believe that outdoor experience is essential to this remit.

3. Action in Wales

In the past three years, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has supported projects and policies which promote and develop the role of outdoor learning.

Through the ESD&GC Advisory Panel

The WAG has provided a £150,000 budget in 2004/05 to the Advisory Panel to support ESD&GC pilot projects. Relevant projects which have received support in the past include:-

- a. Universities Council for Education Training (UCET) Cymru ‘to embed ESD&GC in Initial Teacher Education & Training (ITET) institutions’. A second stage of this project has received funding to carry out continuing professional development for lecturing staff in ESD&GC. Outdoor learning is seen as one of the central skills needed within this initiative.
- b. The creation of a virtual directory for ESD&GC – allowing access by all to various organisations, initiatives and NGOs which support schools in outdoor environments.
- c. Pembrokeshire Sustainable Schools Award – which actively supports schools to develop education outside the classroom.

The Woodlands for Learning Forum

The Woodlands for Learning Forum was set up with the support of the WAG Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, following the first Woodlands for Learning Conference in December 2002. As part of the WAG’s Wales Woodland Strategy Partnership, its role is to investigate and recommend how best to maximise woodlands for learning and has brought together a range of experts in this field. It has been particularly effective in working with its WAG representative on outdoor learning in the Foundation Phase.

Foundation Phase support

The Foundation Phase is the new national curriculum for all children in Wales between the ages 3 and 7 years. Currently in its first pilot year, it will be rolled out to all qualifying settings by September 2008. The Welsh Assembly Government has stressed the importance of the use of the outdoor environment as an important element of effective education in the Foundation Phase. They have placed significant emphasis on the use of the outdoor environment as a resource for learning in Wales. There is specific direction in the text to provide children with opportunities for first hand experiential learning and real life problem solving.

The foundation phase promotes the use of outdoor environments in all seven areas of learning. These environments should be exciting, stimulating, safe and promote children's emotional, physical and cognitive development and their natural curiosity to explore and learn through first hand experiences. They will also enable children to learn about, to enjoy and care for their environment and begin to understand issues such as conservation and sustainability, which are so central to their long-term futures.

Forest Schools

Through the Forestry Commission Wales and the Forest Education Initiative, WAG has supported the training of Forest School Leaders and the establishment of Forest School sites across Wales. This holistic, 'learner-centred approach' to learning outdoors is proving effective, meets the requirements of the Foundation Phase and has been successful with older learners, such as disaffected youth.

Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales)

All Early Years Estyn Inspectors, will be retrained for the Foundation Phase. The statutory use of the outdoors across all areas of learning is new and specific training in best practice will be delivered to Estyn Inspectors in May 2005. The Woodlands for Learning Forum is advising Estyn on this training and will work together to provide opportunities for Inspectors to experience and understand the role of the outdoors in children's learning.

Best practice guidance for use of the outdoor environment

Teachers are often hampered from providing experience of outdoor environments by the pressures of the curriculum, lack of confidence, knowledge, the school budget and health and safety issues. All of these factors conspire to keep children in the classroom, or at best within school grounds. Best practice guidance is being produced by the Welsh assembly government and will be aimed at helping teachers address the barriers of taking children out of the classroom and introducing them to experiential learning in their local and wider environment. This guidance should be issued from the WAG in spring 2005.

ESD&GC Action Plan

The WAG will produce a Wales strategy for implementing priority actions to support ESD&GC by spring 2005.

Estyn guidance

WAG have required Estyn to produce guidance on good practice in the management by schools of provision for PE and outdoor activities by April 2005.

The Sustainable Development Scheme Action Plan

In implementing the WAG's duty under Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the Sustainable Development Action Plan 2004 - 2007, highlights some additional commitments on the promotion of sustainable development in schools. Outdoor education will clearly feature in aspects of these new undertakings which will be taken forward in the next two years.

- a. Specific reference to promoting sustainable development and global citizenship in ACCACs (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales') current review of curriculum

and assessment arrangements

- b. Ensure that ELWa directs Further Education Institutes to include a section sustainable development in their 2005 Strategic Plans
- c. Examine ways to provide a measure of training for teachers on ESD&GC through developments in Early Professional Development and Continuing Professional development – report due in Jan 2005
- d. Promote increase prominence for ESD&GC in the Qualified Teacher Status
- e. Introduce a commitment for ELWa (Education and Learning Wales) to ensure that providers make sustainable development a part of their work via their remit letters and also part of their strategic planning in 2005
- f. Consulting on whether to require governing bodies to carry out their functions having regard to sustainability issues, with a view to making regulations in early 2005

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