



Memo

To: Department of Education
From: Ian Pearson, General Manager, School Travel Forum
Date: April 2011
Re: National Curriculum Review Consultation Response

1. Executive Summary

The School Travel Forum (STF) welcomes the Government's review of the National Curriculum. In this submission the STF would like to highlight the benefits of outdoor education in enhancing a student's engagement with the curriculum. We believe that the curriculum should not only specify subject content but also the full range of teaching & learning methods which will ensure that all pupils and students can actively engage with the curriculum to enable them to achieve the highest possible standards, including a requirement for outdoor education opportunities to be considered across all subjects within the curriculum. We also welcome the inclusion of English, Maths, Science and PE as the four core subjects within the new curriculum; however, we would also like to advocate for the inclusion of modern foreign languages and the humanities, including history and geography.

In this submission we have used our experience to highlight the following areas:

- The benefits of outdoor education in enhancing the curriculum and improving educational attainment.
- The need to ensure that the curriculum is centred on teaching methods to enable all pupils to effectively engage with the content in the curriculum.
- The worrying decline in outdoor education in recent years due to health and safety concerns and bureaucratic procedures which restrict teachers from organising school trips.
- The importance of removing barriers which restrict the effective delivery and implementation of the National Curriculum such as barriers to outdoor education.
- The need to raise the profile of outdoor education within teacher training to encourage the use of this teaching method.
- The case for the inclusion of humanities and modern foreign languages within the National Curriculum.



2. About The School Travel Forum

Since its inception in 2003 the School Travel Forum (STF) has won widespread recognition and support for the way it simplifies and provides essential reassurance for leaders looking to organise study, sports and ski trips. The STF, which includes the major companies in the school travel business, has estimated that around 40% of all school visits are organised through our members. Our members are required to adhere to a rigorous Code of Practice and Safety Management Standards and are externally verified each year by a leading Health and Safety Consultancy. Founded in 2003, the School Travel Forum is a democratic, not for profit organisation of leading school tour operators that promotes good practice and safety in school travel.

Our Objectives include:

- Promoting best practice in educational school travel and support the principles established by the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto
- Designing and promoting sector-specific standards that will be periodically reviewed and adapted to reflect changes in education, health and safety legislation and any other relevant influence.
- Ensuring the needs of schools and teachers are understood and adopted into our standards by regularly meeting bodies such as the Learning Outside of the Classroom Council (LOtC), the Department for Education (DfE), the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP), Head Teacher Associations and Teacher Unions.
- Ensuring that independent assessment of travel companies offering educational travel in line with the requirements of the LOtC Quality Badge and the STF Code of Practice.
- Providing a forum for members to discuss non-competitive issues of common interest and concern.

3. The role of outdoor education within the National Curriculum

Enhancing the Curriculum

The School Travel Forum would like to highlight the importance of outdoor learning in enhancing the curriculum. The known benefits for pupils of learning outside the classroom are many and varied. They include: improved engagement and attendance; the development of learning and thinking skills; and the strengthening of personal, social and emotional development (e.g. confidence, self-reliance, and management of risk). Hands-on practical science is known to stimulate and inspire and effectively-planned and well-taught fieldwork is a particularly powerful approach which helps to improve education standards¹. School trips are becoming increasingly

¹ National Foundation for Educational Research (2004)



recognised as an important, irreplaceable part of understanding your subject in the real world, as well as being an excellent opportunity for team building and personal development.

Ofsted strongly supports the value of outdoor learning experiences as part of a full and rounded education, noting that when well planned and executed, learning outside the classroom “contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils’ personal, social and emotional development”². Ofsted’s recently published report on the teaching of History found that the curriculum is most effective if it is “enriched by wide-ranging out-of-classroom opportunities which complemented students’ knowledge and historical understanding”, such as field trips to the Ypres battlefields³. In addition, a recent report by the Public Accounts Committee on science education found that a pupils’ desire to continue studying depends largely on whether they enjoy and are engaged by the subject, and evidence suggests that outdoor education is a key path to developing a passion for a subject⁴.

Furthermore, and often most importantly, out-of-classroom activity provides an exciting and memorable experience for young people which can enthuse and inspire them, particularly for those who are not engaged by traditional teaching methods. Evidence suggests that low attainment can frequently be linked to a lack of engagement in the teaching style, making it vital for schools to examine and use a wider and more flexible range of teaching methods, such as outdoor education, to engage all pupils, particularly those who are at risk of becoming NEET. Indeed, in 2008, Ofsted recommended that schools ensure their curriculum planning includes sufficient well structured opportunities for all learners to engage in learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of their experience⁵.

Curriculum Entitlement

However, anecdotal evidence has pointed to a decline in outdoor learning at the school level due to a fear of litigation after accidents and the time commitments for organising trips. We are of the view that, to ensure that learning outside the classroom is taken seriously by all schools, there should be an individual entitlement within the National Curriculum to at least one out of school visit a term. We would be flexible on the exact wording of the entitlement but would as a starting point suggest that the entitlement contains an opportunity for all young people to experience at least one significant learning outside the classroom visit during their school years. This will allow all children to access the considerable health, personal development and education benefits that outdoor learning can provide.

² Ofsted, *Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go?* (October 2008)

³ Ofsted, *History for All: History in English Schools* (2011)

⁴ The Public Accounts Committee, *Educating the Next Generation of Scientists* (2011)

⁵ Ofsted, *Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go?* (October 2008)



Delivering the Curriculum

The STF welcomes the Government's desire to give teachers greater freedoms to deliver the curriculum as they best see fit. However, in our experience, health and safety concerns and other timely bureaucratic procedures are preventing teachers from delivering an enhanced curriculum through outdoor education. In recent years the work of headteachers has become more demanding as they are responsible for ensuring that all school visits and activities are properly planned and executed. Therefore the STF would like to highlight the importance of removing barriers which restrict the effective delivery and implementation of the National Curriculum such as barriers to outdoor education. The Government must address these issues as it develops its new National Curriculum to ensure that the curriculum can be effectively delivered by teachers to raise educational attainment and enhance the education experience.

Working with the STF schools can overcome the health and safety barriers and bureaucratic burdens involved in arranging school trips. The STF works to assist schools in identifying external travel providers who deliver good quality teaching and learning experiences and manage risk effectively. This not only reduces the burden on teachers, enabling them to dedicate more time to ensuring a high standard of teaching and learning, but also helps schools to make savings through more effective procedures, ever more important in the current fiscal environment.

This STF recommend the Government should work to raise awareness of the Learning Outside the Classroom Council and the Quality Badge that will provide schools with a list of reputable and recommended travel companies, such as the members of STF. This will enable teachers to source out these administrative burdens in order to enable them to focus on delivering an effective curriculum through outdoor education.

Teacher Training

The STF would also like to raise the importance of adequate teacher training in order to equip teachers with the competence, confidence and commitment to meet the modern day challenges of teaching the curriculum through high quality outdoor education. Teachers are the gatekeepers of students getting out of the classroom and the commitment of teachers and school managers to outdoor education will be vital in any reversal of the decline of education school trips and fieldwork. Teachers must have the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver effective outdoor education in order to enhance every child's engagement with the National Curriculum.

However, evidence suggests that the UK is not currently producing sufficient numbers of teachers with the necessary skills to deliver effective outdoor education. A recent report by Kings College London found that the one of key barriers to learning outside the classroom was



a lack of teachers' confidence, self-efficacy and access to training⁶. The report recommended greater support for schools to develop their capacity to integrate activities and resources that promote learning outside the classroom as part of the curriculum. In addition, a report by Association for Science Education (ASE) found that the quantity and quality of training and development within ITT for outdoor education is highly variable and is weakened generally by the absence of any minimum training requirement in this regard⁷.

Currently, under Qualified Teacher Status 30, trainee teachers are asked only to recognise opportunities for out of classroom learning, however, even this weak standard is not being reached by some ITT providers. The absence of adequate training is due to insufficient importance given to this area. The STF is delighted that the Government has asked Sally Coates to review QTS standards and recommends the review strengthen QTS standards for ITT outdoor education and training through the introduction of a minimum requirement for trainees to plan, organise, take part in or lead outdoor learning activities. This will equip teachers with the competence, confidence and commitment to meet the modern day challenges of teaching the curriculum through high quality outdoor education and encouraged the use of this teaching method to help ensure all pupils and students can actively engage with the curriculum to enable them to achieve the highest possible standards.

National Curriculum Subjects

The STF welcomes the inclusion of English, Maths, Science and PE as the four core subjects within the new curriculum, however, we would also like to advocate for the inclusion of modern foreign languages and the humanities, including history and geography.

Modern foreign languages are a vital for pupils and young people living in the globalised 21st century. In addition, the teaching of modern foreign languages offer opportunities for students to engage in outdoor education through foreign exchanges and foreign visits. These trips not only provide an opportunity to develop language skills but also help to deliver a rounded education by contributing to wider personal, social and emotional development.

The humanities are also a vital part of education, helping students to develop analytical and critical skills as opposed to the more empirical methods used in the science disciplines. Geography and History help students to understand the world they live in, in the past, present and future. These subjects are also strongly oriented towards outdoor education and the STF hopes that the inclusion of these subjects within the E-Bac will increase the uptake of these subjects in schools, thereby increasing the opportunities for pupils and students to engage in outdoor learning experiences to enhance their education experience.

⁶ Kings College London, *Beyond Barriers to Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments* (December 2010)

⁷ Association for Science Education *Outdoor Science Working Group, Initial Teacher Education and the Outdoor Classroom: Standards for the Future* (2011)



The STF urges the Government to include these subjects in the new National Curriculum.

Pupil Premium

The STF welcomes the Coalition Government's commitment to a Pupil Premium to provide additional funding for more disadvantaged pupils to ensure they benefit from the same opportunities as pupils from richer families. Outdoor education plays a vital role in enhancing the curriculum and raising education attainment, particular for pupils in some of the hardest to reach groups. We specifically endorse Schools Minister Nick Gibb MP's recent Parliamentary Written Answer which states that "school may in future wish to consider using the pupil premium funding to enable such children to benefit from out of school educational activities." We are aware that the Department for Education is exploring options for supporting disadvantaged pupils and we would like to highlight our concerns about the access that pupils from low income families have to school trips and visits; for these children school provision may be the only opportunity they have to experience different environments from their immediate locality. It will be important for the Department of Education to ensure that outdoor learning experiences are included in Government guidance to schools so that every pupil eligible for the Pupil Premium has the option of using it to fund an outdoor experience to enhance their engagement with the National Curriculum.

4. Contact Details

If you require any further information, please contact Ian Pearson, School Travel Forum, ianpearson@schooltravelforum.com