

Written evidence submitted by the Institute for Outdoor Learning (ECL0017)

The Institute for Outdoor Learning's response to the call for evidence by DEFRA in their inquiry into Education and Careers in Land-based sectors

November 2023.

1. How can the understanding and awareness of career opportunities in land-based sectors be improved among children and young adults?

Children and Young adults do experience land-based working environments as part of their school driven education e.g. Outdoor Education Residentials, Farm visits and Geography field trips. The focus is often on personal and social skill development or curriculum content, rather than a wider understanding of longer-term career options.

Many of these trips are earlier in school life and become less frequent as the need to make career choices comes to the fore. A better spread progression of experiences in the natural environment through school age years would enable more opportunities to build awareness and understanding of career opportunities in the land-based sectors.

Feedback from providers of outdoor learning services to schools makes it clear that teachers are less connected and less confident and competent in natural environment settings than they were a generation ago. The Institute for Outdoor Learning has sought to reverse this trend through supporting changes to teacher training and CPD. It remains a challenge if children and young people are to be effectively introduced to experiences in the natural environment that lead them to develop pro-environmental behaviours and consider careers in the land-based sector.

2. How effective is the education system at supporting young people seeking careers in land-based sectors? For example, are routes such as T levels and apprenticeships fit for purpose?

The preparation of young people for careers in Outdoor Learning remains an issue for the sector. The Institute has worked closely with employers and colleges to help design routes for young people that are also sustainable for employing organisations. The development and approval of a level 3 and a level 5 apprenticeship through IfA has been an important element of this work.

The 'funnelling' of young people into Higher Education continues to be the bigger challenge rather than the 'fitness for purpose' of the available apprenticeships.

3. What more can be done to facilitate new entrants, including those from non-rural backgrounds, into land-based sectors, including those considering a career change?

More relevant options at GCSE and A-level are required.

The Institute supports the proposal for the introduction of a Natural History GCSE currently being considered by the Department for Education. Such a GCSE with land based practical science elements is crucial to providing the intellectual foundations to support informed choices and spark commitment to land-based careers.

4. Are colleges offering land-based education accessible and available to those seeking to enrol in courses? Are there gaps in coverage and if so, how can these be addressed?

A structured FE based provision struggles to support isolated employers that are usually SME's in the land-based sector and able to employ only 1 or 2 trainees or apprentices.

For training providers to engage with SME's requires flexible and resilient models that do not fit most colleges. This gap has been filled by independent training providers for outdoor learning apprenticeships. Such independent organisations take on significant commercial risk to deliver their services and would benefit from further support as well as careful assessment of competence and quality.

The Institute for Outdoor Learning has stepped up to fill gaps in standards and guidance, such as in outdoor first aid training and certification, working with employers, training providers, assessors, awarding bodies and other stakeholders. Such co-ordination is vital to provide a readily understood and accessible picture of the sector to potential new employees or their parents/guardians.

5. Do colleges offering land-based education have the appropriate facilities and funding to enable effective teaching (e.g. access to farmland)? What more can be done to make this teaching more effective?

6. What role should schools, colleges, universities, and local and central government play in promoting and supporting careers in land-based sectors?

Young people need to experience the attraction of land-based careers to begin to understand them as an option. School and college placements especially need to be better structured to enable young people to spend sufficient time with land-based employing organisations.

It is unrealistic to expect to schools to effectively resource a good selection of land-based work experience options. Local and central government can assist providing work experience hubs for different sector employers to engage with. Such hubs may be facilitated by employer driven organisations like the Institute for Outdoor Learning and would provide a resource for schools and colleges to draw on.

Such a hub would also provide a forum for other training providers, colleges and employers to point to employment and further learning and development opportunities beyond work experience.

With many urban young people unable to readily take up work experience opportunities in the land-based sector there is a need to consider who can bridge the gap in the form of structured experiences and accommodation and living facilities. There is scope to draw on the resources of the Outdoor Learning sector to provide structured programmes of work experience in the natural environment. The Institute for Outdoor Learning is able to assist in the design and delivery of such a programme, working with its employer members.

7. How can more children, young people and adults be provided with opportunities to see the career opportunities in land-based sectors first-hand? Are there examples of initiatives doing this successfully (for example, through initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday)?

8. Are there domestic or international examples of best practice in successfully promoting educational opportunities and careers in land-based sectors?

The Outdoor Learning sector has a long history of providing educational opportunities beyond and outside school and college. This has been facilitated by volunteer organisations like the Scout Association and other more local community driven outdoor focused charities, many of which are members of the Institute for Outdoor Learning and provide evidence to Dept for Education and DCMS consultations.

Such organisations provide outdoor learning-based volunteering opportunities for young people and associated training and accreditation in outdoor disciplines. This progress and recognition of competence leads to commitments to outdoor learning careers from diverse back grounds. Specific case studies from ethnically diverse and urban based communities can be provided by the Institute.