

Written evidence submitted by Field Studies Council (CPW0003)

1 Introduction

- a. Field Studies Council is an environmental education charity. Founded in 1943, we are probably best known for providing residential and day field trips for those studying biology and geography but actually, we welcome people of all ages, abilities and levels of experience onto our wide range of adventure learning and natural history courses to our UK wide network of centres.
- b. Our reason for submitting this evidence is that we are seeing the growing impact of poverty on the ability of a child in Wales to take part in high quality outdoor learning and outdoor learning residential in particular. These experiences boost academic achievement by bringing classroom subjects to life with hands on, real life experiences that can be recalled when back in the classroom and during an exam. Outdoor learning can engage and re-engage children who can struggle in a classroom environment and nature connection can boost their health and wellbeing. Outdoor learning provides an opportunity to develop confidence, social skills, communication and team working through well designed activities and adventures.

2 Submission

Our submission will cover questions 1 and 2.

1. What are the foremost barriers that could prevent Wales from realising the ambitions set out in the UK Government's 2025 child poverty strategy?

The foremost barrier is inequality of access to experiences that were once a normal part of education and are now rapidly becoming the preserve of only those that can afford them. For Welsh children, being able to access all the benefits of outdoor learning, outdoor learning residential and high quality green and blue space is not guaranteed.

As cost pressures continue to rise both for families and schools, disadvantaged children are missing out. Ironically, those that would benefit the most are often at the highest risk inequality of experience, opportunity and aspiration that comes with broadening their horizons through outdoor learning.

Compared to their better off peers, children in poverty are also less likely to be able to make up that experience deficit through family holidays, travel, or by joining clubs and societies. Even those living in Wales' National Parks are prevented from accessing the landscapes on their doorsteps and all that these places have to offer due to a lack of transport or even suitable clothing. As a charity, the demand for our funded or subsidised places outstrips our ability to supply them.

It is only by setting the bar high for outdoor learning experiences rather than lowering or watering down curriculum requirements that this inequality can be addressed.

Guaranteeing these experiences for every child in Wales as part of their school years, (as is being done in Scotland) can reduce a rapidly growing barrier to experience, opportunity and aspiration.

2. How effectively do the UK and Welsh governments work together towards ending child poverty in Wales?

The new Curriculum for Wales is being rolled out and re-visiting the issue of further embedding outdoor learning may not be easy. However, there could be more effective cross border working when it comes to funding opportunities for children and young people to access outdoor learning opportunities.

For example, government funded projects have delivered many proven benefits and impacts such as Generation Green 1 and 2, Nature Friendly Schools, Adventures Away from Home in England. The same model could be expanded to include children in Welsh Schools. As a charity with residential centres in both England and Wales, there is considerable cross border movement. Many English schools visit our Welsh centres to explore the wealth of landscapes Wales has to offer, but we find that few Welsh schools use our Welsh centres and Welsh children appear to miss out on connecting to and understanding their own landscapes.

Therefore a fund that is eligible for both Welsh and English schools to use would go some way to address this imbalance.

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