The need for more fieldwork and outdoor learning
A briefing note for Parliamentarians – June 2012

About FSC:
The Field Studies Council (FSC) is an educational charity committed to bringing environmental understanding to all. It currently welcomes 145,000 visitors every year on courses to its national network of 17 Field Centres. These include groups from nearly 3,000 schools, colleges and universities. Established in 1943, the FSC has become internationally respected for its national network of education centres and is the UK’s leading provider of curriculum focused field courses for secondary schools.

The FSC provides informative and enjoyable opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to discover, explore, be inspired by, and understand the natural and built environment. We believe that the more we know about the environment, the more we can appreciate its needs and protect its diversity and beauty for future generations. We feel that fieldwork should be a vital element of an imaginative and contemporary education.

www.field-studies-council.org

Background:
Good quality day and residential fieldwork helps improve education standards and should be a vital element of an imaginative and contemporary education programme. Fieldwork helps students develop their understanding of subjects such as science and geography as evidence-based disciplines, and acquire the hands-on experimental skills that are an essential part of those subjects.

Recent Ofsted subject reports for Science, Geography and English have all strongly supported the value of outdoor and out-of-classroom learning as part of a full and rounded education. The Government has also stated that fieldwork is essential for high quality science and geography education.

Yet over many years, the FSC has witnessed a significant decline in the number of young people studying secondary science visiting our residential centres. This decline has accelerated in recent years, including an 18% loss between 2008 and 2010. This trend is replicated in the provision of fieldwork in science in British schools.

Extracurricular advantages of fieldwork:
Outdoor learning also provides an exciting and memorable experience for young people, and helps transfer what they learn in school to their everyday lives by dealing first hand with real world examples. Learning outside, especially in a novel setting, introduces challenging situations, opportunities to become risk aware rather than just risk averse; builds self-confidence; develops a sense of responsibility and tolerance towards places and people by experiencing different communities and surroundings; and ultimately offers young people the opportunity to experience, explore and investigate – vital elements in the development of a modern citizen.

The London Challenge project illustrated that teachers are frequently surprised by the abilities and interest ‘poorly performing’ students show in the outdoors, and by the extent to which outdoor learning awakens their potential. For disadvantaged groups and underachievers in particular, this can be a unique experience.

Impact on further education and skills and the UK STEM economy:
The UK risks missing out on a pool of potentially thousands of new scientists as a result of school students not pursuing STEM subjects even if they have an initial interest post-16. Recent studies have found: the number of school students choosing to take physical science post-16 has fallen over the last 25 years; just 17% of 16-18 year olds took one or more science A-level in 2009; and only 28% of those students electing to study science post-16 intended to pursue a scientific career. This has created a shortage of core skills needed (academically and vocationally)in STEM-related and environmental disciplines and industry. Currently six out of ten companies employing STEM-skilled staff say they have difficulty recruiting in the UK and so look internationally for new staff.
**INCLUSIVE FIELDWORK**

Department for Education should recognise fieldwork as an entitlement for all young people.

Department for Education should ensure that examples of best practice on their website are promoted more widely.

Department for Education should provide guidance accompanying the Pupil Premium which states clearly that this can be used to support fieldwork, including for residential experiences in more remote localities thus providing an opportunity to explore the UK's diverse environment.

**Fieldwork as an entitlement:** Over a five year period (2004-2009) the FSC provided residential experiences to over 38,000 Key Stage 3 and 4 students from some of the most disadvantaged schools in London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester through the DCSF London Challenge and City Challenge projects. We found that up to 80% of 11-14 year olds in some of our City Challenge groups had never taken part in a residential experience (a pattern which is also seen amongst their parents). Fieldwork is an important element within a pupil’s progressive development of practical skills and as such we support the inclusion of fieldwork in the curriculum as an entitlement to ensure that all pupils get the opportunity to experience the outside world.

**Pupil Premium:** The FSC welcomes the Pupil Premium. We are concerned, however, that there are no guidelines explicitly recognising that the pupil premium can be used for outdoor learning. We know of at least one Local Authority which has withdrawn its core funding to support disadvantaged pupils attending residentials as a result of funding being directly allocated to schools. We therefore welcome the requirement (from September 2012) for schools to publish information on their use of the Pupil Premium and for Ofsted to take this into account in its inspection process.

‘Middle group’: Joint FSC and Institute of Education research identified an overlooked ‘middle group’ who come from borderline families who often have just failed to qualify for hardship support, but who also lack the means to pay for residential visits themselves. Many young people in this group have very high potential which could remain unfulfilled without the opportunity of a learning experience allowing them to develop further. The FSC is concerned that currently a whole generation of young people do not experience outdoor learning through no fault of their own.

**Closure of field centres:** Up to one third of local authority centres have closed in the past two years, or are facing imminent closure in the next three years due to local authority cuts in funding. Many of these provide the only access to residentials for disadvantaged – often inner city – children. This will have a lifelong and disproportionate impact on poorer communities especially as remaining field centres will not be able to compensate for this gap.

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**CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, and EXAMINATIONS**

The new curriculum guidance should maintain the requirement for fieldwork in geography and to extend the requirement for the sciences and history, especially for Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level.

Ofqual and awarding bodies should be directed, or at least encouraged, to develop assessments which extend teaching and learning through fieldwork to their full potential.

Guidance provided on the Department for Education website should exemplify best practice in science, geography and history fieldwork.

**National Curriculum:** We strongly recommend following the present National Curriculum review that fieldwork continues to be a requirement within the Geography curriculum, and that fieldwork is extended to become a requirement at all levels within the Science curriculum.

**Assessment and examination:** Groups such as the Association for Science Education’s Outdoor Science Working Group have consistently identified assessments and examinations at GCSE and A levels as too narrow and prescriptive to enable the full education potential of outdoor learning and fieldwork to be developed. The move away from coursework may make this even worse. Suitably qualified and experienced teachers should be given the freedom to teach these subjects to their full potential, rather than constraining them through narrow and uninspiring examination tasks and questions.
TEACHER TRAINING, STANDARDS and PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fieldwork training should be mandatory and trainee teachers should: attend, and have an active role, in a school visit as part of their training; plan and lead a lesson with pupils outside the classroom as part of their training; and receive at least 4 hours of training in out of classroom learning as part of their Initial Teacher Training.

Fieldwork should be a vital part of teachers’ professional development to support their attainment of Standard 4 within the new Teaching Standards.

The National College for School Leadership should add a Learning Outside the Classroom specialism to the current list of Specialist Leaders of Education areas of expertise.

The Government should review the National Agreement on ‘Raising Standards and Tackling Workload’ and consider the impact that “rarely covers” guidance has on the number of young people able to benefit from outdoor learning.

Ofsted should report on school management’s effectiveness in reducing barriers to teachers, enabling them to dedicate more time to ensuring a high standard of outdoor teaching and learning.

Ofsted should evaluate school leadership in terms of its effectiveness in ensuring that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have as many opportunities to access the benefits provided by outdoor learning as their peers.

The UK is currently failing to produce sufficient numbers of secondary teachers with the competence, confidence and commitment to meet the modern day challenges of teaching fieldwork to the next generation of children and young people. Our experience has shown that any reversal in the decline in fieldwork will have to be led by teachers. Teachers must have the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver effective fieldwork.

**Initial Teacher Training:** FSC welcomes the increased focus on specialised knowledge and experience but seeks reassurance that fieldwork knowledge and experience will be considered a critical constituent.

**Teaching schools and Professional development:** FSC welcomes the new teaching school alliances and their focus on developing existing teachers’ skills as well as mentoring and supporting new teachers. The FSC seeks reassurance that the Teaching Schools will give due prominence to fieldwork training for both initial and experienced teachers. As such, we welcome the recent House of Commons Education Select Committee’s recommendation of introducing an entitlement for all teaching staff, and hope that fieldwork is included as a core criteria within teachers’ professional development to ensure that all teachers, whatever their specialist subject, have the confidence, commitment and competence to deliver out-of-classroom education. Specifically, FSC would like newly designated Specialist Leaders in Education to include fieldwork and outdoor learning teaching as a recognised area of expertise.

**Teaching standards:** The new standards only refer to outdoor learning within the assessment criteria for ‘Standard 4: Plan and teach well structured lessons’ which requires teachers be able to “set homework and plan other out-of-class activities to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired”. The FSC is concerned that this is too weak a standard to reverse the decline in fieldwork teaching.

**School leadership and management:** These are vital to the quality of teaching and learning, and the promotion of pupils’ learning and progress. School leaders have a particular responsibility for narrowing the achievement gap between potentially vulnerable pupils and their peers and for promoting equality of opportunity. This critical influence in school leader’s prioritisation of extra curricular and out of school activities was reaffirmed at the SCORE National Conference in March 2012. School leaders and managers should, therefore, facilitate good teaching practices by encouraging outdoor education, and support teachers to overcome the bureaucratic barriers that can prevent them from taking their students outside the classroom. To promote this, Ofsted school inspections should include a judgement on leadership’s success in supporting out-of-classroom activities, including fieldwork.

“Rarely covers” guidance: this guidance (part of the workforce agreement) has had a significant negative impact on schools booking residential courses as teachers cannot arrange cover for visits. To overcome these obstacles, teachers must: prove strong curriculum links; have access to a fund which pays for supply cover; have the confidence and self-assurance to push the case; and be politically canny when ‘negotiating’ with colleagues in the staffroom. These are big demands, particularly on inexperienced teachers. ‘Leadership’ must provide support (see above).
OFSTED INSPECTIONS

Ofsted should include judgements and recommendations on the quality and the quantity of fieldwork provision in science, geography and history.

Ofsted grading criteria to include fieldwork/outdoor learning as a key indicator in deciding whether a school achieves ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ status.

The lack of a statutory requirement for schools to provide outdoor learning and fieldwork (except in geography) means that Ofsted rarely reports on these aspects, apart from national reviews of outdoor provision. Recent national reports by Ofsted have highlighted weaknesses in the level and quality of out-of-classroom learning, particularly in secondary schools. School inspections have an important role in boosting the profile and importance attributed to different teaching and learning approaches. Ofsted inspections should include comment on how effectively these are applied outside the classroom as well as within. Such judgements should apply to leaders and management as well as quality of teaching and curriculum. The critical role of senior managers and leaders in enabling equitable access to a reasonable range of out-of-school activities, including fieldwork in science, geography, and history, should be recognised in all judgements. This was reaffirmed at the SCORE National Conference in March 2012.

COUNCIL FOR LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM (CLOtC) QUALITY BADGE and HEALTH AND SAFETY

Department for Education should invest in an effective practitioner-led PR campaign to increase the awareness of the CLOtC Quality Badge in schools.

Ofsted should recognise the value of the CLOtC Quality Badge within its inspection framework and encourage schools to engage with Quality Badge providers in outdoor learning activities to ensure schools are able to access reputable and recommended fieldwork providers.

Health and Safety Executive should promote more widespread knowledge and dissemination of their new guidance and promote the CLOtC Quality Badge as an appropriate and proportionate response to fulfilling this guidance.

The FSC’s experience suggests that there is an unnecessary and disproportionate level of risk averseness by teachers and schools linked to outdoor learning. The Health and Safety Executive have recently issued new guidance regarding school trips and outdoor learning activities “Tackling the health and safety myths” aimed at addressing schools’ concerns. The FSC welcomes this guidance but believes that supplementary guidance will be needed following the abolition of the Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) in 2012. There is still a need, driven by the sector itself, for an accreditation scheme that provides clear benchmarking of good practice and reassures users. This scheme needs to be wide-ranging and inclusive in the activities it covers. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC) Quality Badge, already operational, meets all the required criteria: it has robust Health and Safety protocols proportionate to the risks faced; covers all types of activities and programmes; has robust quality control procedures; and has the support of the providers and the Education Advisers. The CLOtC Quality Badge also has the added benefit of being driven by learning outcomes. The FSC endorses the Quality Badge.

For further information please contact: Dr Steve Tilling, Director of Communications, Field Studies Council

steve@field-studies-council.org