

Ten priorities for the future

FOR FIELD STUDIES AND OUTDOOR LEARNING PROVIDERS



1 Provide inspiring places closer to home

People's lives can be transformed by visits to inspirational places¹. However, increasingly, we are moving into towns and cities² and transport costs are rising, creating ever greater physical and financial barriers to countryside visits and more distant travel. Children from the most disadvantaged communities are most affected: already up to 80% of 14 year olds from some groups will never have been away on an overnight educational visit³. The poorest are ten times less likely than their affluent peers to have access to nearby green space⁴. We need to find new ways of enabling residential visits to continue, but also to increase opportunities for inspirational field studies locally around schools and communities.



2 Ensure that everybody can take part

Some of the UK's urban communities can now claim to be the most cosmopolitan on Earth, with more than 120 languages being spoken in some of London's secondary schools. Around 80% of people live in towns⁵. The population in rural areas has become older with less access to key services⁶. All of this means that we have to strive harder to ensure that people are inspired by the outside world. We have to reach out to influence a wider sector of society, including creating employment opportunities for staff within our own organisations.



3 Use outdoor opportunities to build pride in local communities

Mutual trust based on everybody pulling together helps to build happy neighbourhoods⁷. A lot of our socialising happens during shopping, at work or in activities associated with school⁸. Out-of-school activities and away-from-home residential visits in particular provide powerful opportunities for coming together⁹. Environmentally-focused residential stopovers encourage new skills and knowledge, create new friendships and support the emergence of new groups and leaders¹⁰. All of these could be utilised back at home to develop the accessible and open green spaces which are a great asset for developing community pride⁸, but are uncommon where there is social deprivation⁴.



4 Help make sustainable lifestyles an option for everybody

Many of us want more sustainable lifestyles. Most of us now recycle our rubbish and strive to be energy efficient. However, whereas 65% of us are concerned by the impact of transport on climate change, we are not in favour of reducing car use, and support expanding air travel¹¹. We need to demonstrate practical lifestyle choices that bridge



the gap between environmental values and practical action. These should include options for everybody, and should be presented in way which is jargon free and easily understandable across all of the communities that we work with¹¹.

5 Grasp all opportunities to learn about nature

Surely we should have a chance to know more about nature and the environment than our parents? We need to provide more specialist environmental knowledge and critical field skills – in species identification and recording, for example¹². Given the gaps in formal teaching at schools and universities, we have to seize other opportunities. We make two and a half billion visits each year to open spaces in England alone, but only 3% of adults with children plan to learn something whilst there⁴. Hundreds of groups promote contact and play in nature and yet reach a tiny minority of the population (4% in London for example)¹³. A tiny shift in these numbers could be transformative for future generations. We need to place far more outdoor education in more accessible places particularly into the parks and open spaces in towns and cities where two thirds of the visits to natural areas currently take place⁴.



6 Establish a right to outdoor visits and field studies

Strong support for field studies in schools and universities exists at all levels. But barriers such as narrow curricula, unimaginative exams and inflexible timetables deny many children and students from having access to outdoor visits and field studies¹⁴. Advocacy at the highest level (government and its agencies) will be needed to tackle this, backed up by good quality evidence¹⁵. For schools, our priorities must include training teachers with the skills and commitment to lead outdoor teaching, and equipping them with high-quality resources¹⁶.



7 Reduce anxiety about risk – and becoming more caring as a result!

Concern about 'cotton-wool' children in schools and home is hardly new. A quarter of parents admit they would not let their children climb a tree or walk to school, and almost half discourage a local cycle ride with friends¹⁷. So, compared to their parents, an average 8 year old explores an area shrunken by 90%¹⁸. Schools have similar concerns when considering outdoor visits and activities despite substantial evidence that they are no more risky than staying at school¹⁸. This has to change and both Health and Wealth could become a focus for our work: Health because we must be mindful that a quarter of under-16s may be obese by 2050¹⁹, with almost 40,000 people already dying unnecessarily every year²⁰; and Wealth because being risk-averse is poor preparation for young people facing an increasingly competitive and entrepreneurial world²¹.



8 Promote improved health and well-being as crucial benefits

Ecosystem services²² and national guidance on public health and well-being²³ provide powerful props for developing outdoor activities and field studies. These policies link healthy environments to healthy lives. Now, a deep culture shift is needed²⁴ in a country where 7 out of 10 people do not take enough exercise to benefit their health¹⁹. Much of our work already highlights the availability of green space and the obvious opportunities it provides for exercise and recreation, but promoting its role in tackling health threats such as pollution and climate change will also make the outdoors more appealing. We need to creatively blend the scope of 'field studies' and 'physical activity', and to forge new alliances to help us move forward.



9 Use technology and interactive entertainment to entice people outdoors

Nearly all children and three quarters of the general public now play interactive games. More than 55 million hours are spent gaming every day in the UK²⁵. Yet, in contrast, only a small minority of children play outside, spending less than three hours on this every week. These 'virtual' and 'real' worlds are often presented as conflicting opposites. However, gaming technology could attract previously unreachable audiences to explore the world outside. The potential is proven: iSpot has attracted over 250,000 animal and plant observations from the general public in 4 years²⁶; the National Biodiversity Network already hosts over 90 million records, many provided by volunteers²⁷; and the top 100 UK charities already have 19 million followers on social media, with the smaller charities with a stronger, more unified purpose having benefitted the most²⁸.



10 Work together to achieve our goals

If all of the 193,000 charities registered in the UK²⁹ had a common purpose, or combined their financial, staffing and volunteering capacity, they would create an unstoppable force for change. The combined annual income of registered charities working with health, saving lives, education and/or environmental protection is equivalent to almost half of the UK's central government's budget allocated to these areas³⁰ and this proportion may increase further if state spending is further eroded. One of the biggest challenges for long-established large charities is to reconfigure and build new alliances which best meet rapidly changing 21st Century needs. Some of these will involve large-scale strategic crossovers between education, public health, transport and environment. Some new groupings are already emerging³¹, but we need to see more collaborative work if we are to reach the critical mass which is needed to achieve cultural change²⁴.



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