

**London Challenge Residential Initiative
Main Phase Evaluation 2005 – 2008**

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Summary of Main Findings

The 2005 - 2008 main London Challenge Residential Experience offered all schools in the 33 London boroughs the opportunity to take groups of Key Stage 3 students away on a fully or partly funded residential course at a designated rural field study centre in the UK.

Our main evaluation followed on from the initial pilot evaluation in 2004 and focused on 64 of these courses (8%), nominally involving 2278 students (7%) from 46 London schools, between January 2005 and June 2008. It has revealed that the initiative has continued to enable students to participate in educational *curriculum*, *combined* and *adventure* programmes (including subjects such as science, geography, English and drama and PE). The overwhelming feedback from teachers, senior managers, parents and carers and the students themselves was very positive. Teachers observed a whole range of benefits and impacts for their students.

Our evaluation assessed participants' expectations for possible learning outcomes of the courses and looked at the impacts of these potential outcomes on the students. A framework of questions and observation that derives from Rickinson et al. (2004)'s *A Review of Research on Outdoor Learning* was used, to provide continuity following on from the pilot evaluation. This review outlines four possible areas of impact that outdoor learning may have: cognitive, affective, interpersonal / social, and physical / behavioural.

The main findings of the main phase evaluation are:

- 1) Over the course of phases 2 – 6 of the London Challenge Residential Experience, *combined curriculum* and *adventure* courses became increasingly popular and can be more effective (in terms of cognitive impact) than *curriculum* only or *adventure* only courses.
- 2) Teachers / schools have seen a range of benefits following the residential, including improved cooperation and communication between students.
- 3) Teachers and parents / carers report students gaining self esteem and self confidence as a result of facing and overcoming challenges during the residential.
- 4) Teachers report students who may not normally do so showing leadership skills during teamwork activities.
- 5) Relationships between students and students, and between students and teachers, were built during the London Challenge courses, which in many cases had a lasting, positive effect in the weeks after the courses back in school. Senior managers expressed the need for residential experiences to be repeated at regular intervals as students moved through school, in order to 'top up' the positive effects.
- 6) Teachers noticed some of the gentler, quieter boys gaining respect from their more 'macho' peers, whilst facing and overcoming difficult challenges during the field courses.
- 7) Teachers reported students who may not normally get involved in PE at school being physically active.

- 8) The funding for the London Challenge residentials has given many students in London the opportunity to have a rural, residential experience which their parents / carers would not have otherwise been able to afford.
- 9) Teachers and parents / carers noted that students have developed a sense of independence whilst having to look after and organise themselves during the trips.
- 10) Teachers felt students have benefited from learning in the real world, giving the work they do in school subjects, and things they see in textbooks at school, much more meaning. Motivation to learn and to participate in courses was generally high.
- 11) Some examples have been seen of longer-term cognitive impacts, in which learning during courses has potentially initiated, and thereby contributed to, the development of subject-related concepts and skills back at school.
- 12) Students reported developing a greater environmental awareness during the residentials, which in some cases inspired them to be active around issues in school and at home in the longer term.

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