

perspective

by Andy Robinson, IOL CEO



Change is in the air

Evidence of impact is important and clearly articulated and demonstrable good practice is even more so.

How well do the stakeholders in education, learning, development and therapy understand how and when they might draw on options for engaging with nature and introducing outdoor learning to their work ?

The last year has seen some very important join up at Westminster between Department for Education and DEFRA. This has resulted in a commitment of £10m to develop sustainable models and growth in Nature Friendly Schools, community forest based learning and Care Farming. This funded activity is being further refined to focus on schools and communities that have little to no access to the benefits of such activities at the moment. It's easy to be cynical about such ventures and indeed some previous investment has not lead to much change in schools' focus and activities. There are a few factors at play that lead me to be more optimistic about this significant effort to see more children and young people benefiting from outdoor learning.

Time for change

The first factor is the outdoor learning's community's readiness for change. The last few years have seen a number of leaders in our sector make strenuous efforts to ensure a continued increase in co-operation and understanding across the sector. These efforts are leading to a greater understanding of the development needs of the sector and feedback from elements of UK government that we are more joined up than they have previously experienced. I believe we need to act on this.

Focused campaign

Equally important is the demonstrable development of the sector in the form of a campaign. Working through the Outdoor Council, the Institute, along with a host of other sector-based organisations is facilitating a campaign to change the nature of outdoor learning experiences for the generation starting school in 2022. We are investing in developing understanding, skills and resources to

ensure that a child who is 5 in 2022 will reach adulthood benefiting from outdoor learning through a progression of different experiences.

Significant investment with targeted outcomes

Thirdly this is enough money to make a difference. The Department for Education and DEFRA are seeking to engage with 500 schools and alternative service providers, specifically targeting those with poor levels of school grounds and visit based outdoor learning. They have also identified the need for the investment to deliver sustainable practices that result in two priority outcomes of participants; improved mental health & wellbeing and engagement with school.

Meaningful timescales

Finally, those outside of our little world are starting to take notice of the value of outdoor learning! This funded work is part of a 25 year plan that looks beyond a single government department and the life time of a parliament, to more important generational timescales.

I appreciate that devolution of education policy means that not all nations in the UK are on the same track. I firmly believe that difference this should not be a treated as a problem; it should be a fantastic opportunity to inform this DEFRA led work. Insights from Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and approaches to teaching sustainability are valuable.

Taking action

If, like me, you think that the potential of Outdoor Learning in the UK is far from being realised, what would you like to do about it ? The Institute strives to reflect opinion and inform debate through local and national gathering of informed professionals, as well as on-line opportunities. If you think we are not articulating the value and potential of your practice area please get in touch or join me and others at the Outdoor Learning Sector National Conference on 7th – 9th November 2018. See the events section of the IOL website for more details. ■

<https://www.outdoor-learning-conference.org/>

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