

English Outdoor Council welcomes No 10 recognition of importance of outdoors for children and young people

Following yesterday's launch by the Prime Minister of DEFRA's '*A Green Future – a 25 year plan to improve the environment*' the English Outdoor Council' has given a cautious welcome to plans to engage more children and young people to connect with nature and benefit from the outdoors.

Recommendations in the paper include:

- Developing a programme to support schools and Pupil Referral Units in our most disadvantaged areas in establishing progressive programmes of nature contact for their pupils, which can be opened to schools from autumn 2019.
- Supporting the expansion of school outreach activities delivered by community forests
- Supporting a national expansion of care farming by 2022, trebling the number of places to 1.3m per year for children and adults in England
- In partnership with Step Up to Serve, supporting the 2019 #iwill environment-themed year, with design input from young people
- Evaluating progress in increasing young people's environmental social action, including #iwill campaign activity in 2019, and sharing lessons to sustain good practice.
- Exploring with youth sector partners the potential for piloting a natural environment programme with youth groups that encourages use of natural environments through social action. This would aim to reach more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

The English Outdoor Council is the umbrella body for organisations involved in outdoor learning and recreation and includes over 300 organisations reaching into schools in every county in England.

Chair Martin Smith said "English Outdoor Council is pleased that government has recognised our position on both importance of connecting children to the outdoors and to nature and our concerns that some groups of children have limited and inequitable access. The initiatives within the paper are welcome contributions to our work on opening access and on the delivery of a progressive range of outdoor experiences for every child and young person.

"This though has to sit alongside an accountability framework for schools that values and supports learning in and through the outdoors and connecting children with nature. Through our members we reach nearly all schools in the country and we know that teachers are doing amazing work to bring children the benefits of outdoor spaces. But we also hear how they are struggling with accountability measures and although £10million has been allocated within the Plan to support this work there are still tremendous funding pressures felt by schools".

Over 2018 English Outdoor Council is supporting the work of Institute of Outdoor Learning, helped by Natural England, to create an evidence based progressive framework that outlines the outdoor and nature experiences that children should have from birth to adulthood.

Andy Robinson CEO of Institute of Outdoor Learning and CEO Lindley Education Trust explains "there is a strong evidence based of the positive impacts of learning outdoors and connecting with nature; on mental and physical health, on life skills and on the developing of a generation prepared to take action to engage in protecting the environment. In developing the progression framework we are starting to identify the experiences that every child is entitled to and creating a shared understanding of 'what works'."

For more information on the work of English Outdoor Council, further thinking on the DEFRA plan and for case studies of effective and inclusive outdoor learning in schools please contact:

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