

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to summarise the various documents that have recently been published by UK Government under the umbrella of 'Levelling Up' that have a potential impact on the OL/residential sector. For each one I have asked:

- What is it?
- What is its scope?
- What are the headlines?
- What is the relevance to the OL/residential sector?

The last question involves a degree of speculation that will hopefully lead to further thought and strategy. Other members, closer to particular aspects of the sector, may well be able to offer further insight.

A white paper is a statement of policy; a green paper is a consultation document. Text in **blue** is directly quoted from the source document.

1. [Youth Review](#) (White Paper, published 01/02/22)

What is it?

Policy paper summarising the findings of a DCMS review of the Youth Service in England, announced in 2020.

What is its scope?

The Government states that the review is intended "to develop a clear direction for our out-of-school youth agenda, and to ensure that our spending and programmes meet the needs of young people as well as our ambitions on 'levelling up'".

DCMS engaged with around 6,000 young people across the country, 170 youth sector organisations and academics.

What are the headlines?

Young people asked for:

- regular activities, (e.g. uniformed youth, youth clubs)
- adventures away from home
- volunteering opportunities to give back to the community
- activities that support mental and physical wellbeing and skills development
- to be a part of decision making and help build back better.

The youth sector told DCMS:

- that resources need to be aligned across government departments, and within DCMS
- to champion a skilled, trained and accredited youth workforce.
- to involve young people in decision-making about services.
- that funding should be invested in universal services but as a complement to specialist services for young people with specific support needs.

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

Academics reported that:

- There are excellent pockets of evaluation in the youth sector, however, there are challenges in showing the causal links between informal youth provision and positive outcomes,
- They recommended looking at longer-term studies and considering common metrics/measurement techniques across the sector.

The Government response:

National Youth Guarantee. 'By 2025 every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and volunteering opportunities.'

£560m funding includes:

- £368 million through the Youth Investment Fund (YIF), in areas of need, creating 300 new youth centres
- £171m for NCS
- £22m for DofE, 'non-military uniformed groups' and the iwill fund

Additional support to develop and train youth workers.

What is the relevance to the sector?

NCS:

The £171m to fund a 'reformed' NCS over the next 3 years includes residentials and a commitment to a year round programme. By comparison, in the financial year 20/21 [NCST received a £75.4m grant-in-aid from DCMS](#).

D of E:

Offer D of E to all state funded (includes academies) secondary schools. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is currently offered in nearly three-quarters of English state schools, as well as through youth and uniform groups, sports clubs, hospitals, charities, young offenders' institutions, Pupil Referral Units and alternative provision. There are 3458 secondary schools in England, implying that there are a further 870 or so schools to begin delivering the scheme. There is clearly scope for the Approved Activity Provider (AAP) network to benefit from this expansion.

Support for eliminating the current waiting list for non-military uniformed groups. Waiting lists resulting from a lack of volunteers are [currently 90,000 for the Scouts](#) and [70,000 for Brownies and Guides](#) (2017).

The Governments push for evidence informed practice is also clear. Impact measurement is a priority as is identifying the causal link between informal provision and outcomes that takes into account young people's context. The connection between outcomes and funding is also clear, implying a need for providers to be able to articulate and evidence their practice. Theories of change, as suggested in the [Blagrove report](#) are not mentioned explicitly but link these aspects together. More information on ToC can be found [here](#).

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

2. [Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) (White Paper, published 28/03/22)

What is it?

Policy paper for schools in England, the first for six years.

What is its scope?

Sets out the Government's ambitions for improving school education in England, by 2030. It will form part of a wider programme of change, alongside the SEND Review, Independent Care Review, Skills for Jobs White Paper and Levelling Up White Paper.

This government's 'Levelling Up' mission for schools is that by 2030, 90% of children will leave primary school having achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, up from 65% in 2019. The White Paper adds a further ambition to increase the national GCSE average grade in both English language and in maths from 4.5 in 2019 to 5 by 2030.

What are the headlines?

- Focus on academic improvement
- Evidence informed practice
- Strong support for parental engagement
- Aspiration for every school to be part of a strong, multi-academy trust
- Additional resources and higher priority for SEND

Four key chapters:

1. *An excellent teacher for every child.* Focuses on the quality of teaching through teacher training and development.

2. *Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance.* Focuses on curriculum development, attendance and behaviour.

3. *Targeted support for every child who needs it.* Focuses on addressing the needs of children and young people who fall behind in English and Maths, underpinned by evidence-based support. Strong focus on improving outcomes for children with SEND.

4. *A stronger and fairer school system.* Focuses on the development of 'strong multi academy trusts' that all maintained schools will be a part of.

What is its relevance to the sector?

Cultural activities

64. *As part of a richer school week, all children should be entitled to take part in sport, music and cultural opportunities. These opportunities are an essential part of a broad and ambitious curriculum, and support children's health, wellbeing and wider development, particularly as we recover from the pandemic. The government will publish updated plans to support sport and music education in 2022, and will publish a cultural education plan in 2023, working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England. This will include how best to support young people who*

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

wish to pursue careers in our creative and cultural industries. We will build on our high-quality citizenship education by supporting the National Youth Guarantee, promoting volunteering and expanding access to the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Cadet Schemes.

The support for D of E has been outlined in the Youth Review. The emphasis is on citizenship rather than any OL focus, although there are clearly opportunities for progressive OL experiences through both D of E and the Cadets. This is as close as the White Paper gets to directly referencing OL practice, maintaining the dispersed approach to OL in the curriculum that has been the hallmark of the National Curriculum since its inception.

Reference to updating plans to support sport and music education are significant. Sport premium has been used by numerous schools to support residentials and is likely to be withdrawn at the end of this year (all academies, for example, have been told to remove the sport premium line from their budgets for next year). It may be re-allocated directly into the delegated budget but this means that how it is spent is no longer tightly defined, and Heads will be forced to decide where their priorities lie before spending the money. There is therefore a chance that the money will not be used to support residentials, reducing for some schools their ability to run a trip. However, delegated budgets have already received additional funds to offset the energy price rises, so it is far from certain whether the sport funding will be reappportioned in this way. Providers can help Heads to make the case by being really clear about what they offer and what it will help the school to achieve (see reference to Theories of Change above)

National Curriculum

66. In order to provide stability for schools and enable them to remain focused on recovery from the pandemic and raising standards of literacy and numeracy, we will make no changes to the National Curriculum for the remainder of the Parliament.

This was known pre-white paper, but emphasises that the position of OL in English schools will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. It is interesting to note that one freedom afforded to academies is that they do not have to follow the National Curriculum. If all schools are academies by 2030, there would appear to be no need to reform the NC as it becomes the responsibility of each MAT. This could be an opportunity or a threat, as the curriculum design will depend on each MAT and their values. An entitlement to outdoor experiences may yet be a long way off.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

A secure future for the Education Endowment Foundation putting our independent 'what works' centre on a long-term footing and placing the generation and mobilisation of evidence at the heart of our education system.

The focus on evidence informed practice and the support for the EEF highlights the role of evidence in influencing strategy. OL is currently poorly represented on the EEF toolkit, although 'adventure learning' shows positive outcomes. A current project involving [Outward Bound and Commando Joes](#) is seeking to understand more about the benefits of these experiences, but if the EEF is going to be the go-to place for evidence that justifies practice - and hence spending - the sector must engage with it.

Inclusion and SEND

The SEND Review (see below) and the White Paper are clear that a greater focus on inclusion is a priority. For mainstream schools, this is likely to mean that there will be more children with

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

identified SEND and accordingly a greater number of children with SEND accessing residential. The White Paper and SEND review propose a greater level of specialism and qualification of staff in school, and providers could benefit from training for all staff on different aspects of SEND. This includes first points of contact (e.g. sales teams) as well as delivery staff. The feel that people making enquiries get when discussing their needs is as important as the delivery itself.

Multi Academy Trusts

The proposed academisation of all schools by 2030 and the associated development of strong trusts alters the role of the LA. Although it is suggested as a route to improved quality, the strategy forces the school-as-business agenda, with schools buying services on the open market. Relationships between providers and MATs already influence business strategy but will inevitably become more important.

Education Investment Areas

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063088/Priority_EIA_selection_methodology_FINAL.pdf

55 Education Investment areas have been identified to increase funding and support to areas in most need, plus extra funding in 24 priority areas ‘to address entrenched underperformance, including in literacy and numeracy, in areas with some of the highest rates of disadvantage in the country. In these areas, around £40m of additional funding will be provided for bespoke interventions to address local needs’.

3. [SEND review: right support, right place, right time](#) (Green Paper, published 28/03/22)

What is it?

Green paper (consultation) seeking views about the Government’s proposed changes to the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision (AP) system in England.

What is its scope?

The review is a response to the widespread recognition that the system is failing to deliver for children, young people and their families. The paper sets out plans for an inclusive system, starting with improved mainstream provision that offers early and accurate identification of needs, high-quality teaching, and prompt access to targeted support.

What are the headlines?

- 20/21: 15.8% of all school pupils – 1.4 million – were identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- 3.7% of all pupils had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This is an increase on recent years, from 2.8% in 2016. (Number of EHCPs has increased by 10% since 2020)
- Amongst pupils with an EHCP, the most common primary type of need in 2021 was Autistic Spectrum Disorder (30%)
- Outcomes for children and young people with SEND or in AP are poor
- Navigating the SEND system is not a positive experience for CYP and their families

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

- The system is poor value for money

As per the White Paper, there is a strong emphasis on improving mainstream provision. Key proposals involve increased investment, creating a single national system for SEND and AP, new national qualifications for SENDCos and reforming alternative provision.

What is its relevance to the sector?

As described above (White Paper).

4. Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems (White Paper, published 21/04/22)

What is it?

Policy paper applying to education and children's services systems in England.

What is its scope?

Environmental aspects of sustainability, framed within a social and economic context.

Responds to recommendations from the Committee for Climate Change, the Dasgupta Review¹, and the Green Jobs Taskforce report, supporting the 25 Year Environment Plan and Net Zero Strategy .

The strategy brings together four strategic aims:

1. Excellence in education and skills for a changing world: preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.
2. Net zero: reducing direct and indirect emissions from education and care buildings, driving innovation to meet legislative targets and providing opportunities for children and young people to engage practically in the transition to net zero.
3. Resilience to climate change: adapting our education and care buildings and system to prepare for the effects of climate change.
4. A better environment for future generations: enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality and increasing access to, and connection with, nature in and around education and care settings.

What are the headlines?

Two key initiatives, the **National Education Nature Park** and the **Climate Leader's Award**, will drive the strategy across five 'action areas' - climate education, green skills and careers, education estate and digital infrastructure, operations and supply chains, and international.

Notes

- 1 The full **Dasgupta Review** into the economics of biodiversity is 610 pages long. An accessible, 10-page headline summary can be found [here](#).

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

National Education Nature Park (NENP)

The NENP is intended to build on existing work to engage children with the natural environment, positioning all education estate, i.e. school grounds and facilities, as one virtual park. CYP will be able to measure and improve biodiversity in their own settings and upload progress to a digital mapping service, enabling knowledge sharing and development of mapping, data collection and analysis skills. As a result, the aim is that they will deliver improvements to their own settings, increase engagement levels with the natural world and improve nature connectedness.

Climate Leaders Award (CLA)

A Climate Leaders Award will complement classroom learning and allow us to celebrate and recognise education providers, children and young people for:

- developing their connection with nature
- making a real contribution to establishing a sustainable future for us all

The award will provide a structured route through existing awards in this area, such as the John Muir Award, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Junior Forester Award and others. Participation will enable children and young people to acquire credits towards the prestigious Climate Leaders Award. This will be recognised and valued as supporting progression to employment and further study.

Both initiatives target improving connection to local environments and biodiversity levels. The Government acknowledges the challenges faced by disadvantaged CYP, stating that their design has inclusivity at their heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQiznzU-ots>

Design and delivery of both initiatives are currently (April 2022) out to tender.

What is its relevance to the sector?

The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commits to encouraging children to be close to nature both in and out of school, and the strategy outlined in the White Paper provides clear support for spending time in nature as part of the education offer.

The focus of the paper is climate change and sustainability but the Paper also recognises the value of practical activities outdoors in bringing learning to life, aiding pastoral work, and delivering physical and mental benefits. Time spent in nature 'can form part of targeted support to:

- improve engagement and attainment, including as part of wider packages of support for pupils with SEND
- give young people a sense of agency where anxiety stems from climate concerns'

In school, the compulsory outdoor element of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework leads via 'science, geography and citizenship' programmes to a new Natural History GCSE to be introduced by 2025 and offering associated fieldwork opportunities. As noted above, though, there is no other review of the NC planned so OL remains dispersed throughout the curriculum for schools and teachers to adopt and implement as they see fit. Support and encouragement through resource development are the key government tools rather than curricular reform.

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

The Paper states that the Government will ‘build on learning from the [Children and Nature Programme](#), encouraging schools to join up with local delivery partners to develop effective school-specific options and build links with local communities’. Many providers are already encouraging CYP to develop their knowledge of the natural environment and their potential role in addressing climate change, and the introduction of the NENP and CLA add further potential opportunities.

Further encouragement for the sector is evident in subsection **3. Learning in the natural environment**, where it is stated that ‘In 2022 we will:

- build on our investment into the Children and Nature Programme, by engaging with DEFRA on further research into how outdoor learning can be delivered for the greatest impact, with a view to exploring opportunities to support education settings to deliver quality outdoor education

This is, potentially, significant. In this paragraph the government specifically mentions and commits to supporting high quality outdoor learning/outdoor education for the first time. Again, as outlined in both the Schools White Paper and the Youth Review, the emphasis is on research informed practice that delivers impact.

Commentary

The four papers outlined above form part of, or are linked to, the Government’s [Levelling Up](#) strategy and climate change agenda, and together they provide a vision of the educational landscape in England for the next decade. This government’s period of office is due to end in 2024, but it seems unlikely that there will be significant reversals of direction if a different political party wins the next general election. Bridget Phillipson, the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, [spoke at the 2022 NAHT conference](#) and was non-committal when asked what they would do about the Academisation policy if they got into power.

All of the papers reference at least one of the others and there is an express intention to ‘link up across government to identify new opportunities and strengthen action as part of the levelling up agenda – for example, with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on the [National Youth Guarantee](#) to increase access to out-of-school activities for all children’.

From an outdoor learning (OL) sector perspective the key points are:

- A focus on greater inclusion in mainstream schools, meaning a likely increase in the number of children with identified special needs visiting providers;
- A commitment that all mainstream schools will be either in or committed to joining a strong multi-academy trust by 2030, leading to a changed local authority role;
- Targeted funding for identified Education Investment Areas, leading to potential opportunities for specific interventions;
- Strong support for increasing nature connectedness amongst CYP through the development of resources and CPD for teachers;
- Fieldwork opportunities connected to the new Natural History GCSE;
- Development of the National Education Nature Park and the Climate Leader’s Award, providing links to D of E, the John Muir Award and Young Foresters Awards;

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

- Support for schools not currently delivering D of E to do so;
- A reformed, year-round NCS scheme that includes residential;
- Support to reduce waiting lists for non-military uniformed youth groups (i.e. Scouts and Girlguides);

- An emphasis on evidence informed practice.

The list above illustrates potential engagement opportunities for the OL sector, but there are a number of challenges.

Funding

As with all policy statements, the issue of funding is not far away. It is clear that the Government's solution to the demand from young people for adventurous trips away is more of the same through D of E and NCS. The money apportioned to D of E and NCS is welcome, as it supports greater access to opportunities but in real terms the funding for NCS is less than previously, so the value of residential to the sector would seem unlikely to increase. For schools not currently running D of E the funding will help to establish the scheme, although it is unlikely to address issues of equal access based on socio-economic status that exist where the scheme is already run. Also included in the funding is a commitment to reduce waiting lists in the Scouts and Girlguides, although how funding will address a volunteer issue is unclear from the Paper.

In schools, increased access to nature requires more than a bank of resources. CPD needs to be impactful and more than optional, bringing with it additional cost, while the unequal provision of green spaces in or near to the 'education estate' means that transport will be an ongoing issue. Increasing energy, food and fuel costs will impact spending power of schools and parents alike, making travel orientated decisions harder.

It is interesting to note that while sport and the arts are counted as cultural activities and are clearly represented in DCMS, the outdoors is not. Human-nature relationships for education purposes, physical and mental health, wellbeing and sustainability form aspects of political strategy across the DfE, Defra, DCMS and increasingly the Department of Health and Social Care. Given its status as a 'cultural good' of the UK, it would seem that the time is now right for the outdoors to have similar status to the arts and sport. Similar to sport and the arts, this would enable funding to be provided that supports access to the natural environment, allowing schools to target funding that meets local need and context.

Evidence based practice

Throughout the White Papers lies a continuous thread of evidence based practice, highlighted by the re-endowment of the EEF. The commitment to further research into OL is welcome and suggests a door ready to be pushed against.

The challenges faced by schools in terms of funding mean that they will have to consider carefully where they allocate resources, so evidence that supports the identified needs of sustainability and mental /physical health could help school leaders' decision making. There is an increasing body of evidence already, but as the Blagrove report pointed out, the sector is 'an overlapping patchwork of interests that differ in what is offered, to whom and where', with only limited linkage between measured outcomes and participants' (or 'customer's') agendas. Theories of change (ToC) are proposed by the report authors as accepted ways of developing that connection, simultaneously

Outdoor learning sector education White and Green Papers summary, May 2022

adding to a reliable and robust evidence base. Support is needed, however, to upskill providers in terms of knowledge and application of ToC. The IOL currently hosts a number of nationwide [Research Hubs](#), the goal of which is to develop links between practice and academia. The hubs have begun to address some of these challenges but there is a clear opportunity for these to be developed further.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper is to highlight key messages from the recent Green and White papers relating to education in England, and how they might impact on the outdoor learning sector. The papers are situated in a pandemic-recovery context, and it is important that they are framed accordingly. [Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#) has been substantially impacted by the pandemic, and many schools are facing challenges in terms of CYP's resilience and behaviour. Staffing challenges exist in schools and centres alike, and for many the focus is necessarily trying to meet the day to day expectations of clients, parents and Ofsted while not succumbing to ill health and burn out themselves. Couple this with the rising cost of living and there are significant challenges for the sector ahead.

At sector/policy level, the White and Green papers show what the education landscape will look like going forwards towards 2030. Much of what is outlined above may well resonate already with providers, but there is also a chance that by being proactive rather than reactive the sector may be able to achieve the goal of more opportunities taken up by more people, with higher value placed on what OL can offer. The sector has a chance to be more strategic in its thinking and to choose (or draw) the appropriate map that goes with the terrain. The 'voice' of the sector has therefore never been more critical, and the recent setting up of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for outdoor learning is a big step forwards in getting the sector's voice represented at government level. Hand in hand with that representation must go the development of the evidence base to support what the sector knows instinctively it can do well.

Author notes

Dave Harvey is currently in the final stages of a PhD looking at developing outdoor learning provision. He was National Chair of the AHOEC from 2012-15 and has held both Chair and Secretary roles at regional level. He is currently an associate member of the AHOEC, working in a primary school supporting the development of outdoor learning.



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