

**Engagement with Scotland's National Parks and National Nature Reserves:
A Blended Case Study from six Scottish Schools**

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The Cairngorms National Park, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned an action research project to develop an understanding of barriers to specific groups accessing the two Scottish National Parks. Visits to six schools in or near to the National Parks involved interviews and focus groups with teachers, students, school administrators, parents, local education authority staff and youth workers. This is the first study to involve teachers from across a wide range of subject areas (previous work has focussed on biology and geography teachers) and found considerable support from the great majority of those involved in the study. Interestingly costs were not as significant an issue as might be expected and links and connections to curriculum for excellence were viewed as crucial in successfully implementing outdoor learning and school visits to National Parks. Risk assessments and risk management, paperwork and administrative issues were considered to be the biggest barrier to outdoor learning. The case study is a blend of the issues raised in the six schools and offers tables of issues and suggestions on ways to progress and support outdoor learning for various agencies.

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1.0 Profile and Background

1.1 School profiles and previous engagement with the outdoors

This case study is a blend of six case studies which were developed during 2008 as a result of visits to secondary schools. The six schools involved in the project are all located in or relatively close to one of the two National Parks in Scotland. Of the six schools involved in the project three are located inside National Park boundaries and the remaining three are located between 5 and 20 miles away from the nearest National Park boundary. Four of the schools can be characterised as rural and two as urban. School sizes vary from 380 to 1000 and FTE teachers from 35 to 91.

1.2 Engagement in Research

The school visits involved interviews with groups of staff who had been, currently are, or potentially will be, involved in some kind of outdoor learning at the school. Those involved play key roles in assisting other teachers in the school so they have an overview of what is happening, how and why. In addition whenever possible parents were interviewed and staff from the education authorities consulted. A summary of those involved in the work is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Summary of subject teachers and others involved in the schools case study.

1 Faculty head of social subjects
2 CDT teacher
2 Education advisors
2 Learning Support teacher
3 Art and Design teachers
4 Head teachers
4 PE teachers
9 Geography teachers
Biology teacher
Chemistry teacher
Deputy Head teacher
Drama and Media teacher
French teacher
Head of technology
History and Archaeology teacher
Home Economics teacher
Modern Studies and History
OE Teacher
Pupil Support and Life Skills, PSE
Pupil Support, Support for Learning
Science teacher
Student support coordinator
Support for learning, psychology
Four Parents (including two chairs of parent council)

Youth worker from youth project

In addition to staff interviews two focus groups with 20 and 25 students were undertaken which included the year representatives and other interested students.

This study is novel and interesting as no work like it has been undertaken in Scotland before. Previous work has rested on the assumption that most outdoor education provision is through Biology and Geography teachers and has been undertaken through questionnaires and telephone interviews. Using interviews, focus groups and a survey the more comprehensive approach in this study shows how outdoor education generally, and interest in visits to National Parks and National Nature Reserves in particular, is integrated across subjects and disciplines in most schools. Perhaps more importantly, it indicates how there is a general support for taking students outside the classroom by a great majority of teachers from a wide range of backgrounds.

During the discussions the focus was initially on getting a grasp of the current provision and views on the schools relationship with the two National Parks. We asked about 'how they would like the relationship to be' and 'what they think that they, and the park, can do to improve and increase the opportunities for students to visit the National Parks and National Nature Reserves'.

Current provision and opportunities for outdoor learning in the schools vary considerably and represent a complex matrix of timing (in school hours and out of school hours), curricular connections and subject specialisms, types of opportunities (activity focused, museums, plays, packaged provision, historical sites), length of visits (half day to five day – and more – residential) and various degrees of involvement by teachers.

During the visits to the schools it became clear that a general trend of opportunities for outdoor learning (in a general sense) having decreased in the last 20 years. For example, in one school, as recently as three years ago there was an activities week towards the end of the academic year, this has now been reduced to activities days. The reasons for these and similar changes are complex and explored further in the following sections.

2.0 Managing Risk – Perception, Practice and Paperwork

One of the key issues raised throughout discussions in the schools was that of paperwork and risk assessment forms. Repeatedly teachers commented on the requirements for undertaking risk assessments been overly detailed and bureaucratic and their lack of training for doing this part of their job (which for many is new since they first started teaching). It rapidly became clear that the perceptions of what is required, the practice with regard to administrative systems and procedures and the paperwork required varies considerably in departments, schools and different authorities. Three broad areas emerged for consideration.

2.1 Perceptions and Preparations

The first issue identified was the time prior to a visit outside the school that paperwork had to be requested, collected, completed and submitted for approval. The teachers were quick to get to the main challenge for them – completing risk assessment forms and paperwork before leaving the school grounds,

There is an incredible amount of paperwork. Shortly after I came here I went on a risk assessment course which absolutely terrified me and it put me off a wee bit. I know you have to have things in place if you are going to take the students out. It was a bit of a fear factor on the course. Although having been involved in outdoor education I have never had a bad experience.

All of the teachers were well aware of the challenges of risk assessments,

I teach art and design. We take the kids out drawing but we have actually done it less in the last couple of years because of the increased bureaucracy involved in trips and taking them across the school door. I have to get a more general consent form sorted out so we can take them out to the local gallery and park so we can do some perspective drawing. Some of these are things I want to repeat in the future.

Another teacher commented that the completion of risk assessments had put them off,

I teach technology but from a curricular point of view – nothing. I don't take kids out for all the risk assessment reasons. Paperwork, can't be bothered with all that nonsense.

One of the biology teachers gave an overview of provision within their subject area at the school,

We don't take the kids anywhere. We used to take the kids in the second year when we did the environment topic. The school has a little plot not far away that was bequeathed to the school, we would take them down there to do quadrats and work on sampling. We have not done that for a few years now ... I think it stopped because of the red tape that went around taking them out. What used to be quite simple, a simple permission slip to say that when the pupils started their science course

they were issued with a permission slip to say that there will be at some point during these two years a trip to the field and did they give permission and that would be fine. We just decided that whenever it fitted into our classroom work and also the weather we would say, the weather's good for Thursday I am going to take my S2 kids out and it was a matter of walking them. You tended to have another member of staff (from learning support) so there was another adult and we would walk to the park, do the work and then come back up. But then we got all sorts of forms to fill out to take the kids out of school now and in-between that time we have the inclusion policy where we have a lot more kids with special needs and we would maybe require more members of staff because we have kids with special needs now.

Despite a reluctance to complete paperwork everyone involved in the study understood the importance of documenting risk assessments and the culture of litigation (primary and secondary risks). It appears that completing risk assessments is seen as important but also something that puts off less enthusiastic or less experienced teachers. Once teachers have completed paperwork it goes through different processes depending on the authority. In some areas it is signed off by the head teacher while in others it is approved by an officer from the council. Procedures vary considerably depending on different authorities.

While there was not clear agreement on the timing two examples were offered of ways to overcome some of the challenges of completing risk assessments. Both The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) and another voluntary organisation have provided teachers with risk assessments that they can use and saves them from having to create fresh risk assessments. For example, one PE teacher commented,

If there was a risk assessment put in place I would be more than happy to lead expeditions into the Park. Obviously there are some areas I could not go to as I don't have a mountain leaders award so that's a no no at the moment. Things such as that though, if there was even just some guidance from the park on how to go about achieving that [mountain leader award] that is something I would be interested in pursuing.

Another PE teacher commented on her experiences of taking students to a local indoor climbing wall,

When I book the climbing I say I don't sign the risk assessment form but the climbing centre actually give me a risk assessment that they have done therefore I don't need to do it because they have already done it for their company. That would really help if we said we want to take a group there and a private company said they had the risk assessment already completed. It makes it easier for us, much less paperwork.

It transpired that some teachers did not realise it is possible to complete a generic risk assessment to cover, for example, multiple modes of transport on different occasions and once completed this can cover all visits throughout a school year.

2.2 Competencies and Qualifications

Teachers in the schools expressed concern regarding the qualifications framework and identified problematic issues, for example, a French teacher explained,

I am qualified with my BELA award [The Sports Leaders UK Level 2 Award in Basic Expedition Leadership], I am qualified to take pupils on bikes and this, again, is where some of the paperwork and legalities goes wrong I think. I am qualified to take pupils along the busy 'A' road close to the school but not along the cycle track to a village nearby. And that is crazy. Somehow if this is going to work, if we are going to get people involved that has to change. I think the whole qualification thing is important but I think somewhere along the line they have lost the plot.

A further example where teachers identified qualifications requirements which they saw as been prohibitive, an art teacher noted,

There are restrictions here ... you have to be a qualified walker to walk and there was a thing that came around and I could have volunteered to become a qualified walker but I have not done that yet. I was always more happy to be a helper rather than a leader on these things.

A parent took over the story,

We have an interesting situation in the school in that the head of the mountain rescue team can't take kids out to walk along a track in the forest because he does not have the right bit of paper. Basically the legislation is good but this is a case of it being a complete overkill.

Checking with different authorities confirms that sometimes qualifications are required but in most authorities there are systems for accreditation courses which are run by and recognised by councils. In some authorities undertaking one or both of the above options is fully funded which represents considerable funding investment in teachers continuing professional development (CPD). Despite this support many teachers are not willing to invest the time and energy to take such courses which often lead to taking increased responsibility in the school.

2.3 Council Responsibilities and Perspectives

Not surprisingly discussions in schools led to discussions regarding councils, local education authorities and their roles and responsibilities for schools. Following up with Outdoor Education Officers to get their perspectives and check on the accuracy of some of the claims that were being made proved to be interesting and informative.

Outdoor Education Officers typically have responsibility for supporting and guiding leaders associated with excursions offered by schools in the region. In one of the authorities a consequence of the appointment of an Outdoor Education Officer was a review of the systems, procedures and processes

associated with the Health and Safety of pupils on Educational Excursions (<http://childpolicyinfo.childrenscotland.org.uk/index/news-app?story=2524> and <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/12/20444/48944>) to ensure that the Scottish Governments best practice guidelines and the council policies and procedures were being followed. The review resulted in an approval form system, funding for training and a readily available support system to assist teachers where required to come up to speed with legislative requirements, current best practice and the council procedures. Some teachers were less than happy about this and not willing (as a matter of principle) to complete what they considered to be 'meaningless paperwork'.

One Outdoor Education Officer clarified the council policy regarding off site excursions,

Teachers and youth leaders have to fill out an approval form if they are going off site and the approval form can be completed for several visits if they are of a similar nature, similar staff and pupils. But if they have discrete trips that are different they need to fill out separate forms for that. Along with that there is a requirement that they fill out an excursion risk assessment form. Excursion risk assessments are based on the five topics that the Scottish Government identified in Health and Safety on Education Excursions (HASEE) medical needs, behavioural needs, how the weather might impact, crossing roads, railways, rivers etc. and group management. A worked example has been provided to help with this process. Staff who have 'grabbed the bull by the horns' for want of a better phrase have found that it is a relatively straightforward process once they get the mythology out of their head and the staff room chat off to the side they discover that it is relatively straightforward to do. Many staff do more than they need to and fill out the forms in much more detail than they need to.

In another local authority the council have outsourced the approval process to an independent organisation for adventurous activities. In turn, this organisation has identified a number of approved organisations which teachers are encouraged to use. Teachers indicated that when planning visits this system was fairly straightforward although it does need a minimum of six weeks from submitting paperwork to the date of the visit. However, if they want to use a provider (for whatever reason) who has not already been approved through this council outsourcing system then it is more time consuming and cannot be undertaken within a six week period.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
Risk assessments are a challenge for many teachers.	CPD for teachers on risk assessments. Liaise with Local Authorities for CPD on risk assessments. Offer some training courses in schools at lunch times or immediately after school.
Risk assessments are often seen as bigger than they are.	Central locations with sample risk assessments that can be adapted for

Risk assessments can be generic depending on authority requirements.

visits. e.g.

<http://www.rhet.org.uk/EZEdit/view.asp?MID=93>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/myth/may.htm>

Qualifications and risk assessments are often big barriers (perceived) to taking students outside.

The perception of issues of risk assessments and required qualifications is often inaccurate. Providing accurate information to dispel some of the perceptions and myths is helpful. This work can often be done by council employees – with encouragement and collaboration with the National Parks and National Nature Reserve employees.

Where councils employ staff to specifically support and promote outdoor education there is a support system in place that teachers can utilise.

Work to make teachers aware of the resources available to them in terms of people, skills, CPD opportunities and equipment.

(http://www.outdooreducation.dk/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=46)

When teachers do undertake to organise a visit of some kind they often find that the paperwork is much easier and less arduous than anticipated.

Work to encourage a mentoring system which 'spreads the word' on how 'user friendly' the systems are. Consider options for doing this and sharing of resources electronically.

Permission slips from parents for school visits cause paperwork but generic ones can be completed that cover the whole school year (unless adventurous activities are involved).

Encourage the use of generic permission slips.

Local providers can sometimes help in providing risk assessments thus alleviating the burden on teachers.

Consider collating information on possible providers and make available to teachers through various mediums. Some liability issues on advising of possible providers will need to be considered.

For some teachers visits to National Parks and NNRs are a big undertaking and encouragement

Staff from NNRs and National Parks could visit schools to offer classroom activities, school grounds activities, slide shows etc

is needed.

Opportunities for developing personal skills (such as mountain leader award) will be welcomed.

Some teachers are prepared to assist but do not want to take the lead in outdoor learning (often confidence related).

Teachers recognise the importance of qualifications to take groups outdoors but are sometimes sceptical of the over reliance on them as indicators of competence.

Qualifications for taking students out are seen as important but sometimes as 'overkill'

to enthuse the children and build a relationship with teachers/schools. 'Take the Parks to the people'.

Send information to schools on opportunities for such courses, perhaps provide a calendar of such opportunities well in advance so teachers can plan their CPD. Find information on funding support from local education authorities for such courses and provide with calendar. Provide information on a web page for such courses so it can be updated regularly. Try and target courses that occur during school holiday time so that cover does not have to be found (and financed) by the school.

Create opportunities for teachers to shadow others working with students in the outdoors, this will help to build their confidence if appropriate activities are chosen.

Focus on manageable 'bite size' experiences to start with. National Nature Reserves might be good settings for this as they are smaller.

Some education authorities rely on National Governing Body Awards as indicators of competence when it is possible for them to consider experiences as indicators without qualifications (in line with the Adventure Activities Licensing Service). Working with education authorities to (a) encourage them to consider experience of teachers may help to avoid an over reliance on national governing body awards and (b) work with education authorities to provide relevant national governing awards for teachers at reduced costs or free of charge.

Encourage teachers to take appropriate qualifications (such as BELA, WGL and local authority endorsements).

Councils often offer support for teachers to undertake training and assessment courses to gain qualifications or council recognition to take students to engage in outdoor activities.

School trips that go to places where risk assessments are completed on behalf of the school are appealing to teachers.

Paperwork for visits outside school can create a lot of work. Different councils and authorities have a variety of systems. Understanding and working within these systems can assist teachers.

Procedures for education authorities vary and thus the timing for signing off risk assessments and preparing for school trips varies.

Promote opportunities available to teachers through monthly bulletins, flyers and through the GLOW intranet system for teachers.

Promote opportunities to visit NNRs and National Parks when risk assessment and leadership is available – e.g. a package approach.

Consider this issue in development of materials and marketing information. Also to be considered if visits to schools are made.

Ensure that whatever opportunities are offered that they are approved through relevant council and authority systems so that visits are as administratively light as possible for teachers.

Try and present risk assessments in a positive light and as a support mechanism rather than a barrier.

Be familiar with the different systems and ensure that materials are adjusted appropriately to streamline the paperwork process.

3.0 Curriculum Connections

3.1 A Curriculum for Excellence

Discussion regarding connections to the curriculum focused around justifying taking students outside and bringing the curriculum alive by joining together curriculum areas. This seemed to be uncontroversial and in general there was support for cross disciplinary teaching as it is consistent with the principles of *A Curriculum for Excellence*. The aspiration of *A Curriculum for Excellence* is "for all children and for every young person ... should be **successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens** and **effective contributors** to society and at work. By providing structure, support and direction to young people's learning, the curriculum should enable them to develop these four capacities. The curriculum should complement the important contributions of families and communities."

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/11/20178/45862#5>). One head teacher commented,

No one seems to be coordinating in terms of *A Curriculum for Excellence*. I think there is plenty of opportunity for outdoor education in there. To be honest if you are committed to *A Curriculum for Excellence* then it needs to be coordinated which it is not. It comes down to whether there is cover for the classes - and individual teachers have to be keen that it goes ahead.

While the principles of taking students outside was agreed among staff it was interesting to note that to do this the head teacher plays a central role. One teacher responsible for pupil support explained,

Enthusiasm of teachers and support of the head teacher - which is currently easy as he is keen. It is crucial, 'you have got to get the get go from the man at the top'.

Thus, one potential barrier is teachers' enthusiasm, in the schools visited most teachers were enthusiastic about outdoor learning and this was generally supported by the head teacher – within practical reason.

Staff at the schools were overflowing with ideas of how they can use the outdoors to develop curricular content. Teaching Maths, Geography, PE and a range of other subjects were mentioned enthusiastically. Some aspects of these connections are already developed in the form of visits to local farms, forestry and tourism – teachers indicated that this is with a view to showing young people the opportunities for working in the local area and minimising urban migration.

Of course, there are also other benefits to outdoor learning and the teachers spoke passionately about students doing presentations to their peers when they return from various field trips, the confidence that this gives them and the important skills they develop through this process which can be directly linked to the five Core Skills identified in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (Working with Others, Communication, Numeracy, Problem Solving and Information Technology).

It was interesting to hear one head teacher talk about how he has developed the staff specialism at the school by deliberately recruiting teachers who show commitment and interest in creative approaches to teaching and experiential learning e.g. outdoor education. He elaborated on the relationship of outdoor education, teachers and the curriculum developments,

I am supportive of the purposes and 'Capacities' of *A Curriculum for Excellence* but you can have whatever curricular components you want but unless you have got good teachers it means nothing and learning is so much dependent on good teachers.

This suggests that a head teacher who is committed to outdoor education and considers this to be almost a trademark of good teaching is an important part of encouraging relationships with organisations such as the National Parks and National Nature Reserves.

3.2 Logistics and Timetables

The second related issue that arose in this theme was the challenge of time to get students out of the classroom. There appeared to be some tension between subject areas regarding the value of taking students outside and the interruption this causes to timetables. One Modern Studies and History teacher explained,

It really comes down to whether there is enough cover for your classes and the individual teachers have to be keen that it goes ahead and then you have to almost make sure that this is something every year so you can go back and say ... remember how we did this last year ... like this is set in stone, that's how we have worked it.

An Art and Design teacher in another school described the issue...

...getting staff to agree that these kids can go out in school time, so what we are trying to do is do it on a rota basis so we have a group of 20 kids and maybe 2 or 3 go away at a time so they are not missing so much and it is not so disruptive.

Two inter-related issues can be identified. First, the work that the students miss will need to be covered. This requires students to request permission to miss a class and arrange to catch up on the work covered (and teachers are quite at liberty to turn down requests). Second, the teacher taking a group out for a day needs to arrange for their classes to be covered and consider the impact on those students. While one obvious response to this might be to pay for a supply teacher this does not solve the problem of continuity and the coherence of the curriculum in that class. These issues are summarised by a biology teacher,

I do the internal work for the Duke of Edinburgh Award. I do the visits for competitions, local organisation visits. In actual fact, I find that not really a problem, and I do quite a bit of it. I do all my health and safety for the bus journey but when we get to the place we are going to they have all their own health and safety in place. I have to liaise and get the kids to liaise with the teachers whose classes they are going to miss and they

have to arrange to catch up with any work missed. If you are doing a sequence of events, say three visits and it is every Friday – that's a lot of work these pupils have missed.

Another school has a rural skills project and teachers have taken some creative approaches to timetable challenges. A Technology teacher explained,

We also had a suspended curriculum last May for S3 and we had an environment week, the idea was that the pupils would get something out of it but also the local community too.

Other schools faced some different challenges with regard to timetables. In some rural schools it is possible to offer outdoor experiences to students within a typical timetable period (50-55 minutes). This is possible as the school is located in an area surrounded by opportunities, for example students can study biodiversity and river environments within and very close to the school grounds. Sometimes these activities were described as extra curricular (because they are outside the classroom) even though they are occurring in school time and have strong links to the curriculum. Timetables are still a challenge though, a head teacher explained,

One of the difficulties of course is when you want to get outdoors to learn you disrupt what is going on indoors, and especially in a secondary school situation we have bells ringing every 50 - 55 minutes so to try and fit in outdoor activities always causes conflict, always causes upset.

This issue of time periods has been addressed in some schools by having a collapsed timetable or a 'period of extraction' for a half or whole day each week. Usually on Wednesday or Fridays a 'period of extraction' allows students to leave at the end of the morning, eat packed lunches *en route* and return to the school by 1530 when classes come to an end. This permits some flexibility. It may be that some schools introduce whole day extractions and bigger blocks of time which will potentially permit more time for fieldwork and time out of doors.

In other rural schools the challenges can be very different. A large catchment area in one school combined with many of the activities undertaken occurring outside the normal school day and many students catch buses home (often over one hour journey). This challenge was partially solved by offering a late bus option one evening a week. This enabled some students to take part in after school clubs, but was limited to one part of the catchment area.

This challenge also means that activities at the weekend are rare as that can require a 3 hour journey for parents. This is resolved by offering more activities at the end of the school day through the week. This means that students can get the bus to school and then parents may be required to make one journey to collect them rather than two.

People responsible for encouraging schools to visit National Nature Reserves and the National Parks should also be aware that there are some times of year when it is not possible to take students out (e.g. exam periods) and

planning around such times and coordinating timetable arrangements requires forward planning.

Beyond the issue of timetables teachers were also keen to point out that some of the 'basics' need to be in place if they are to organise school visits. Relatively easy access to toilets and a wet weather alternative that is linked to the curriculum are virtually essential. If organisations that the school is visiting take care of health and safety issues it is a big help.

In short, when the hassle of organisation and logistics are reduced the educational value can be focused on. Perhaps most importantly teachers need to be convinced that the visit will be worthwhile and in this respect curriculum links are essential. Organisations that understand the curriculum in schools and how the activities they offer will integrate meaningfully into the learning experiences of young people are the most likely to attract school visits. Organised activities, such as worksheets and tasks for students to engage with are seen as positive. Of course, having a good coffee shop and toilet facilities is also attractive.

3.3 Encouragement and Information on the National Parks

When talking about where to go the teachers were clear on the criteria – it needs to be linked to the curriculum. In order to put in the work and to justify a visit there needs to be some clear connection to the curriculum. Ideally, the National Nature Reserves and National Parks could offer people to run sessions for the pupils so all teachers have to do is get them out there and the rest is taken care of. This can be seen as the first phase in building teacher confidence so that in time they can be more and more involved in offering sessions and taking leadership during visits. This is a progressive form of CPD that builds capacity in schools. One teacher was keen to point out that the relationship is crucial – if there is a strong relationship between National Park staff and teachers and the teachers feel that the National Park staff understand what is needed and can build a good relationship with the students then they will go to a lot of effort to make visits happen.

Two Geography teachers described how they regularly receive telephone calls from teachers in other schools who are planning to visit the Park which acknowledges their expertise and local knowledge,

I often receive phone calls from schools who are coming up and they ask if we can recommend a site for a river study. Actually people from schools out with the Park are asking us for advice. It seems that there could be recognised places where the Park could say... we have done the risk assessment, there is sufficient parking space. Local knowledge to help people know where to do fieldwork, what features are where and how they link to the curriculum.

When staff take students out themselves they want to make sure that information is available to the students – ideally through interpretation boards and leaflets / exercises for them to undertake. The choice of where to go

appears to depend on the subject area, on the one hand an information pack for a specific area that can be used (such as the one developed for Inchcailloch National Nature Reserve) is desirable but on the other hand, some teachers prefer to maximise the 'contact with nature' and only use a visitor centre for toilets and as a wet weather option,

...from a biology point of view I am against taking students to visitor centres because the students are one step removed from the environment. I can understand why you might need that for Geography but for Biology I want the students IN the environment, not watching it on a television. That's why I would avoid a visitor centre (other than for a pit stop). Maybe that is because we are enthusiasts and have experience, other people might want to do it differently.

Teachers repeatedly commented that they need clear information on who to contact. By this they wanted to be able to contact people who could help them decide where to go and suggest activities that are linked to the curriculum. On a related note regarding the information received and the contacts, a History and Archaeology teacher made a point about materials from the Park,

... with the best will in the world there are a million and one other things that take your mind off taking students out. I often find that if something comes through the door I will think 'oh yeah, that's good' and I will pin it next to the computer and every time I walk past think 'oh right, got to remember that' so things that don't come through the door, I don't remember it.

3.4 Residential Experiences, Awards and Project Work

Some of the schools visited offer residential experiences. An example of this is a visit to one of the Scottish Islands (involving a journey of over five hours) which has proved to be an ongoing success, known through generations, and primarily focused on the residential benefits. The content of the visit was described by the head teacher,

The teacher is a great man for the outdoors and a great man for the traditional Scottish music as well, so with his many talents they went to visit local features, cliff walks, pointing out local plants, birds and so it is a very broad education for them. It also gives the opportunity for other staff, it is not just teaching staff - librarian, learning support auxiliaries, technicians, office staff, they all take part.

This is now planned to be run much closer to the school, with involvement of teachers and parents to encourage a sense of community. A crucial element of this is teachers and pupils together in a residential context to build relationships. There are currently negotiations under way to involve some parents who work in the outdoors locally and may be able to provide some activities. However, the story illustrates how individuals who are champions of outdoor education and committed to taking people outdoors make these visits and residential experiences happen.

Many teachers, students and parents made mention of the John Muir Award and or the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE). Some schools were keen on the philosophy of the John Muir Award (JMA) and see it fitting well with S1 and S2, partially because it is considered to be 'bureaucracy light' in comparison to some other schemes. The trend seems to be to offer students an option to subsequently build on this, probably with the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE). This gives good opportunities to tie in with personal and social development needs and across the curriculum more generally. One Drama and Media teacher commented,

We are in the fortunate position of having small classes here – no class in the school is bigger than 20 students so that takes away a constraint for us straight away as it really helps with the ratios.

Some parents were reported to be keen on the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) award as they consider to be more recognised by employers. It seems that these two awards might helpfully be seen as complementary with one building on the other as students progress through their school experiences.

One project that teachers in one school were enthusiastic about involved making a film about the National Park, (this project was in collaboration with one of the National Park Authorities). The Technology teacher described the project,

The first film we made was just to make a film about the Park and things to do in the Park. At the start they thought there was nothing to do and there are no buses but by the end of the film they turned around and said there is a lot to do – but there are still no buses! That's quite a good project, I am keen to stay involved with that.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
When curriculum links are clear teachers are often willing to put in a great deal of work and extra effort.	Ensure that curriculum links are clear and the multiplicity of benefits of such experiences are emphasised.
Curricular and extra curricular differences are often not clear.	These terms can be confusing: talking about in and out of school time may be clearer.
Teacher's passion is crucial in developing provision.	Offering CPD for teachers may be a way of sharing passion and encouraging teachers to go outdoors.
Staff can easily identify a plethora of ways in which outdoor learning and, more specifically, visits to the National Parks and National Nature Reserves can be linked to curriculum. Teachers also see the importance of engaging people in the local communities as a	Encourage teachers to visit the National Parks and National Nature Reserves by offering to visit the schools and to facilitate visits and suggest locations. Invite teachers to open days and to evening events to showcase resources, facilities and

<p>means of minimising urban migration.</p> <p>Recruitment of teachers who are interested and committed to experiential learning is a key to nurturing visits to the National Parks and National Nature Reserves. This is viewed as more important than policies on curricular issues.</p> <p>Information must be available to students that is relevant to them and stimulating.</p> <p>Visits to the NNRs and National Parks can be enhanced by using technology to engage students and them being encouraged to offer presentations on return.</p> <p>In general there is support for ACfE and the spirit supports outdoor education.</p> <p>If ACfE is to be successful then it needs to be coordinated within schools to ensure there is a coherent 'joined up' approach.</p> <p>Arranging cover for classes is important if schools are to visit National Parks and NNRs.</p>	<p>ideas for potential future visits.</p> <p>Encourage head teachers to consider this issue when recruiting teachers, offer to be involved in interview panels and lobby teacher training systems to embed this as a part of teacher training for future years. Offer training courses for current teachers to develop their confidence and understanding of the value of visits to National Parks and National Nature Reserves.</p> <p>Ensure that interpretation boards are of interest and that flyers, worksheets and related interpretations materials are engaging and easily available for students. Consider making these materials available to teachers (via the internet) prior to visits.</p> <p>Work with schools to identify if support is needed for this (such as providing some digital or video cameras and burning a CD or DVD for them to take back to school with them as a record of their visit and as materials for them to use later.</p> <p>Encourage teachers to embed the experiences in the overall school experience through ideas such as the one above.</p> <p>Consider noting this supportive spirit in materials aimed at schools.</p> <p>When visiting schools suggest this. Lobby for this to be required (in a similar way to educational visits coordinators (EVC) in England.</p> <p>In materials for schools and when talking about visits try to highlight the cross disciplinary nature of the visit to encourage teachers to see the links and join together for visits that benefit different subject areas.</p>
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<p>Getting agreement to be 'out of school' can be challenging as has logistical implications and can also illuminate views and assumptions on the value of taking students outdoors.</p> <p>Timetables can be a challenge as requests are normally required from other teachers to gain permission to leave school for a day and miss classes.</p> <p>Timetables can be a challenge for teachers even if they have completed risk assessments.</p> <p>Students who take a bus to school are often disadvantaged and cannot take part in after school activities.</p> <p>Weekend activities are often not feasible as a result of long distances from homes to the school.</p>	<p>Securing funds to support staff from NNRs and National Parks to be seconded in to schools may be a helpful way of developing relevant curriculum for visits.</p> <p>Mapping learning outcomes on various activities (as is currently been undertaken by SNH) can assist in illustrating the benefits of such activities. These need to be based on ACfE and expanded from there so as to show connections to teachers which will enable them to argue for outdoor experiences to be seen as adding rather than detracting from student learning.</p> <p>Depending on the school, teachers involved and the time of year it may be helpful to promote cross curricular aspects of visits which will assist teachers in seeing interdisciplinary benefits of visiting NNRs and National Parks.</p> <p>Suspended timetables can help teachers to take students out for longer periods of time thus making completion of risk assessments 'worth it'.</p> <p>Develop systems to allow for late buses some evenings of the week or lift sharing by parents so that students can take part in after school activities.</p> <p>Work with schools to offer sessions within school times. For example, visits to schools and visits which involve minimum travel from the school to avoid students spending more time in coaches.</p> <p>Explore funding for bus services at weekends.</p>
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Proximity of toilets is often helpful.

Teachers often like to have a coffee shop available if students are occupied with worksheets or similar self directed activities.

Class teaching times of 50 minutes are a challenge.

A collapsed timetable is helpful in permitting staff to arrange visits that span over a longer period of time than a usual teaching period.

Planning visits ahead allows for timetables to be managed, collapsed and for students to gain permission to miss certain classes.

Flexible or collapsed timetables can offer opportunities for teachers to take students outdoors and for project based work. Both of these can occur in the National Nature Reserves and National Parks but can also be part of preparation for visits or work following visits.

It is often easier to use local environments that do not incur costs (for transport) and can also fit into smaller timetable periods.

Create maps which identify nearest free toilets and possibly more details – such as locations of locked toilets, how to get keys etc.

Consider this when developing packages and other opportunities.

Local opportunities can sometimes mean that 50 minutes is long enough for an outdoor experience.

Encourage teachers to use the collapsed timetable to visit the National Parks and National Nature Reserves. Suggest to head teachers that they offer a collapsed timetable to enable visits to take place often.

Timetable visits a long time in advance, try to nurture systems that permit forward planning of this nature. Planning ahead also permits teachers to develop inter disciplinary projects and materials that build up to and follow on from visits thus integrating the learning into the curriculum.

When talking with people involved in education stress the importance of this. Speak with HMle's to get their assistance and support in pushing this logistical issue that has a big impact on teaching and learning quality and flexibility.

Encourage teachers to use local environments as a stepping stone to visits further afield. Consider promoting the use of specific National Nature Reserves to Schools and developing appropriate curriculum materials in consultation with teachers. This may be easier to be conceptually grasped as the topographical areas are smaller than the whole National Parks.

Wet weather alternatives that are linked to the curriculum are helpful.

Information for notice boards as reminders for staff (and students) will be helpful. A small folding brochure is ideal.

Teachers and schools are being contacted by other schools for advice on locations to visit.

Building relationships with teachers is crucial.

Teachers that are passionate and see the value of visits are good ambassadors for the National Parks and National Nature Reserves.

Develop wet weather options when developing packages. Ensure they are clearly linked to core curriculum issues and aims.

Develop materials for this purpose – specifically targeting schools and teachers.

Coordinate with schools to gather contacts and make direct contact to support their visits, send promotional information, offer to give some input on the National Park and National Nature Reserves and other relevant services that it is possible to provide. It may be possible to use some materials that are already created (e.g. lesson plans, photographs) and make them available on the internet to teachers planning visits. Consider creation of a 'searchable' portal or data base of some kind where lesson plans, curriculum linking information, photos, teaching ideas, recent updates from visits and such like could also be posted. For an example see <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/> and search for 'outdoor'.

Consider offering familiarisation visits for teachers which could involve them visiting potential locations or staff going into schools and doing presentations or similar (over lunchtime breaks perhaps).

Encourage and develop mechanisms for teachers already engaging with the National Parks and National Nature Reserves to be ambassadors and to encourage other teachers to organise visits. Consider supporting them to go to conferences, visit other schools and offer CPD courses.

Support from head teachers is crucial and their enthusiasm and understanding is potentially a significant barrier.

Clear information on specifically who to contact in the NNRs and National Parks to provide guidance on where to visit and what to do.

Using award schemes such as those mentioned above can help to 'join up' previously fragmented areas of the curriculum.

Small class sizes help considerably with ratios for such awards and for visits generally.

A balanced approach to the use of awards if favoured by parents as they are aware of the different ways in which such schemes are valued.

Teachers see the benefits of residential experiences and outdoor experiences to be of value. The former is often held in higher regard than the latter.

Develop materials and workshops that are specifically targeted at head teachers. Consider offering input on head teacher CPD courses (e.g. <http://www.scssa.ed.ac.uk/>)

Develop clear information on web pages, consider appointing staff to be responsible for this task and developing relevant materials. Get involved in campaigns such as http://www.outdoor-learning.org/oaw_may09.htm

Develop a 'Yellow pages' for the NNRs and National Parks.

Develop finance to support placements visits into schools to gain an understanding of life in the school and to answer questions, help staff design visits and assist in answering general questions. Likewise, teachers placement visits to the National Parks could be organised.

Continue to support and develop further relationships with organisations such as John Muir Award and the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE).

When possible offer extra staffing to enable visits to continue if ratios are prohibiting.

Encourage and support a variety of awards and encourage schools to offer a variety of options to students when possible.

Lobbying the government, LTS and GTC to include outdoor experiences in the curriculum for teacher training may have long term impacts.

Information on residential opportunities and centres in package formats may be helpful in

encouraging teachers to arrange residential visits to the National Nature Reserves and National Parks.

Securing funding for projects is ideal. However, looking for alternatives such as encouraging teachers to encourage students to undertake projects based on the National Nature Reserves and National Parks may be more economically viable.

4.0 Costs

When considering schools visiting National Nature Reserves and National Parks it is often cost that is assumed to be a barrier. During the visits to schools this was surprisingly low on the list of discussion points and was only brought up in two of the schools. However, cost is a complex issue and one that can be viewed in several ways. Staff in one school explained the challenge of costs of taking students outside in three different ways. First, the cost of covering teaching while they were out of the classroom. Second, the difficulty of asking students for money to pay for aspects of field trips (usually transportation) which sometimes meant that some students were not able to participate. Overarching both of these aspects of costs the biggest challenge is getting permission to run a trip (time cost), one Geography teacher explained,

A few years ago we did a river study and we had support from some rangers for that...we did it two years ago and it was just great but, again, it was costing a lot of money and the head master at that time would not let us continue. I have not tried it again and I think it would be pushing our luck to get another day out of school – I think we are doing well to get one day out in each year.

Some teachers explained how they use the local streams for brief outdoor encounters that are linked to the curriculum and a home economics teacher commented,

The thing about the National Park I think they have lots and lots of activities on for young people but I don't know about them and I don't think it is very well publicised. If something came out to the school and said this is what we have got on, this is the age group it is geared towards and we could get them there I would have my classes along there every other week. What we need is a liaison officer who is actually coming out here to local schools for a start.

There is no doubt that given the degree of autonomy that head teachers have if they are keen on outdoor learning and field trips then they are much more likely to happen. One of the head teachers explained why she has managed to maintain support for the students to go outdoors – both financially and logistically. This support and commitment to outdoor learning no doubt has a big influence on all staff, pupils and the ethos of the school. In discussion with her it emerged that she had taken part in a course at the original Outward Bound School in Wales when she was training to be a teacher. This was an influential experience to her and one to which she attributes her ongoing commitment to outdoor learning. This also explains why she has made Wednesday a flexible day (collapsible timetable – see separate section) which allows more flexibility for taking students outdoors and for project based learning.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Investment in experiences for teachers in training may provide benefits for a long period afterwards and it may be difficult to see immediate benefits.</p> <p>Support, enthusiasm and commitment from head teachers should not be underestimated.</p> <p>Costs of school visits are complex and interact in sophisticated ways. In addition to costs of teachers cover (currently £250 per day) there are also costs associated with transport and specialist skills / instruction that sometimes need to be bought in.</p> <p>Some teachers believe that there are a finite number of days that will be permitted to be 'out of the classroom' by their head teacher.</p> <p>Teachers need information on activities and opportunities to engage with National Parks to be made clear to them through brochures, visits from staff / Rangers and information through electronic sources.</p> <p>Head teachers who are committed and supportive of field trips are likely to find ways to support them – financially and logistically.</p>	<p>Support and encourage (perhaps lobby) for experiences in the National Parks and National Nature Reserves to be offered to teachers as part of their initial and ongoing training.</p> <p>Consider searching for funds to support schools, perhaps creating a database of funding sources that can be made available to teachers. If possible assist teachers in completing applications to bid for such funds. For example the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (www.phf.org.uk)</p> <p>Further work on promoting the value of outdoor education and visits to National Parks and National Nature Reserves (to head teachers and teachers generally) as an organising framework for <i>A Curriculum for Excellence</i>. This can assist in dispelling the myth that the main curriculum links are to Biology and Geography.</p> <p>Consider creating brochures that can be distributed monthly to schools informing them of opportunities in the coming month.</p> <p>Whenever possible arrange visits to Schools to talk about possible links and connections with the National Parks.</p> <p>Consider a short weekly bulletin that can be circulated via GLOW to all teachers in Scotland with information, news and links to further information.</p> <p>Encourage head teachers to visit the Parks, send them information and host events specifically targeted at them.</p>

5.0 Planning Ahead and Packages

Enthusiasm and commitment to school visits and taking the students to National Parks and on field trips was evident in all of the schools in the study. Examples of visits organised and the value of the visits for the students in relation to the curriculum were numerous. However, in order for visits to take place they need to be planned a long time in advance so they fit in with curriculum planning, timetables and allow administrative procedures to be completed. Most off site visits happen in the first term (August to December). This is the time of year when it is much easier to get students out of classes, when more flexibility is possible in the timetable and sufficiently far away from exam times which place additional pressures on staff, marking and disruption to the timetable. This has implications for planning for all involved and it may be advantageous to be aware that school timetables and calendars (which are distributed to parents and students) are normally developed in the spring preceding the academic year which means that planning for a visit to happen in October should happen in the previous April. In school planning terms this is a relatively short timescale, to take the example further, planning a visit in May normally needs to happen the previous April – 13 months beforehand.

In addition to planning visits well in advance teachers also favoured packaged opportunities. Two examples of this are Field Studies Council (FSC) centres (<http://www.field-studies-council.org/outdoorclassroom/index.aspx>) and Archeolink (<http://www.archaeolink.co.uk/>). These are both examples of a sufficiently positive and organised experience that staff consider it worthwhile to undertake paperwork, arrange for teaching cover and transportation, not to mention considerable travel time so that students can visit these places.

When considering outdoor excursions teachers prefer to be able to buy into a package deal where the provider covers risk assessments, leadership, curriculum links and sometimes travel arrangements. This frees up teachers to concentrate on permissions and administrative duties in pre-trip planning and not have to be working beyond their skills training and being vulnerable (in their view) to litigation and professional criticisms (however realistic or not they may be).

The whole concept of planning and taking students on a visit out of school needs support. Teachers are busy and have many pressures placed on them – taking visits is an optional extra and not something required of them (at the time of writing). One Geography teacher explained more,

There is an official from the Royal Highland Education Trust who covers this area and I just find the advice really useful on where to go, who to contact and how it connects to the curriculum. I also think that there are certain types of outdoor visit you could do and a lot of the infrastructure is in place for you. And in this day and age where time is at a premium I will snatch at anything like that, that is going to help and support me otherwise I would have to go out at a weekend and do it privately. I am not going to do that.

The teacher later offered an example of a visit to a farm where a non-alcoholic hand wash was available for Muslim students and other similar attention to detail. Then he went on to say more about the specific challenges in this school,

To give you an idea, to get 44 kids out on a one day visit last week I was planning five weeks in advance and two days before I was still chasing things up to ensure all of the details were in place. You know, in this area there are over 50 languages spoken so we need to get informed consent forms translated in to a lot of languages as many parents do not speak English. That's a lot of work.

A further example of teacher preferences for packages comes from a school with a plethora of opportunities on the door step. However, the students travel to the opposite side of the Park and beyond (over 3 hours) for a week long residential experience with an outdoor activity provider. The rationale for this is entirely pragmatic, the provider takes care of everything and make it easy for the teachers.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Teachers are busy, time is at a premium and there is no requirement for them to take students on visits.</p>	<p>Focus on the benefits of visits and make it was easy as possible for teachers. Make curriculum links for teachers, provide suggestions of places to visit and supporting materials (such as worksheets).</p> <p>Appoint a contact person for each school (an 'account manager') who is responsible for contacting, initiating and supporting visits and feedback.</p>
<p>Needs of a range of students must be accounted for as students come from increasingly diverse backgrounds.</p>	<p>Work with schools to ensure materials are specific and relevant to students. Some materials may need to be translated for different students. Food needs to be account for dietary and religious requirements to make packages appealing. Seconding staff to and from schools will assist in this process.</p>
<p>Package deals are preferred by schools as they ease administration.</p>	<p>Highlight the inclusive nature of opportunities. Ensure that opportunities are inclusive and coordinate with authorities to ensure that all aspects are covered and the relevant paperwork requirements are fulfilled.</p>

<p>Planning ahead is very helpful so that teachers can make connections to a variety of areas of the curriculum and so they can ensure paperwork is complete and minimise disruption in the school.</p> <p>Packages are favoured by teachers and schools.</p>	<p>Highlight legal responsibilities to ensure that staff are not unrealistically concerned regarding litigation and related issues.</p> <p>Encourage providers in the National Parks and NNRs to package materials in a user friendly way for schools so that school teachers can 'buy in' to a package with their classes and have the security of knowing that all of their responsibilities are covered thoroughly. This may be influenced by the DCSF badge scheme which is currently being developed (in England and Wales).</p> <p>Ensure that all staff are aware of these timing issues. Work on long term relationships with schools and expect to be making commitments to supporting visits (in whatever ways are possible and relevant) for several months prior to visits taking place.</p> <p>Whenever possible offer packages and encourage other providers using the National Parks and NNRs to do so. Note that there may be an ideological issue to consider regarding offering packages and then, over time, encouraging schools to be more involved in planning and for packages to become frameworks and support structures for schools to plan their own visits.</p>
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6.0 Special Qualities and Further Opportunities

6.1 What is special?

Many people involved in the study were strong believers in the importance of students knowing why National Parks and National Nature Reserves are special places, what the special qualities are and why it has been designated in a particular way. This belief and the way in which it should be communicated to young people was summarised by a head teacher,

We as teachers can tell students that they are in a National Park, we can talk about it just as we can talk about the death rate in Malawi, some mathematical formula or a chemical reaction ... we are just teachers. I think what is needed is more than that, I think National Park people need to come up with some way of capturing the imagination, I don't think that is what we can do. We try and do it for all the usual stuff, the mundane stuff. To do it for the National Park, I don't think we have the people for that. Bringing people in is as important as taking people out. What we need, I think, is for those people in power in the Parks to make a sales pitch, to say 'look what's on offer' and how can we make sure it is on offer for future generations to come.

This view is one which is interesting to contrast with student perspectives. From the student groups involved in this study only one student could name both of the National Parks in Scotland. Most students struggled to name one of the National Parks and none of the students could explain why the National Park areas had been given such a designation. None of the students were aware of National Nature Reserves.

Further discussions raised interesting points and questions regarding the wisdom of 'promoting' the parks and the message this sends to school children. One obvious example is that schools in Scotland that are outside the Park boundaries are often surrounded by stunning countryside that can be used in stimulating ways for educational purposes which alleviates pressures on National Park resources. Perhaps more importantly, driving distances to visit parks (and the hidden curriculum that it promotes – the subtle things that people learn but are not openly stated or intended) may be counterproductive in the long term and send a message to students of the importance of caring for the National Parks but not for their local environment. Furthermore, one plausible interpretation might be that the best (and only?) place to partake in healthy outdoor activities is inside the National Park boundaries thus overlooking the local environment. Conceptualising the National Parks as having porous boundaries was suggested as a helpful way of thinking about this issue.

6.2 Further Afield

In addition to students knowing about National Parks and National Nature Reserves in some schools there was mention of linking to opportunities beyond. This distilled in to three main views. First, that students should have local experiences to build up to visiting the National Parks. Second, that

students should visit the National Parks for a 'big experience' and then on return to their home be encouraged to visit local parks and spend time outdoors. Third, that both of the above options can and should encourage a sense of wonder and intrigue that can lead to further opportunities (often further afield).

An example of these kinds of experiences was developed by one of the teachers who described himself as having become 'jaded' a few years ago was given a CPD opportunity which he spent sailing on the west coast of Scotland with other teachers and various people involved in education and learning (both formal and informal). Through this experience he became hugely enthusiastic, was invited to be a trustee of a newly formed trust (Spey Grian: <http://www.speygrian.org.uk/>) committed to outdoor learning. He now organises the 'Classroom at Sea' (as it is known to teachers) and the 'Scottish Sailing Adventure' (as it is known to students) for ten students at the school each year.

Subsequently he has visited Alaska (through the Polar Pairs programme: <http://www.livingearth.org.uk/>) on an exchange to learn more about a community development programme in the area. The relevance of these visits to the Scottish National Parks is that schools often see visits to the Parks as part of a spectrum of opportunities for students that are both curricular and extra curricular, local and further afield. These are complementary and supporting of visits to parks rather than competitive. Put another way, these might be conceptualised as an abundance model rather than a scarcity approach to students spending time out of doors.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Opportunities that occur outside the National Parks and National Nature Reserves might usefully be conceptualised as complementary rather than competitive.</p>	<p>Consider developing partnerships and relationships with organisations such as those mentioned above (and others) to identify ways of working together, sharing good practices and passing on ideas between organisations of ways to encourage teachers to use multiple providers (perhaps on a rotational basis).</p>

Clear messages and information on the special qualities of the National Parks.

The idea that National Parks should be appreciated by all people and that all schools should visit them is contested by some people.

Educational messages promoted by encouraging schools to drive long distances to visit a 'special place' may be counterproductive.

CPD opportunities, sabbaticals and secondments can provide opportunities for teachers to become inspired or re-inspired regarding the value of outdoor experiences.

Make clear statements in marketing materials to this effect. Ensure marketing materials are varied and differentiated for different audiences.

<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/publications/results.php?publicationID=181>

Consider focusing the majority of effort on schools that are relatively close to the National Parks (say within a 1-2 hour drive).

Review materials and assumptions in discussions on an ongoing basis regarding the educational logic and messages.

While financing sabbaticals and secondments may be unrealistic it may be possible to provide information on possible funding sources, support applications and suggest possible ways of using sabbatical time. It may also be possible to set up networks of support for those who have undertaken sabbaticals to support others, offer mentoring type schemes and workshops as CPD (e.g. <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>).

7.0 Spoiled for Choice

Many people involved in the study were quick to point out what a beautiful area the schools are located in and how there is so much potential to learn out of doors. In the urban schools this also applied as the benefits of local parks, gardens, museums and galleries were pointed out enthusiastically. In some of the schools the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) expeditions can take place from the school without requiring any transport. However, staff encourage students to plan expeditions further afield so that students explore other areas that they may not be familiar with. One French teacher responsible for the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) explained the curriculum links,

The reason I got involved first of all, *Curriculum for excellence*, is a very new thing that has come out in the last two to three years but the reason I got involved, six years ago is because I felt, if you look at the four capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence*, each of those four seems to be catered for by the Duke of Edinburgh Award. In terms of giving pupils confidence, developing pupils leadership skills, communication skills, giving pupils a chance to get involved in their local community. All of those skills seemed to me to be encapsulated by the DofE award to a certain extent.

A History and Archaeology teacher described how he took a group of students to the Edinburgh fringe festival each year for a day. During the day they see four or five shows, running around between them. This illustrates how teachers have a lot of choice regarding opportunities for out of classroom visits and in some respects the National Nature Reserves and National Parks are in competition with these other options. One of the rationales for the visit was explained,

I like to take them into an adult audience, I let them sit where they want to sit and they become part of the adult world and they have to behave in a responsible way. I think it is so beneficial as opposed to these groups of kids and another group of kids and you have 2,000 kids together watching a piece of theatre that is aimed at children. I don't think it is particularly useful.

This is an exception to the other discussions and comments with staff who seemed to prefer a 'packaged' experience. This teacher's philosophy was about exposing students to experiences that were concerned with their broader education and in doing so was happy to plan, prepare and organise the visit. This is worth consideration by the National Nature Reserves / National Parks as they may be able to attract teachers to bring students to events taking place in the National Nature Reserves and National Parks for events that involve arts, theatre, poetry, creativity and well being.

Through these and similar examples it became clear that for most schools there is a great deal of choice. Lots of opportunities present themselves and teachers are faced with choices regarding which, if any, to follow up.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Some staff prefer to put together excursions and visits themselves rather than packages so that students have to interact with the 'adult world'.</p> <p>Some staff may be interested in visiting the National Parks and National Nature Reserves to engage with local culture such as listening to music, seeing plays and local arts and crafts.</p> <p>Staff are keen to encourage students in the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) scheme and the John Muir Award.</p>	<p>Consider offering opportunities for this to happen and beware of assumptions regarding what schools 'want' or 'need'.</p> <p>In promotional materials directed at teachers remember to include the breadth and depth of opportunities to engage and not only those outdoors.</p> <p>Strengthen links with schools via the Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) scheme and offer ideas and suggestions for opportunities within the National Park and NNRs for undertaking aspects of the Award.</p> <p>Encouraging and supporting Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) students may require a re-focus on some promotional materials to accommodate students who are not particularly interested (initially) in the National Park or NNR of natural history generally.</p>

8.0 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In order to encourage teachers to visit the National Nature Reserves and National Parks they are keen to get some CPD (continuing professional development) opportunities that involve going to sites that would be good for teaching specific subjects – links to historical and archaeological curriculum, geology, landscape and geographical links, personal, social responsibility, health education, drama and media, science, creativity and enterprise, art and design. In smaller schools combining these curriculum areas into one visit makes justifying a visit much easier. A parent explained,

Raising awareness, what is in the park already. Do not presume that everyone knows, what is going on, what good practice is there, what has been tried and is successful, what hasn't and yes, a bit of support on funding – what is available and how do we go about applying for it.

The other aspect of CPD that the schools were keen on is creating some time so they can do some planning – create time so staff can liaise with each other, plan projects that they could do together that worked across subject areas. This process would ideally involve some support for applying to grants as many teachers don't have the skills and rarely have the time to complete forms. A range of views were expressed from staff regarding the best timing of training courses – some indicated they need to be coordinated with the school to coincide with CPD days while others viewed this as something that staff could undertake at weekends in their own time. Some helpful suggestions are summarised by a PE teacher,

If we could have a day of CPD for all staff it would be helpful to enthuse staff – if we could get a day out of doors with the John Muir Award officer rather than the usual CPD days that involve sitting in presentations. It could focus on local resources and expertise. I think it would be good too as it would give a perspective on what the National Park is about – many of the staff have lived here all of their life and then suddenly it became a park and most people do not know why.

The easy argument is to say 'risk assessment for taking kids out' or the staff ratio for taking 1:20 out, there are really easy arguments and that's why we are moving towards trying to get this flexibility, where we want to be able to say, every week we have an opportunity to go out.

One of the things we are starting to tap into is the Ranger Service and the RSPB. All we have to do is get them there and then there are projects for them to do. One organisation offered to leave conservation type jobs back for the students to do if it is going to be a regular thing. For example, every year the school can dig the dragonfly pits which would be fantastic and is exactly the kind of thing we need to develop which comes from having great contacts, great relationships and a really clear set programme of work, a clear understanding of what departments do, what and how it ties in. It would be helpful to have a data base of organisations and jobs that need to be done so schools could tap into

partner organisations and do useful work that linked to curriculum and helped the organisations.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Teachers are keen to be involved in CPD opportunities.</p>	<p>Create lots of opportunities for CPD – visiting schools, circulating information and flyers about opportunities and events.</p>
<p>It is unclear as to how many teachers will use their own time (e.g. weekends) for CPD opportunities.</p>	<p>Timing of CPD opportunities may prove crucial. Liaising with education authorities and schools to plan times and locations will enhance uptake.</p>
<p>Staff need time and support to plan projects.</p>	<p>If staff from the National Nature Reserves and National Parks can be seconded in to schools they can support teachers to plan and implement outdoor learning and provide the encouragement needed.</p>
<p>CPD opportunities that involve visits to potential sites for visits will be welcomed.</p>	<p>Whenever possible coordinate with schools to offer CPD opportunities. Make it easy by providing transport, clear information on what to wear and what will be taking place and ensure that teachers are given relevant materials and shown facilities (such as lockers to leave bags in, wet weather alternatives, gift shops and interpretive materials).</p> <p>When it is not possible to take teachers in to National Parks and National Nature Reserves for CPD offer to go to the schools with materials, slide shows, maps and any other relevant materials to give a detailed picture covering relevant issues and questions from their perspective. Follow up from such visits can involve letters, e mails, phone calls and sending of monthly bulletins of 'what is happening in the National Park and National Nature Reserves' that may be relevant to them.</p>

9.0 Relationships

Throughout visits to schools and conversations with the various stakeholders it was clear that relationships are crucial to schools visiting National Nature Reserves and National Parks. Therefore it is important that it is clear who should be contacted for information and advice on where to visit or activities that are going on. One teacher described their experience in the past of visiting an English National Park suggesting that the National Nature Reserves and Scottish National Parks should be able to offer something similar,

...so I thought I could maybe take a mini bus down to that Park and so I would phone up and within a day a pack of material would arrive – here are all the activities that are available in the Park, whether it be for O grade, highers ... and the name of the person who would be available on that day to show me around and to assist me during a visit. Basically that would be a ranger. A ranger who would have that specific expertise not just in education but in the specific courses, they would know what the O grade Geography course was about and that was different from the GCE Geography course – but they knew about that as well. ... They had an education officer, I am not sure about who the education person is now ... I forget her name.

While this is a big job, there is no doubt from the comments from teachers in this school (and others) that this kind of support will make a big difference and encourage teachers to bring students to the Parks. A similar and related point regarding the focus of the Park was made,

I read the magazine that comes through the door at home and when you read it there is nothing in it about youth. You read every section and it is about what people are doing, what the community are doing, it's what local businesses are doing but I could not find the word youth anywhere in it. Apart from the funding aspect of it, that kind of thing does not seem to be happening – there is not much interest or focus on young people.

How accurate this comment is does not matter – the point is that this is the perception of some teachers. This is an important point as the message that is sent to young people regarding their involvement, importance and place in the park could be much more positive through some minor and no- or low-cost actions. Perhaps this aspect could be enhanced through associated organisations such as the John Muir Award and The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) scheme.

One suggestion is to create a data base of information so that it is easy to know who to contact, for what issues. The example given was for information on who were providing different activities, who to contact in the Park staff to answer different questions and details of people and organisations who offer free services. A 'yellow pages' for the National Park. Likewise, it may be helpful for National Parks to have databases of key contacts in schools who are 'champions' for outdoor education (the equivalent of educational visits coordinators in England and Wales). Training events could borrow from curriculum for educational visits coordinator trainings currently available.

Key Themes and Issues	Implications for Practice
<p>Having a data base of organisations that can be searched by different criteria is considered to be desirable.</p>	<p>Check thoroughly what is currently available before creating new resources. Consider directing people to sites such as http://www.highland.gov.uk/learningher/e/communitylearning/outdooreducation/ and http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/takinglearningoutdoors/</p>
<p>Sharing of information may be more important than creating new information and resources. Unclear on who to contact with questions about the National Nature Reserves and National Parks.</p>	<p>Consider creating a leaflet which details useful web sites that teachers can pin on their notice boards as reminders.</p> <p>Support and encourage CPD days for teachers, prospective teachers, parents and others associated with schools. Make this information very clear on the web sites. Consider a 'yellow pages' for the National Park and National Nature Reserves specifically aimed at Schools and Youth Groups giving clear contacts details for different areas, people, aspects of planning.</p>
<p>Specialist knowledge of curricula will be helpful in planning and arranging visits. Link to work currently being undertaken on behalf of SNH by Creative STAR learning company.</p>	<p>Consider staff secondments to schools and from schools (however short). This will help to build knowledge of curricula but also relationships and networks.</p> <p>Consider appointing a specialist with curricula knowledge.</p>
<p>Bridging the relationships between organisations and students in schools is important and welcome.</p>	<p>Encourage staff to visit schools, plan ahead to arrange such visits and work on building relationships with staff in schools. Appoint schools liaison officers.</p>

10.0 Concluding Comments

This case study identifies eight main themes which emerged from visits to six schools. The majority of teachers are convinced of the value of taking students outdoors and are keen to support, within reason, field trips, residential stays and visits to National Parks and National Nature Reserves. It is much easier for teachers to justify visits to National Parks and NNRs if they can demonstrate clear curriculum links. It is also helpful to teachers if they have to complete minimum paperwork to gain permissions. This is one obvious area where National Parks and NNRs can encourage visits if they can lobby and work with Local Authorities to streamline processes and make it as easy as possible for teachers.

Conceptual issues were also identified as needing further attention which may assist in clarifying and informing policies of the National Parks and National Nature Reserves. Exploration of the ideal and the purposes may be helpful in resolving some of the issues identified in section six above.

It is helpful if clear information is available on who to contact when planning a visit and on different facilities available during a visit – such as toilets, places to leave bags, coffee shops and wet weather alternatives. If teachers are going to travel significant distances for field trips stronger justifications are normally required which often means them making arguments regarding why places are “special” and worth the journey and time.

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