



Outdoor education

Aspects of good practice

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Introduction

1. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and additional inspectors (AI) from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) were commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to undertake an evaluation of the personal development aspects of outdoor education, with specific focus on the work of outdoor education centres (referred to as centres in this document). In particular, the evaluation sought to identify good practice and the unique contribution made by outdoor education to enhancing young people's personal and social development (PSD).

2. Outdoor education (OE) is a general term used to embrace different types of activity undertaken by primary and secondary students in a range of contexts: outdoor and residential visits; field work; outdoor and adventurous activities; outdoor pursuits; and 'outward bound' activities. This report concentrates on the opportunities provided for students of age 9–16 years in outdoor education, linked to aspects of the National Curriculum in physical education (PE).

3. The evidence base for this report includes section 10 inspections of primary and secondary schools carried out during the school years 2001/02 and 2002/03, and reports by HMI on physical education published since 1999. These reports yielded background evidence on the work of students across the ability range and in a variety of settings: in school grounds; off-site in the locality; on daily visits to outdoor activity centres; and sometimes during a residential visit. Additionally, reflecting the focus of the inspection, 15 outdoor education centres were visited to look at the quality and range of opportunities available to students and to evaluate the impact of the activities on their learning. In gathering this evidence, HMI and AI held discussions with heads of centre and staff from centres and schools. They also interviewed students, observed 62 preparatory and follow-up lessons and read documentation including curriculum plans and evaluations.

Main findings

- ❑ Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students' physical, personal and social education. However, not all students in schools benefit from such opportunities.
- ❑ The quality of teaching in outdoor education in school-based settings and in centres is generally good. Weaker teaching focuses on the activity itself with insufficient attention given to the way the activity contributes to students' learning. In school-based settings, this is often due to limitations in accommodation and resources but also to teachers' insecurities in subject knowledge and fears of litigation.
- ❑ The quality of teaching in centres is good or better in 80% of sessions. In 32% of sessions it is very good. Factors contributing to good-quality teaching include small group size, teachers' specialist knowledge and their ability to adapt tasks to provide an appropriate challenge for students.
- ❑ The majority of centres provide good opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment. However, insufficient use is made of these and other assessments to examine the effects or outcomes of students' experiences on the formation of attitudes and values over the longer term.
- ❑ In the majority of cases, teachers accompanying groups on courses play a supporting role in sessions. In some cases, however, the school teachers keep to general supervisory duties and do not exploit the opportunities to use their skills and to develop them still further when working with specialist teachers.
- ❑ Students generally make good progress in outdoor education, both at school and outdoor centres. They develop their physical skills in new and challenging situations as well as exercising important social skills such as teamwork and leadership.
- ❑ Students' attitudes and behaviour during outdoor and adventurous activities and outdoor education activities are good and often exemplary, with mature responses to challenging situations.
- ❑ In most cases, school and outdoor centre staff work closely to plan a programme with clear objectives that provide a purpose for each activity. However, the use of residential courses as part of a coherent scheme of work for outdoor education and personal and social education, with procedures for assessing and recording students' work, is rare.
- ❑ Leadership and management are good or better in over half the centres and at least satisfactory in the large majority. The majority of centres have a range of systems for evaluating the range of provision and various benefits for students, although few assess the impact of provision on improving students' attitudes and achievements.
- ❑ The quality of accommodation and resources is generally good in the majority of centres and is often very good. This is a key feature in the success of centres

and students benefit significantly from the opportunity to learn in different settings using a wide range of specialist resources.

Points for action

- To achieve further improvements in provision for outdoor education, **schools** and **centres** should:
 - develop the systems for evaluating the impact of provision on improving students' attitudes and achievements
 - make better use of assessment data, including students' self-assessments, to seek evidence of students' learning, and the formation of attitudes and values over the longer term
 - improve the quality of teaching still further by ensuring all teaching takes sufficient account of students' responses and teachers' intervention guides their learning
 - ensure all teachers accompanying groups on courses can develop their skills and knowledge when working with specialist teachers
 - improve programme planning to ensure that students' residential experiences support their future work in the school curriculum
 - ensure the benefits of outdoor education can be experienced by all students.

Evaluation of provision

Quality of teaching

4. The quality of teaching in outdoor education in school-based settings and centres is generally good. The occasional unsatisfactory teaching focuses on the activity with insufficient attention to students' learning. Consequently students' make insufficient progress. Good and very good teaching in outdoor education shares the same general characteristics as teaching in normal classrooms, but some of these are particularly important, including:

- clear, demanding but realistic expectations of students of all ages
- teaching that ensures students take responsibility for their work and evaluate it
- crossing subject boundaries to broaden students' understanding
- relating activities to specific learning outcomes
- engaging with students to check they understand what is required of them
- focused feedback that helps students move forward
- support for students but also high levels of encouragement for them to be independent learners
- clear attention to safety and risk management
- end of session focus on 'how it went and why?'

5. These features are often found in lessons taught by enthusiastic teachers with up-to-date specialist knowledge of outdoor education and a keen interest in using the content and outcomes of activities as a means of developing social attitudes, team work and self-motivation. Such teaching ensures that students engage in a range of tasks that make increasing demands on them, as in Example 1.

Example 1

The teacher is lively and communicative as she challenges students over their map-reading skills in a school-based Year 11 lesson. She questions individuals and the whole group to determine their understanding of key words to describe terrain and other features that influence expedition preparations. As groups discuss concave and convex features of map contour lines, the teacher responds to their uncertainties by asking them to visualise the terrain and describe how it would influence the route to be walked when carrying

backpacks. Individuals are selected to lead route-planning tasks and others are given responsibility for specific jobs such as reading compass bearings and identifying local features. The skilful intervention of the teacher maintains the pace of the lesson and ensures the activity supports the development of students' expedition planning skills and awareness of safety, as well as effectively engaging them in teamwork.

6. In outdoor education lessons taught in school-based settings, however, less experienced teachers tend to opt for activities offering lower levels of challenge which are well within the capacity of students. This is often due to the limitations of accommodation and resources and insecurities in subject knowledge. For some of these teachers it can also be attributed to a lack of understanding about good practice in health and safety, concerns about taking risks and a fear of litigation.

7. The quality of teaching in centres is good or better in 80% of sessions. In 32% of sessions it is very good. The best sessions are characterised by the expert contributions of specialist teachers who are secure in their judgements about how far students might be expected to take the initiative and make independent decisions in challenging situations. They are able to give students constructive feedback based on accurate observations of their responses and also create a real sense of adventure for all students, regardless of their ability. Examples 2 and 3 show lessons with these features.

Example 2

Inside a cave, Year 10 students are given a range of sensory experiences – darkness, cold, wet, enclosed spaces – as they are led, and lead each other, through a series of chambers and caverns. The use of specialist equipment, helmets, lamps, waterproof clothing and Wellingtons emphasises the special nature of the journey and potential risks. The teacher asks questions about the stalactites and stalagmites and about the way the cave has been formed. As they go deeper into the cavern, they are encouraged to help each other manoeuvre through narrow spaces and deep running water. The teacher uses specific situations to develop students' responsibility for their personal safety and that of others. For most, this is a memorable journey, particularly as they walk under a waterfall, catching their breath as they feel the chill of the icy water.

Example 3

An introductory session on climbing started at the centre, where Year 9 pupils practised putting on their harnesses and learned about general safety and the purpose of the climb to follow. The teacher made it very clear that to operate well as climbers the personal and social development objectives of co-operation, good humour, teamwork, responsibility, and effort were basic requirements for everyone. As they travelled to the quarry face, pupils in the group were excited and good humoured as they talked about the challenge that lay ahead. During the final walk to the rock face the teachers checked students' recall about safety using quick-fire open and

closed questions and students were quick to show they had listened and knew the expectations. At the rock face, an ideal south facing outcrop with 10-15 metre climbs, the centre teacher set up ropes expertly and quickly whilst students scrambled and traversed with the second teacher. Working as groups of four, rotating in role (climb, belay, assist belay, guide route), each student tried four routes of increasing degrees of difficulty. Sensitive and supportive teaching ensured good teamwork and improvements in climbing technique. Everyone climbed two or three routes and learned how to belay. They discussed the difficulties most of them experienced when being lowered down after the climb, an activity which tested their trust as they leaned away from the rock face. This moment of 'leaning out', 'touching the karabiner' and the 'rhythm of belaying' were used by students to illustrate strengths and weakness during their review of the session.

8. Pupils in primary schools also enjoy opportunities to learn and consolidate new physical skills in activities rarely experienced by the majority of students in schools. Example 4 highlights the acquisition of new skills in a challenging context.

Example 4

As Year 6 pupils prepared themselves for canoeing they showed a good awareness of how to handle the specialist equipment such as waterproofs, helmets and buoyancy aids, and how they should be used correctly. They listened carefully to safety instructions, as demonstrated by the way they used the paddle to slide into the canoe, applying the 'do's, don'ts and why' approaches outlined by the teacher. They completed a range of paddling and manoeuvring exercises using their newly-acquired understanding of how to paddle forwards, backwards and in circles. As they gained confidence, most students moved more quickly and changed direction with ease. All pupils made very good progress in performing basic paddling skills in this new activity and confidently explained why they had to paddle in a specific way.

9. From the moment students arrive at a centre they are faced with high expectations for them to take responsibility and to show improvement. This ethos is usually introduced as part of the introduction and welcome sessions, which set out the work of the centre, the purposes of the visits and the rules, regulations and behavioural expectations of community living. During one visit, noticeable improvement was observed in the cleanliness and tidiness of the dormitory. Following inspection each morning, dormitories were given scores out of ten for overall appearance and, from a low start in some cases, students began to work harder and encouraged a recalcitrant minority. A clear 'feel-good' factor had developed.

10. Students generally make good progress in outdoor education, both at school and outdoor centres. Their achievement is good or better in almost four fifths of the centres visited. They make most progress in sessions where they are challenged through constructive feedback from teachers and are given a range of opportunities

for listening and imitating behaviour, asking questions, observing, exploring and applying skills in different contexts. Students also enjoy outdoor education sessions because they often experience more challenging activities, supported by specialist resources and teaching through different programmes.

11. The best teaching also shows a flexibility that enables teachers to exploit opportunities as they arise. For example, during a mountain walk, time was taken to discuss conservation issues and national policies for the countryside, or to reflect on events to illustrate how survival relies very much on working together as a team. This is crucial as centres work towards a sensible balance between the attainment of outdoor education objectives and those relating to citizenship and students' personal and social development.

12. As well as developing performance skills, a high priority for many outdoor education courses is to use the activity or environment to challenge students to think about the way they work and their attitude to it. Courses in outdoor education most notably contribute to students' personal and social development, because they allow them to respond to challenges and to show how they:

- take responsibility, co-operate with others and work effectively as a team
- understand rules and regulations
- engage in decision-making and apply their problem-solving skills
- assess and manage risk
- take the initiative and lead others during an activity.

Example 5 shows how these features emerge in a lesson.

Example 5

Year 11 boys are grappling with the challenge presented by the 'spider's web', involving a rope obstacle suspended from the ceiling. They work together effectively, listening to each other's solutions and agreeing a way to enable them to pass through the spider's web safely. As they progress with the task, the gains made in knowledge and understanding about the need for precision and control of movements and the importance of analysing, planning and selecting approaches to solving problems are accompanied by clear improvements in teamwork, co-operation and self-confidence. At different times during the activity, individual students adopt a leadership role by encouraging the group to take a particular decision and guiding them through the task.

13. Students on residential courses are given opportunities to develop broader personal and social skills. For many students, residential courses provide opportunities to form positive relationships with centre staff, their own teachers and peers, learning to be both self-aware and self-critical, and to seek and accept advice. This is because they are able to work on sustained activities in closely monitored

environments where they can reflect on their decisions and their contributions to group tasks, and develop good work habits.

14. In most centres, teachers work with small groups of students and this is a significant factor helping teachers get to know students and establish positive relationships. The most successful teachers have an excellent ability to relate well to the students, combining good humour and patience with high expectations of students' behaviour and application. Centre teachers rely on schools to provide information about students' capabilities but this is often very general. However, working with small groups helps teachers to adapt content quickly to meet the identified range of students' different needs. They also make effective use of their observations and assessments of students' responses to provide well-judged feedback.

15. In a minority of sessions, students made limited progress because tasks were not adapted to take sufficient account of students' responses and teachers did not intervene to take opportunities to guide students' progress.

16. During residential courses, centre staff encourage individuals to set their own targets specifically related to their needs rather than compare themselves with others in the group. Outdoor education also enables students to work with new people in their own and other year groups, and occasionally students from other schools.

17. Students' involvement in self-assessment is a good feature in most centres. The majority of residential courses require students to complete a record of achievement (RoA), which involves setting three achievable aims for the week. At best these tackle a combination of subject and personal and social development areas, such as: 'to learn to tie the ropes and to do a figure of eight knot; to help someone; and to work with others, not just my mates'. Each evening students are given an opportunity to reflect on the day's experiences and the extent to which they have met their targets. However, where target setting and evaluation are not supervised, the quality of targets and subsequent evaluations are often too general to be of any real value. Some centres have also designed an electronic RoA for students who may not be able to produce a written one of high quality. This is a simple template which students can fill in. One centre is also developing the use of voice recognition packages using the expertise of the local university.

18. Only a minority of centres and schools work together to assess and record systematically students' achievement during residential courses, or their impact on learning, attainment and personal development.

19. The majority of centres also conduct a post-course review, which asks students to think about the activities they have experienced, but often ignores what they have learnt. Consequently most students recall aspects of their behaviour and the effort they put in to their participation. Students' comments are rarely carefully monitored by staff and consequently reviews often fail to examine the effects or outcomes of students' experiences or seek evidence of longer term and sustained influences on attitude and value formation.

20. Some centres are usefully developing a set of criteria concerned with specific elements of personal and social development, such as relationships and taking responsibility. For each of these elements, criteria are assigned to levels that indicate the range of achievement that might be expected at a particular key stage.

21. Most centres are also making increasingly good use of information and communication technology (ICT) and students' ICT skills, for example by recording their experiences using a digital camera and using images and other information to prepare and send a newsletter back to the school website. Other students develop their skills in using the internet to find out information about the terrain they would be walking.

22. The role and effectiveness of school teaching staff accompanying groups on residential courses varies according to the relationship between the centre and the school and the confidence of individual teachers. In the majority of cases where school teachers have a long-standing relationship with the centre, they play a supporting role in lessons, often helping individual students. In some cases, however, school teachers keep to general supervisory duties and do not exploit the opportunities to use their skills and to develop them further when working with specialist outdoor education teachers.

Curriculum provision

23. Outdoor education continues to thrive in those schools where headteachers or individual enthusiasts provide leadership and a vision that promotes a well-balanced PE curriculum and outdoors off-site, day or residential experience as part of curriculum extension and enrichment. They recognise the importance of outdoor education experiences in giving depth to the curriculum and to the development of students' personal and social development.

24. Students' participation in a range of activities enables them to develop skills, including their ability to:

- orientate maps and read compasses, and complete an orienteering course
- plan and navigate mountain walks, making important decisions about terrain and weather
- describe and discuss changing climates, renewable resources and energy consumption using correct vocabulary
- apply existing skills to new and more challenging activities such as rock climbing, abseiling and gorge walking
- work safely and responsibly with specialist equipment in different challenging contexts.

25. Objectives for outdoor education often correspond with the content of subjects of the National Curriculum. For example, canoeing and climbing techniques relate to

physical education, pond analysis to science and knowledge about settlements to geography. At best, outdoor education is part of a well-structured programme designed for a specific group of students, as illustrated in Example 6.

Example 6

Outdoor education is offered as a non-examination option in Years 10 and 11. There are currently 127 students taking the course, which is organised into a series of modules providing good opportunities for students to undertake a variety of progressively challenging activities, such as climbing, canoeing and problem solving. Residential opportunities are planned effectively to develop students' school-based experiences and ensure they have opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in challenging environments. A clear set of objectives is agreed with students and all activities focus on these, providing a good sense of direction, purpose, coherence and consistency to the course. Each module is assessed and students' achievement is used to plan new learning.

26. Students studying for GCSE coursework, such as the Countryside Stewardship Course, use centres as work-related environments in order to develop their skills in areas such as conservation. For example, a small group of Year 10 pupils working at their local centre assisted centre staff working on a small area of mainly silver birch woodland on the edge of a wide drive. When describing their work, pupils in this diligent group of young conservationists were able to explain in detail the nature of their work using correct vocabulary.

27. Others use their outdoor experiences to meet part of requirements of award schemes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

28. Some schools use additional funding from a range of national and local initiatives to improve opportunities for outdoor education and provide a more balanced curriculum that caters for students of all abilities. Example 7 illustrates how some schools in Cornwall are making the most of their location close to the sea and countryside, where skills in outdoor education are particularly relevant. These schools are also working closely with the LEA and other community providers to ensure effective use of local expertise and resources.

Example 7

All pupils have opportunities to go sailing, and there is residential experience for all pupils in Years 7 and 8. A trailblazer scheme for low attainers is linked to key skills. This means that pupils are becoming self-reliant, and leaders are also emerging. Pupils are gaining experience in individual outdoor activities such as sailing, canoeing, rock climbing and orienteering, and at a local adventure centre pupils have worked in groups on team-building activities and outdoor challenges, which require co-operation and leadership skills. The pupils are encouraged to join local sailing, canoeing and climbing clubs. Pupils gain relevant accreditation in a range of activities.

29. Schools work closely with the LEA and many partners in the provision of residential experiences and in running a range of courses; many students are actively involved in tuition. Assistance is received from the local sailing and adventure centres, police officers and the Royal Naval Air Station. Good links are also being established with higher education establishments that offer outdoor pursuits.

30. In some cases, as in Example 8, schools ensure that all students in a specific year benefit from a residential experience.

Example 8

In one secondary school in the south west, all Year 8 students have a short residential experience. This includes a good balance of curriculum extension activities and outdoor pursuits. All students undertake climbing, caving and some water sports. They also use the locality to study aspects of local history, design and technology and the environment. For example, the local Roman iron workings are explored as a settlement and the techniques of extracting iron are replicated. The school recognises the pastoral significance of the residential experience and all tutors stay at the centre with their tutor groups. The improvement in relationships is evident and often remains throughout a student's school life. The students' families recognise that the students are far more independent on their return and a spirit of co-operation is much more evident.

31. Despite these positive examples, outdoor education remains a minority area in the physical education curriculum of most secondary schools.

32. The quality of curriculum opportunities in centres was judged to be good in all centres and very good in a third. These courses clearly make an important contribution to a range of students' physical and social skills. Residential visits, in particular, have a positive impact on many young people.

33. Many students working in centres enjoy new challenges and take on responsibilities in unfamiliar locations. For example, pitching a tent, cooking their own meals and navigating a mountain walk are new experiences for many students, and ones which contribute to their personal and social development. In most instances, students demonstrate mature responses to new and changing situations, as in Examples 9 and 10.

Example 9

During a late night mountain walk, Year 9 students setting out for the summit expressed some apprehension about the darkness and the possibility of getting lost. As they ascended the grassy path towards the summit they reassured each other during team stops and encouraged those at the back to set the pace so that 'we can keep together'. During these team stops discussions took place about the stars, with teachers pointing out the plough and the planet Mars in

the south east. Discussion moved on to the distant lights of surrounding towns and the stunning views. Apprehension had given way to fascination that so much could be seen in the dark.

Example 10

During a mountain walk, Year 7 pupils kept a steady pace and encouraged each other to keep together on their first real mountain experience. The fierce gusts of wind and flurries of snow as the group ascended the footpath on the top edge of the steep escarpment left no-one in doubt that this was a challenging walk.

34. As well as recognising their intrinsic benefits, schools often use residential and off-site experiences to compensate for gaps in curriculum provision, for example the lack of outdoor education in PE or personal and social development programmes. They also use them to promote health, fitness and a fulfilling use of leisure time. Where schools offer such experiences they expect centres to offer specialist courses reflecting their distinct identity. Most do this successfully by offering a range of day-time and residential experiences. For example, one centre offered courses linked to GCSE and A-level PE coursework; mountain walking opportunities, which included map reading, geology, geography and ecology; camping and expeditions linked with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award; canoeing and kayaking; climbing and abseiling, including using ropes, climbing indoor and outdoor rock faces; caving, exploring the limestone caves and learning about the geomorphology of the cave environment; mountain biking as a means of exploring the local hills and mountains; and additional activities, including night walks, orienteering, problem-solving, treasure hunts, bowling, swimming or visits to local towns.

35. In this centre, the standard programme varied in length (two, five or seven days) and students worked in small groups following different activities for about one day each, often linked together in an arrangement that allows everyone to try each activity. Centres also offer flexibility and schools can negotiate changes to suit the needs of specific groups, for example a more sophisticated climbing course or snowboarding when weather permits.

36. An important feature of good outdoor education programmes is that they encourage schools to become more inclusive by improving the access of all students to new curricular activities that suit their varying needs. For example, some schools consider that outdoor education is uniquely placed to focus on aspects of personal development and citizenship for their disaffected students and therefore offer them residential courses, as outlined in Example 11.

Example 11

A secondary school reviewed its Key Stage 4 curriculum to determine whether it is meeting the needs of all its pupils. The review demonstrated that the curriculum offered to the least able students was far too academic and was a factor in their disaffection and poor attendance. Working with the local further education college, the school established a number of link courses for students for one or two days each week. The school identified the students who might benefit from such a programme, using recognised

characteristics of disaffected students, who were often: working on their own; in trouble in lessons; lacking social skills; low attainers (mostly boys); and irregular or very poor attenders. The students and their parents were interviewed prior to being allocated a place on the programme.

At the start of the Year 10 programme, the students spent five days at an outdoor education centre. Boys and girls attended different centres. Throughout their time at the centre, the programme focused on team building activities. The students were expected to play an active part in all the activities and in the domestic duties: the latter were interesting and new experiences for many. The outdoor activities increasingly called upon them to rely on others and to contribute as members of a team. At the beginning, the students were often forced to work together against a common 'enemy' – the staff or the weather!

By the end of the week, the students had made considerable progress. For example, their greater confidence and team spirit had an unexpectedly positive impact at the school. Before they went to the centre, if they were unhappy with any aspect of school life they did not object, but simply opted out and stayed at home. After their residential experience, they talked more, sharing feelings and opinions with each other and with their teachers. As a result, relationships between students and teachers improved. Teachers responded to students' feelings by revising course content, offering students a more coordinated college and school curriculum that met their needs.

37. Such residential experiences are most effective where there are good links between schools and outdoor centres so that the contribution to the curriculum of residential experiences is clear and is evaluated to guide future planning. Too often, however, such coordination is absent and this challenging environment is only recognised as a 'one-off' activity. Consequently, the work of the programme is not developed further when students return to school, so that the long-term benefits are lost. For example, the strength of this work is significant in students' personal development but it is not yet an integral part of the formal curriculum.

38. Significantly, outdoor education activities also involve students in risk assessment and in the management of risk. Outdoor education is uniquely placed to offer structured opportunities for students to identify hazards, calculate the related risks and decide the significance of a risk in order to determine and implement the precautions necessary to eliminate and minimise risk. Students' involvement in risk management makes them aware of potential harm and contributes towards their being able to take greater responsibility for their own and others' safety.

39. Many centres are also promoting outdoor education as a fulfilling leisure activity with health and fitness benefits. This involves provision of additional 'mobile' services that take outdoor education into schools and communities or the offer of weekend and holiday courses so that students can return and revisit experiences in the same learning context to consolidate and practise new skills and behaviours. This

sometimes leads to further and more varied work. For a minority, this can involve a major expedition at home or abroad.

40. Despite this very positive picture of students involved in residential courses, the majority of students are unable to take part. Often, the extra-curricular nature of the activity, its cost or limits on the numbers that can be taken, lead to a 'first come, first served' basis for selection. This means that even in those schools that do want to promote outdoor education, many students who would like to take part are not able to participate.

41. Furthermore, despite general recognition of the value of outdoor education and residential experiences, some schools remain unconvinced of the benefits when weighed against the pressures on curriculum time, lack of specialist expertise, concerns about taking risks and fear of litigation. This situation is not helped as the role of the LEA adviser diminishes and some LEAs reduce funding arrangements, thus inhibiting the role of centres in curriculum-related provision.

Leadership and management of centres

42. Leadership and management are good or better in over half of the centres and at least satisfactory in all. Where provision is well led and managed, key staff have:

- high levels of commitment to the aims of outdoor education as a vehicle for personal development
- clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- strong lines of communication, including newsletters and regular network meetings with their schools, LEA and other youth and community groups
- collaborative working relationships with teachers and a shared agenda for provision
- a well-focused development or action plan, based on a rigorous audit of strengths and weaknesses and systematic evaluation
- effective policies and procedures for the protection of children and ensuring a healthy and safe learning environment.

43. The monitoring and evaluation of provision is generally good and occasionally very good. Centres collect data in a number of ways, such as:

- registers of schools and other groups attendance at courses
- questionnaires collecting teachers' levels of satisfaction with courses and teaching
- surveys of students' attitudes before and after the course

- letters from parents on the success of different courses
- portfolios of photographic evidence of events or students' performances.

44. These data often provide evidence of the range of provision, course attendance and improvements in students' behaviour and attitudes, and usually feed into the centre's interim and annual reports. All centres have adapted their programmes to take account of feedback and changing demands from schools and other users. In general, however, reports often emphasise events and the structures in place rather than considering the impact of provision on improving students' attitudes towards education, their learning or their achievements.

45. The quality of staffing is a significant factor in determining the success of centre-based outdoor education. In many centres, experienced and well qualified heads of centre effectively lead teams of full-time and part-time specialist teachers and centre support staff with a strong belief in, and commitment to, the role of outdoor education in promoting students' personal and social development. Clear roles and responsibilities and good lines of communication contribute significantly to effective management. The majority of staff have access to a range of in-service courses commensurate with the resources available.

46. The majority of centres have a role in training teachers, for example in mountain leadership, and have established close links with many national governing bodies. All centres actively engage in countryside conservation and where centres deliver a substantial number of scientific, geographical and environmental courses, staff are actively engaged in research to support this work.

47. Most LEA centres feel well supported by their LEA. However, a minority of centre heads report various changes in 'ownership' of the centre. For example, transference of the centre between different LEA departments such as lifelong learning, education or leisure inhibits development planning over the long term. It also makes lines of accountability unclear and staff morale suffers as a result of the uncertainty. Some problems of budgeting can be associated with changes in LEA funding and short-term funding arrangements that inhibit medium term development planning.

48. Many centres spend heavily on specialist staff, accommodation and resources. Several heads of centres reported concerns about funding and the competing demands of providing a service for schools in a specific LEA and offering commercial courses in order to raise funds for ongoing developments. Many heads of centres have successfully bid for additional monies which are helping to improve the range and quality of provision. For example, one centre used monies from the Landfill Tax to develop environmentally friendly sustainable living courses, others established new Healthy Living Projects for 11–14 year olds using lottery funding.

49. The quality of accommodation and resources is generally good and often very good. This is a key feature in the success of outdoor centres and students benefit significantly from the opportunity to learn in different settings using a wide range of specialist resources. The majority have good onsite facilities such as sleeping and eating areas, classrooms, changing and drying rooms. The grounds around the centres are generally well maintained and contain a wide range of equipment,

facilities for challenges and problem-solving tasks, and well-developed environmental areas that suit the needs of the centre users. In a minority of cases, however, poor, run-down external environments do little to encourage a positive attitude among students working in the centre. Although most LEAs continue to invest significantly in maintaining centres, a minority have reduced the budget and this is having an adverse effect on external maintenance. Centres also work in the wider surroundings making good use of local caves, climbing areas and mountain walks with varying degrees of difficulty.

Annex A. Centres involved in the survey

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre, Llangollen, Denbighshire

Calshot Activities Centre, Southampton

Cumbria Outdoors, Keswick, Cumbria

Hengistbury Head Centre, Bournemouth

Longtown Outdoor Education Centre, Hereford

Low Bank Ground Outdoor Education Centre, Coniston, Cumbria

Maes y Lade Outdoor Education Centre, Brecon, Powys

Medina Valley Centre, Newport, Isle of Wight

Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham, Abingdon

Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre, Pencelli, Brecon

Rhos y Gwaliau Outdoor Education Centre, Bala, Gwynedd

Sayer's Croft Field Centre, Crowling, Surrey

Trewern Outdoor Education Centre, Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire

Woodlands Outdoor Education Centre, Glasbury-on-Wye, Powys

Yenworthy Lodge Outdoor Education Centre, Lynton, North Devon