

Nature Premium ‘Social Equity’ Discussion Paper

We are calling for an investment in education to fund a Nature Premium guaranteeing that all children and young people will experience regular and ongoing nature experiences, with additional funding for those with least access to nature, (nature defined broadly as wild school grounds, woodlands, gardening, conservation, Forest School, farming, etc.). The Nature Premium is an ambitious idea that would help those children from disadvantaged ethnic minority ‘backgrounds’, and deprived families and still be fair to all children. We believe that an annual investment of £1bn will:

- enable children and young people to learn how to manage their own mental and physical wellbeing through connecting with nature.
- give them agency to deal with the climate emergency and loss of biodiversity.
- Support them to ‘grow up greener’ and contribute to a sustainable economy.

Why is there an urgent need to invest in enabling children to connect with nature?

"Connecting children with nature is one of the most important things we can do for them. It can boost their health, wellbeing and learning and give them a life-long love of the natural world", [Lord Blencathra, Deputy Chairman, Natural England](#). In 2019 the then Environment Secretary, [Michael Gove](#), launched the Year of Green Action saying ‘As the future stewards of our planet, children and young people have a vital role to play in this’. The Department for Education, DEFRA, and Natural England all agree that children benefit from connecting with nature (Fig 1).

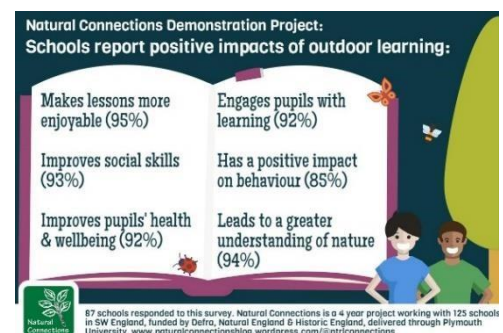


Fig 1

The [Why Society Needs Nature Report](#) (2021), stated that green and natural spaces are seen as places that should encourage mental health and exercise by 89% of people in England, and in Scotland 70% of people reported mental health benefits from enjoying nature. Unfortunately, socio-economic factors play an important role in who is visiting natural spaces, with adults on lower incomes, with lower education, the unemployed and those living in the most deprived areas making fewer visits into nature. This illustrates that there is an inequity of access to nature between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. This inequity of access to nature was ‘brought to light’ and exacerbated by the 2020/21 Lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [71% of children](#) from **ethnic minority** backgrounds reported spending less time outside since the pandemic, compared with 57% of white children.
- Three-quarters (73%) of children from households with annual income below £17,000 spent less time outdoors, compared with 57% from households with an annual income above £17,000.

The socio-economic status of parents should not:

- dictate how often their children access nature.
- Mean that children miss out on the associated benefits of spending time in nature.
- Stop children learning how to manage their own mental and physical wellbeing.
- Stop children ‘growing up greener’ to thrive in the 21st century.

[Research](#) shows that connecting children with nature is **equigenic** in that it disrupts the usual relationship between economic disadvantage and a poor health outcome. The Nature Premium would be fair to all AND provide a **greater** benefit to children from ethnic minority communities and lower economic status groups.

Why is there an urgency to connect children with nature in 2024? Connecting with nature improves wellbeing and delivers important benefits for recreation, physical health, social wellbeing and employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased children and young people's poor mental wellbeing and lives in deprivation:

- [Child mental health disorders](#) have become more common and more strongly linked with poor outcomes over recent decades. As the pandemic has progressed, referrals to child mental health services reached record highs, with [NHS England data](#) (May 2021) showing the highest ever recorded monthly referrals. In April 2020- March 2021 there was a 37% increase in child mental health service referrals, and a 59% increase in referrals for child eating disorder issues, compared with the previous year.
- Just over half (54.8%) of young people aged 17-25 years reported being worried about the impact of climate change.
- Key facts from the [NHS Mental Health of Children and Young People in England Survey, 2023](#) showed:
 - 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8-25 years had a probable mental disorder. i.e. 20.3% of 8–16-year-olds, 23.3% of 17–19-year-olds & 21.7% of 20- 25-year-olds.
 - After a rise in prevalence between 2017 and 2020, rates of probable mental disorder remained stable in all age groups between 2022 and 2023.
 - Among 8–16-year-olds, rates of probable mental disorder were similar for boys and girls, while for 17–25-year-olds, rates were twice as high for young women than men.
 - More than 1 in 4 children aged 8-16 years (26.8%) with a probable mental disorder had a parent who could not afford for their child to take part in activities outside school or college, compared with 1 in 10 (10.3%) of those unlikely to have a mental disorder.
 - Research carried out by [Loughborough University](#) (2021) for the End Child Poverty Coalition has described a dramatic rise in child poverty in the last five years.
 - Even before the pandemic, 4.3 million children were living in poverty, up 200,000 from the previous year – and up 500,000 over the past five years.
 - Three quarters (75%) of children living in poverty in 2019/20 were in households with at least one working adult; up from two thirds (67%) in 2014/15.

Why use the Nature Premium as an investment to connect children with nature? This would guarantee regular and ongoing nature experiences in education settings. The result would be that all children would have the same opportunity to have regular nature experiences, whether this was limited at home by income, culture or time poverty. The funding would send the message that nature connection is an important priority.

Don't school children spend time in nature anyway? Some schools make spending time in nature a priority and some don't. [The Glover Report](#) (2019) quoted the numbers of children going on school visits to the countryside is shockingly low at just 6-7%. It comes down to the interest of the Multi Academy Trust, the headteacher and funding.

Why can't schools find the funding to get children into nature? According to a [IFS 2020 Annual Report on Education Spending in England](#) School spending per pupil in England fell by 9% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2019–20. This represents the largest

cut in over 40 years. The government has allocated an extra £7.1 billion for schools in England in 2022–23. This will increase spending per pupil by 9% in real terms between 2019–20 and 2022–23 (as measured against expected general inflation) and near enough reverse past cuts. Accounting for expected increases in teacher pay, the real term increase in spending per pupil will be lower, at 6%. In any case, spending per pupil in 2022–23 is set to be no higher in real terms than in 2009–10.

Isn't spending time in nature part of the curriculum? Teachers can take children outside to learn in nature but with all the current pressures on teachers it tends to be a rare treat rather than the norm. In a recent letter to the campaign Rebecca Pow said '*The evidence and insight from previous projects, such as the Government's Natural Connections Demonstration Project (2012-16), suggest that the two fundamental barriers schools face in taking their learning outside, underpinning the more traditionally cited barriers of risk, cost and national curriculum, are a lack of confidence in how to build learning outside the classroom safely and effectively into teaching practice, and simply being too busy to make sense of a wide array of potential support available to them from the voluntary, private and public sectors*'. The reality is that for all children to connect with nature, there needs to be a Nature Premium that will give education settings financial capacity so that, for example, their staff's CPD can be delivered during school hours rather than in evenings or weekends.

Will the new Labour government invest in getting children into nature? Spending time in and connecting with nature is in line with:

- The Environment Act 2021 Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 8 (7) The environment improvement plan, *A Green Future: Our [25 year plan to improve the environment](#)* that prioritises connecting children with nature.
- The Environment Act 2021 Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 19 (1) Policy statement on environmental principles: *A Minister of the Crown must, when making policy, have due regard to the policy statement on environmental principles currently in effect.*
- recommendations in the HM Treasury commissioned report the [Dasgupta Review](#) that calls to transform how we educate children about the natural world.
- recommendations from The [Committee for Climate Change](#)'s report to increase public awareness of the need to achieve Net Zero and the impact of the climate emergency.
- The DEFRA commissioned [National Food Strategy Review](#).
- Educating around the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with only 9 years remaining to achieve government commitments.
- The Environment Audit Committee first report [Biodiversity in the UK: bloom or bust?](#) education recommendations.
- The UNESCO World Conference 2021 - [Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development](#)
- AND children enjoy being in nature! [83% of children said](#) that being in nature made them very happy.

How do UK children's wellbeing outcomes (mental well-being, physical health and academic and social skills) rank in international league tables? UK children don't fare well according to the [UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 16: Worlds of Influence - Understanding What Shapes Child Well-being in Rich Countries](#). In the wellbeing outcome league table UK children were in the lower third of 38 countries at 27. UK children were judged to be:

- 29th out of 38 countries for their mental well-being.
- 19th out of 38 countries for their physical health.
- 26th out of 38 countries for their academic and social skills.

We would argue that regular nature experiences would certainly improve our children's wellbeing so that it competes on an international basis.

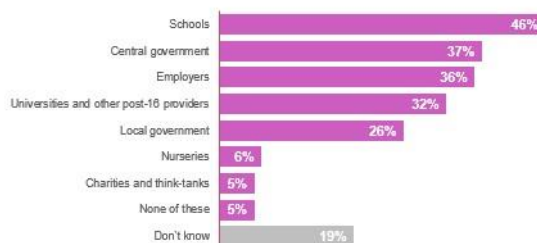
How does the UK fare on an international assessment of social mobility? The UK was ranked 21 in the World Economic Foundation's [Global Social Mobility Index 2020](#). There is room for improvement and UK people think that schools could offer the solution.

People say that government should do more for social mobility – and schools could offer a solution

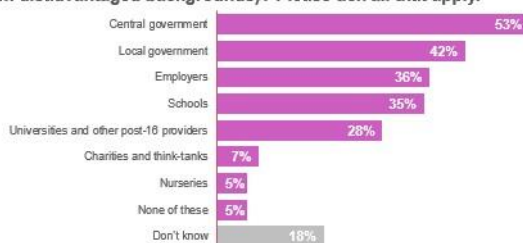
When people were asked which institutions are best equipped to improve social mobility, and promote equal opportunities, the most commonly cited response was 'schools' (46%) followed by central government (37%) and employers (36%).

People thought that government should be doing more to ensure opportunities for all, with central government (53%) and local government (42%) most frequently cited.

Which of the following is best equipped to have an impact on social mobility and ensuring opportunity for all (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds)? Please tick up to three.




And which, if any, of the following do you think SHOULD be doing more to impact on social mobility and ensuring opportunity for all (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds)? Please tick all that apply.



Sample size 4693 adults in UK. Fieldwork: 27th January – 1st February 2021.

For more information and to discuss our proposal further please contact:
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Children need to grow up greener... Nature Premium.