

## **COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: OUTDOOR EDUCATION**

**Westminster Hall, Tim Farron MP**

Wednesday 11 June 2025

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- **The Countryside Alliance firmly supports outdoor education and plays a direct role in providing it through our Fishing for Schools programme.**
- **Fishing for Schools is a programme for 10-16-year-olds that uses fishing as a pathway to engage and inspire an enjoyment of learning and nature. Now in its 18th year, Fishing for Schools continues to make a difference across the country, helping young people build confidence, learn new skills and connect with the natural world.**
- **Campaigners for outdoor education more broadly have focused on securing a guarantee of a formal programme of residential outdoor education for all pupils as a standard element of the curriculum. While Fishing for Schools is not a residential scheme, we believe it could prove complementary to any such programme.**
- **The campaign has been adopted as a cross-party effort across England, Wales and Scotland, with Private Members' Bills introduced in each jurisdiction. To date, however, none has progressed beyond the early parliamentary stages.**
- **Outdoor education opportunities represent a potentially transformative contribution to a child's learning and personal growth that could not be successfully replicated in the confines of the classroom. This is especially true for children whose personal and family circumstances do not otherwise permit them to engage in outdoor pursuits.**
- **In addition to the individual benefits to participating children, outdoor education stands to fulfil the broader social purpose of addressing the divide that exists between rural and urban communities, fostering understanding of the realities of life in the natural world and thereby promoting social accord.**

### **Background**

- **The Countryside Alliance firmly supports outdoor education and plays a direct role in providing it through our Fishing for Schools programme. Further details are given below.**
- **Campaigners for outdoor education, led by The Outward Bound Trust – a charity that provides outdoor education for children of a range of age-groups – focus on securing a guarantee of a formal programme of residential outdoor education for all pupils as a standard element of the curriculum.**
- **This campaign has been adopted as a cross-party effort across England, Wales and Scotland.**

- In England, Tim Farron MP (Westmorland and Lonsdale, LD) brought a Private Member's Bill in the last session of the previous Parliament, but as a Presentation Bill it lacked parliamentary time to make progress.<sup>1</sup>
- In Wales, Sam Rowlands MS (North Wales, Con) introduced the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill in 2023.<sup>2</sup> Per Senedd procedure it was then subject to a consultation to which the Countryside Alliance responded positively,<sup>3</sup> but ultimately the Bill, having failed to attract support from the Welsh Government, was defeated by one vote in April 2024.<sup>4</sup>
- In Scotland, Liz Smith MSP (Mid Scotland and Fife, Con) introduced the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill<sup>5</sup> which in April 2025 received a positive reception at Stage 1 after SNP Members abstained from voting, but under the procedure of the Scottish Parliament it will be unable to make progress because the Scottish Government has declined to table the financial resolution necessary for it to progress to Stage 2.<sup>6</sup>

## Fishing for Schools

- Fishing for Schools is a programme for 10-16-year-olds that uses fishing as a pathway to engage and inspire an enjoyment of learning and nature. Now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year, Fishing for Schools continues to make a difference across the country, helping young people build confidence, learn new skills and connect with the natural world. Its mission is to support and nurture young people as they discover the world of angling, both as a recreational pursuit and a unique pathway to learning.
- The initial programme was launched in 2007 to assist students with learning difficulties by offering fishing related activities as a way back into formal education and learning; in the classroom, on field trips, or a combination of both. By 2012, mainstream schools were asking to join the programme. It became apparent that the programme offered opportunities for young people from a variety of backgrounds and abilities to enjoy learning and gain a wealth of skills through angling.
- Since its foundation, Fishing for Schools has allowed over 4,000 children and young people from over 150 schools to benefit from learning outdoors and connecting with nature. The total of 152 schools is comprised of 76 secondary, 23 primary and 37 SEN schools, plus 15 alternative provisions and 4 mental health groups.
- As of 2024, 18% of pupils in England were leaving school without 5 GCSEs. Disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs are particularly affected. Fishing for Schools offers a fresh opportunity for young people to build resilience and learn new skills in a unique environment.
- While Fishing for Schools is not a residential scheme, we believe it could prove complementary to any residential outdoor education programme introduced thanks to campaigning and legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament, [Outdoor Education Bill 2024-25](#)

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Parliament, [Residential Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill](#)

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Parliament, Children, Young People and Education Committee, [Response from Countryside Alliance \(Wales\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Countryside Alliance, [Senedd narrowly rejects Outdoor Education Bill](#), 22.04.24

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Parliament, [Schools \(Residential Outdoor Education\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

<sup>6</sup> Countryside Alliance, [Schools \(Residential Outdoor Education\) Bill - SNP abstain from voting](#), 03.04.25

## **Future Countryside polling**

- In advance of Future Countryside 2025, the now-annual rural conference that unites the diverse voices of farmers, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, polling carried out by ORB on behalf of the conference found significant interest in outdoor education and expanded opportunities to learn about the natural world.
  - 69% said they had some kind of outdoor learning as part of their education, whereas 27% said they did not recall outdoor learning.
  - Of those who recalled receiving this education, 91% said it left them with a positive impression of the countryside (56% very positive, 35% somewhat positive).
  - 75% said they would be interested in a Natural History GCSE qualification, while only 21% said they would not be interested.
  - 79% feel motivated to spend time in the countryside (37% very motivated, 43% somewhat motivated).<sup>7</sup>

## **Countryside Alliance position**

- Our efforts to provide opportunities for predominantly urban schools to give their pupils an experience of angling, through our Fishing for Schools programme, would be greatly enhanced by a presumption that all children will be able to experience at least a week's residential outdoor education at some point in their school career.
- Outdoor education opportunities represent an invaluable, potentially transformative contribution to a child's learning and personal growth. They foster practical knowledge, skills and resilience in the face of challenges, none of which could be successfully replicated in the confines of the classroom. This is especially true for children whose circumstances do not otherwise permit them to engage in outdoor pursuits.
- In addition to the individual benefits to participating children, outdoor education stands to fulfil a broader social purpose. We are concerned that there currently exists a gulf in understanding as to the realities of the countryside between those who live and work in it and people brought up in urban environments, which has fuelled prejudice against essential rural activities.
- Addressing that divide is a legitimate and necessary purpose of public education. Facilitating outdoor education would do so by giving all children the opportunity to experience life in the natural environment directly and stimulating surrounding discussion and thought, thereby promoting social accord.
- The substantial interest found in Future Countryside polling in a Natural History GCSE further illustrates the potential for expanding educational opportunities in this area.

## **For more information please contact:**

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<sup>7</sup> Future Countryside, [Poll: Farmers better champions of the countryside than environmental activists say Gen Z](#), 20.05.25