13 March 2015

Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee

Sent by email: to ec.committee@scottish.parliament.uk

Session 2: Role of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest

John Muir Trust response

Context

The John Muir Trust is the leading wild land conservation charity in the United Kingdom. Working with people and communities to conserve, campaign and inspire, the Trust is a membership organisation that seeks to ensure that wild places are protected and enhanced, and valued by and for everyone.

The Trust owns and works to improve some of the finest areas in the UK including Schiehallion, Ben Nevis and parts of the Cuillins on Skye. The John Muir Award was launched in 1997 as our main engagement initiative, helping people from all sectors of society to value wild places wherever they find them. Our core audience is aged from 10-16 (although all ages get involved), and the majority of organisations we work with – Award Providers – are schools (and outdoor centres).

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It helps people connect with nature, and enjoy and care for wild places. People use the John Muir Award to:

- help appreciate and value nature, urban greenspace and wild landscapes.
- encourage awareness, understanding and responsibility for wild places.
- promote personal development and well-being through outdoor experiences.
- recognise and celebrate achievements.

All of these aspects have been applied to school settings and to improving attainment. In particular, the John Muir Award is used effectively to support less academic pupils. A key rationale when it was set up was to help ensure that social or geographical circumstances don’t exclude people from opportunities to experience wild places. Every year, more than 25% of those who achieve the Award are from socially excluded backgrounds (this was more than 8,000 participants in 2014).
The John Muir Award is delivered in partnership through a number of diverse organisations and settings including schools, colleges, youth groups, adult learning and outdoor education centres.

Please answer some or all of the following questions and provide any other information you think may be relevant.

- the scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities;

Scale of involvement

The John Muir Trust produces an annual Education Report for HMIe. This report highlights John Muir Award activity in Scotland’s schools. During Academic Year 2013-2014:
- 370 schools were involved in delivering the John Muir Award, including 13 special schools (increase from 284 schools last year)
- 12,494 Awards were achieved by pupils and teachers (24% increase from 10,108 last year)
- 3,080 pupils (25%) are from socially excluded backgrounds
(Ref: The John Muir Award Education Report - Scotland Academic Year 2013-2014)

The John Muir Trust is a member of the Awards Network – a forum of twenty three providers of non-formal learning awards in Scotland. We work together to raise awareness of the variety of awards available to young people aged 12 to 25 that use youth work approaches and are available throughout Scotland. Over 130,000 young people gaining recognised awards annually (www.awardsnetwork.org).

Improving attainment and achievement

Audit Scotland released an independent evaluation of school education, the School Education Report (June 2014) www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/all_national.php. The Report provides an assessment of pupil attainment over the last decade. The Report concluded that performance has improved against all ten of the attainment measures examined over the last decade. However, there is significant variation in attainment with regards to levels of deprivation. Closing the gap in performance between schools is likely to be critical to improving overall attainment levels.

The John Muir Award was referenced very favourably, particularly around pupil attainment and as an exemplar of wider achievement (Exhibit 13 & 14 - page 28).

Key School Education Report recommendations:
- develop more coordinated approaches to gathering and recording information on the range of wider achievement activities offered in schools.

The John Muir Trust is providing Award data directly to councils. Through the Awards Network the Trust is also involved with the development of Insight (senior phase benchmarking tool) with SQA, and other tools with Education Scotland to record attainment and achievement.
- fully assess the potential long-term impact on attainment and wider achievement of budget reductions

During 2015 we are evaluating the impact of the John Muir Award. This includes using the Scottish Government SHANARRI indicators on well-being, and measuring the impact the Award has on learning and teaching.
- develop and implement strategies to reduce the gaps in performance between the highest and lowest performing schools.

The John Muir Trust is proud that more than 25% of people who achieve their John Muir Award come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Trust works closely with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Central Scotland Green Network targeting resources to areas highlighted by the Scottish Index of
Multiple Deprivation. The Trust has outlined how the Award is being used to engage young people from all backgrounds in ‘Inclusion, wild places and the John Muir Award’ report (2014) www.johnmuiraward.org.

The role of the John Muir Trust
The Trust administers the John Muir Award. The Trust offers advice and assistance to Award Providers – schools, youth clubs, Local Authorities, rangers, outdoor centres etc. – to help them integrate the Award structure with their own outdoor and environmental activities. This flexible, partnership approach is highly successful. We work alongside Local Authorities and charities in supporting 16+Learning Choices and Activity Agreements and are partnered with Community Learning and Development teams across 10 Local Authorities and confidently expect this to increase. We are referenced in, and support the emergence of, Outdoor Learning Strategies such as those developed by Edinburgh Council.

The John Muir Trust encourages people to connect with nature, and enjoy and care for wild places by aligning the framework of the John Muir Award with key social drivers, e.g.

- Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award http://issuu.com/johnmuirtrust/docs/jma_curriculum
- Employability and the John Muir Award www.jmt.org/assets/john%20muir%20award/downloads/employability%20and%20the%20john%20muir%20award.pdf
- Five Ways to Wellbeing and the John Muir Award www.jmt.org/assets/john%20muir%20award/downloads/five-ways-to-wellbeing_a4_v3.pdf
- Inclusion, wild places and the John Muir Award www.jmt.org/assets/john%20muir%20award/downloads/inclusion,%20wild,%20places,%20and%20the%20john%20muir%20award.pdf

This alignment with National Policies and social drivers fosters a supportive partnership between the Trust, local and education authorities and other agencies.

- whether their approaches have been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils. If so, whether their methods could be more embedded in the curriculum;

The partnership approach taken by the John Muir Award helps organisations and participants to engage, and have contributed to ‘improving achievement and attainment for school pupils’. The approaches used by the John Muir Trust are that the John Muir Award:

- is free to use (cost is a barrier to people getting involved) and inclusive
- is simple to use (by non-outdoor specialists too) and low on bureaucracy, and can be used alongside existing schemes, initiative, programmes and schools’ curriculum.
- offers a way of engaging with topics that some find daunting or inaccessible – sustainability, biodiversity, citizenship...
- can be used to link positive outdoor experiences to a range of themes – curriculum, healthy lifestyles, youth work, employability, wellbeing...

Teachers and educators embed the John Muir Award within curricular areas to deliver Experiences and Outcomes and to promote interdisciplinary learning. The Trust has provided examples of activity and topics that can help meet Award criteria in a dedicated resource, and supports practitioners with a series of on-line case studies.
The John Muir Trust values the support of a number of key agencies in Scotland, in particular Scottish Natural Heritage and the two National Park Authorities. These agencies recognise how the John Muir Award helps to improve and celebrate participant achievements. The Trust continues to work with Education Scotland and individual Local Authorities to explore new and innovative approaches to grow John Muir Award activity and meet demand. The Trust predicts an annual increase of Award activity of 20% over the next three year period. Managing and supporting demand for the John Muir Award is a significant challenge for the Trust with its limited capacity.

The Trust notes the contribution of the members of the Awards Network to improving children’s attainment and achievement.

- **whether the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children’s attainment and achievement is being realised;**

The John Muir Trust agrees with Audit Scotland’s key School Education Report recommendations to:
- **develop more coordinated approaches to gathering and recording information on the range of wider achievement activities offered in schools.**

The John Muir Trust is providing John Muir Award data to councils through the annual John Muir Award Education Report. Through membership of The Awards Network the Trust is involved with the development of Insight (senior phase benchmarking tool) with SQA. It should be noted that whilst the Awards Network welcomes the development of Insight as a tool that recognises a schools’ broad provision of learning beyond formal qualifications, the Network sees the limitations of this tool due to the requirement for learning programmes and awards to be the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework credit rated (Ref: letter from Awards Network ‘Insight for Excellence’ to Mr Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, sent 24th June, 2014).

The Awards Network is encouraged to note that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland are developing Insight as “just one way in which information will be provided on wider attainment”.

- **given the strong policy focus on the early years , whether the third and private sectors have been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages.**

The John Muir Award is open to all who understand and meet Award criteria. Generally this works best at upper primary level and above. The John Muir Trust sees growth in John Muir Award activity and outdoor learning in secondary schools and whole year groups.

All reports and references are available on request.

Yours sincerely

Toby Clark
John Muir Award Scotland Manager
John Muir Trust