
EDUCATION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY WHAT TRAINING IS OFFERED BY INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

The research was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Natural England¹, and Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) to provide information on the extent and nature of training in education outside the classroom (EOtC) in initial teacher training (ITT) institutions, across curriculum subjects and across different types of teacher training courses. The research was carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in collaboration with the Centre for Informal Learning and Schools, King's College London.

Education outside the classroom can be defined, in its broadest sense, as any structured learning experience that takes place beyond the classroom environment during the school day, after school or during the holidays. It can include, amongst other activities, cultural trips, science and geography fieldwork, environmental and countryside education, outdoor and adventurous group activities, learning through outdoor play, and visits to museums and heritage sites.

- The results from the survey suggested that there was substantial variation in the amount of EOtC training across courses and across institutions. The quality of provision during school placements was rated as variable by around a third of respondents.
- The findings from the survey indicated that EOtC was explicitly addressed in nearly 90 per cent of primary and secondary ITT courses.
- At the secondary level, all directors of geography, art and design, physical education (PE), music, citizenship, drama, leisure and tourism, and classics courses indicated that EOtC was addressed within their programmes. EOtC was also addressed in the majority of courses provided by science and history directors. It was less likely to be addressed on mathematics and English courses.
- The majority of respondents indicated that there was an expectation that trainees had some practical experience of EOtC on their course, either as a course requirement or a preferred option.
- Schools played a major role in training for EOtC, particularly at the secondary level. Over four-fifths of secondary respondents reported that student teachers received training in EOtC when they were on school placements.

¹ The work began through the Countryside Agency, which has since become part of Natural England



- Overall, just under half of all respondents reported that there was no minimum entitlement for EOtC training on their courses. Where there was a minimum expectation, this was typically for short periods of time.
- There were several gaps in subject directors' knowledge, particularly around factors such as the amount of time spent on activities, where responsibility lay for coordinating EOtC activities, and on what happened on school placements.
- When respondents were asked to indicate changes in the provision of EOtC training over the last five years, over two-fifths felt that it had increased, a similar number felt there had been no change, and just over a tenth said there had been a decrease.
- The main changes/actions that respondents thought would help to encourage their ITT institution to offer more EOtC activities to trainees on their courses were: increased funding and time; greater clarification of, and emphasis on, the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards (in relation to EOtC); a change in schools' expectations and standards; course modification and the provision of additional EOtC related-materials and information.
- Overall, three key issues emerged from the study: the variation between institutions in the provision of EOtC training; the possibility that some students may be inadequately prepared for EOtC; and the lack of quality assurance resulting from course and programme directors' lack of knowledge of what happens on school placements.

Methodology

In June 2006, questionnaires were sent to primary programme directors and secondary course/subject directors in all of the 75 higher education institutions (HEIs) providing ITT in England. A total of 312 questionnaires (281 from secondary and 31 from primary) were received from 70 HEIs. This represented an overall response rate of 47 per cent.

Other findings

Provision of EOtC activities

- At the secondary level, directors of PE, history and geography courses most frequently

indicated that trainees had to have practical experience of EOtC. Directors of modern foreign language courses were least likely to say that practical experience of EOtC was a requirement of their course.

Delivery and coordination of EOtC activities

- The main objectives of the EOtC training provided on primary and secondary courses focused on 'preparing and enabling trainees to run EOtC activities' and 'enabling trainees to maximise pupil learning during EOtC'. Respondents were least likely to focus on gauging the quality; or measuring the impact of EOtC experiences, or enabling trainees to experience how pupils behaved in different environments.
- In addition to school-based training, most secondary respondents reported that EOtC training was delivered through stand alone compulsory units or during off-site days/residential experiences. Most primary respondents reported that EOtC training was interwoven across subject areas.
- EOtC training was generally coordinated by individual course or subject directors, rather than by the overall director of ITT. A small but significant number of primary and secondary respondents indicated that EOtC training was not coordinated at all on their programme.
- Fieldwork was the most common EOtC-related training provided on both primary and secondary courses. All primary undergraduate programme directors indicated that fieldwork-related training was provided on their courses. At the secondary level, analysis by subject area showed that the EOtC training focus was closely related to the subject directed. For example, the majority of geography and science directors indicated that training on fieldwork and the natural environment was included and all English course directors indicated that EOtC training linked to creativity and the arts was included on their course.
- A wide range of external providers were involved in EOtC training, including museums, galleries, field study centres and outdoor education centres.

Timing and quality of EOtC activities

- Approximately one in ten respondents reported that students received no training in EOtC-related activities during their school placement, whilst a

slightly higher proportion reported that they did not know if any training was provided on school placement.

Where there was a minimum expectation for EOtC training on ITT courses, this requirement was more likely to relate to students acquiring theory and understanding of EOtC rather than practical experience of EOtC.

The two main EOtC training activities most frequently and consistently identified by all respondents were 'off-site day visits' and 'school site activities', whilst fieldwork and the natural environment were the EOtC areas most commonly cited as having time dedicated to training. The average length of time spent on training in these activities and areas was relatively short.

The EOtC areas least likely to have time dedicated to training were: food and farming; active citizenship; places of worship; and overseas visits and exchanges.

Overall, most respondents felt that the quality of EOtC experiences when trainees were on school placement was too variable to comment on. Most of those respondents who did provide a quality rating gave a positive response. However, one in 20 secondary course/subject directors considered the quality of EOtC experiences when on school placement to be poor.

Challenges and facilitators

The three main factors that respondents felt had helped the provision of EOtC training within their institution over the last five years were: the 'availability of suitable EOtC sites, opportunities and activities'; an 'awareness of the outcomes of EOtC'; and 'school-based demand'.

The three main factors that respondents felt had hindered the provision of EOtC training within their institution over the last five years were: 'funding for EOtC training'; 'curriculum changes/pressures'; and 'the demands/expectations of the ITT course'.

In terms of changes in the provision of EOtC training over the last five years, the majority of secondary respondents indicated that they

thought that there had been no change, whereas the majority of primary respondents indicated that they considered there to have been an increase. Roughly equal proportions of both primary and secondary respondents (around one in ten) considered that EOtC training had decreased during this five-year period.

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