

VINE response to the consultation on the National Curriculum in England Framework document

VINE (Values in Nature and the Environment) is a not-for-profit organisation set up to support UK nature conservation, in particular by exploring the deeper values motivating those working in the sector (see www.vineproject.org.uk).

We are responding to Question 3 of the consultation on the National Curriculum in England Framework document: Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

We are encouraged to see the requirement for ecological knowledge in science; starting with learning to name plants and animals, and progressing to learn about habitats and evolution. We particularly welcome the requirement for fieldwork and real world learning experiences in geography and science, as we feel such experiences are essential in inspiring children.

We are deeply concerned about the proposal to largely remove climate change from the national curriculum guidelines for key stages one to three. We consider it unacceptable and irresponsible for under 14s and pupils who do not study GCSE geography to be denied a science-based understanding of climate change impacts on humans and ecosystems. We feel strongly that the interdependence of humans and our environment and sustainable development should remain embedded within in the curriculum, and would remind Government of its ambition, in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, “to see every child in England given the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment... [and] to help people take more responsibility for their environment...”

We agree with Former Chief Scientific Adviser Professor Sir David King who has said that the exclusion of these issues represents an abdication of our duty to future generations. It is imperative that all children understand climate science, risks and impacts if they are to be able to shape a future for themselves, future generations and other species. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change stated that failing to take action based on the evidence is a huge gamble with the future of our children, grandchildren, and every other living species. We must ensure that our children are educated in a way which will enable them to do so.

There is currently much discussion about how the amount of time children spend outdoors has decreased markedly in recent years, and the negative impact that has on their mental and physical health (e.g. Richard Louv’s “nature deficit disorder”). It is therefore vital that children have the opportunity to spend time outdoors as part of the curriculum to enable them to develop the understanding and appreciation of nature that will motivate them to care for the environment.

We urge you to reinstate care for the environment and climate change in the national curriculum for key stages 1-3. We suggest that the “safe and just space for humanity” critical environmental thresholds and the ‘ecosystem services’ analysis framework, would be useful as conceptual frameworks for understanding our interdependence with the environment.

Sent on behalf of the VINE Executive committee,

Sophie Lake, VINE secretary