

Northern Ireland Committee for Education
Inquiry into Educational Underachievement
Written Evidence from the ESD Forum (Northern Ireland)
26th January 2017

- The Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESD Forum) is a networking organisation that promotes a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of environmental education in Northern Ireland. Through providing a forum and network for the exchange of information on environmental education, by encouraging co-operative working amongst those involved in its delivery and by promoting the role of environmental education in delivery of many core and non-core curriculum subjects, the Forum plays an important role in enhancing environmental education provision.

- The Forum represents 80 organisations from across the Sustainable Development sector in Northern Ireland. Through the members education programmes thousands of young people are being engaged in outdoor learning every year with all the huge positive benefits these experiences provide. As the main co-ordinating voice for the sector in Northern Ireland, the ESD Forum firmly believes in the transformative power of outdoor learning to all ages and abilities in the formal and non-formal education sectors, including those who are currently underachieving in mainstream education.

- As we are all aware, education is more than the acquisition of knowledge. Improving young people's understanding, skills, values and personal development can significantly enhance learning and achievement. Learning outside the classroom is not an end in itself, rather, it is a vehicle to develop the capacity to learn. There is strong evidence that that good quality learning outside the classroom adds much value to classroom learning. It provides a context for learning in many areas: general and subject based knowledge; thinking and problem-solving skills; life skills such as co-operation and interpersonal communication. (*Council for Learning outside the Classroom*)

- Research suggests the need to re-engage learners with the world as they actually experience it. This is often called 'experiential' or 'authentic' learning. In recent years teachers have been exploring 'learning how to learn' in order to raise achievement. What we see, hear, taste, touch, smell and do gives us six main 'pathways to learning'. Young people are intensely curious and should be given the opportunity to explore the world around them. Outdoor learning can improve motivation and attitude to learning by providing new and stimulating environments in which to learn. (*Child-initiated learning, the outdoor environment and the 'underachieving' child*).

The ESD Forum would be happy to engage further with the Education Committee on this matter.