



RESEARCH SUMMARY

TITLE **RESEARCH INTO THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS**

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CLIENT **Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Children, Schools and Families.**

INTRODUCTION

In this research project, ‘built environment education’ was used as a term that refers to the various types of learning activity for children and young people of school age which use buildings, places and spaces as a context for learning. It covers many different kinds of built settings such as: historic and contemporary; urban and rural; and exceptional and commonplace. It also has a considerably broad remit ranging from: pupil involvement in designing and building their schools; to projects focusing on the relationship between people and places; to pupils’ exploring their own communities and local built environments; and linking religions, cultures and places.

As the joint Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Advisory Committee on Built Environment Education (JACBEE) highlighted in 2004, education focusing on the built environment has a number of benefits and can provide a wide range of creative, cross-curricular learning opportunities for young people and their communities. It can provide pupils with ‘open-ended, creative learning tasks which can help increase confidence, enhance pupil motivation, provide work satisfaction and contribute to the development of social and lifelong learning skills’ (DCMS and DfES, 2006). More recently, in November 2006, the government launched the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Manifesto which publicly advocates the importance of children and young people learning beyond the classroom experience. Heritage and the built environment were highlighted as key contexts of LOtC activity.

Engaging Places is a partnership between the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), English Heritage, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), in association with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF – formerly DfES) and the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC). It was set up by DCMS to develop an approach that can make people more aware of the learning opportunities available in the built environment and to ‘unlock’ the educational potential for schools of the historic and contemporary built environment. *Engaging Places* hopes to increase schools’ engagement with the built environment by developing a national advocacy network which can harness and improve the delivery of the built environment learning services to schools.

In September 2006, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by DCMS and partners to undertake two research projects which independently considered the supply side (providers) and the demand/audience side (teachers/schools) of built environment education. Both sets of research focused on three pilot regions (London, the South East and Yorkshire and the Humber). A synthesis of the main findings from each of the research projects was also commissioned in the form of a briefing document for Ministers, senior official and members of key sponsored bodies and stakeholders.



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KEY FINDINGS

- There was a wide range of learning activity available to schools across the three regions.
- Providers demonstrated a tangible willingness and intent to supply schools with high quality provision, opportunities and experiences. There was also evidence of a clear demand for built environment education from schools and teachers.
- School staff demonstrated awareness of, and enthusiasm for, built environment education and were familiar with the benefits it can bring to teaching and learning. A key issue centres on the need to capitalise on this situation and to build upon teachers' generally positive perceptions of built environment education. Increased understanding of the tangible benefits may be the essential precursor to increased take-up by schools. The sector and providers of built environment education need to further develop and nurture schools' and teachers' understandings of built environment education to increase their confidence to incorporate it into their teaching.
- There was some evidence to suggest that there is a discrepancy between the remit of built environment education providers and the needs of teachers, in that providers see themselves as serving schools primarily at a national and regional level and teachers typically use providers in the local area. As such, providers should seek, more actively, to promote their services to teachers and schools in their immediate locality and maximise the potential of this key audience.
- The potential of local buildings, places and spaces to facilitate and support schools' pursuit of the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda could also provide an effective means of encouraging further take-up. Teachers should be made aware of how built environment education meets each outcome i.e. in terms of Enjoy and Achieve, the stimulating and motivating effect that the practical approach of built environment education can produce can impact of young people's concentration, learning and achievement in other areas of the curriculum.
- More information is needed regarding the availability of, and opportunities associated with, built environment education as well as advice and guidance relating to how to use buildings and local places can be used in teaching.
- From the teachers' perspective, the development and promotion of a single source of information, particularly if web-based, could provide a useful and effective means of supporting their engagement with built environment education.
- The research has also shown that it is important for schools to have someone, such as a practitioner or local authority advisor, who can provide support, inspiration and advocacy for this way of working. There is scope for the sector to work with those teachers already committed to built environment education and to apply their knowledge, experience and credibility (as practitioners) to promote the opportunities and realities of using buildings and places in teaching amongst the wider profession.
- *Engaging Places* therefore has a crucial role to play in (i) continuing to bring together the supply and demand elements of built environment education, (ii) to focus on bridging the gap between teachers' (and other end-users) awareness and understanding of the potential of these resources, experiences and opportunities and (iii) at raising the general profile and importance of helping children and young people to learn about and engage with the buildings and places that characterise their physical environment.

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Supply side research: (September 2006 – February 2007) an investigation into the provision of work on offer by built environment education providers. Following an initial mapping exercise to identify providers:

- 93 organisations were selected for inclusion in a telephone survey to gather further information about them and the activities they offered
- nine case study organisations were then chosen for in-depth profiling to illustrate how built environment projects operated on the ground and the variety of provision on offer.

Demand/audience side research: (March 2007 – September 2007) an overview of teachers', headteachers' and governors' views on using buildings and local places as a learning resource. The study involved:

- an initial postal survey of teachers (51), headteachers (13) and governors (7), on the use of built environment education within teaching
- following this, short telephone interviews were conducted with 13 teachers, three headteachers and three governors in order to explore their views on built environment education further.

During the course of the two research projects, DCMS established and worked with:

- three regional advisory groups (one in each of the three pilot regions), comprising representatives from across the built environment sector and Local Authorities (LAs)
- a national advisory group bringing together the regional chairs with national organisations.

These groups provided intellectual and strategic direction in relation to emerging research findings and the development of the *Engaging Places* project.

PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

The research was not published but was used to inform discussion with Ministers about the development of *Engaging Places*. A presentation to Ministers was made by the research team in January 2008.

CONTACT DETAILS

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