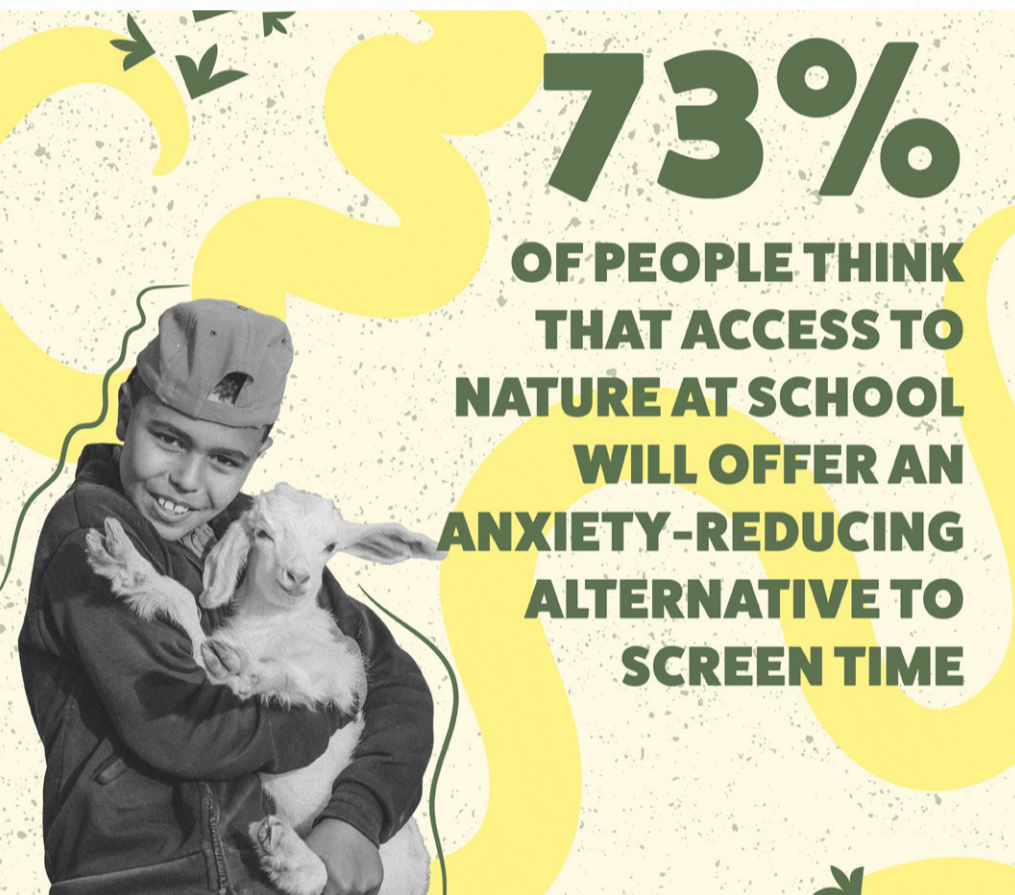


CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED NATURE



73%
**OF PEOPLE THINK
THAT ACCESS TO
NATURE AT SCHOOL
WILL OFFER AN
ANXIETY-REDUCING
ALTERNATIVE TO
SCREEN TIME**



73%
**OF PEOPLE BELIEVE
ACCESS TO NATURE
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
CAN IMPROVE THEIR
MENTAL HEALTH**



AUTHOR
Sarah Lawfull, Director of Where The Fruit Is and
Chair of Forest School Association

Sarah has over three decades of nature-based education experience – most recently as a qualified coach, an early years consultant and an FSA Endorsed Forest School trainer. She is committed to advocating with and for all those children whose background makes accessing nature difficult and is co-lead of the Nature Premium campaign.



AUTHOR
Dr. Sara Collins, Biologist, Forest School Practitioner
and expert den builder

Sara has taken on the role of political campaigner as co-lead of the Nature Premium campaign. It has been a joy to work with others that share the idea that all children should have regular access to nature, with additional support for those who need nature most.

CALLING FOR A NATURE PREMIUM
TO GUARANTEE REGULAR TIME IN
NATURE FOR ALL CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE



There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children"

Nelson Mandela (1995)

Children have lived through a pandemic, climate and biodiversity emergencies, vivid images of burning forests, and now a war in Europe. Stories of hospitals and homes bombed are served as a daily dose of trauma, without adults to explain geographical distance or to navigate emotional fallout. Combine these experiences with messages that you are overweight, spend too much time on screens, or that you have lost so much learning that you will never catch up. Our children hear that they and their world is broken – many hear that it is their fault.

Whilst CAMHS referrals increase, access to treatment lags and the number of children missing school rises. Government reports label the reason for this as 'challenging communities', as if these problems stem from marginalised families in difficulty rather than global and national social inequalities (1).

A big idea

During the first lockdown, Forest School Association (FSA) trustees met on Zoom to discuss children's and teachers' experiences. We spoke of children in inner-city Leicester and Portsmouth living in flats without gardens and families locked out of parks. Children had nowhere safe to play and no morning walks to school. The social inequities of access to nature showed starker than ever (2).

Institute for Outdoor Learning member Matt Harder had a lightbulb moment,

"What children need is a Nature Premium!"

He worked with key workers' children and vulnerable learners and saw the value of time at Forest School for the wellbeing of staff and children.

This seed of an idea grew and we searched for someone to plant and nurture it. Our own lightbulb moment was that we needed to do the planting. Having never run a campaign before, we were like first-time tree planters. Armed with a tree ID book, our acorn, a spade and enthusiasm, we searched for others to join us to plant the Nature Premium idea.

Between us, we had a lifetime's experience of working with children and young people in nature. Dr. Sara Collins, with her background in ecology and commercial management, brought passion for the environment, tenacity and a methodical brain. Sarah Lawfull offered understanding of human learning from her roles as teacher, youth leader, coach and Forest School trainer. Other trustees set up a website, produced an animated film, created a logo, and reached out to members.

With the encouragement of colleagues at the FSA, and the forbearance of our families, we emailed anyone who believed



children needed nature. Having no experience with campaign protocols, we wrote audacious emails asking Lords, government ministers, writers and conservationists to help. We flew right to the top.

Early supporters were Chris Packham, the Bishop of Durham, who included the Nature Premium in an article co-written with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Merlin Sheldrake, scientist and author, who helped our mycelial network to grow.

As more artists, environmentalists and economists engaged, FSA members spoke to their MPs and put us in touch with people who could help. Colleagues in the Natural Environment Sector Partnership (NESP), Our Shared World (OSW) and Forest Education Network England (FENE) offered guidance.

As the pandemic progressed, the social inequities of access to nature became stark; Natural England's *People and Nature Survey* found that one-in-eight households in Britain are without a garden, and in England, black people are nearly four times as likely as white people to have no access to outdoor space at home (3).

Reaching out to policymakers and colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we realised the work they were doing to narrow this gap and make their curriculums fit for purpose. As with England, there were case studies of effective nature-based learning in schools and early years, and calls for funding and increased political will to ensure every child has access to green spaces locally and further afield.

We saw how a Nature Premium would contribute to quality education

THREE QUARTERS

OF PEOPLE BELIEVE ACCESS TO NATURE AT SCHOOL WOULD IMPROVE A CHILD'S QUALITY OF LIFE



TWO THIRDS

OF PEOPLE THINK SPENDING TIME IN NATURE CAN INSPIRE CHILDREN TO LEAD MORE SUSTAINABLE LIVES



THREE IN FIVE

PEOPLE THINK THE NATURE PREMIUM WOULD BE A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT



54%

OF PEOPLE BELIEVE THE NATURE PREMIUM WILL HELP THE GOVERNMENT LEVEL-UP CHILDREN'S SKILLS, EDUCATION AND WELLBEING



around the UN SDGs and understood the importance of big picture, systems thinking (4).

Meeting regularly with colleagues at the Wildlife Trust and Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC), we recognised that the Turning Learning Inside Out (TLIO) consortium was ideally poised to provide safe, enriching learning outdoors as soon as children returned to school. The Nature Premium would guarantee that schools can access this wealth of expertise as part of an ongoing COVID-19 recovery plan (5).

February 2021 saw the publication of the government-commissioned *The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta review*. This report states that nature-based learning must be integral to our education system if we are to halt biodiversity loss and live in harmony with the natural ecosystems that sustain all life on earth (6).

This sentiment is what the Nature Premium asks for, so we asked Professor Dasgupta to support us, which he did:

In my report...I made a plea for a transformation of our education systems towards one where children from an early age are encouraged to try and understand the infinitely beautiful tapestry of processes and forms that is Nature...the Nature Premium will deliver such a transformation to the benefit of our children and their future development."

Having attended the Bank of England's seminar on the review, we met Andy Haldane, then Chief Economist at the Bank of England, who suggested we find a funding mechanism to offer the government a solution (7).

Emboldened, we asked more influential people to help us. The more conversations we had, the more we realised how many agendas the Nature Premium would help address.

Pre-pandemic, through our own Forest School programmes and nature connection work, we witnessed the transformation of young people struggling with formal education. The latest figures suggest one in six 6–16-year-olds now has a probable mental health disorder (8).

Grant funding

Late summer 2021, the Ashden Trust awarded the FSA with a grant and guidance for the Nature Premium. With their networks and campaigning experience, the campaign was even shared at COP26 through 'sounding out' conversations in the Blue Zone.

With the publication of the DfE's *Sustainability and climate change* draft strategy, we doubled our efforts. Nadhim Zahawi's statement that:

"Education is critical to fighting climate change. We have both the responsibility and privilege of educating and preparing young people for a changing climate" (9).

had us all cheering. The Nature Premium could be the answer to his call for innovative and transformative ideas.

What do children and young people think?

From the outset, Teach the Future and UK Youth for Nature offered



their support for the Nature Premium; the commitment of these young people and their demands for government and schools to listen to their concerns about the climate and biodiversity emergencies fuelled us. They understood that younger generations must have a proactive relationship with the natural world to promote biodiversity and to mitigate the impacts of rising temperatures.

Natural England's survey found 83% of children say being in nature makes them very happy, with eight in ten agreeing that they would like to do more to protect the environment (10).

Global Action Plan also found that young people care deeply about other people and nature. Whilst coronavirus has strengthened this, they experience negative impacts to their wellbeing when they perceive that 'others don't care about the environment'. This "values-perception gap" increases eco-anxiety and makes them less likely to act on the issues they care about (11).

Grant funding has made it possible for us to begin scaling up our youth engagement, calling on the expertise of other organisations and the lived experience of our own ambassadors (12).

NEEDING NATURE

What about schools?

From Leading Nature NOW, an early years wellbeing and catch-up programme in Oxfordshire, Sarah hears from practitioners about toddlers who are terrified of crawling on grass. One early years teacher spoke of a four-year-old's amazement at feeling rain on his face for the first time. Stories of such poverty of experience are flooding in.

Writing about the value of environmental education, Matt Larsen-Daw suggests that

"Schools and colleges can act as 'levellers' to enable all young people to have a minimum level of nature experience, when the opportunities and encouragement they get at home may differ enormously" (13).

We believe the Nature Premium should provide additional funding to allow levelling up, where those children who have the least access to nature should receive more support.

Campaign supporter Edd Moore, a primary school teacher, agrees,

"There is a clear disparity in access to nature for children and young people in the UK, which has only been made worse by lockdown... Time outdoors experiencing our natural world should be a right, not a privilege."

Learning about your local area creates a sense of place, a feeling of belonging, and builds communities. With the Nature Premium, the education system would invite marginalised communities to feel welcome, enjoy and care for natural spaces.

Next steps

At COP15, world leaders will gather to discuss reversing the declines in nature. We hope that children and their education will be high on the agenda.

Research shows that human behaviour in natural spaces largely depends on our experiences with nature, that the 'extinction of

experience' is a threat to biodiversity conservation and to our own wellbeing.

Researchers Goodenough and Waite note that,

"Sustainability is not just about 'looking after nature"

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IMAGES

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ACCESS THE TOOLKIT

Click [here](#) to get the Nature Premium toolkit. Further details about Nature Premium can be found here: www.naturepremium.org

but includes social justice and the wellbeing of all who share this planet through economic, political, social and natural dimensions (14).

It is time for a curriculum that meets the needs of all living things, including humans, to teach children that we are nature. Unless we learn to live in harmony and sustainably with the natural world, life on earth will be irreparably damaged and we will miss this golden opportunity to foster the long-term health of future generations and...provide long-term benefits to nature, humans, health and the climate alike (15).

At this moment, post-COP26 and after the impacts of COVID-19, we have a once-in-a-decade opportunity to influence government policy and get children into nature.

To influence and embed the Nature Premium within the Sustainability and Climate Change strategy before its intended publication in late April 2022, we have grown the campaign team and are generating widespread support with a high-profile PR campaign (16).

With the Harmony Project on board, our advocacy for children and nature enters a new phase; the once small acorn of an idea is now growing into a strong tree.

We are in this for the long haul, knowing oak trees grow slowly and thrive only in a community. We recognise the decade of work by Mary Colwell, campaigning for a Natural History GCSE, and the years of relationship-building that the CLOtC has put into furthering the cause of inspirational learning experiences.

Funding

We know that schools and early years settings are best placed to understand the needs of their children, so they will decide how to use the money. We have worked with colleagues at the Centre for Public Service Reform to create a Social Bridging Funding (SBF) model.

This model fits with the Environment Plan and builds on the projects that are part of the Defra/DfE-funded Children and Nature programme.

We seek to meet and work with the DfE, other stakeholders, including philanthropic funders, to explore how the SBF model can pilot the costs and feasibility of implementing the Nature Premium.

Futureproofing

The Nature Premium campaign's objectives align with the government's recently announced package of measures to 'level up' activities for young people and its aims to increase access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer (17).

We share Natural England's vision of thriving Nature. A "*nature positive future*", to quote Tony Juniper, is the future our children want and the legacy we can leave them (18).

Will you join us in nurturing this idea that grows stronger every day?

Will you advocate for a Nature Premium so that our children can grow up happier, healthier and greener? ■

FIND AWE,
WONDER AND
FUN

Learn outdoors with
fairies on page 34.