

SCOTLAND'S TEENAGERS AND THEIR AWARENESS OF, ATTITUDES TO, AND ACTIONS FOR THE NATURAL HERITAGE: KEY INFLUENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

**A research project commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage,
and conducted by Market Research Scotland Ltd.**

This research report, undertaken for SNH, looks at how Scotland's teenagers view their natural environment, what influences these views and how they are expressed. The study used focus groups and questionnaires to get the views of 5000 young people from across Scotland.

As well as summarising the findings of the research, the report suggests how these might be used by individuals or organisations wanting to target environmental education more effectively for this age group

This paper is a summary of the project report, published by SNH as Review No 99 (1999)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- The role of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) relates to the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's natural environment, and the promotion of its understanding and enjoyment.
- With regard to young people, most of SNH's investment to date has been directed at 5 - 14 year olds, especially in the formal education setting. There is a perceived gap in our current knowledge about the needs of teenagers, within and outwith school education.
- In order to help address this, SNH commissioned Market Research Scotland Limited to conduct a survey of Senior Fourth Year pupils throughout Scotland.
- This extract details the structure of the research project, together with some of the key findings.

1.2 Research objective

- The key objective of the research was to establish the factors influencing young people's attitudes towards the environment.

1.3 Research Methodology

- This research survey was conducted in two phases.
- The first phase comprised of 12 group discussions with Senior Four secondary school pupils. This qualitative investigation enabled a range of attitudes and behaviours held by young people to be highlighted, while at the same time providing guidance on the construction of the quantitative questionnaire for the second phase.
- The second phase resulted in 5,089 questionnaires being completed by Senior Four

pupils in schools throughout Scotland.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Awareness of, attitudes to, and activity for the benefit of Scotland's' natural heritage

- First hand, outdoor experience of the natural environment has an impact in shaping the views and attitudes of young people in relation to environmental matters.
- Scotland's natural heritage is most often identified by this age group as geographical features such as hills, rivers, coastlines etc. It is less likely to be seen as including flora and fauna and, in a third of cases, buildings are mistakenly included.
- Awareness of environmental issues tends to comprise major environmental concerns such as the "greenhouse effect" and "depletion of the ozone layer" and "pollution", mainly because these are the most heavily discussed issues through the media and within the school.
- The environmental issues which impact most on young people's lives are the "inadequate disposal of litter", "obvious/physical pollution on land and sea", and "traffic congestion" with the resultant "noise and air pollution".
- Just under half of young people claimed to take steps to protect the environment, most commonly "recycling", "usage of environmentally friendly products" and "litter control".
- Only a small proportion of young people were members of an environmental organisation.

2.2 UK and Global natural heritage

- Many young people felt that they were well informed about "global" environmental issues. In comparison, young people were less well informed about UK and Scottish issues.

2.3 The motivators and demotivators which influence awareness, attitudes, and action

- Young people tended to be more interested in global environmental issues than Scotland's natural heritage. These issues were seen as more dramatic and impactful, and therefore more demanding of attention.
- Males especially in rural areas showed a much wider usage of Scotland's natural heritage through their greater involvement in outdoor activities, although easier access is likely to have played a significant role.
- Lack of interest and lack of time were the most common reasons given as demotivators.
- Scotland's environment was considered by many as being not relevant to their age group, believing that they had more interesting and exciting things to do with their time.
- Involvement with other young people (i.e. group activity) is a substantial motivation, regardless of the subject matter.

2.4 The relative importance that the natural heritage plays in young people's lives

- Around half of young people claim to be interested to some degree in Scotland's natural heritage. The qualitative research suggested that young people found Scotland's natural heritage boring because of an obvious lack of "things to do". In image terms, it was associated with parents and tourists.
- It is also believed that peer group pressure forces young people to see the countryside as "not cool", as negativity was greater in the group discussion situation than was recorded by the more individual attitudes in the quantitative findings.
- In summary, we found that young people did not believe the natural heritage to be important in their life,

2.5 What are their concerns? What opportunities/actions do they think should be taken?

- Overall, there were low levels of concern on any issue.
- "Litter" and "sewage pollution of seas/beaches" were perceived as the main causes for concern.
- Little suggestion was given as to what actions should be taken. This lack of pro-activity is self-justified by the belief that they have little power to effect change.

2.6 Their "Future" visions for Scotland's environment, and how important the natural heritage is to this.

- Scotland's environment was seen to be very good in comparison with the rest of the UK and, as a result, no major threats to the level of quality were anticipated.
- To these young people, Scotland's natural heritage was a stable, unthreatened, largely unchangeable object. Therefore, their vision of the future was no different from their view of the present.

2.7 How to target and inform young people about the environment.

- Many young people considered that they received too little information about their environment, and are receptive to receiving more information. The study itself may have contributed to increasing consciousness and therefore demand. School and television were seen to be the most appropriate communication routes to inform young people about their environment and natural heritage issues.
- Organised activities involving other young people and a magazine or newsletter specific to natural heritage issues, especially local issues, are also worth considering.
- However, it should be noted that many of this age group are no longer members or participants in youth organisations (outwith school), so awareness raising activities exclusively through these types of organisations will not be sufficient to significantly improve awareness, concern or action overall amongst young people.
- Targeting this age group through schools appears to be the most appropriate option to successfully inform and educate the majority, with communication which is impactful, stimulating, and encourages participation or involvement.

If you would like further information, or if you have any issues you wish to discuss, please

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