
Exploring teachers' preferences for school trips

Survey report

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Executive Summary

Background

Providing memorable, experiential learning opportunities for pupils of all ages is a top priority for teachers, particularly in schools where significant percentages of pupils may be culturally-deprived. Many curriculum areas require children to use their knowledge of the world and make links between different subjects; having limited cultural capital can create a barrier to learning and contribute towards an attainment gap between groups of pupils. Taking pupils on school trips is one way to address this issue but, with budget cuts and an increasing emphasis on progress in the 'core subjects', taking children out of class can be a challenge.

In July 2016, Schoolzone carried out a survey on behalf of some well-known organisations within the charities, cultural and heritage sector who wish to find out about teachers' experiences of planning trips so that they can ensure their provision is in line with teachers' needs. The great news for trip providers is that we had a fantastic response to the survey – over 800 primary and secondary teachers took the time to answer the questions which suggests the issue is high on their ever-growing list of priorities!

Summary of findings

Types of learning experiences

Our findings suggest that, despite the challenges associated with organising a school trip (such as limited budgets and time constraints), schools still place a high value on these experiences: virtually all schools have organised a trip to an external organisation or venue in the past twelve months, regardless of region. Perhaps most interestingly, over 80 per cent of survey respondents indicated that their school has organised visits *from* external organisations/individuals, possibly because this approach is likely to be much cheaper and mean fewer/no risk assessments are needed. In terms of location and type of activity, a range of these are of interest to schools, with visits to historical sites and museums being very popular with both primary and secondary schools.

Cost of trips

On the whole, pupils are asked to contribute towards the cost of school trips – only six per cent of respondents said that pupils are not asked to contribute.

Supporting documentation

Information about the venue was considered most important, with activity ideas and pre-lesson preparation materials also being rated fairly highly; lesson plans were least popular.

Barriers to organising trips

Financial cost is the biggest barrier to school trips; however, this cost was often due to coach hire rather than a venue's entry fees, and non-payment by parents and the costs of supply cover were mentioned as additional expenses. Other barriers included finding suitable additional adults to go on school trips, associated paperwork (such as risk assessments), and the time limits of the school day – both in terms of travel time and struggling to find time in the calendar with an already jam-packed curriculum.

Virtual school trips

There was a lukewarm response to virtual trips: a desire for children to experience the 'real thing', technology issues and teachers' lack of ICT knowledge seemed to be the main reasons for this.

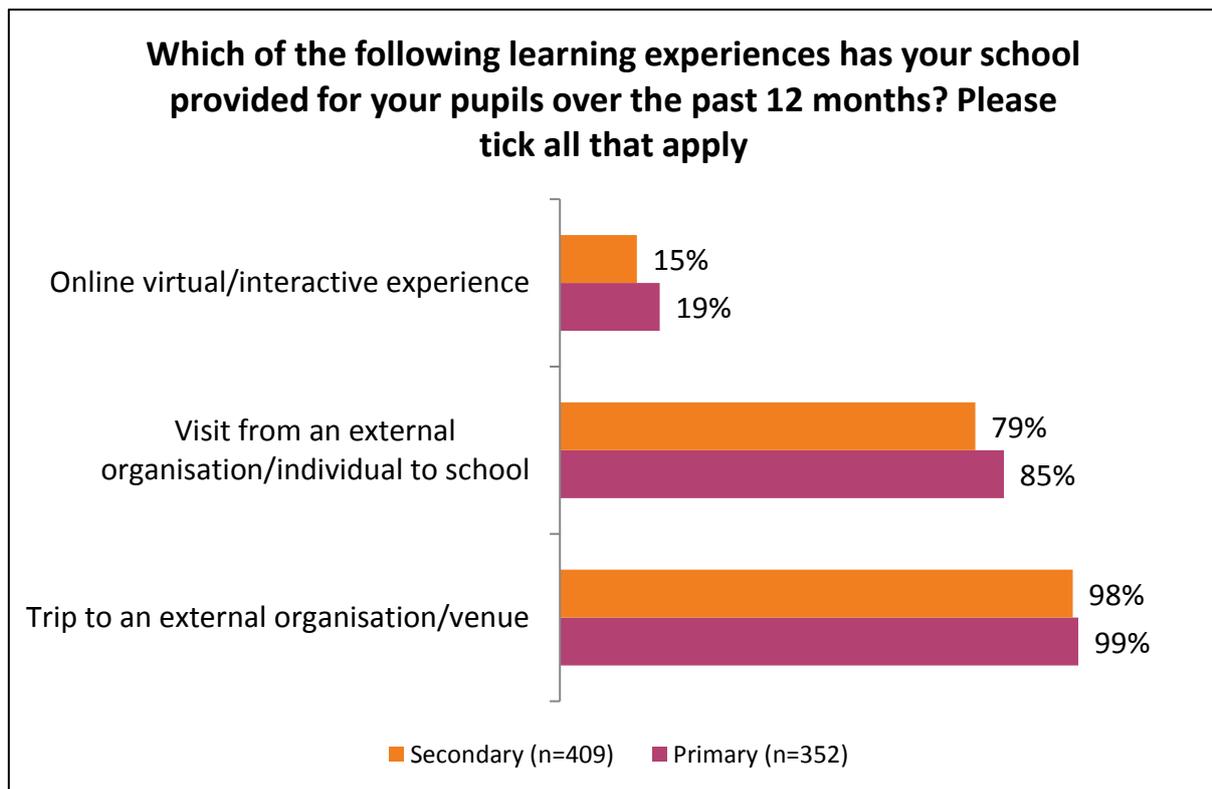
Key recommendations

- School trips are still popular amongst teachers therefore trip providers should continue to market widely, taking their target demographic into consideration (e.g. marketing farm experiences to secondary schools appears less likely to achieve a good response).
- If not already doing so, providers should investigate if there is a way to take their experience *into* schools to avoid the school having to pay coach costs and other associated expenses. This reduced-cost, school-based option should be included explicitly in marketing materials.
- Providers could check if they are scheduling marketing material around the school year timetable. From our experience in teaching, we know that there are peaks and troughs with regards to when teachers are more receptive to this type of material. For example, receiving marketing material mid-summer term for trips in the autumn is more useful than receiving it in September: teachers are likely to be very busy at the start of the academic year and therefore less likely to read marketing emails or flyers in their pigeon holes. Conversely, marketing outdoor activities and residential offerings to Year 6 teachers in the autumn and early spring terms may be successful as they consider post-SATs treats for May-July.
- Providers should evaluate their current documents for teachers to ensure that any venue information is comprehensive. They may also want to consider whether any existing lesson plans are useful, and whether it is worth creating more of these in the future. Pre- and post-visit resources should be publicised to teachers as these appear to be more popular than the lesson plans themselves.
- Venues should try to keep entry fees as competitive as possible to decrease the financial burden on schools, and could consider a tiered system of ticket prices based on distance from the venue.
- Any marketing materials should provide explicit links to the curriculum – if teachers can see how to weave the experience into their curriculum coverage then they are more likely to go to the extra effort of organising.
- Virtual trips may not be worthwhile at the moment as teachers are not showing a great deal of enthusiasm for them, and schools' ICT provision is a barrier to this approach. However, this may change over time, as teachers begin to utilise technology more and more in the classroom. Providers who do wish to embrace virtual field trips in the future should ensure that they go hand-in-hand with software training, as well as supporting guidance which can be accessed by the teacher independently.

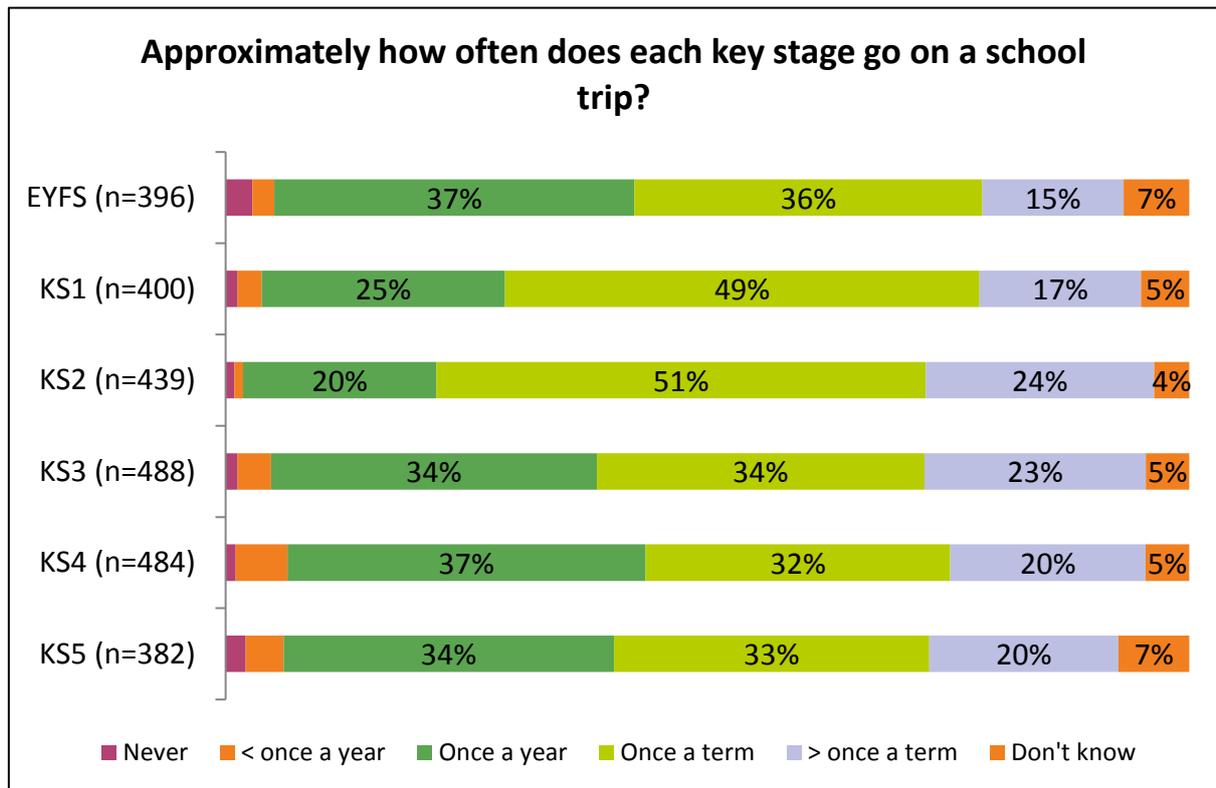
Research Findings

Types of learning experiences

Virtually all schools have organised a trip to an external organisation or venue in the past twelve months. What was particularly interesting was the finding that over 80 per cent of survey respondents indicated that their school has organised visits from external organisations/ individuals. Having external visitors is likely to be much cheaper and mean fewer/no risk assessments are needed, and this could explain why schools adopt this approach. Whether every year group or individual classes have had a visit is not clear, but it was certainly encouraging to find that schools see the value in bringing in outside expertise and experiences into the classroom. Analysis of the survey data by school phase showed that a lower proportion of secondary schools had external visitors, although this percentage was still quite high (79 per cent).



The modal number of times that pupils tend to go on a school trip is typically once a year or once a term, although the frequencies vary across the key stages: for example, about half of teachers said that Key Stage 2 pupils go on school trips every term, compared to a third in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. In other words, it appears that primary schools go on school trips more often than secondary schools, as is evident in the following chart:

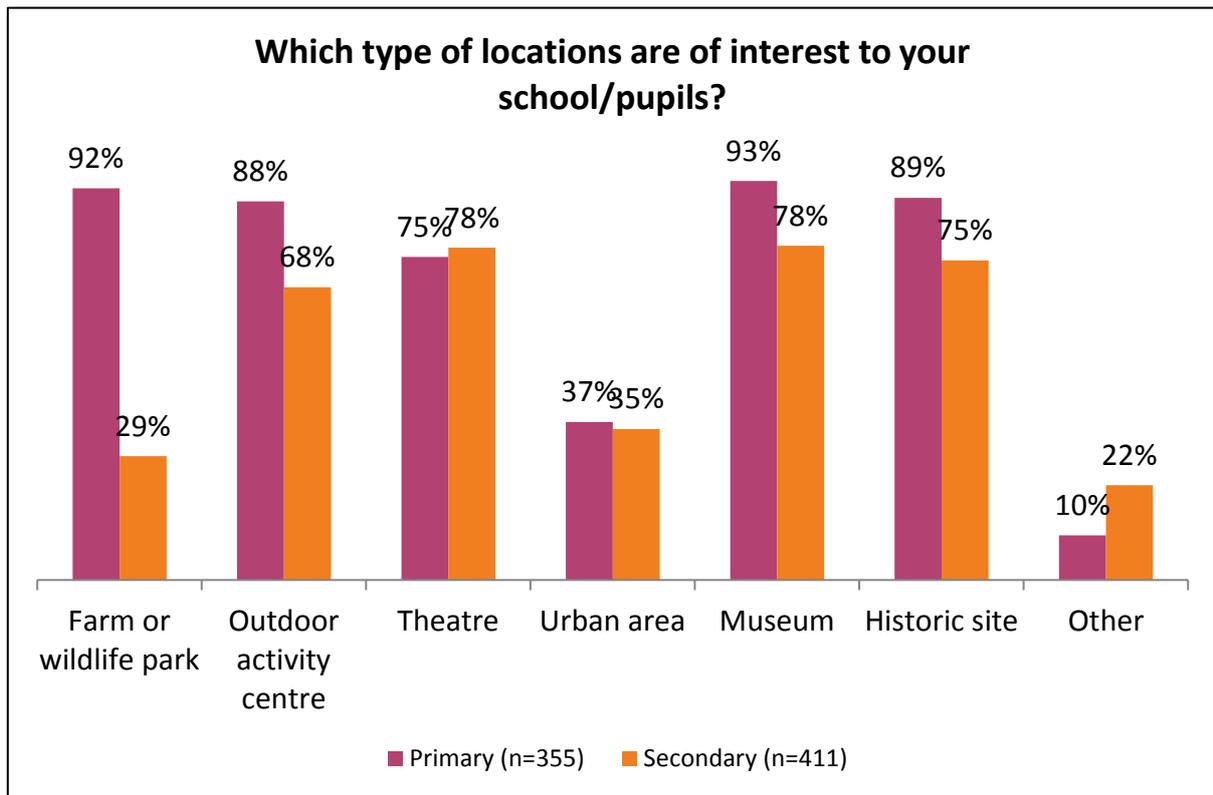


Note: The likelihood of going on school trips does not appear to vary by region.

Very few schools never take pupils on school trips – around one to two per cent. In contrast, an average of 20 per cent of respondents indicated that pupils are taken on school trips more than once a term. This figure may be higher than one might expect and demonstrates the high value placed on out-of-school experiences by some schools, especially when considering the amount of time, money and organisation required to make these events happen.

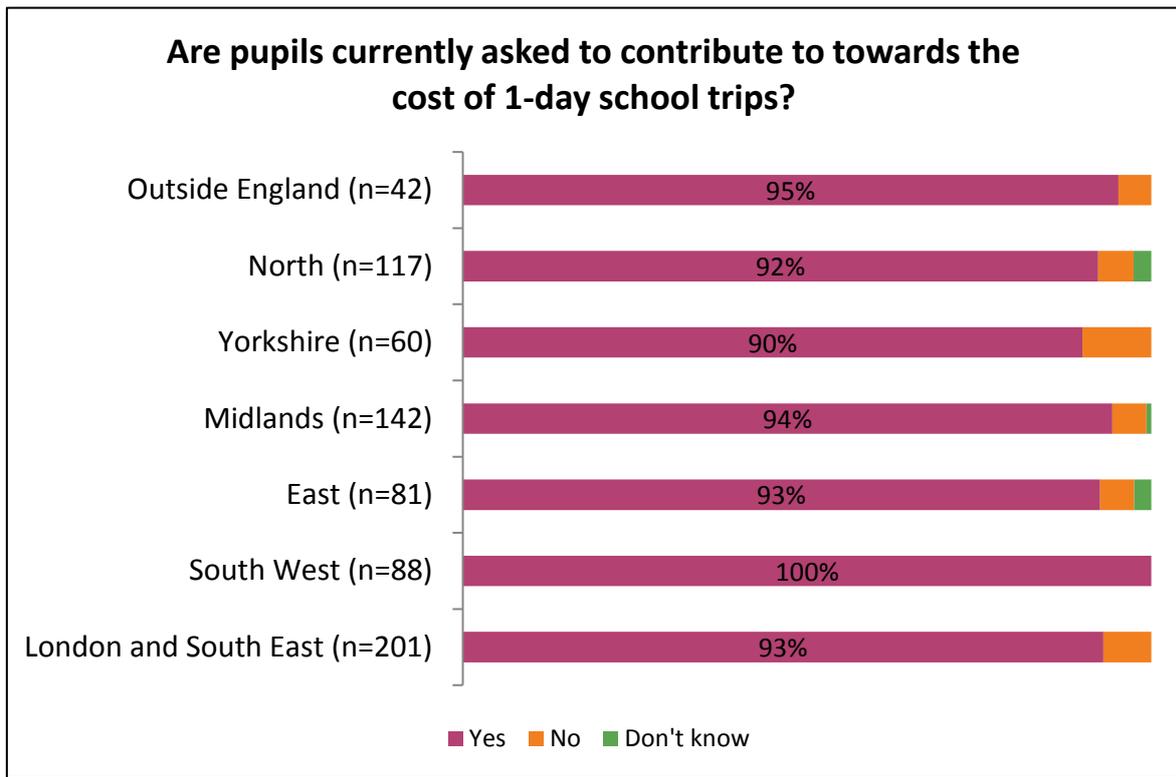
Locations and venues of interest

A range of locations and activities are of interest to schools when taking their pupils on a school trip: visits to historical sites, museums and theatres are popular with both primary and secondary schools; farm or wildlife parks are most attractive to primary schools, since nearly all respondents ticked this option when presented with a list of choices; and a higher proportion of primary schools find outdoor activity centres appealing, compared to secondary schools, although the overall level of interest is still quite high. The implications of this are that outdoor activities providers should ensure they are targeting primary schools with their marketing materials alongside secondary. Urban area visits are less popular, although obviously relate to individual school location and demographics. Other locations listed included universities, local businesses, science parks and religious centres, though the majority of these venues were mentioned by secondary teachers.



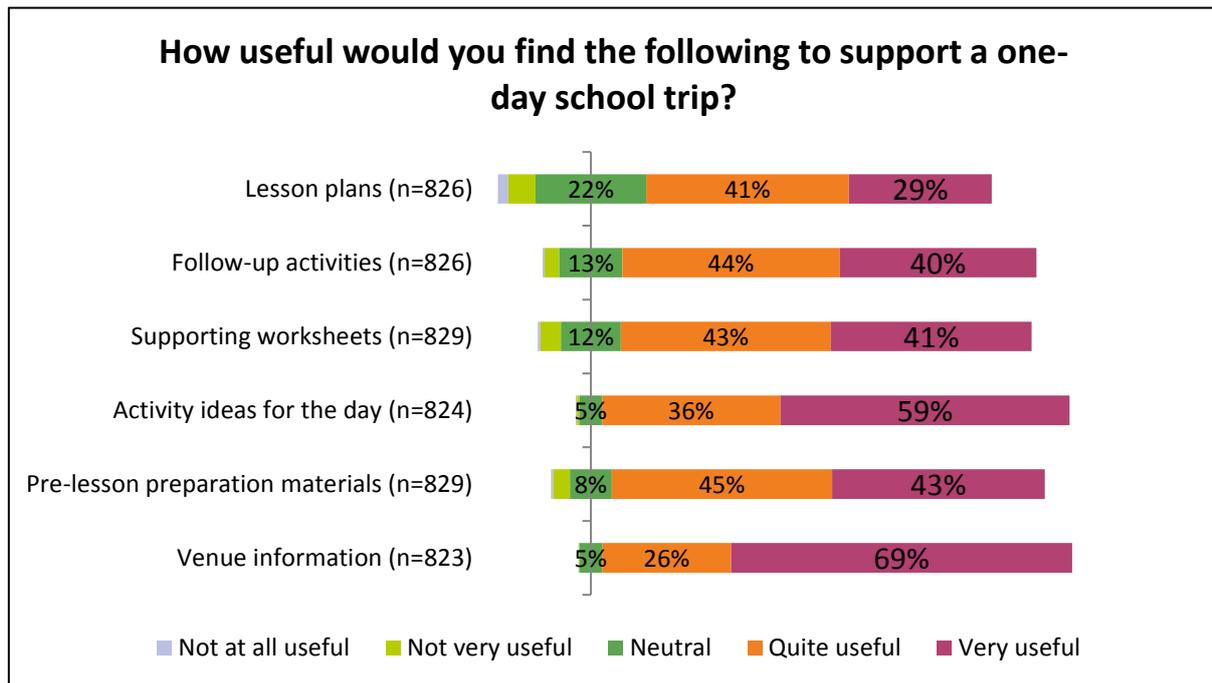
Contributions towards the cost

On the whole, pupils are asked to contribute towards the cost of school trips – only six per cent of respondents said that pupils are not asked to contribute (and this group of 51 schools was representative of the survey sample i.e. shared the same profile). However, a breakdown by region reveals a slightly different pattern in the South West, whereby ***all*** schools ask pupils to contribute towards the cost of school trips, although this discrepancy in the data could be the result of sampling bias - it's difficult to be sure.



Supporting documentation required

Information about the particular venue is considered the most useful information required for a school trip. This was followed closely by activity ideas for the day, pre-lesson preparation materials, supporting worksheets and follow-up activities. Lesson plans were least popular (only 29% said they were 'very useful'), possibly because teachers are highly skilled at planning their own teaching and would prefer to incorporate a venue's resources into their own lesson planning, rather than use an 'off-the-shelf' solution which may not be suitable for their particular cohort of children.



A comparison across sectors suggests that there may be small differences in what supporting material teachers want: for example, worksheets appear to be more suited to secondary-aged pupils since 88 per cent of secondary teachers indicated that supporting worksheets would be useful, compared to 78 per cent of primary teachers. This supports the findings of a recent project carried out by Schoolzone, which found that primary schools prefer school trips to promote hands-on, experiential learning rather than worksheet-led activities. Many primary schools seem to prefer the idea of taking photos to record learning on the day, with more 'formal' learning (e.g. written activities) being completed back at school. This explanation is further supported by the fact that 'ideas for activities on the day' were deemed 'very useful' by 65 per cent of primary teachers, compared to 53 per cent of secondary teachers, which suggests that primary teachers prefer ideas and inspiration, rather than a prescriptive outline for the learning that should take place. Other than this, there were no significant differences between the sectors as to what information or resources they'd like to receive to support a school trip.

Barriers to organising school trips

Cost

Cost is the number one barrier preventing teachers taking pupils on school trips: it is the cost of the coach hire, rather than the entry fee, that is the main cause for concern because this extra cost significantly raises the total price per pupil.

"The cost of transport seems to take up most of the cost!"

Venues could consider incentives for schools travelling from further away (e.g. reduced ticket prices or 'bonus extras'). Eleven teachers overtly stated that **voluntary contributions** from pupils' parents do not always cover the costs of a trip, even when schools pay for pupil-premium children. If parental contributions fall short, school trips may be cancelled and schools are undoubtedly likely to search for more affordable local options in the future.

"Issue with parents not paying as it has to be a 'voluntary' contribution. Many choose not to pay. As a result we have had to cancel trips."

"The fact that if a trip is an integral part of the curriculum, schools can only request a voluntary contribution. However, if nobody pays, the trip cannot run! Schools are not able to build in a 'buffer' in terms of charges meaning that trips run in curricular time are either impossible or have to accept that they will run at a loss. In my school, any deficit is met by departmental capitation."

An additional cost involved when taking pupils out of school is **supply cover**, which one assumes is covered by the school budget, although verification of this was not sought in the present survey.

"School budgets are pared to the bone so there is no way we can easily organise trips without having to charge students for the cost of bringing in supply teachers."

Staffing

Many schools have difficulties finding the staff to go on school trips and one presumes that the impact of releasing staff from their timetable of delivering the curriculum to other pupils is a consideration.

"Time out of school for KS4 and KS5 has impact on exam classes."

One primary teacher mentioned that the school has reduced the number of teaching assistants and consequently they do not have enough adults to take the children on school trips. The availability of other suitable **adults** (e.g. parents) to accompany children on the trip is also a challenge for a significant number of schools, although once again it was difficult to ascertain the reasons behind this from the qualitative data that was collected (difficulties finding DBS checked helpers was mentioned by a couple of teachers).

Travel time

Interestingly, the shortage of available venues was raised by a number of teachers, partly because they get booked up very quickly, but frequently because the distance was too far to reach within a one-day round trip. This research finding links with concerns over travel time: getting back to school in time for the end of the day is a problem for many secondary schools, whereby pupils need to be back on site to catch school buses at the end of the day.

"Some of the barriers include the expense and availability of coach travel. Ensuring that children are returned to school before 3:30. Not having enough time at the venue once lunch and other necessities have been taken into account."

Furthermore, coaches may have to be back early in the afternoon too, in order to fulfil other bookings/contracts (a factor that affects both primary and secondary schools) as described by the following teacher:

"Buses usually need to be back to take up their other role as daily school transport."

Admin / paperwork

With so many other responsibilities to manage, school trips are not a priority for many: teachers referred to the amount of time required to organise a school trip, particularly with respect to the volume of **paperwork and admin** tasks involved, such as the completion of risk assessments and the time taken chasing up pupils for payment and consent forms. A staggering 125 teachers (i.e. 15 per cent) listed having to complete risk assessments as a barrier to organising school trips, many adding that this can be a complex, time-consuming process which may also involve a prior visit.

Other barriers mentioned by fewer respondents but of interest include meeting the needs of SEN pupils, managing student behaviour (seen as a risk) and gaining SLT approval. The later issue relates to the cost implications of running

school trips, as leadership teams - with budgetary responsibilities and having less money in the pot - are keen to make savings in every area.

Impact on the curriculum

Respondents reported that it can be tricky to find a suitable day in the timetable to book in a school trip, because of the huge number of activities that go on in school (including exams and coursework) and consequent timetable clashes. One got a sense that some school trips do not happen because they require time away from lessons and hence valuable curriculum time is lost (of particular issue in key stages 4 and 5); this may also disrupt subsequent lessons and have a resultant impact on other students.

"We can't go on trips when we are doing coursework."

"Fitting in with the overall school schedule in relation to how many staff can be out of school at a time, the amount of activities that can go on at any one time considering different curriculum needs for different year groups, and indeed, getting your HoD's approval."

"The school timetable has double periods for humanities and other option subjects so students miss too much study time."

"Disruption to learning in other areas is becoming increasingly difficult with the curriculum changes."

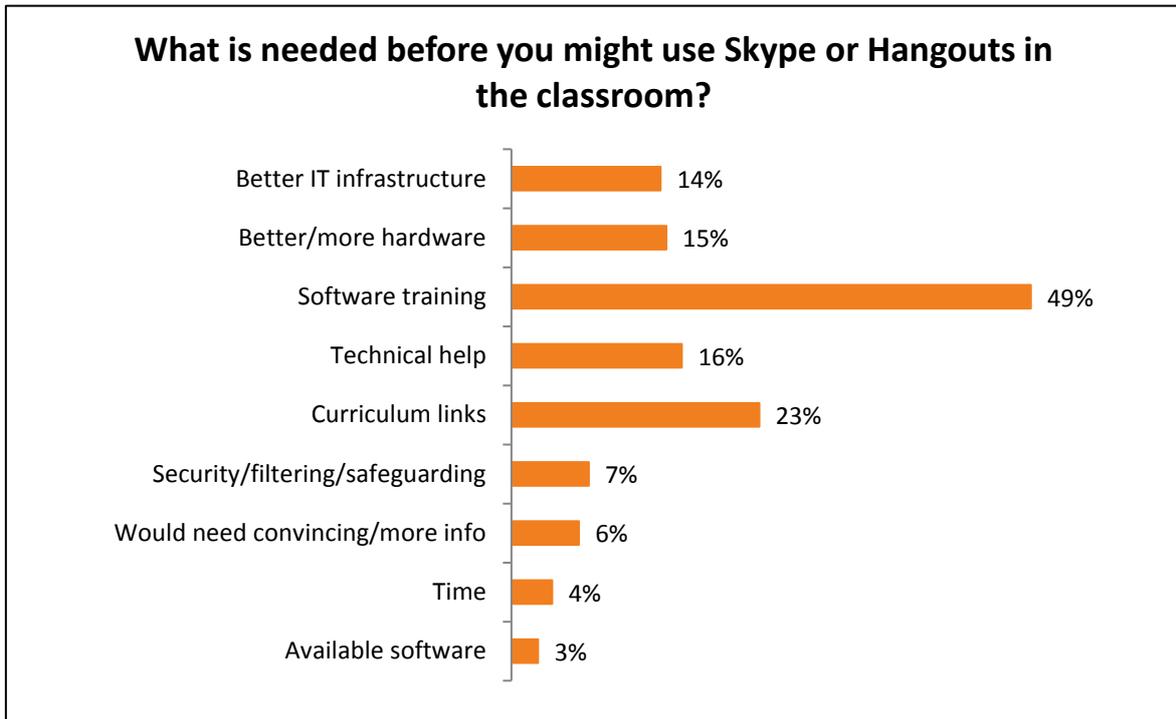
Virtual trips

Only 17 respondents (i.e. two per cent) have already accessed a field-trip remotely via digital software, such as Google Hangouts or Skype. A further half of the survey respondents are interested in this concept, although over a quarter are not interested so there is a range of feelings about using technology to create 'virtual' experiences.

A number of teachers (circa 50 i.e. six per cent) expressed explicitly that they would prefer to experience the real thing, as evidenced in the following quotes:

- *"It's not a field trip, might as well watch a documentary."*
- *"Doing it for real is much more effective."*
- *"Not sure if it would engage the children in the same way."*
- *"It's just not the same! We need the children to be literally there and expanding their horizons."*

Other negative views about virtual field trips tended to be associated with concerns about the internet connection rather than the concept per se. Issues with the school's ICT infrastructure was also mentioned in response to the question: "What would be required before you might use Microsoft Skype or Google Hangouts to broaden your pupils' learning experiences?" This was followed closely by demands for better/more ICT hardware (which includes computers, projectors, speakers, smartboards and cameras).



Nevertheless, the need for software training and technical help were the most common requirements for teachers before they would feel confident in using Skype or Google hangouts in the classroom. Therefore, although there is some resistance to the idea of having online school trip experiences, the main barrier preventing this from happening is teachers' lack of ICT knowledge and experience. The complete digital package would involve organisations providing schools with a tailored virtual field trip experience and a complementary suite of learning resources, in addition to a training programme and supporting guidance for teachers to familiarise themselves with the technology beforehand. The latter may be addressed naturally over time via other means/activities as teachers begin to utilise technology more and more in the classroom – time will tell.



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