

JOHN MUIR AWARD AND THE CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE



The John Muir Trust aims to inspire people and communities to benefit from and advocate for wild places. The Trust's main engagement initiative, the John Muir Award is a UK-wide environmental award scheme, focused on wild places.

The John Muir Award supports the delivery of learning outcomes through practical, creative and engaging approaches that are beneficial to all. In a curriculum setting, it encourages a healthy approach to life through learning for sustainability and as a framework for outdoor learning. It helps develop skills for life, learning and work and celebrate achievement in and beyond formal education.

Use this document to find out how the John Muir Award can help Scotland's teachers:

- contribute to learning
- support school priorities
- help deliver Experiences and Outcomes

“It has been amazing to have an opportunity to make a difference, and this has inspired me to do more. I learned why it was important to look after nature. Now, in a climate crisis this is more important than ever.”
Pupil, Whitehill Secondary School, Glasgow.

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Introducing the John Muir Award

The John Muir Award encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It's ideally suited for those participants working at later stage of primary education and beyond (Second Level). For further guidance on suitability please see the [Get Involved](#) section of the website prior to planning your involvement.

It provides a flexible framework within which activities identified by your school, college, or youth organisation can be tailored to meet the needs of the group, the wild place(s) chosen, and the curriculum.

The Award's Four Challenges

Four Challenges are at the heart of each John Muir Award. They are designed to promote a holistic approach to learning – including awareness, understanding and action.

To achieve a John Muir Award each participant engages in a range of activities to meet Four Challenges:

- **Discover a wild place(s)** – this can range from school grounds to mountain top
- **Explore it** – experience, enjoy and increase awareness and understanding
- **Conserve it** – take action for wild places, nature and our climate
- **Share experiences** – reflect, review and celebrate with others

Help keep the John Muir Award free

There are many ways organisations and groups using the John Muir Award can help the Trust keep it free: build fundraising into your Award activity; donate to our Wild Action Fund; add us to your funding and proposals; join us as a member... Visit [‘Support us’](#) to find ideas that suit you.



Use the John Muir Award to:

- Inspire people about the benefits of wild places and how they can help tackle the climate crisis and reverse the loss of nature
- Help meet learning across the Four Contexts
- Build capacities and enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors
- Place people's rights and the needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improve children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Help tackle inequalities caused by poverty
- Build skills for life, learning and work and support learner pathways
- Engage young people in their learning
- Deliver Learning for Sustainability

The Curriculum's Four Capacities



Learning across the Four Contexts through the John Muir Award

Curriculum for Excellence puts young people at the centre of their learning, placing an emphasis on developing skills and capacities. It encourages an active, healthy approach to life through learning for sustainability and aims to support children and young people to learn beyond the classroom. It embraces initiatives that support outdoor learning, such as the John Muir Award.



Opportunities for wider achievement

The John Muir Award can...

- recognise equity of non-formal learning and achievement
- celebrate individual achievement with a nationally recognised Award
- provide progression – increasing personal responsibility, leadership and challenge
- contribute to learner journeys by complementing other initiatives and awards – see [Awards Network](#) and [Achieving Awards in, through and for Nature](#)
- embed youth social action for the environment – see [Young People and Nature](#)

Interdisciplinary Learning

The John Muir Award can...

- join up learning across subjects and themes (see pages 4-5)
- reinforce values-based learning and promote citizenship
- develop skills for learning, life and work in a real-world context
- enable young people to lead their own learning
- embed nature and climate across all areas of learning

The Curriculum
'the totality of all that is planned for children and young people throughout their education'

Ethos and life of the school as a community

The John Muir Award can...

- build connections with wild places in local community
- enhance school grounds as a resource for learning and play
- improve health and wellbeing through nature connection and physical activity
- support family engagement
- support youthwork and community learning approaches
- complement whole school approaches e.g. Learning for Sustainability, Rights Respecting Schools, Eco Schools
- provide Continuing Professional Learning and Development

Curriculum areas and subjects

The John Muir Award can...

- enhance subject delivery through hands on learning outdoors
- raise attainment
- help meet the needs of learners, including learners with additional support needs or those learning outside mainstream education
- give focus and structure to residential and adventurous experiences

See education [case studies](#) for more ideas in practice.



How can the John Muir Award be used across the Curriculum?

Examples of activities and topics that have contributed to meeting John Muir Award Challenges of Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share.

Activities can:

- Meet Experiences and Outcomes by taking learning outdoors
- Make connections across the curriculum
- Help raise attainment in core areas of Literacy, Numeracy, Health and Wellbeing
- Support whole school priorities such as Learning for Sustainability (sustainable development education, global citizenship, outdoor learning, children's rights and play) and STEM Learning

“The John Muir Award brings the curriculum to life. Learners make sense of the topics studied across many subjects by experiencing learning outdoors in the ‘real world.’” *Karen Fulton, Teacher, Doon Academy*

Modern Languages

- translate work into a poster
- write newspaper articles
- produce a leaflet to attract tourists
- create a PowerPoint presentation
- learn environmental and emotional vocabulary

Sciences

- sensory exploration of nature
- work with experts e.g. ranger services
- consider food miles and carbon
- survey wildlife in school grounds – citizen science
- role of wild places/nature in tackling our climate emergency
- soil sampling
- nature walks
- pollution surveys
- conduct energy audits
- consider personal impacts and lifestyle choices
- food chains
- study biodiversity
- litter campaigns

Health and Wellbeing

- connect with nature – solo time, personal reflection
- volunteer - support community wild places
- group work – planning and participation
- participate in risk assessments
- engage and learn from your community
- cross country running
- adventurous activities
- scavenger hunts
- review experiences – awareness of self and others
- practical conservation projects – taking responsibility, physical activity
- orienteering
- green travel
- walking

English and Literacy

- persuasive writing- creating a campaign
- creative writing
- debate environmental issues
- create a poem
- find nature in literature
- produce a guide to local wild place
- write newsletter articles
- reflect in Record Books
- presentations
- lead guided walks

Religious and Moral Education

- volunteer – community and environmental projects
- consider fair trade, organic issues
- explore values and spirituality
- Scottish Outdoor Access Code
- initiate a natural resources debate
- campaign for wild places, nature and climate
- investigate climate change and take action
- consider climate justice
- investigate local, national and international wild places
- advocate for nature - develop youth voices

Mathematics and Numeracy

- mapping skills – references and bearings
- analyse wildlife data
- estimate and measure height and age of trees
- sort and categorise litter – time spans and biodegradability
- presentation of data e.g. wildlife surveys
- plan and measure routes
- estimate and measure area, angles and distances

Technologies

- build planters for school ground
- litter picks – understanding litter sources
- make bird seed cakes
- recycling
- reduce ecological footprints
- consider personal impacts and lifestyle choices
- design and place homes for wildlife – birds, bats and insects
- film making, photography and animations
- investigate alternative energy sources – large or small scale
- choose fairtrade and organic
- create displays and give presentations
- consider food miles – local and seasonal food
- make nature inspired art and crafts – needlework, natural dyes, collages
- share on the internet
- compost at school

JOHN MUIR AWARD

wild places:
DISCOVER
EXPLORE
CONSERVE
SHARE

Expressive Arts

- map natural sounds
- investigate John Muir's sketches and drawings
- create exhibitions and displays
- paint and draw outdoors
- find art in nature
- photography
- perform outdoor plays
- hold celebration events
- present at school assemblies
- lead guided walks for peers and family
- make environmental films
- consider landscape painting
- create music inspired by nature

Social Studies

- consider the environmental impact of human activities
- investigate weather and climate impacts on living things
- conduct environmental quality surveys
- consider the social impact of pollution
- investigate the life and legacy of John Muir
- map land use – understand competing needs
- learn about conservation values
- experience the seasons
- investigate the history of local green spaces
- map read – investigate scale, distance and direction
- compare and contrast different wild places
- improve school grounds
- investigate features of Scotland's landscape
- consider the environmental impact of transport



Core curriculum areas

Health and Wellbeing

There is a sizeable body of evidence demonstrating positive associations between learning in the natural environment and a range of educational, social, developmental, and mental or physical health outcomes. The John Muir Award supports activity, boosts motivation and helps people be more active. It's a tool to help improve social, mental and emotional wellbeing. [*Five Ways to Wellbeing and Wild Places*](#) illustrates why nature offers an ideal setting to support personal wellbeing, and shares ideas to put this into action.

Creativity and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths)

Curiosity, observation and seeing things in different ways help us make connections across disciplines, generating new ideas and creative solutions to the challenges we face as global citizens. John Muir Award activity can provide rich, multi-sensory experiences in nature, sparking curiosity. Its framework supports connections across subjects such as STEM and creativity. [See a STEM By Nature padlet](#) of ideas and resources.

Literacy and Numeracy

John Muir Award activity can include a wide range of literacy activities from planning and reviewing experiences in wild places, to campaigning for nature and climate issues and creative writing (see [Literacy & Nature](#)). Community events, guided tours of wild places and presentations at school assemblies can help to develop vocabulary and confidence. To develop numeracy skills opportunities can be created for learners to analyse survey data (as part of Citizen Science activity), measure areas and angles, or calculate bearings and journey times.



Supporting school priorities



Inclusion, equity and raising attainment

The John Muir Award was set up to ensure circumstances are not a barrier to people experiencing and advocating for wild places. Each year at least 25% of people who achieve the Award are experiencing some form of disadvantage.

The John Muir Award is part of the rich menu of strategies and interventions used to raise attainment and achieve equity in educational outcomes. 73% of organisations that deliver the John Muir Award in Scotland agreed that it helps the people they work with improve attainment. Evidence highlights that securing pupils' interest and engagement with learning through fun outdoor approaches has a part to play in raising attainment – see [Attainment](#) and [Closing the Gap](#).

Employability skills and Developing the Young Workforce

John Muir Award activity involves positive, real-life experiences that provide space for developing key skills such as problem solving, decision-making, creativity, communication and team-working. The Award often brings young people into contact with a range of outdoor, creative and countryside-based roles, helping broaden horizons. Activities undertaken can help demonstrate experience and achievements in personal statements and at interviews. [Employability and the John Muir Award](#) gives an overview of how it is used to help move participants towards employment.

Learning for Sustainability and Outdoor Learning

The John Muir Award embraces outdoor learning approaches and offers a personal learning context for exploring sustainability and climate through direct experiences of nature. The Conserve Challenge promotes simple concepts of personal responsibility and the ability to make a positive difference. This helps learners to understand the impact of our actions and helps engage them in finding solutions to mitigate some of the most urgent global and local issues of sustainability, climate action and managing the planet's natural resources.

School inspection reports highlight that the outdoors offers huge potential for high quality learning through the [John Muir Award](#). The Award can inspire increased connections with nature and bridge indoor and outdoor learning, including spontaneous school ground activities and adventurous experiences further afield such as expeditions in National Parks and residential centres.

See [Ideas and Resources](#) for more on supporting school priorities





Next steps

1

Send us your
Proposal Form



2

Get outside
and get active



3

Review
your activity



4

Send us a
Certificate
Completion Form



Find out more at johnmuiraward.org where you can:

- Watch a [short introductory animation](#)
- Download an Information Handbook – detailed guidance on delivering the Award
- Find [ideas and resources](#) to inspire and help you get started, including a range of Award case studies from education settings

To register for the John Muir Award, outline your activities on a Proposal Form and email this to info@johnmuiraward.org before you get started. We will review and (if necessary) develop your plans with you.

Contact us

- Email: info@johnmuiraward.org
- Social: #JohnMuirAward, @JohnMuirTrust
- See our [FAQ](#)
- johnmuirtrust.org

The John Muir Trust is a conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places for the benefit of all.

The John Muir Award in Scotland is supported by many partners, including Cairngorms National Park, City of Edinburgh Council, East Ayrshire Council, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, NatureScot, Scottish Forestry, Scottish Government and The Outward Bound Trust.

Continuing Professional Learning and Development

The John Muir Award can be used as a tool to help meet GTCS Professional Standards and as a basis for, or part of, a portfolio to gain Professional Recognition from the General Teaching Council of Scotland. For further information see: [John Muir Award - Professional Development for Teachers](#).

Training is not a requirement - the website provides all the information needed to run a John Muir Award. Professional learning is available to complement this information, helping leaders find out more about the ethos of the John Muir Award and practicalities of delivering it. Visit johnmuiraward.org to find out more.



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Cover image and P7 Holyrood High School (Malcolm Cochrane/Learning Through Landscapes), P6 St. John Vianney Primary (Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre), P7 Pittenweem Primary School (Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre) and Gairloch High School (Emma Smith). Illustrations by Calumma

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