

# Outdoor learning

“When it comes to learning, it prompts the question ‘Why indoors?’”

Pete Higgins, Professor of Outdoor and Environmental Education, University of Edinburgh

## What is outdoor learning?

Outdoor learning is an approach that takes learning outside of traditional classroom settings, using natural or outdoor environments to engage learners. It can be fun, adventurous, exhilarating, challenging and creative.

It can support formative experiences that inspire confidence, awareness and appreciation, values and responsibility. Outdoor learning can happen over varied timescales: from a lesson or session to a week-long residential trip; and in any outside location - school grounds, local parks, along rivers and coastlines and in National Parks.

## Benefits of outdoor learning

### Bring learning to life

Outdoor environments provide a real-life context for curriculum and learning themes, encouraging enquiring minds and investigation. Exciting opportunities and challenges outdoors can also help to re-engage people with learning.



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### Raising achievement

Outdoor experiences can stimulate curiosity and help develop transferable skills for learning, life and work. Practical, ‘hands on’ learning can cultivate deeper understanding and motivations for action. Such an approach to learning can encourage people with a wide range of abilities to shine and reach their potential.

### Develop personal and social skills

Learning in the outdoors can provide experiences and opportunities to broaden horizons and encourage new interests. Outdoor learning has been shown to help people become more independent, improve communication skills, and build self-esteem and confidence.

### Improved health & wellbeing

Evidence shows that spending time outside and in contact with nature helps mental well-being and resilience. Getting involved in the natural environment encourages a more active lifestyle and can lead to new interests and hobbies. For many adults outdoor experiences are fond and vivid childhood memories.

## Sense of self

Research indicates that nature experiences typically offered through outdoor learning approaches can have a significant impact on values – the guiding principles that help form our life goals, beliefs, viewpoints and actions. These often-enjoyable experiences can promote respect for diversity, equality of opportunity and the sustainable use of the environment.

## Sense of place

By connecting with, enjoying and caring for the outdoors people are able to develop an awareness of the importance of their environment. This helps people to take greater responsibility for their actions in the future.

## The John Muir Award and outdoor learning

The John Muir Award is used by a diverse range of organisations delivering activities that combine adventure, the environment, and personal development.

The four Challenges of the Award offer a simple structure that embrace, enhance and support outdoor learning approaches. The Award can be delivered through specific curriculum subjects, used as a focus for cross curricular projects or extracurricular activities, and through residential field trips or expeditions.



## Useful websites

The following websites provide a range of research articles, activity resources, examples of good practice, training (CPD) opportunities and practical advice to help in relation to outdoor learning.

[Council for Learning Outside the Classroom](#) range of resources to support anyone working with young people outdoors

[The Institute for Outdoor Learning](#) supports and enhances good practice in the outdoors through training, events and publication

[Education Scotland: Outdoor Learning](#) an overview of opportunities and resources available to support outdoor learning

[NatureScot](#) – Guidance, case studies and resources from Teaching in Nature programme

[Learning through Landscapes](#) events resources and guidance for creating stimulating outdoor learning and play experiences for young people

[Outdoor Learning Wales](#) support for individuals and groups involved in the outdoors to share information and good practice, develop resources and deliver projects and events

[Field Studies Council](#) CPD and fieldwork opportunities in spectacular sites and habitats in the UK

[The National Trust](#) – find a property near you and discover what learning/education opportunities they can provide

[RSPB](#) - relevant resources and ideas to actively engage your class or group with nature and the outdoors

[The Woodland Trust](#) free resources and activity ideas as part of the Green Tree Schools Award

[Outdoor Learning Directory](#) a portal to services supporting outdoor learning by the Environment and Forestry Directorate organisations in Scotland

[Project Wild Thing](#) film led movement to get more children outside and reconnecting with nature; research and activities to support this

[Creative Star Learning](#) wide range of resources for developing learning and play outdoors

[Accessible Outdoors](#) a collection of ideas to support working with people with additional needs in the outdoors

[Mission: Explore](#) missions and challenges for all ages to inspire outdoor activities

[Outward Bound – Social Impact Reports](#) the value of outdoor learning for young peoples' personal development

[Common Cause - The Case for Working with Values and Frames](#) an overview of the common cause idea with activities and exercises that support you to explore values in your own setting

[Greenspace Scotland Better Outside](#) web-based resources to help adapt to delivering activities outdoors, including practical tips and suggestions from a range of organisations

[Five Pathways to Nature Connection](#) research-based ways to improve nature connectedness, with activity ideas