



curriculum for excellence through outdoor learning



Ministerial foreword

Our vision for Scotland is that our children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. This is one of the national outcomes set out in the Concordat with Local Government and lies at the heart of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Learning need not take place solely within educational buildings. The outdoor environment has massive potential for learning. We are extremely fortunate to have such rich urban and rural environments on our doorsteps and our children and young people's learning experiences can be enhanced by maximising the potential of the outdoors. The Scottish Government is keen to see all our children and young people having positive learning experiences in a variety of settings. This is why we are investing in the production and promotion of guidance to support opportunities presented by the new school curriculum for learning in the outdoors. The guidance makes it clear that the outdoor environment offers motivating, exciting, different, relevant and easily accessible activities from pre-school years through to college.

Progressive outdoor learning experiences are best delivered through a combination of school-based outdoor learning and residential programmes. I welcome *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*, which, together with a supporting online resource, sets this in context and exemplifies good practice in progressive learning from ages 3 to 18. The guidance will help teachers, educators and their partners to embed the use of the outdoors in learning and teaching to provide powerful learning experiences and I would like to extend my personal thanks to all involved in its preparation.

I encourage everyone in the school community to study *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* and pursue the opportunities presented by *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide creative, sustainable and progressive opportunities for all children and young people to participate in a range of outdoor learning experiences.



Keith Brown MSP

Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning



Contents

Ministerial foreword	3
Introduction	5
Vision and rationale	7
The place of outdoor learning within Curriculum for Excellence	8
Progressive experiences	10
Planning	12
Inclusion and equality	14
Learning and teaching outdoors	15
Working with partners	16
Parent and carer involvement	17
Places to learn outdoors	17
Residential experiences	18
Recognising achievement and attainment	20
Self-evaluation resource	22
Initial teacher education and continuing professional development	23
Health and safety considerations	24
Implementation	25
Conclusion	26

Introduction

Outdoor learning experiences are often remembered for a lifetime. Integrating learning and outdoor experiences, whether through play in the immediate grounds or adventures further afield, provides relevance and depth to the curriculum in ways that are difficult to achieve indoors.

Learning outdoors can be enjoyable, creative, challenging and adventurous and helps children and young people learn by experience and grow as confident and responsible citizens who value and appreciate the spectacular landscapes, natural heritage and culture of Scotland.

The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences. *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* is designed to help teachers, educators, Community Learning and Development (CLD) and their partners, including the voluntary sector, plan such experiences to ensure that progressive and sustainable outdoor learning opportunities are embedded in the new curriculum.

Outdoor learning contributes to delivering the Scottish Government's overarching strategic objectives towards 'creating a more successful country':

Smarter – Outdoor learning encourages learners to understand the interplay and relationship between curriculum areas. This awareness promotes lifelong learning and develops critical thinking skills.

Healthier – Learning outdoors can lead to lifelong recreation. Activities such as walking and cycling which are ideal for physical and emotional wellbeing contribute to a healthier Scotland. Scots have a reputation for adventure activities such as mountaineering and have achieved international sporting success in canoeing, sailing and skiing.

Safer and stronger – Outdoor learning activities span social divisions and can help build stronger communities. Some organisations have therapeutic programmes where outdoor learning plays a central role. Children and young people have opportunities to develop skills to assess and manage risk when making decisions.

Greener – Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages children and young people to engage with the natural and built heritage. Scotland's countryside and urban areas provide ideal settings for children and young people to understand the global significance of sustainability issues and inform personal decisions that contribute towards a greener Scotland.

Wealthier and fairer – The outdoors provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always visible in the classroom. Becoming aware of such skills can fundamentally change personal, peer and staff perceptions and lead to profound changes in life expectations and success.

This document outlines the integral role outdoor learning has in the new curriculum. It signposts ways for teachers, educators and their partners to plan for and use the outdoor environment to provide imaginative



learning and teaching which is relevant, lively and motivating.¹ All staff at every level of involvement with the education of children and young people have a responsibility to make the most of the outdoor environment to support the delivery of the experiences and outcomes of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Developments in outdoor learning are underpinned and supported through Glow and by the Learning and Teaching Scotland outdoor learning online resource, which was initially developed in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education. The online resource provides support for all those involved in outdoor learning and provides detail on issues such as planning experiences and selecting locations. The online PDF version of this document has embedded links to sections of further guidance available at the online resource.

These outdoor learning resources have been produced by Learning and Teaching Scotland and members of the Outdoor Learning Strategic Advisory Group. We would like to acknowledge the work of the Outdoor Connections Advisory Group (2005–07) and thank the wide range of partners and organisations for their contributions.

¹ HMIE, *Improving Scottish Education 2005–2008*, January 2009



Vision and rationale

Vision

Our vision for outdoor learning in Scotland is that:

- all children and young people are participating in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum
- schools and centres are providing regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond
- teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.

Rationale

Curriculum for Excellence offers opportunities for all children and young people to enjoy first-hand experience outdoors, whether within the school grounds, in urban green spaces, in Scotland's countryside or in wilder environments. Such experiences motivate our children and young people to become successful learners and to develop as healthy, confident, enterprising and responsible citizens.

Well-constructed and well-planned outdoor learning helps develop the skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection necessary for our children and young people to meet the social, economic and environmental challenges of life in the 21st century. Outdoor learning connects children and young people with the natural world, with our built heritage and our culture and society, and encourages lifelong involvement and activity in Scotland's outdoors.

The core values of *Curriculum for Excellence* resonate with long-standing key concepts of outdoor learning. Challenge, enjoyment, relevance, depth, development of the whole person and an adventurous approach to learning are at the core of outdoor pedagogy. The outdoor environment encourages staff and students to see each other in a different light, building positive relationships and improving self-awareness and understanding of others.

Partnerships between staff in schools, other educational settings and with other organisations will create working relationships that contribute to professional development for teachers and educators and construct clear pathways for delivering *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences and outcomes outdoors.

Realising this vision will contribute to the wellbeing of our children and young people and enable them to become resilient, responsible citizens and successful lifelong learners, who value our landscape and culture and contribute effectively to our local and global society.



The place of outdoor learning within Curriculum for Excellence

*'Children and young people are **entitled** to a curriculum that includes a range of features at the different stages . . . it is the responsibility of schools and their partners to bring the experiences and outcomes together and apply the national entitlements to produce programmes for learning across a broad curriculum . . . throughout this broad curriculum it is expected that there will be an emphasis on Scottish contexts, Scottish cultures and Scotland's history and place in the world. This planning should demonstrate the **principles for curriculum design**.'*²

The transformational changes taking place in the curriculum offer our children and young people real opportunities for outdoor learning. The *Building the Curriculum* series outlines a curriculum framework for learning contexts in the outdoors which are reflected in many of the experiences and outcomes of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Examples from the *Curriculum for Excellence Principles and Practice* papers relating to the outdoors include:

- 'encouraging and capitalising on the potential to experience learning and new challenges in the outdoor environment' – Health and wellbeing
- 'as children and young people progress in their learning of the sciences, teachers can take advantage of opportunities for study in the local, natural and built environments' – Sciences
- 'learning outdoors, field trips visits and input by external contributors' – Social studies.

Opportunities for outdoor learning exist within and across all curriculum areas, including the themes for development across learning such as enterprise in education, sustainable development education and global citizenship. Learning outdoors is part of the wide range of practical approaches to developing skills. *Building the Curriculum 4* outlines how these approaches should be integrated:

*'These practical approaches to learning must not be seen as a 'bolt-on' or alternative form of provision but part of an integrated experience.'*³

² *Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching*, 2008

³ *Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work*, 2009



Different outdoor learning experiences offer opportunities for personal and learning skills development in areas such as communication, problem solving, information technology, working with others and thinking skills.

Learning in the outdoors can make significant contributions to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In literacy there are opportunities to use different texts: the spoken word, charts, maps, timetables and instructions. In numeracy there are opportunities to measure angles and calculate bearings and journey times. In health and wellbeing there are opportunities to become physically active in alternative ways and to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Therefore, outdoor learning offers many opportunities for learners to deepen and contextualise their understanding within curriculum areas, and for linking learning across the curriculum in different contexts and at all levels.

The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.

'Outside . . . children are transferring skills and learning across contexts. Literacy and numeracy, for example, through an environmental studies project can be carried on outside.'

Local authority Curriculum for Excellence Development Officer

'They understand what they're doing a lot more – it's all very well looking at books and speaking about things but if they're outside doing it, it's a lot more real for them and I think it helps them to understand.'

Parent council member



Progressive experiences

*'All aspects of the curriculum can be explored outside. The sights, sounds and smells of the outdoors, the closeness to nature, the excitement most children feel, the wonder and curiosity all serve to enhance and stimulate learning.'*⁴

Learning outdoors has a solid foundation within early years settings including many examples of good practice through activities in local areas.

Providing a progressive range of sustainable outdoor learning experiences may mean maximising the use of local contexts and using repeat visits at different levels to add depth to the totality of experiences. From a learner's point of view each visit, including ones to the same place, will offer a different perspective, enriching the curriculum and providing greater coherence. For example, a visit to a local farm in P3 will have very different outcomes from a visit to the same farm in P7. Similarly, an environmental activity led by a countryside ranger will have very different outcomes if visits occur in S1 and S4. Creative planning will allow the use of the experiences and outcomes in different outdoor contexts throughout the curriculum levels, weaving a thread of progressive outdoor learning experiences which link directly to 'indoor' experiences. When outdoor learning experiences are embedded in the curriculum, this cycle of learning will occur naturally as it currently does in most early years settings.

In the light of outdoor learning becoming more 'regular and frequent', current practice will evolve as more use is made of school grounds and local areas. The school grounds are often the first step in taking pupils outdoors and for staff considering progression to learning contexts further afield. Younger children, in particular, can explore, and develop a sense of ownership of their school grounds in their own time on a daily basis. As well as providing contexts for learning, the school grounds can engage the local community as partners who can often provide good sources of expertise, finance and other resources for development projects.

The Scottish Government's School Estate Strategy requires local authorities to 'consider how to make the best use of school grounds and the outdoor spaces as an integral part of the learning environment ensuring that landscape design is at a par with building design.'⁵ A long-term authority-wide vision for school grounds through School Estate Management Plans will help maximise their potential as a learning environment.

⁴ *Building the Curriculum 2: Active learning in the early years*, 2007

⁵ The Scottish Government, *Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future*, 2009

'I like the art because it makes the playground a happier and cheerier place to be in.'

'At our school we had a ground force day – adults and children helped to make these figures attached to the fence. They make the school more exciting and welcome. Before, the fence used to be just boring and dull; now it makes it feel more child-friendly.'

Primary school pupils talking about their school grounds

The location of establishments is important in understanding variations in learning contexts. For example, rural schools may have ample opportunities to visit 'greenspaces'⁶ and choose to visit urban environments. An inner city youth group, by contrast, may choose to visit greenspaces to balance the range of experiences. The breadth and depth of learning should not be linked to distance from the establishment.



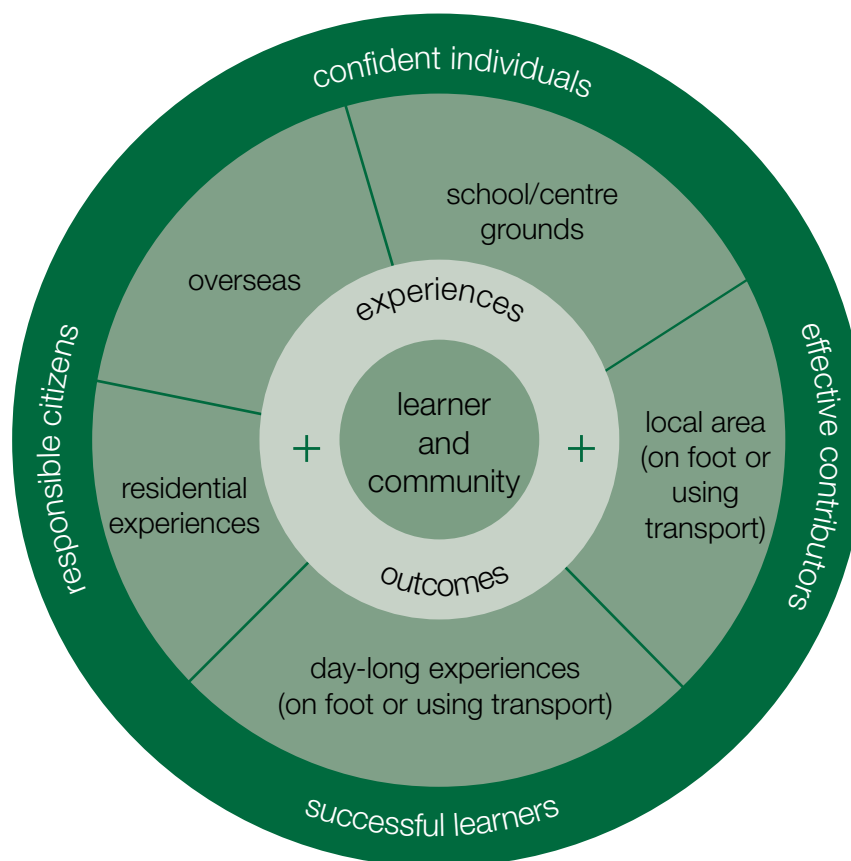
⁶ The term 'greenspace' is now widespread and often used to identify parks, play areas and sports fields as distinct from areas such as streets, etc. Young people in rural areas also make use of greenspaces. A broader view would include the entire non-built environment.

Planning

Achieving the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* across all levels in a variety of outdoor contexts requires careful and comprehensive planning and knowledge of the experiences and outcomes. It is essential that all partners share a vision of the learning journey from 3 to 18 and beyond and there has to be clear thought and communication amongst staff across curriculum levels and between partners. Outdoor learning experiences can be particularly effective in supporting smooth transitions between stages. Planning for progressive learning experiences is aided when teachers and educators take full account of children and young people's previous experience of outdoor learning.

Figure 1 illustrates how the learner and the experiences and outcomes are central to planning across a range of outdoor learning contexts.

Figure 1: Planning for outdoor learning



Suggested questions to reflect on when planning

- Which experiences will have more impact on learning if done outdoors?
- How can learning outdoors enhance and deepen learning within curriculum areas?
- Which experiences are best suited to a combination of indoor and outdoor learning?
- How can learning indoors best be consolidated, progressed or enhanced using the outdoors?
- What opportunities exist for linking learning across the curriculum?

Importantly, planning should allow for 'spontaneous' or pre-planned, 'off-the-shelf' local visits when, for example, weather conditions are suitable or favourable. Glow should be used by educators to gain access to resources which actively promote and support creative learning and teaching, enabling children and young people to share their outdoor learning experiences across Scotland.



Inclusion and equality

Managing cultural and social diversity is central to planning and must be addressed well in advance when planning to take groups outdoors. To assist planning, details of equality legislation and guidance on how it applies can be found at the online resource.

It is important to ensure that no one is denied opportunities through discrimination, prejudice or exclusion because of factors such as race, gender or disability. Every effort should be made to spot and overcome barriers to participation as early as possible. These barriers will be different for different groups of individuals but could include, for example, communication difficulties, physical disabilities, financial limitations or religious/cultural issues. Planning may require dialogue with individual participants, stakeholders and agencies or the need to seek advice from those specialising in supporting equalities groups to ensure that all learners can access the curriculum.

The entitlement of every child and young person to personal support, as outlined in *Building the Curriculum 3*, should enable the opportunities provided by *Curriculum for Excellence* to be experienced to the fullest potential by all learners.



Learning and teaching outdoors

Learning outdoors can be the educational context which encourages children and young people to make connections experientially, leading to deeper understanding within and between curriculum areas and meeting learner needs.

Outdoor learning, used in a range of ways, will enrich the curriculum and make learning fun, meaningful and relevant for children and young people. Outdoor learning can deliver sustainable development education through initiatives such as working to improve biodiversity in the school grounds, visiting the local woods, exploring and engaging with the local community and developing a school travel plan.

‘My daughter’s favourite thing to do at the moment is forest school, where they take a picnic lunch, they get to play, explore and investigate and even toast marshmallows on a fire. She absolutely loves it and talks about it all the time.’

Parent of a child in a pre-school centre

There are associated health benefits to learning outdoors. Research indicates that the use of greenspace or ‘green exercise’ improves health. In particular, learning outdoors generally results in increased levels of physical activity. In addition, interacting with greenspace (walking, gardening, etc) improves emotional wellbeing and mental health.⁷

The use of new technology as part of the planned approach to outdoor learning will add value to the outcomes for children and young people. Experiences recorded digitally, for example, can be taken back to the classroom and used to reinforce and further expand on the experience itself. Glow is a resource which will support outdoor learning, enabling educators, young people, children and parents to share experiences.

⁷ Muñoz, S A, *Children in the Outdoors, A Literature Review*, Sustainable Development Research Centre, 2009



Working with partners

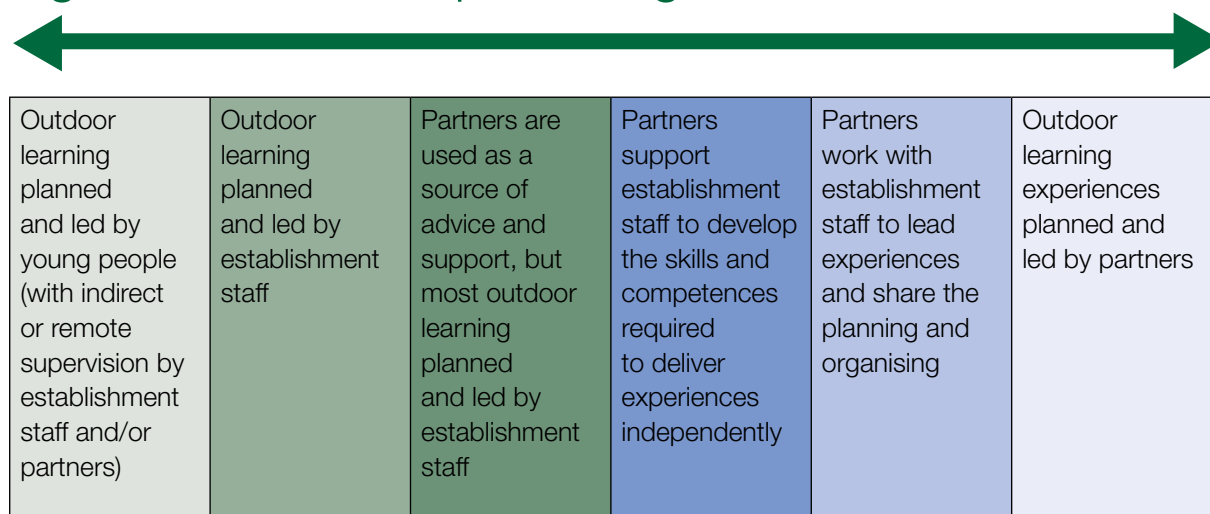
*'Curriculum for Excellence can best be delivered through **partnership working**. All establishments should work with partners and share a common understanding and language around skills development and application.'*⁸

Partnership working starts in the early years and continues through to 18 and beyond. Local circumstances and requirements will influence the range of possibilities for developing partnerships. Careful planning will help identify when and where staff in an establishment would benefit from working with partners or partner organisations to progress and increase outdoor learning experiences. There are many creative and stimulating ways to experience practical activities which may best be achieved by partners working in the school grounds or the local area. Residential experiences may offer a completely different range of partners and different sets of learning outcomes.

Partnerships can contribute to learners' personalisation and choice by providing pathways and opportunities for children and young people to develop their learning and skills in new ways.

Specialist partners, who may be professionals or volunteers with expertise in areas such as school ground architecture, adventure activities or forest school practices, can offer invaluable technical knowledge and guidance. Volunteer partners can make the difference to outdoor learning experiences becoming viable. Figure 2 illustrates a spectrum of partnership working from the planning and leadership of outdoor experiences being owned by children and young people through to experiences planned and delivered solely by partners. Establishing the nature and mode of partnership working will help develop a shared understanding of learning purposes and help plan continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for establishment staff and partners. High quality CPD for all within learning communities will be central to the development of successful outdoor learning experiences.

Figure 2: Partnership working⁹



⁸ *Building the Curriculum 4: Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work*, 2009

⁹ Adapted from Forestry Commission Scotland, *Forest Kindergarten Summary*, 2009

Parent and carer involvement

*'Parents provide a distinct perspective on learning and teaching which can help staff to improve learning for young people and also, in some cases, for the parents themselves . . . Wherever parents are starting from, it is important for teachers to engage with them to discover and share their views to help the parents to support their children's learning.'*¹⁰

The support and contribution of parents and carers is very important. They are key partners in delivery and help to prepare children and young people for outdoor learning experiences. They may also provide rich outdoor learning outwith educational settings, as well as assisting on outdoor visits.

Parents and carers should be fully informed of planned visits in line with local procedures as well as being made aware of the educational benefits of 'spontaneous' visits. Good communication is therefore crucial, for example to help parents appreciate and understand the value of outdoor learning and ensure that children and young people are properly prepared in terms of clothing, food and what is required on the day.

Places to learn outdoors

Outdoor learning takes place in a range of settings – from the school grounds to historic grounds, from local parks to national parks, from villages to cities, from residential experiences within Scotland to overseas expeditions. Each outdoor learning opportunity allows children and young people the chance to explore new places and share experiences. Learners may well have ideas for using local areas which may not have been included at the planning stage.

Asking some of the following questions may help with decisions on the best places to learn.

- Which experiences and outcomes can be addressed in the school or centre grounds?
- Who can offer advice on what's available locally and nationally?
- Where do other schools or centres in the local area go?
- Which places can be easily accessed on foot so that outdoor learning experiences can be sustainable and/or regular?
- Are the proposed learning contexts sufficiently challenging for children and young people?
- Which places can be visited a number of times to add depth to learning?
- Which places can be visited at different seasons to achieve different outcomes?

¹⁰ HMIE, *Learning Together: Opening up Learning*, 2009

Residential experiences

*'Bringing together young people . . . for several days provides an environment where people can explore ideas relating to individual and group identity.'*¹¹

In this context residential experiences refer to educational visits where outdoor learning is the main focus of the experience and which include one or more overnight stays. Residential experiences include using outdoor centres or youth hostels, camping, bivouacking, snow-holing or sailing boats. This contrasts with residential experiences which have a different focus, such as a school orchestra exchange in Europe.

During residential experiences there will be many opportunities to deliver experiences and outcomes of *Curriculum for Excellence*, particularly those which cannot easily be achieved in the local community. For example, comparing and contrasting local communities with communities within or close to the residential setting as outlined in the experiences and outcomes for social studies. In self-catering contexts, planning and preparation which involves buying and cooking food clearly resonates with promoting healthy eating habits for health promotion and nutrition.

The duration of a residential visit offers a unique form of intensive experience which encourages children and young people to engage with staff and peers at a deeper level and build relationships.

Spending time away from the home environment gives children and young people opportunities to develop:

- confidence, by living more independently and making their own decisions
- resilience, by having individual and group ownership for learning, community living and sharing free time
- a sense of adventure, by exploring new places and new environments
- an appreciation of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through physical activity
- a chance to reflect on experiences and learning.

In order to maximise the benefits of residential experiences, careful planning and preparation, including work undertaken with children and young people before and after the residential experience, is key to the relevance, coherence, breadth and depth of learning. Project work to take forward during the residential experience should build on previous learning. Taking an appropriate quality task back to the school environment will maintain an important element of depth in the experience. Using technologies such as

¹¹ Higgins, P and Nicol, R, *Learning as Adventure: Theory for Practice*, DfEs and Connexions Service, 2002

Glow will support such an approach, allowing children and young people to report back on an experience while it is happening. When appropriate, indirect or remote supervision will enhance the learning experience by giving learners the opportunity to become more independent.

Overall, for children and young people to get the most out of their residential experiences it is essential that any joint planning with residential providers is rigorous. Clearly identifying and allocating roles and responsibilities for learning, teaching and recognising achievement will focus the educational intent.

'I enjoy seeing students outside of the classroom doing something which I know is within their capacity but which is perhaps outside of their previous experience . . . people who might excel in the classroom find themselves outside of their comfort zones on a much more level playing field, and pupils who can be 'invisible' in school can find their own feet, and sometimes take the lead.'

Principal teacher, art and design



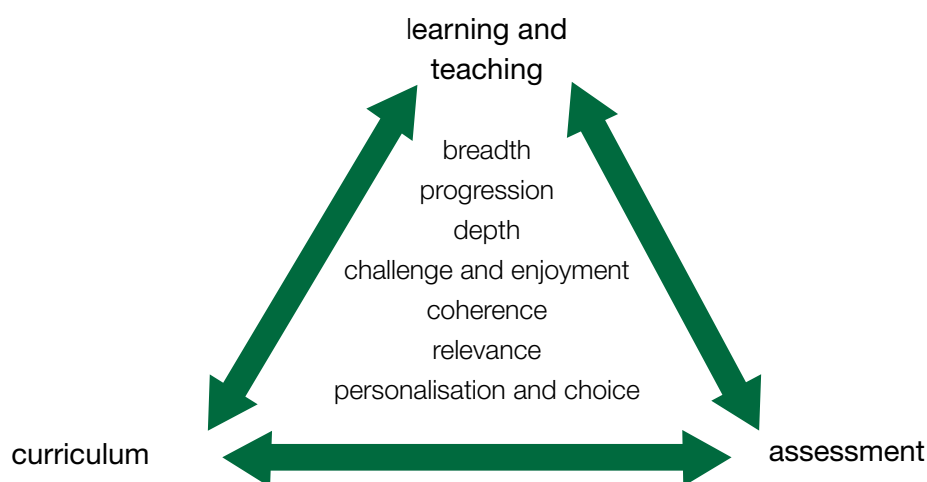
Recognising achievement and attainment

*'Assessment of the broad range of planned learning is required across the full range of contexts and settings in which the curriculum is experienced... They cover learning both within and outwith education establishments and classrooms.'*¹²

Outdoor learning provides fresh settings for children and young people to demonstrate what they know and can do and therefore for assessing their knowledge and skills. Assessment of learning in different outdoor contexts can provide opportunities to vary levels of challenge appropriate to individuals' needs and abilities across a broad range of personal, interpersonal and practical skills. Diverse practical contexts and high-quality interactions, immediate and constructive feedback and time for reflection contribute to the breadth and depth of assessment processes.

Within the curriculum, assessment is integral to effective learning and teaching.

Figure 3¹³: Learning and teaching, curriculum and assessment



Educators should recognise the role of technologies such as Glow in supporting improved attainment and providing appropriate planned opportunities for achievement in different contexts: achievements which deserve to be recognised for the significance they have for learners, their families and communities.

Many children and young people are involved in a range of formal and informal activities within the school community and beyond which offer opportunities to recognise a range of achievements.

^{12, 13} *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment*, 2010

*'Assessment should apply to learning outside the classroom'*¹⁴

School improvement plans are constructed drawing on a wide range of evidence, including assessment information. Assessment of outdoor learning experiences provides valuable evidence to contribute to school improvement plans.

To assess individuals' progress, essential skills may be reported and recorded through learning portfolios, learning profiles and/or reports. Actively involving children and young people in the assessment process helps develop ownership of learning.

Within the senior phase, young people will be able to seek accreditation for skills through a range of National Qualifications and awards whilst continuing to develop in other broader areas. Possible routes to accreditation can be found in *Building the Curriculum 5*.

*'Whilst the opportunity to study for qualifications will be a central feature of the senior phase, there will be other planned opportunities for developing the four capacities. These will include an ongoing entitlement to learning and experiences which continue to develop a young person's literacy and numeracy skills, skills for life and skills for work. The promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle and an appreciation of the world and Scotland's place in it should be part of this.'*¹⁵

Individual teachers, schools, clusters, CLD, local communities and local authorities need to consider the various ways in which achievement is recognised. Achievement awards such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), John Muir Award and Millennium Volunteer Award are useful and frequently used ways of recognising and celebrating success in particular programmes. Some awarding bodies have begun to align their programmes to the experiences and outcomes of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Comprehensive information on achievement awards can be found at the online resource.



The introduction of Scottish Baccalaureates, particularly in Science, at Higher and Advanced Higher together with an interdisciplinary project will offer opportunities for the outdoors to be used as a context for learning.

¹⁴ HMIE, *Learning Together: Opening up Learning*, 2009

¹⁵ *Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for Learning and Teaching*, 2009

Self-evaluation resource

Self-evaluation should be integral to planning outdoor learning experiences. The outdoor learning self-evaluation resource is available on an accompanying CD and at the online resource. It is specifically designed to support teachers and educators in all sectors, including CLD, to evaluate the potential of their work to help children and young people learn outdoors. The resource focuses specifically on helping schools and centres to evaluate their impact when providing outdoor experiences designed to improve the achievements, successes and quality of young people's learning. It is based on five key features and the themes of the quality indicators from *How good is our school?* (HGIOS). The resource includes questions and examples and sources of evidence to support good practice around the five outcomes and can be used at all stages to identify areas for improvement.



Initial teacher education and continuing professional development

Initial teacher education and continuing professional development have a key role in equipping the teachers and educators with the appropriate skills necessary to deliver high-quality outdoor learning. Increased understanding and knowledge of outdoor learning acquired during initial training and then further supported through CPD will strengthen the confidence of newly qualified teachers.

Those involved in teacher education are key to ensuring that teachers in training value the place of outdoor learning in the curriculum, for example by developing programmes and validating awards with outdoor learning as a core component. Any formalisation of outdoor learning in recognised awards will require collaboration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

CPD in areas such as designing and planning outdoor learning experiences, and managing and leading groups, will increase the confidence and skills of teachers and educators in taking children and young people outdoors. Representative local authority networks will help build capacity for further CPD opportunities in outdoor learning by sharing knowledge, agreeing strategies and disseminating information.

Educators wishing to establish what CPD they require could ask the following:

- What do I need to know?
- How can I find out more?
- How can I integrate new learning into my practice?
- How can I share my learning?

Attention should be paid to the benefits of online technology to support the CPD strategy such as:

- use of Glow to support the outdoor learning professional community
- embedding outdoor learning CPD opportunities in the local authority professional review and development (PRD) process
- 'CPD find' and 'CPD reflect'.

Helping children to become risk assessors is a big part of our work . . . We believe that one of the greatest risks in life is not understanding what risk is. It's very important to be able to manage risk . . . We see the children assessing what they are able to do for themselves . . . we try to support children to take the next step and to support them as they develop in competence.

Nursery class teacher

Health and safety considerations

Managing the health and safety of learners and staff in outdoor learning is vitally important but with careful planning and conduct, outdoor experiences can be both safe and stimulating. Many outdoor learning activities carry no higher risk than activities and situations faced by learners on a day-to-day basis.

The law expects leaders and others to manage significant risks as far as is reasonably practicable – this does not mean eliminating all risks. It follows that, for every experience, an appropriate person should decide if the balance between risk and opportunity is appropriate for the learners concerned.

A powerful approach is to use risk/benefit analysis which consciously balances the benefits of an experience against the intrinsic risks along with risk assessment.



This section is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive

Teachers and others taking children and young people outdoors are uniquely placed to manage this process. They should adopt an enabling attitude towards outdoor learning that identifies exciting, creative opportunities for learning. Where appropriate they should use published guidance and the advice of senior staff and specialists to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

Sometimes in planning, eliminating or controlling a hazard may seem so daunting that offering the experience seems impossible. That is the point for serious consideration but not necessarily the moment to cancel plans. Children and young people should not be denied an experience simply because some significant but unlikely hazard could not be completely eliminated. A venture where all conceivable risk has been eliminated removes the opportunities for learners to develop their own strategies and attitudes towards risk. Learners should be at the centre of the risk management process from the outset.

This guidance recognises that risk has both positive and negative aspects. With careful thought and planning it is possible to remove unreasonable risks from a venture without extinguishing the brilliant spark of personal adventure at the heart of outdoor learning.

In planning and considering risks and benefits it is important to consider:

- Is the level of challenge appropriate to the learner group?
- How will risks be assessed and balanced against the benefits that can be expected?
- Can the rationale for this experience be justified even if events don't go according to plan?
- Are the management arrangements appropriate for the location selected?
- Are the leadership and supervisory staff appropriately skilled, qualified and experienced?
- How do we communicate with parents and carers?
- Could we benefit from enrolling partners?
- Are there any relevant examples of good practice that we can draw on?

More detailed information can be found at the online resource.

Implementation

Educators and organisations will be able to build on current practice in implementing *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*.

At a national level, government bodies, national agencies and other partners are important stakeholders to provide information, expertise and CPD to support staff delivering outdoor learning experiences. Continued and further partnership working between government agencies will assist a co-ordinated approach to outdoor learning and maximise resources in areas such as research or CPD. Recognising the contribution outdoor learning has to agendas such as sustainable development education, healthy living and skills for work will help integrate policies. A national network in outdoor learning will provide strategic leadership and promote improvements in areas such as planning, CPD and quality assurance.

At local authority level, collaborative working and strategic planning across services is essential to developing or building upon an authority-wide plan for children and young people to have greater access to quality outdoor learning experiences. Some local authorities have a designated officer or co-ordinator specifically for outdoor learning. Allocating time for outdoor learning during in-service training will help develop and establish local and regional networks for outdoor learning. National and local organisations can assist with achieving a balanced and proportionate approach to health and safety in outdoor learning.

At cluster and community level, developing networks to plan experiences will help in the sharing of knowledge and resources. Identifying staff with the expertise to support less experienced staff will contribute to CPD in outdoor learning.

At an organisational level, a review of practice to reflect *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* will help identify and plan frequent, regular and sustainable outdoor learning opportunities. Establishing and maintaining partnerships between staff and between organisations will contribute to CPD, and increase opportunities to share resources. Identifying or nominating a member of staff with specific responsibility can be a useful way to help raise the profile and support for outdoor learning. The use of Glow as a portal for information exchange will develop and support links between organisations.

At an individual level, those directly responsible for learning are often best placed to plan and deliver learning experiences outdoors. The online resource has information and links to assist with planning for learning outdoors and examples of practice. *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* aims to support staff to take learning outdoors on a more regular and frequent basis in the local community and beyond.



Conclusion

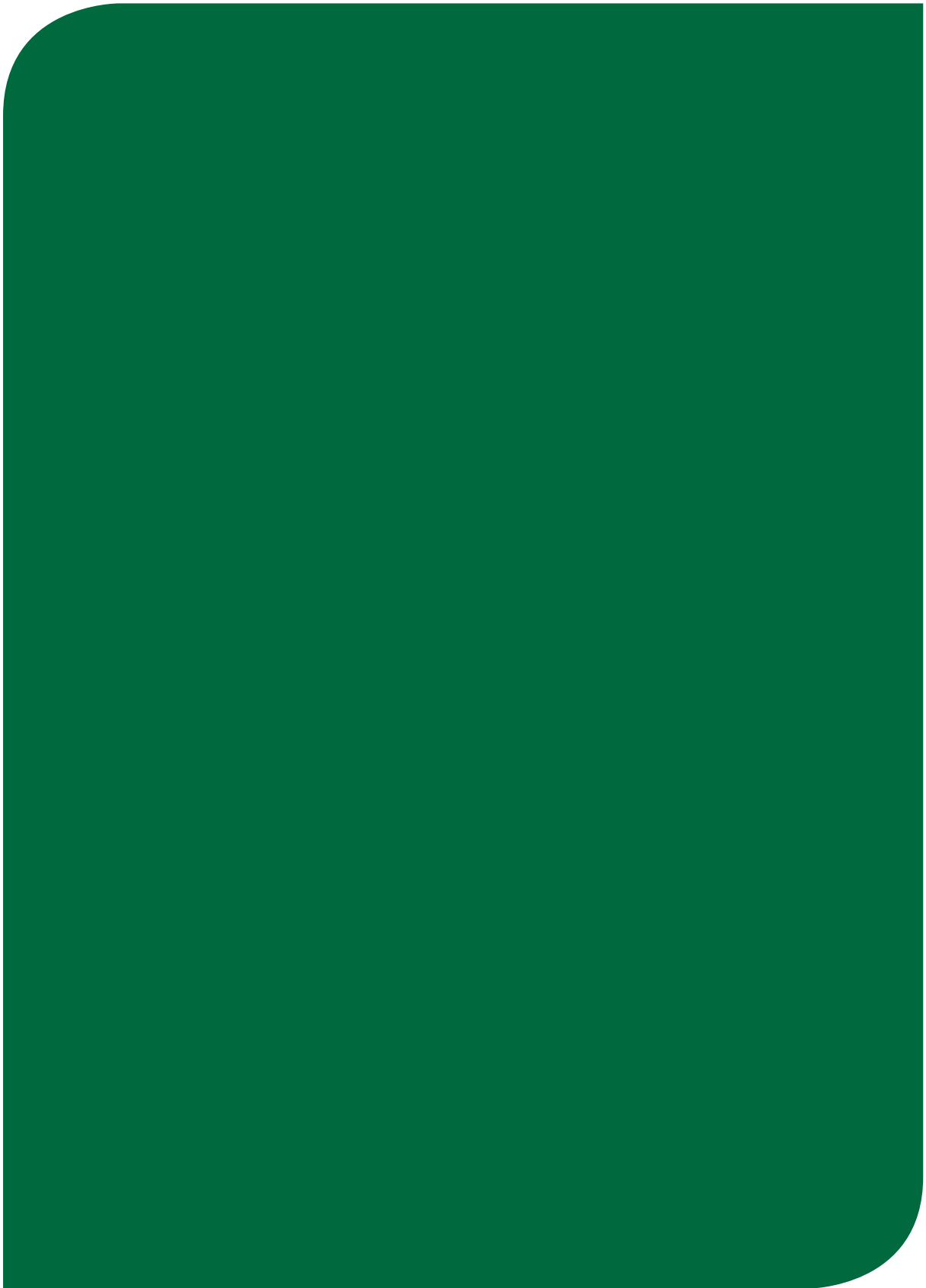
As *Curriculum for Excellence* becomes embedded in every establishment and other contexts for learning, now is the ideal time for all educators and partners to create, develop and deliver outdoor learning opportunities which can be embedded in the new curriculum. From school grounds to streets of cities, forests to farms, ponds to paths, coastlines to castles, moors to mountains, Scotland has a rich wealth of outdoor learning opportunities which will help children and young people make connections within and across curriculum areas. Outdoor learning enhances classroom learning and is a powerful means of addressing the Scottish Government's National Outcomes. Outdoors is often a more effective place to learn than indoors. When working in partnership, clearly identifying the roles and responsibilities of partners will focus the educational intent and may contribute to CPD. Well-focused planning of progressive and sustainable outdoor experiences is key to success.

Such experiences, from early years to adulthood, will help our children and young people to enter education, employment or training with transferable skills required to meet the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The outdoor learning online resource will guide educators and partners to resources and information to support staff.

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning has set out a vision for all schools and educational settings to provide frequent and progressive outdoor learning opportunities which are clearly part of the curriculum. It is the responsibility of all involved in education to recognise the place of outdoor learning within the curriculum and plan accordingly to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland receive these opportunities as part of their learning journey.





Learning and Teaching Scotland
The Optima, 58 Robertson Street,
Glasgow G2 8DU
Customer Services: 08700 100 297
enquiries@LTScotland.org.uk
www.LTScotland.org.uk

