

project, 80% of respondents had continued to take their pupils outdoors for learning and 72% had supported a colleague to do so.

As well as having a huge impact on some of the teachers involved - and their pupils - the *Teaching in Nature* Project has influenced the way other organisations support teachers in their outdoor learning professional development. Grant partners, e.g. are seeing the value of this approach and finding that often simply taking teachers out together to a great place is of more value than providing them with lesson ideas (which eventually run out).

### Contact for further information

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### References and web links

Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010) Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/cfethroughoutdoorlearning.asp>

Learning for Sustainability (2012) Report of the One Planet Schools Working Group:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/GovernmentResponse>

General Teaching Council for Scotland Professional Standards:

<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/>

Mannion, G., Fenwick, A., Nugent, C., l'Anson, J., (2011) Teaching in nature. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 476

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1839>

Graham Donaldson, (January 2011) Teaching Scotland's Future – Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland, Scottish Government <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/01/13092132/0>

General Teaching Council Professional Recognition

<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-update/professional-recognition.aspx>

A Planning Model for Outdoor Learning:

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A764013.pdf>



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad



**"I can confidently state my learners' progress and achievement has been positively impacted by this experience"**

# Scottish Natural Heritage Teaching in Nature

## Summary of CLPL Programme

### Introduction

The benefits of outdoor experiences for young people's learning, behaviour and physical and emotional health are now well recognised. Learning outdoors is a powerful, practical approach to learning which is no longer seen as an add-on but an integral part of the curriculum. "The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences" ([LTS, 2010](#)).

In 2013 the government accepted the [Learning for Sustainability report's](#) key recommendations; which included actions on teacher education and career-long professional learning. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's [Professional Standards](#) affirm the importance of Learning for Sustainability, which includes Outdoor Learning; now regarded as an entitlement for all learners.

Despite the political impetus, many teachers need support in embedding outdoor learning into their practice. *Teaching in Nature* supports groups of teachers to work together to use a nearby place that is special for nature to plan, implement and evaluate challenging and fun outdoor learning experiences for their pupils. It combines collaborative, practical and online learning to support teachers through the next stage in their outdoor learning professional development.

The programme takes account of the lessons learned from our [year long action research project](#) (Mannion et al, 2011) and takes on board recommendations from the [Donaldson review](#) of teacher education that professional learning for teachers should involve "more local, team-based approaches, which centre around self-evaluation and professional collaboration and achieve an appropriate blend of tailored individual development and school improvement" (Donaldson, 2011).

This document gives an overview of *Teaching in Nature* to date and some information on how it works.

### Background

In 2010/11, SNH worked with researchers from University of Stirling School of Education and around 20 teachers to look at what teachers would do if you took them to a 'special' place, usually a National Nature Reserve (NNR), and asked them to plan something for their pupils. The thinking behind the approach was



**"The children were more interested, got caught up in the excitement and actually their behaviour and performance improved. The children managed to cooperate more outdoors and work together. In the future I will make sure I incorporate Outdoor Learning into my termly plans."**



that we are experts on the natural heritage and teachers are experts on the curriculum. Rarely do you find someone expert in both, so could we work together to make best use of these strengths? The project found, if you take a group of teachers and match them with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable site manager, wonderful things can happen! There is a link to the full report above and in the references section.

This initial project involved:

- 5 Fife and Dundee Secondary teachers using Loch Leven NNR
- 6 South Lanarkshire Primary teachers using Clyde Valley Woodlands NNR
- 5 Aberdeenshire Primary and Secondary teachers using Muir of Dinnet NNR
- 3 Primary teachers from Iona and Mull using local designated sites.

The teachers found the experience very rewarding and one even said it was 'transformational'! The South Lanarkshire group went on to become the first teachers ever to achieve [Professional Recognition](#) in Outdoor Learning from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

### The Teaching in Nature project

The research showed that there are three key elements to a successful *Teaching in Nature* project: give teachers time; get teachers together to collaborate; and introduce teachers to the people who know and love a place. We devised the project that followed with these in mind. Below are some of the steps in *Teaching in Nature*. You may also wish to look at the [Planning Model for Outdoor Learning](#); *Teaching in Nature* works round the first 'cycle' twice.

- A group of teachers visits a place together, without pupils, to meet the site manager/owner or other knowledgeable person to learn about the place and just enjoy being there
- Each teacher plans what he/she will do with their pupils on site and shares it with the rest of the group. Because they have made a 'public' statement about what they will do, they now have to do it! There is a sense of healthy competition and the teachers support one another to address any issues and overcome barriers
- Teachers visit with their pupils
- Teachers share what happened on their visit with the other teachers in their group, offer support and advice for next steps and plan the next visit, building in pre- and post- visit work, as appropriate
- Teachers make their second visit with pupils – in a different season. Most teachers never visit a place more than once with the same group of pupils so this will be a valuable learning experience for pupil and teacher alike
- Again, the group of teachers discuss and evaluate what happened on their second visits and support one another to plan next steps



**"I feel that the class responded better than I anticipated to the outdoors... It was the first time I had got such a good response to a home learning project and I think in terms of learning intentions and success criteria the children surpassed my expectations."**



This is the project at its simplest. There are various options for extending this, depending on the specific aims and the resources available. For instance, teachers working towards Professional Recognition in Outdoor Learning will carry out additional reading and research and reflect on their professional development in line with the Professional Standards. Some groups collaborate online, e.g. via a Glow Professional Learning Community (Glow is the Scottish Schools Intranet). Some work with their local authority to share their learning outwith their *Teaching in Nature* group.

In 2012/13 we worked with:

- North Lanarkshire Early Years Practitioners using Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve
- East Ayrshire Secondary teachers using Dumfries House Estate
- Fife Primary and Secondary teachers using Loch Leven NNR
- Stirling Secondary teachers using Flanders Moss NNR
- West Lothian Primary teachers using Blawhorn Moss NNR
- Inverclyde Primary teachers using Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park
- Perth & Kinross Primary and Secondary teachers using Battleby grounds
- East Ayrshire Primary and Secondary teachers using Craiggengillan Estate

In 2013/14, we worked with:

- Highland Primary teachers using Merkinch LNR
- Aberdeenshire Primary teachers using Forvie NNR
- South Ayrshire Primary teachers using Dundonald Links Golf Course
- Falkirk Secondary teachers using Callendar Park

In 2014/15 we are working with a larger number of teachers from West Dunbartonshire using Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. This group are the first to go through our accredited version of *Teaching in Nature*. In November 2014, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) accredited the programme so that registered teachers who successfully take part gain Professional Recognition in Outdoor Learning.

### SNH's input

As well as establishing and facilitating the partnerships between the local authority, teachers and site manager SNH has been offering funding to enable the teachers to get out of class together for planning and peer support. We have also funded some of the bus trips to enable teachers to try out their ideas with their pupils. SNH NNR managers have led guided walks for teachers, as have partners on other sites.

### Impact

Teaching in Nature works! In a recent evaluation, all but 3 respondents said their confidence in taking learning outdoors had increased (with the other 3, already fairly confident, remaining the same). In addition, in the year following their involvement in the



**"I have always associated Outdoor Learning with mainly Science topics or with Health and Well-being. I think this project has made me realise that Outdoor Learning has much more scope than this and that any curricular area can be covered outdoors."**

