



Title: **Outdoor Learning in Nature – an update on progress**

Date: **06 May 2020**

Purpose:	Information.
How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change	<p>The development of outdoor learning practice is a key outcome sought by the current Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Challenge and Route Map to 2020 and is a key element of SNH's current corporate strategy – Connecting People and Nature.</p> <p>Outdoor learning and play are increasingly recognised as a nature-based solution for supporting educational and health outcomes. They also play a vital role in stimulating a life-long connection with nature in young people and can be a key driver for investing in nature where it is practiced.</p> <p>While currently directly impacting on our work with schools, the current COVID-19 emergency has also increased the spotlight on the importance generally of local greenspace and contact with nature for young people.</p>
Summary:	This paper provides a brief update on SNH's work on outdoor learning during the current corporate strategy period.
Report Author(s): Sponsor:	Pete Rawcliffe – People and Places Activity Eileen Stuart – Head of People and Nature Outcome
Appendices:	1 – Outdoor learning in nature – update on progress –board information paper

Outdoor learning in nature – an update on progress

Purpose

- 1 This paper provides a brief overview and update on SNH's work on learning in nature.

Background

- 2 Outdoor learning in nature is important for supporting attainment, improving skills and confidence, and physical and mental health. It also plays an important role in stimulating a life-long connection with nature and can be a catalyst for investing in nature where it is practiced. The development of outdoor learning practice is a key step for identifying one of the (indirect or system level) drivers of biodiversity loss identified in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Challenge and Route Map to 2020 and it also a key element of SNH's current corporate strategy – Connecting people and Nature.
- 3 SNH's work in this area during the present corporate strategy period has been shaped by an earlier review of our education work together with the reprioritisation of our educational expertise into communications activity which saw a reduction of circa 8 staff to less than 2. This change required a more strategic approach based on the following elements.
 - Stronger alignment with Scottish Government educational priorities on attainment, reducing inequality and health and well-being
 - A move away from producing educational material or providing learning opportunities for classes to supporting the development of skills and experience of teachers to take learning outdoors
 - A shift from one-off interventions to more sustained efforts with specific schools and teachers that better embed outdoor learning policy and practice and increase its impact
 - Closer working with partner bodies including forestry, the national parks and historic environment, and NGOs
 - A focus on educational activity at a smaller number of NNRs
- 4 These changes reflected wider developments in educational policy and practice brought in by Curriculum for Excellence and the Learning for Sustainability agenda which embedded both environmental awareness and understanding, and outdoor learning, more explicitly into mainstream education. As a result of these developments, spending time outdoors learning is now something pupils should routinely expect during the school day. Equally, teachers were required to develop skills and confidence to take learning outdoors across all areas of the curriculum. A key focus for SNH during this period has been to help facilitate the translation of this policy into practice. As Box 1 below indicates, there is considerable scope for improvement given the low base most schools started from in 2014.

Box 1 - Data on outdoor learning provision from our national trend survey in 2014 – key headlines

- Provision in primary schools increased from an average of 19 minutes per pupil per week in 2006, to 30 minutes per pupil per week in 2014.
- Provision in secondary schools increased from an average of 13 minutes per pupil per week in 2006 to nearly 16 minutes per pupil per week in 2014.
- The percentage of time spent outdoors as a proportion of the pre-school day went up from 23% in 2006 to 36% in 2014.
- Although schools and pre-schools have increased their average outdoor durations since 2006, provision is unevenly spread and further substantial increases are achievable and desirable.
- The effect of learning and play within green or natural places of all kinds through residential and non-residential experience alike was particularly strong in generating greater engagement and challenge and enjoyment.
- In general, pupils attending primary and secondary schools in more deprived areas were less likely to be in receipt of a residential outdoor experience, and were more likely to experience shorter outdoor events

- 5 Throughout the current corporate strategy period, the development of a place-based approach to our work has also influenced in our approach to learning – see annex A. The ability to deliver regular, frequent, structured and progressive outdoor learning experiences require the use of both the school grounds and local settings such as greenspace and woodlands within walking distance of the school. One-off trips to special places and residential experiences have a role to play in providing opportunities to experience more of Scotland's nature and landscapes, to learn about them and how they are looked after. But the evidence suggests that these experiences or education interventions are likely to have greater value within a more systematic approach to outdoor learning. This is what we have called “a progression model of place-based learning” (see Annex A).

Key elements of work

- 6 The following is a snapshot of the key elements of work undertaken during this period, with Box 2 illustrating some of the typical feedback from teachers and pupils we have received.
- **Teaching in Nature** - Our career-long professional learning (CLPL) programme supports teachers and other educators to reach the next stage of their professional development in outdoor learning. It involves groups of teachers working 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 is accredited as a Professional Recognition programme by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) who have described it as “sector leading” with other partners including the two National Parks and RSPB also adopting the approach the model. To date, around 130 teachers have taken part in the programme directly with SNH and funding to Landscapes through Learning Scotland (formerly Grounds for Learning) has enabled a further 300 teachers to take part in the programme.
 - **Learning in Local Greenspace** – This priority project in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Route Map to 2020 was developed with the aim of

getting more pupils learning regularly in local greenspaces close to their schools and build teachers confidence to take learning outdoors. It is focused on disadvantaged areas in Scotland and has met the ambitious target to work with 100 schools (115 schools across 12 local authorities with over 4000 pupils engaged). Staff from SNH and a range of national and local third sector bodies have been involved in its delivery. The project has engaged schools in learning about their local greenspaces through learning resources such as camera trapping and the [Beyond your boundary: easy steps to learning in local greenspace](#) toolkit. Improvements to local greenspaces have also been made, including the establishment of new woodland, wildflower, wetland areas, the removal of litter and invasive non-native species. A full evaluation of project outputs and impacts has yet to be undertaken though the impact of this work is already being documented through a series of case studies.

- **Online resources** – We maintain the [Outdoor Learning Directory](#) to provide a “one stop-shop” for environment, forestry and heritage bodies across Scottish Government for signposting existing outdoor learning resources, funding, research and news across the sector. We also maintain a range of resources and guidance on our [education pages](#) on the SNH website.
- **Zepto outdoor app** - The NNR team secured funding from Scottish Enterprise’s CanDo Fund for public sector innovation and sponsored an open challenge through CivTech. The result is a smart phone app developed by Oxido Ltd from Glasgow. Using technology to connect with nature provides a new way to encourage self-guided groups visiting NNRs and other outdoor spaces, and can support teachers and pupils alike to engage in place based learning outdoor.
- **STEM (Science, technology, engineering and maths)** is an education priority which we support through collaborative work with external STEM learning and ENFOR partners. Several SNH staff are also STEM Ambassadors.
- **Early learning and childcare (ELC)** - The benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play for children in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing are acknowledged and inform the rationale to increase children’s access to outdoor play and learning as part of the ELC provision. SNH is a signatory to Scotland’s Outdoor Play & Learning Coalition Position Statement. Over the last 12 months following a request from SG’s Early Years Directorate, we have also been working to support the Government’s ambitious plans for outdoor learning and play through the roll out of expanded early years’ provision.

Box 2 – The impact of outdoor learning - examples of feedback from teachers, pupils and partners

"I can't believe we have existed so closely to this place and never made use of it... I felt that the curricular areas were endless." P1 teacher, North Lanarkshire, Teaching in Nature participant

"I didn't know how close I live to nature" - S5 pupil, Clydebank High, Teaching in Nature participant

"That's the first time I have ever seen frogspawn in real life, that's really cool!" accompanying staff, Viewforth High, Kirkcaldy - Learning in Local greenspace participant

On our first visit to the school only two of the young people reported regularly visiting Coulhill woods in their own time. Others had heard the woods were dangerous or boring and avoided them. By the end of the first session, pupils were more comfortable moving around the woods, and we explored a different path on each trip. During our second visit, approximately half the class reported that they had been to the woods in their own time, and by the third they could confidently identify trees and find evidence of wildlife." Aigas Trust staff – Outdoor Learning in Nature fund

"Fantastic...they used it as a resource to research nature...they were explorers, scientists, investigators...." Jane Cowan, Equity principal teacher, Townhead primary school, on her pupils trying out the Zepto app. CivTech Demo Day 4.0 – Zepto launch

"We have had sessions that clearly motivated some very hard to reach pupils into engaging fully with the learning. A session in Polkemmet Primary, that was due to be an hour of literacy before the end of school, ended up with parents having to wait for a group of boys to finish poems – the same group the teacher pronounced as disengaged with literacy and school." Learning through Landscapes Scotland staff

"Planting trees is just great fun. I'm interested in the environment and I've learned a lot. You get a real sense of responsibility, I want to come back to see how my trees are getting on." - Louise, from Coatbridge, John Muir Award participant.

Developing the evidence base

- 7 Our key focus is to collate and better promote the evidence base on the benefits of play and learning in nature. We are working to support the Scottish Outdoor Learning Research Hub and coordinate meetings to share evidence and practice across this sector. We are also currently funding a PhD at the University of Edinburgh looking at the impact of the local environment and teaching practice on connecting young people with nature.

- 8 As indicated above, to assess progress in embedding learning into teaching practice, we commission a national trend survey through a contract to the University of Stirling. The next survey has been delayed because of CoVid-19 measures and will be run in 2021 with funding from Scottish Government Early Years Team, Scottish Forestry and the National Park Authorities.

Funding

- 9 Our ability to fund third sector bodies and local organisations through grant has declined generally during this period. To increase the impact of the funds we had available, we established the Outdoor Learning Challenge Fund which prioritised activity that supported schools eligible for in the Learning in Local Greenspace project. £510k has been invested in 22 partners over two phases of funding over three financial years.
- 10 We have also maintained support for two strategic partnerships with Learning through Landscapes Scotland (previously Grounds for Learning) and the John Muir Trust. The former 20k annual funding has delivered activity to promote awareness, understanding and good practice in outdoor learning. The latter has focused on supporting delivery of the John Muir award, with SNH's annual investment of £81.6k in 2020-21 supporting circa 20,000 awards in Scotland, of which 25% are by people experiencing disadvantage, and delivered by nearly 900 different providers. As with the learning in local greenspace project, a range of biodiversity improvements have been delivered alongside learning outcomes.

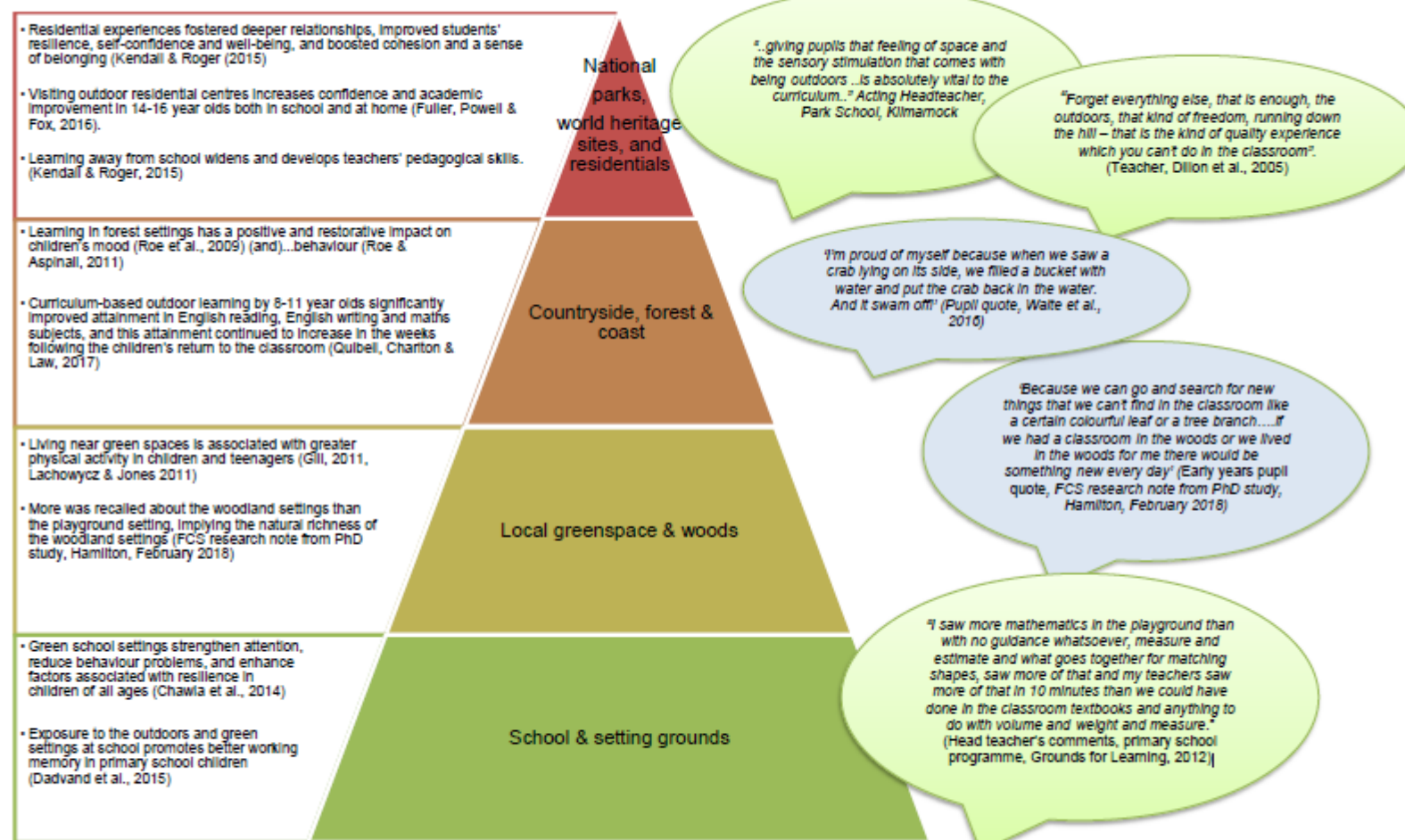
Towards a nature rich future

- 11 The recent Board paper on a nature-rich future highlighted the role that outdoor learning in nature would continue to play as we step up our efforts to help tackle the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and the climate emergency. While impacting on our current work with schools, the current COVID-19 emergency has also increased the spotlight on the importance generally of local greenspace and contact with nature for young people. With current project activity and nearly all funding arrangements ending this financial year we will be reviewing our approaches to feed into the next corporate strategy. Focusing our activity on the key actions and places which maximise our impact and working collaboratively with partners will continue to be two of the key challenges as we move forward.

Pete Rawcliffe
Head of the People and Places Activity
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Annex A

Evidence model showing the impacts and benefits of outdoor learning and play approaches in different outdoor learning contexts



P. Martin ENFOR Outdoor Learning Project Officer (draft 3) 15.11.18 based on *The impact and benefits of outdoor learning Literature summary and stakeholder group statements for Forestry Commission Scotland* a report by Carrie Hedges University of Cumbria, with additional feedback from Chris Mackie PhD Research student and ENFOR partners

