

Bringing Alive Learning in Our National Parks

Outdoor Learning with the National Parks Summary Report

Executive Summary

January 2010 – January 2012



Early Years children enjoy their outdoor spaces, Cumbernauld; Aboyne Academy pupils learning plane tabling skills to map the abandoned settlement of Auchtavan, Cairngorms; senior pupils explaining natural navigation to teachers on a CPD course, Ardlui.

Long Term Vision

At the time of writing the role of outdoor learning is one of high priority for Scottish Education. There are many ways in which it is being promoted, developed and driven forward in a political and strategic way. Outdoor learning has had a long and strong history in Scotland both within schools and through community learning and development. The vision for this project is that as many schools, organisations and individuals as possible are supported and enabled to provide regular, progressive outdoor learning. These opportunities must be provided for all Scotland's children and young people, incorporating the development of many skills vital to personal wellbeing and economic prosperity. Further, through building networks to ensure such progress, the population's connections with Scotland's landscapes will be richly enhanced, and our varied habitats and resources, including our National Parks (NPs), forests, woodlands, National Nature Reserves, upland areas, geoparks, freshwater and marine environments will be valued, respected and enjoyed.

Ministerial foreword Dr Alasdair Allan, Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages



The place of outdoor learning and the role of our National Parks could not be more relevant today with Scotland's focus on a smarter, healthier, greener, fairer country. While it undoubtedly supports and enhances all curricular areas and contexts for learning, there is also a huge benefit to society through developing more active citizens who demonstrate a connection with and understanding of nature and all its life-enhancing elements. Outdoor learning aligns superbly with principles of sustainability, local foods, seasonality, biodiversity and the importance of habitat diversity for a healthy population.

The 2010 guidance document *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* and the supporting online resource emphasised that 'the Scottish Government is keen to see all our children and young people having positive learning experiences in a variety of settings'.

This laid the foundations for investment into building capacity and confidence of our teachers to deliver progressive, frequent and quality learning opportunities for children and young people aged 3-18 in a range of places. Learning is now taking place from school grounds and their local environment, to rural and urban settings further afield, encompassing local green spaces, churchyards, main streets, riverbanks, forests, moorlands and much more.

This successful partnership project with Scotland's National Parks (NPs) has provided a suite of effective approaches to engage children and young people in the natural beauty that is such a fabulous resource in these unique landscapes. Whether the opportunities come from living in or close to the Parks, from traveling to them, or from learning in their own local landscapes supported by resources from the NPs, the experiences are helping to develop each of the four capacities in our children and young people. Through using outdoor learning as a pedagogy for Curriculum for Excellence this project has helped young people become more engaged with and aware of their place in Scotland and Scotland's place in the world.

The work of this project demonstrates some of the values and benefits of true strategic approaches to partnership. Through strong collaborative planning a great value has been added to the potential for each partner to provide resources, innovation, packaged experiences and support for all, making best use of the expertise and support available with the National Parks and other local and national partner organisations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alasdair Allan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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.
(Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010)

Abstract

The 'Outdoor Learning with the National Parks' project promotes and supports strategic development of outdoor learning. Working closely with the partners, in 2012 we will be delivering collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) in local areas and supporting the progress of the authorities' outdoor learning groups, there will be a second cross-authority senior pupil residential and associated staff residential CPD weekend, and there will be a focus on communicating progress to wider audiences. This paper concisely outlines the aims and impacts of the project and makes recommendations in line with our initial aims and with *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*.

Aims

Our overarching aim is that more children and young people experience high quality and frequent learning opportunities outdoors and as a result are better connected to nature. Through their outdoor learning experiences they are developing informed opinions about special and protected places, developing connections with their local areas and developing an understanding of connections across the curriculum.

Specifically, we aim to:

- Build capacity and confidence in our teachers and educators through CPD, with a focus on cluster- level, practitioner–led training and opportunities for action research where possible. (***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.*** Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010)
- Actively promote the growing of local networks of support
- Share good practice through the networks, annual conferences and other local and national events. (***Representative local authority networks will help build capacity for further CPD opportunities in outdoor learning by sharing knowledge, agreeing strategies and disseminating information.*** Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010)

- In so doing, through the support offered in partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA), the special opportunities offered by the unique landscapes and habitats of the NPs are promoted.

All of the above takes place at a time when the national focus on outdoor learning (OL) is reflected in the implementation of new professional standards in sustainable development education and outdoor learning, the One Planet Schools and Scottish Studies agendas and the work of HMI from 2013.

Successes

The full report outlines the range of activities which have demonstrated success with the project, and in relation to the aims stated above there are specific indicators:

- Through conferences, local CPD and the CPD weekend, over 500 teachers and educators have benefitted from direct support, training and inspiration from the project, with greater numbers benefitting indirectly through SCIPD (Scottish Continuing International Professional Development) visits, information and resources, and pupils' involvement in the project. Plans are in place for further local CPD events in each partner local authority.
- Networks are established in each of the partner local authorities, all of which are members of the national OL network, and all are actively either developing authority-wide policies, sharing practice and / or establishing CPD opportunities, to suit their individual purposes.
- Three excellent National Parks case studies have been published on the Education Scotland website by way of sharing good practice, and the Glow groups, Glow meets and CPD communities offer a wealth of support for staff at the click of a mouse. Good practice is also shared (events, newsletters, local and national webpages and glow groups) within authorities and nationally.
- Quotes and data from evaluations of events of all sorts substantiate that the training, networking and sharing of practice are of value to teachers and educators and in many instances lead to direct impacts on their learners.
- In addition, pupils have demonstrated and provided anecdotal evidence that their OL experiences through the project have had deep and lasting impacts on them. As an example, Golspie High School pupils were inspired by their experiences on the senior pupil residential week to organise and lead a walk up their local hill for the primary

pupils, while some pupils led a workshop for teachers at the Glenmore Lodge conference.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the shared experiences from the 'Outdoor Learning with the National Parks' project, and from working closely with national agencies, OL development officers, local authorities and partner providers, a number of recommendations are outlined below.

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. (Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010)

All teachers should:

- plan for regular and frequent OL opportunities for all pupils, making use of school grounds and local places for learning in all curricular areas
- build on this and on partnerships with partner schools, youth and community groups and families to take advantage of support offered by National Parks
- consider and plan quality visits to National Parks and to other designated areas such as National Nature Reserves, with advice and support available from national organisations (e.g. Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, National Parks, Education Scotland, Historic Scotland and many more)
- seek support and guidance from local authority (LA) officers and local partners as well as from colleagues further ahead on their OL journeys
- consider working towards achieving the new professional recognition related to OL and seek out / request career long professional learning (CLPL) opportunities to support this
- look to become involved in, or develop, a 3-18 places project in partnership with one or more establishments in their cluster / learning community, and with LA officers and university contacts to support action research as part of the project (linking in to national OL development priorities and support).

All head teachers (HTs) should, in addition:

- consider including OL in school improvement plans, either explicitly or alternatively through developing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing (HWB), the skills agenda or a disciplinary area, using OL as an approach
- promote whole school planning approaches to OL
- support staff in their professional review and development through some of the recommendations herein, incorporating the use of Glow CPD (CLPL) opportunities and locally based professional learning for clusters

- support teachers through the process of gaining professional recognition in outdoor learning from the General Teaching Council for Scotland
- identify and seek support from Education Scotland and from their LA officer responsible for OL, and push for authority wide incorporation of OL in improvement plans.

All Quality Improvement Officers and Education Officers should:

- establish, support and lead an authority wide OL group or network, to include partner providers, ranger services, active schools, teachers and HTs from all sectors, and Community Learning and Development officers
- support and develop strategic approaches to embedding OL through policy development and growth of networks
- ensure provision of regular, quality CLPL (CPD) around OL to support all areas of the curriculum
- establish links and communication channels between school staff and partner providers, universities and community and youth groups who can jointly ensure high quality, progressive OL experiences for children and young people
- engage with Education Scotland to identify and promote good practice, play an active role in the national network, and provide support in development work around OL
- support and provide CLPL (CPD) for HTs and Depute HTs, and for LA officers with responsibility for OL, to establish a cohort of leaders in OL
- recognise pathways to professional recognition and evidencing professional standards, and implement CLPL (CPD) opportunities for all staff which supports these.

All Directors of Education should:

- recommend curricular planning which takes a whole-school and cluster approach and promotes OL as an approach across all learning, with a focus on interdisciplinary learning
- request recommendations from their OL group as to how best to embed OL into children's learning, skills development and wider experiences across the authority
- engage with national partners, including our National Parks, to facilitate joint planning and bringing in expertise around particular issues to stimulate young people's learning
- maintain channels of communication with inspectors to ensure OL is recognised and recommended for self- evaluation in inspections

- collaborate with universities and colleges to ensure and support research into all aspects of OL whether from policy, practical or evidential perspectives, in partnership with Education Scotland.

All HTs and LA officers should:

- pursue links with Universities and colleges to support OL professional development and opportunities such as action research leading to professional recognition awards for the new professional standards, and consider:
 - *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* (Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010)
- consider translation of the partnership model of the 'Outdoor Learning with the National Parks' project to other designated areas, authorities and partners, and
- wherever possible with such partnerships, recognise the crucial importance of a dedicated coordinating officer for sustainability.

All Teacher Education Institutes should include OL as a normal part of all initial teacher education (ITE) and probationary training.

All Career Long Professional Learning (CPD) providers (in LAs, educational institutions and partner organisations) **should:**

- be familiar with the role of outdoor learning in Curriculum for Excellence and incorporate it into all CLPL (CPD) as a normal approach
- engage educators in consideration of the updates for professional standards for learning and teaching due to be adopted in 2014
- offer regular CLPL (CPD) opportunities to support teachers' OL journeys, and consider OL as a normal approach in CLPL (CPD) for all aspects of the curriculum.

Education Scotland should:

- continue to develop strong partnership working with national organisations to lead progressive and innovative outdoor learning opportunities for all children and young people, with on-going support from the National Parks

- seek to provide a range of high quality support - through resources, online and physical opportunities, communities of practice and creative approaches - to help grow and develop confident and experienced teachers and educators to lead outdoor learning initiatives and promote its becoming truly embedded in all schools' learning and teaching
- in partnership with school leaders and managers continue to support, challenge and improve whole school approaches to outdoor learning, and promote partnership work with communities and with National Parks.

Further details are to be found in the full report.

Alison Hammerton, OL with NPs Development Officer, Education Scotland

In partnership with the Outdoor Learning with the National Parks steering group.