OEAP

Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning
Cyngor Cymru ar Gyfer Dysgu yn yr Awyr Agored

High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales

Overview

'Outdoor learning' embraces an approach to learning that:

- involves being outdoors as a central part of the experience
- is open to all
- seeks to use the outdoor environment as a vehicle for transforming the experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours
- can have a challenging, adventurous element
- will often involve a residential component
- often involves some physical activity
- always respects the natural environment
- is often cited as being both memorable and fun

Underpinning this approach are five core themes that often characterise outdoor learning:

1 **Participation**

2 **Self-confidence and achievement**

3 **Differentiation and progression**

4 **A balanced approach to risk management**

5 **Can be part of a residential experience**

The guide clearly outlines the benefits of learning and teaching in the natural environment and has been written to help you evaluate and then set about improving, or further improving, the quality of outdoor learning. In support of this, ten key outcomes of outdoor learning have been identified with a range of indicators attributed to each one. These indicators can be used to support any improvement work and will often be enhanced by working closely with partners.

The Environment Act (Wales) 2016 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 together create modern legislation for improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Outdoor learning contributes to all 7 Wellbeing Goals as well as providing 'opportunities and activities that expand horizons within and beyond the traditional learning environment of the classroom.' [1]

Successful futures

4 curriculum purposes

The purposes of the curriculum in Wales should be that children and young people develop as: > ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives > enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work > ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world > healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Realised through

6 areas of learning experiences

Expressive arts	Humanities	Languages, literacy and communication	Science and technology	Health and wellbeing	Mathematics and numeracy

Embedded within

3 cross-curriculum skills

Literacy	Numeracy	Digital competence

Wider skills: creativity; critical thinking and problem solving; personal effectiveness; planning and organisation.

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Contents

About this guide 2

What is 'outdoor learning'? 5

How do young people participate? 6

Using the guide to improve outdoor learning 8

High quality outdoor learning – themes and outcomes 10

Create the vision 12

Make the vision a reality 12

Inspire young people to learn and achieve 13

Help young people to learn and achieve 13

Outcome 1 – enjoyment 14

Outcome 2 – confidence and character 15

Outcome 3 – health and well-being 16

Outcome 4 – social and emotional awareness 17

Outcome 5 – environmental awareness 18

Outcome 6 – activity skills 19

Outcome 7 – personal qualities 20

Outcome 8 – skills for life 21

Outcome 9 – increased motivation and appetite for learning 22

Outcome 10 – broadened horizons 23

Working with others to improve quality 24

Summary 26

Finding out more 28

References 29

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About this guide

Britain has a long tradition of engaging young people in outdoor learning, and the positive impact that this can have on a young person's development is widely acknowledged.

This document provides a Welsh context that builds on the previous guides published by the English Outdoor Council. This revised guide has been produced in response to wider societal recognition of the value of the outdoors in the development of children and young people, and the increasing evidence and support that underpins this view. The scope of the original document has also been extended with the term 'outdoor education' being replaced by 'outdoor learning', which recognises the importance of progressive formal education experiences sitting alongside experiences in non-formal settings.

Introduction to the guide

The guide is intended to:

- clearly outline the benefits and outcomes of high quality outdoor learning
- recognise and evaluate high quality outdoor learning
- focus on the delivery of high quality outdoor learning – what it looks like and how to achieve it
- Highlight where high quality outdoor learning can help deliver the curriculum in Wales

The guide is intended for:

- those directly involved in outdoor learning with young people, including teachers and support staff, youth workers, youth leaders, providers, instructors, coaches and parents
- policy and decision-makers who wish to understand more about the benefits and impacts of outdoor learning and the establishment of positive behaviours in adult life
- those involved in managing and monitoring outdoor learning, including head teachers, youth service managers, heads and managers of outdoor education centres, leaders of voluntary youth organisations and outdoor activity/environmental clubs, and outdoor education/learning advisers

The guide is presented in sections as follows:

- an introductory section – explaining how to use this guide to evaluate and improve the quality of outdoor learning
- an overview of provision – how we inspire and enable young people to achieve through learning in the outdoors
- a statement of ten outcomes of high quality learning through the outdoors, together with five cross-cutting themes – aspects or models of learning that have general relevance across outdoor learning, drawn from current research and experienced practitioners in the field
- a list of indicators for each outcome – to give a picture of what we should expect to see young people achieving when they are involved in high quality outdoor learning, developed by members of the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel
- an overview of effective links and partnerships – how schools, youth organisations, outdoor centres and formal club settings can work together to achieve high quality

Why learn outdoors? Support and evidence

To maximise the positive impact that outdoor experiences have upon children and young people, they should have access to **frequent, continual and progressive** experience of outdoor learning. Over the last few years, there has been a growing body of evidence that supports the value of the 'outdoors' in terms of a young person's development. Outlined below, is some of the current thinking underpinning this.

Progression – from early years to lifelong learning

In the early years of development, the 'outdoors provides children with the space to move freely: movement, along with play, has been described as one of the most natural and powerful modes of learning for young children... when outdoors, children can construct on a bigger scale, explore the world first-hand and experience natural phenomena'.[2]

In addition, 'there is a wealth of evidence to support the positive effect that spending time in the natural environment has on the health and emotional well-being of children'.[3]

We know that 'active children perform better in school and in later life. Fundamental physical literacy must be developed from a young age and consolidated through positive experiences in childhood. We know that children who enjoy physical activity and develop those basic skills early in life are more likely to be active in later life'.[4]

Engaging in the wide spectrum of experiences available through outdoor learning provides opportunities for young people to participate in new and exciting activities and to develop skills into adulthood. Indeed, many of our more successful Olympic sports have their origins in outdoor adventure activities, and can go on to inspire young people to achieve at the very highest level.

Attainment

There is no doubt that when effectively integrated into a well-planned learning programme outdoor learning experience can have a positive impact on attainment. Indeed, Estyn recognises that 'High performing schools share a passion and vision for making sure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to be physically active and learn outdoors. They believe that this leads to high levels of engagement and involvement from the pupils, which in turn leads to high standards. Teachers find imaginative ways for pupils to develop and apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum through active learning in the outdoors'.[5]

'Compelling evidence from research points to the wide-ranging educational benefits of teaching and learning science through fieldwork'.[6] Undertaking fieldwork is an essential skill in Geography, and it has been shown that, when undertaking simple fieldwork activities, children 'achieved higher literacy scores than children that did not'[7] take part in such learning outdoors.

Research has also shown that whilst learning in the outdoors, improvements can be made in literacy and numeracy levels. A research project in Scotland found 'that for a 12 week programme (2 hours per week) the children gained on average 6 months of Mental Arithmetic and 2 months of General Maths against a similar cohort of children within the control schools'.[8]

About this guide

Health and well-being

Research suggests that children need opportunities to be outside and that the outdoors is where many children like to be the most. By allowing children the freedom to be outside, we reinforce their emotional well-being, which in turn enables them to embrace the natural world independently.[9] Not surprisingly, outdoor adventure programmes are seen as 'a promising tool to promote the health and well-being of young people'.[10] 'A high level of health and well-being is associated with positive functioning, which includes creative thinking, productivity, good interpersonal relationships and resilience in the face of adversity, as well as good physical health and life expectancy'.[11]

Social and emotional resilience

Progressive exposure to learning outdoors provides a route for young people to become more resilient. They can move from exploring the world outside their classroom to a first night away from home and onto more demanding expeditions and visits in the UK and abroad. In doing so they develop lifelong skills and attitudes that will build towards fit,

healthy and fulfilled lives. Outdoor learning provides opportunities to develop social and emotional resilience, support wider learning outcomes and develop broader interests.[12]

The development of 'character and resilience' is seen as vitally important for a young person's life chances and 'these so-called 'soft skills' can lead to hard results'. It is these characteristics that are often seen as typical outcomes of learning outdoors, and provide essential skills for life both in employment and as a part of wider society.[13]

Sustainability management of natural resources

By creating an empathy and an ethic of care towards the natural environment, outdoor learning can make a clear and significant contribution towards fostering positive sustainable behaviours and attitudes in young people.[14] It is has also been reported that guided time spent in outdoor environments can encourage positive behaviour and attainment, develop skills in risk-assessment, promote health and well-being and stimulate an affective relationship with the environment that promotes sustainable behaviours.[15]

Residential experiences

Residential experiences have been a traditional core element of outdoor learning. Such experiences are 'a surprisingly powerful developmental experience'[16] and 'high quality residential learning does appear to boost attainment'.[17] High quality residentials are characterised as being most effective on improving outcomes for young people when they are progressive and embedded within existing programmes of delivery. This process is further enhanced if both staff and young people are involved in the design and delivery of residentials.[18]

It is also recognised that there can be significant increases in 'psychological resilience immediately following an outdoor adventure based residential' and that 'residential experiences can promote personal growth. These include the extent to which students feel in control, act independently and are able to solve problems'.[19]

Access to such important experiences should be an expectation for all young people.

What is 'outdoor learning'?

In this guide the term 'outdoor learning' embraces an approach to learning that:

- **involves being outdoors as a central part of the experience**
- **is open to all**
- **seeks to use the outdoor environment as a vehicle for transforming the experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours**
- **contributes towards a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language**
- **frequently has a challenging, adventurous element**
- **will often involve a residential component**
- **often involves some physical activity**
- **develops an understanding, appreciation and care for the natural environment**
- **is often cited as being both memorable and fun**

Outdoor learning experiences may occur on or close to a school or venue, at a distance from that site or during a residential or expedition experience in the UK or abroad. These experiences include outdoor activities purposely designed for their educational /learning impact, such as field work, coastal and forest school, trails, bushcraft, initiative challenges and rope courses; recognised sports with an adventurous component, such as canoeing, climbing, hill walking, orienteering or sailing; outdoor leisure pursuits, such as camping or hill walking; and the use of the outdoors as a learning or experiential environment for both cognitive and non-cognitive development.

Outdoor learning is primarily an approach to teaching and learning through these and other similar activities and through broader experiences in the outdoors. It is important that the value of this powerful context for teaching and learning is recognised by everyone involved in children's care and education. Increasingly research is demonstrating the benefits for children when they connect with the natural world and are able to enjoy outdoor experiences. The impact on learning and development as well as health and well-being can have long-term benefits.[20] The common thread is the focus on positive outcomes in personal and social development. However, it must not be forgotten that the experiences are in themselves hugely memorable and, more often than not, great 'fun', having merit as experiences in their own right.

This guide focuses on the delivery of high quality outdoor learning – what it looks like and how to achieve it. It recognises that outdoor learning takes place, not only in the formal education sector and through outdoor providers, but equally in youth services and voluntary youth organisations, as well as in a wide range of outdoor activity clubs that cater for young people, and with peer and family groups.

How do young people participate?

This guide recognises that young people become involved in outdoor learning in a variety of contexts, in schools, youth programmes or groups (organisations), outdoor education/activity centres, outdoor activity/environmental clubs and with peers and family members. There are huge benefits in accessing frequent, continual and progressive outdoor activity experiences. Many of these opportunities arise through diverse delivery methods, but often have similar or overlapping objectives, with the common threads of personal and social development, health and well-being, and personal effectiveness running through them.

Schools have a central role to play in delivering high quality outdoor learning, both within the school setting and further afield. They may provide regular outdoor and adventurous activities which can link to all areas of the curriculum. They frequently offer out-of-school-hours learning opportunities and organise day and residential visits to outdoor education/activity providers.

National Awards, such as the John Muir Award, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and similar awards are being delivered through a range of organisations.

Youth services and groups in both the statutory and voluntary sectors provide significant outdoor learning opportunities as part of their curriculum and youth and play programmes, many of which have personal and social development as a prime focus. The voluntary youth organisations, in particular, have a long tradition of work in this field. (The terms 'youth services' and 'youth organisations' are used interchangeably in this booklet.)

Schools and youth services have in common the ability to measure the impact of outdoor learning in the context of a young person's whole development over an extended period.

Outdoor education/activity providers include those managed by local authorities, schools or groups of schools, voluntary and charitable organisations, and the commercial sector. All have the potential to make a substantial impact on the personal and social development of the young people they engage with; for many this is their primary purpose. Providers are well placed to bring their specialist expertise to the delivery of high quality outdoor learning, best realised when they work in close partnership with their customer schools and youth groups. Many providers also offer activity courses, open to individual recruitment, for example in holiday periods, providing further opportunities for young people to benefit.

Outdoor activity and environmental clubs offer young people valuable opportunities to access outdoor learning experiences. They can provide an environment that encourages progress towards higher levels of knowledge, performance and skill, whilst also contributing significantly to broader learning, personal growth and life-long recreational experiences.

Overseas visits and expeditions, whether provided by a school, commercial or voluntary organisations, engage many young people in extended opportunities for adventurous activities, advanced scientific field skills, community work, and heightened cultural and environmental awareness. Additionally, young people learn about working as part of a team, including how to manage risk, and they develop a greater tolerance for, and understanding of, the strengths and weaknesses they and their peers have. Increasingly, recent research is providing evidence of significant learning outcomes gained by those who participate and the development of the core skills that employers and universities are seeking.[21]

Family members or peers have often been influential in initiating and supporting an individual's engagement in the outdoors. 'A survey by Public Health England and Disney (similar results will be expected for Wales) found that 57% of children said that they were more likely to be active if their parents were'.[22]

Getting started

If the young people you work with are currently not involved actively in the outdoors and you want information on how to get started, some of the website references on page 28 will be helpful.

Each school should have an Educational Visits Co-ordinator, and there should be an Outdoor Education Adviser linked to the Local Authority who will be able to help and advise on how to get started. The Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel website is a useful resource: **www.oeap.info** and lists most of the Local Authority advisers. The Wales Council for Outdoor Learning acts as a voice for the sector, working together with partners across Wales to support the development and delivery of **High Quality Outdoor Learning** at both local and national levels.

National Governing Bodies of Sport and various environmental orgnanisations can be found through websites and social media (see examples on page 28).

Using this guide to improve outdoor learning

This guide has been written to help you evaluate and then set about improving, or further improving, the quality of outdoor learning.

In Wales, four purposes are at the heart of the curriculum, that all children and young people will be:

- Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work.
- Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

High quality outdoor learning can contribute to achieving these purposes and providers of outdoor learning can use the guide, perhaps in conjunction with the curriculum or their own curriculum/programme and Estyn inspection frameworks, to obtain an overview of the quality they are achieving. High quality outdoor learning will develop knowledge, skills and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of the four key purposes. Outdoor learning should be a natural, integrated and stimulating part of the curriculum.

As a school, youth provision, centre or club, you will probably already have processes that you follow to evaluate the quality of provision and the progress made by young people. Using this guide as part of this process will help ensure that, in relation to learning in the outdoors and learning about the outdoors, your evaluation is as reliable as possible.

The following steps offer one possible approach, but first a word of caution.

A great deal of outdoor learning relies on the commitment of colleagues who give their time entirely voluntarily or in an unpaid capacity beyond their contracted hours. If this is the context in which you work, you may need to employ less formal approaches, at least until colleagues are convinced of the value to the young people of devoting a small proportion of their voluntary time to this sort of evaluation process.

Evaluating quality and effectiveness

This document focuses on the ten key outcomes for outdoor learning listed below. You may of course have others.

1 Enjoyment
2 Confidence and character
3 Health and well-being
4 Social and emotional awareness
5 Environmental awareness
6 Activity skills
7 Personal qualities
8 Skills for life
9 Increased motivation and appetite for learning
10 Broadened horizons

For each outcome, there is a list of indicators of quality and effectiveness. These can be used to help gain an overall picture of the quality of the learning and experiences you provide. There are also a number of general themes described on page 10, which have relevance to all or many of the outcomes and should be considered alongside them.

1. Look at each of the outcomes and their associated indicators. There is a suggested list of about 10 indicators for each outcome. Not all of the outcomes may be relevant to you, though most of them should be and many of them may be overlapping.

2. Be clear about what your key outcomes are, consider why you are doing what you are doing.

3. Decide how to evaluate the indicators you have chosen. It might be through observation, through debrief and review, feedback from participants in written or digital diaries. Try to think of the indicators collectively, not as individual items to be checked off.

4. To what extent are your young people meeting each outcome? You might find it helpful to record the results on a simple sliding scale for each of the ten outcomes, like the one shown below. For a result beyond the half-way point, you would want to be satisfied that most of the young people in your group are meeting or progressing towards most of the indicators.

5. As a team, discuss the individual evaluations and try to establish a picture across the whole school, youth service, centre or club. If most of the individual evaluations are above the half-way point, this would suggest that you are providing high quality outdoor learning for young people. Where you judge that you are below the half-way point, but none the less are seeing progress, this would suggest you are moving towards high quality.

Improving and sustaining quality and effectiveness

The quality you achieve in outdoor learning will depend on:

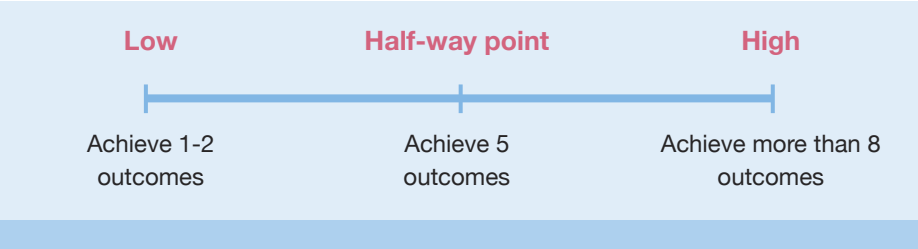
- how well your decision-makers, managers and leaders are creating a vision that recognises the benefits and impacts of outdoor learning and assist in making it a reality
- how well your teachers, youth workers, instructors, coaches or support staff are inspiring and helping young people to learn and achieve and have a clear idea of why they are doing it and what outcomes they intend to achieve
- the extent to which young people are involved in organising and planning their own activities and understand why they are undertaking such activities
- the extent to which young people, whatever their circumstances, are able to participate in your programme
- the effectiveness of links between schools, other youth settings, centres, expedition providers and clubs in maximising and reinforcing the learning outcomes for young people.

The latter sections of this guide highlight some of the characteristics of high quality provision focusing on the points above.

This is not intended as a definitive guide – use it to help you identify what you are already doing well and what you could perhaps do better.

Give yourselves a realistic time-scale for any improvements you identify and during this time concentrate on improving the impact of your provision in these areas. At the end of the period, carry out the evaluation again and see whether more of your young people have progressed towards meeting more of the indicators.

Don't forget that this guide is about improving quality and effectiveness, whatever your starting point. A great deal of high quality outdoor learning already takes place in schools, other youth settings, centres, expeditions and clubs up and down the country. This document is intended to benchmark, celebrate and build upon this good work.



High quality outdoor learning: themes and outcomes

Five core themes of outdoor learning

1. Participation

By providing opportunities to experience non-traditional sports, many of which are challenging, stimulating and yet easily accessible, such as walking and cycling or engaging in environmental activities such as bird watching, young people can forge a route to a life-time of engagement in a range of outdoor activites.

Outdoor learning lends itself to dynamic models of learning that can be used to deliver other beneficial outcomes. In high quality outdoor learning young people are encouraged to engage in the planning of their outdoor activities and take maximum ownership whilst participating.

Time spent reviewing or reflecting on the activity ensures that learning outcomes are emphasised, reinforced and applied in wider contexts and into the future. This in itself it is an indicator of high quality outdoor learning.

2. Self-confidence and achievement

Outdoor learning is one means of challenging young people to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence. Competition can be used as a spur to encourage all to strive to do their best, and, having done so, to take pride in their achievements. Additionally, co-operation can be used to demonstrate that we generally achieve more by working together rather than in isolation or in opposition.

Outdoor learning also offers alternative avenues for physical achievement where the only 'competition' is within oneself against the environment (e.g. a rock face or the weather). This sort of challenge frequently motivates young people who find difficulty expressing themselves physically in a competitive 'head-to-head' situation.

3. Differentiation and progression

In high quality outdoor learning young people are engaged as far as possible at a level that matches their own abilities and development. Activities are planned that can be adapted to present challenges at different levels appropriate to different group members, or that permit group members to take on different roles. Activities have the greatest impact when they are progressive – this can operate at different levels and scales.

4. Residential experience

Residential experiences provide opportunities for young people to live away from home, undertake activities in the company of their peers and often feature prominently in high quality outdoor learning.

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Learning Away[17] project found that:

- progressive residentials embed learning and skills year on year
- residentials that are embedded within existing programmes of delivery lead to improved learning outcomes
- residentials that are designed and led by school staff mean that activities can be specifically developed to meet the needs and learning objectives of young people
- residentials that are designed and led by young people lead to better outcomes
- opportunities to mix with others and develop relationships that bring opportunities for new insights and learning
- new and memorable experiences at both the local level and as well as further afield can help build resilience

A residential outdoor programme, or extended expedition, can go on to offer young people the chance to engage in adventurous activities in new and challenging environments far away from their local area, with unique opportunities for personal and social development. They are often amongst the most memorable experiences of a young person's development and can lead to a lifetime of involvement in a new activity.

Young people's progress and feedback is monitored to ensure they can be continually motivated by new challenges.

Feedback from young people on their progress and understanding should inform activity and programme development.

5. Nothing ventured… balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors

Challenge is an essential part of learning, and learning outdoors is no exception. Moreover, challenge can be thought of as having several characteristic features: an opportunity to gain; a risk of loss or harm; careful goal setting; a willingness to participate; physical and/or emotional activity outside the comfort zone.

Therefore, outdoor learning should always be conducted with an awareness of risk within a sound framework of safety, involving a careful assessment of both the risk and benefit of the activity. Responsibility for safety management rests primarily with the leaders and instructors or coaches in charge. However, in high quality learning outdoors the young people themselves are actively engaged in the process of risk management, at the planning stage, whilst undertaking their activities and in debriefing and review.

For a more detailed outline of how best to balance the risk and benefits in the outdoors, refer to Tim Gill's book *Nothing Ventured*[23], sponsored by the English Outdoor Council.

Risk management is a 'life skill' in its own right. Learning this skill will be of value to young people, both in the work place and in other aspects of their adult life.

Ten key outcomes

When schools, youth organisations, youth programmes, clubs, expeditions or centres or families are providing progressive high quality outdoor learning, they see young people who:

- enjoy participating and reflecting in outdoor activities and adopt a positive attitude to challenge and adventure
- are enhancing their overall well-being by gaining personal confidence and developing character and resilience through taking on challenges and achieving success
- are developing their self-awareness and social skills, and their appreciation of the contributions and achievements of themselves and of others
- are becoming alive to the natural local and global environment and understand the importance of conservation and sustainable development
- are acquiring and developing a range of skills in outdoor activities, fieldwork, exploration, journeys and expeditions
- are demonstrating increased initiative and innovation, enthusiasm, curiosity, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance, tenacity and commitment
- are developing and extending their key skills of communication, problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, leadership and co-operation
- are learning to appreciate the benefits of physical activity and the lifelong value of participation in healthy leisure activities and reflection
- are displaying an increased motivation and appetite for self-directed learning that is contributing to raised levels of attainment in other aspects of their development, as well as becoming concerned, responsible and fulfilled citizens
- are broadening their horizons and becoming open to a wider range of employment opportunities and life chances

In providing high quality outdoor learning organisations, groups and individuals need to be clear about their intended outcomes and their wider vision for outdoor learning.

Creating a vision

In settings that provide high quality outdoor learning, decision-makers, managers and delivery staff:

- recognise what outdoor learning can achieve for young people's overall well-being
- set high expectations of what individual young people can achieve through outdoor learning
- explain the impact and outcomes of outdoor learning on participation, progress and achievement in a way that everyone involved can understand
- review the outcomes and celebrate young people's achievements
- encourage independent participation into adolescence and beyond

Make the vision a reality

In settings that provide high quality outdoor learning, managers, delivery staff and support colleagues:

- are aware of the over-arching importance of improving the well-being of all children and young people
- are creative in providing the time, staff, equipment and resources to enable young people to develop and achieve
- encourage and support the staff involved and provide professional development opportunities
- listen to young people and take account of what they say
- involve parents/carers and listen to and take account of what they say
- monitor the impact of outdoor learning to ensure the vision is met
- manage the provision in a way that secures its long-term sustainability
- create an environment that is safe, welcoming and rewarding to young people
- encourage and develop their leaders, volunteers and support colleagues who work with young people
- work effectively on partnership with others (see page 24)

Inspire young people to learn and achieve

In settings that provide high quality outdoor learning, staff working with young people:

- are aware of the over-arching importance of improving the well-being of all children and young people
- show commitment and enthusiasm
- provide positive role models
- show confidence in young people's ability to make progress and achieve
- listen to young people and value what they say and do
- raise young people's aspirations
- take pride in and celebrate young people's successes
- develop their own expertise as activity leaders and outdoor educators
- inspire a connection to and respect for the environment

Help young people to learn and achieve

In settings that provide high quality outdoor learning, staff working with young people:

- share and discuss with young people what they expect them to achieve, and involve them in setting targets
- take into account what young people have already learnt and identify the next steps in their progression
- provide young people with relevant activities in environments that interest, challenge and motivate them
- provide opportunities for young people to review and evaluate their own and others' progress
- give young people advice and support to guide their learning and enhance their own well-being, allowing them time to think, reflect and make decisions for themselves
- make effective use of the time, staff, equipment and resources available
- ensure a safe environment whilst also enabling young people to understand and assess the risks involved and transfer this skill to other areas of their life
- have a clear plan of action that sets out what they individually need to do to realise the organisation's vision for outdoor learning

Outcome 1 > enjoyment

Young people enjoy participating in outdoor activities and adopt a positive attitude to challenge, learning and adventure.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- enjoy being outdoors – smile often!
- want to repeat experiences either now or after review and reflection
- opt into activities and participate fully
- participate voluntarily in their free time

- are keen to sign up to activities that are optional
- talk about their experiences, positively and with enthusiasm
- encourage their friends to take part, are keen to find out how to progress further (e.g. by joining a club)
- take a full part in all aspects of a residential experience
- want to return to an education/activity centre or club and progress further in the activities offered
- attend a club/youth organisation and their activities regularly

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

Outcome 2 > confidence and character

Young people are developing personal confidence and character through taking on challenges and achieving success.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- overcome their apprehensions to take part in challenging activities
- want a second go at things they find challenging first time
- develop resilience through perseverance where before they felt they could not succeed
- feel proud of what they have achieved
- want to move forward to the next challenge
- talk openly about their successes, and their failures
- feel positive about themselves – have a 'can-do' attitude
- display more social confidence – 'come out of their shell'
- feel they can make a positive contribution to the success of their group, school or club
- are able to recognise how they can modify their behaviour to overcome future challenges both in the outdoors and their everyday lives

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

> **There is a growing body of research linking social mobility to social and emotional skills, which range from empathy and the ability to make and maintain relationships to application, mental toughness, delayed gratification and self-control. These research findings all point to the same conclusion: character counts.**
>
> (Character and Resilience Manifesto, 2013, p.4, All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility)

Outcome 3 > health and well-being

Young people are learning to appreciate the benefits of physical fitness and the lifelong value of participation in healthy active leisure activities.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- keep themselves fit through regular physical activity
- have a positive self-image
- talk about the benefits to their health through participation in physical outdoor activities
- adopt a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating appropriate to the demands of their activities
- understand the risks to fitness and health posed by smoking, alcohol and drugs, and set an example in their own lifestyle
- walk or cycle, where this is a realistic and safe option, or take other regular exercise

- want to continue their interest in outdoor activities beyond school and into adult life
- independently participate in follow-up courses where these are available
- understand how much exercise is required to remain healthy
- are aware of the links between physical and emotional well-being

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

> **Increasing engagement with the natural environment through the education system can therefore produce a number of beneficial health outcomes, such as increased levels of physical activity, helping tackle childhood obesity and greater well-being and potentially improving mental health**
>
> Allen and Balfour, 2014, p.21, Natural solutions to tackling health inequalities

Outcome 4 > social and emotional awareness

Young people are developing their self-awareness and social skills, and their appreciation of the contributions and achievements of themselves and of others.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- are learning to recognise their own and others' strengths and current limitations, valuing the contribution of others
- willingly trust others and accept their support, while also recognising when others need support and willingly offer theirs
- treat others with tolerance and respect, challenging intolerance when necessary
- understand how their own actions impact on others
- recognise and modify any aspects of behaviour that adversely affect their group

> **Residentials provide the opportunity and experience of living with others. This transforms relationships and develops a strong sense of community and belonging between staff and students involved. Our evaluators found that this sense of community supports a wide range of positive social and learning outcomes long after the return to school.**

Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2015, Learning Away – Brilliant residentials and their impact on children, young people and schools

- recognise and applaud the achievements of others, regardless of how these compare with their own
- developing and valuing friendships
- take on roles of responsibility for planning and organising activities, fulfilling the role of junior leaders
- take responsibility for their own safety as well as that of others
- respect others' private space

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

Outcome 5 > environmental awareness

Young people are becoming alive to the natural environment and understand the importance of conservation and sustainable development.

> **...the potential contribution outdoor learning can make to the development of attitudes towards sustainability and a broader ethic of care for the environment is clear and significant.**

Beth Christie, 2012, The impact of outdoor learning on attitudes to sustainability: A review of literature, Field Studies Council and University of Edinburgh

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- have regular access to the outdoors as a learning resource
- experience a range of different environments in different conditions
- understand the impact of human activities on the environment

- demonstrate care for the environment through their own actions (e.g. green recreation, leave no trace)
- are keen to participate in conservation activities
- develop an interest in wider issues of sustainable development
- appreciate and draw inspiration from the natural environment (e.g. in oral or written reflection, artwork or photography)
- experience and gain respect for the power of natural forces (e.g. wind and waves)
- understand the impact of the activities on the local environment and economy
- experience 'awe and wonder' in response to the natural beauty of wild environments

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

Outcome 6 > activity skills

Young people are acquiring and developing a range of psychomotor skills in support of their participation in outdoor pursuits, recreation and exploration.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- develop physical skills that they adapt and apply effectively in outdoor activities
- develop relevant mental skills (e.g. determination, co-operation, resilience)
- acquire and develop appropriate technical knowledge and skills
- know how to dress appropriately for outdoor activities
- understand how to keep themselves comfortable when outdoors in a variety of environments
- recognise the value of training and practice in developing skills and improving performance
- recognise the value of competition as a potential spur to high performance
- understand something of the history and ethics underpinning outdoor sports and leisure pursuits
- respond positively in challenging environments (e.g. darkness, inclement weather)

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

Finding the sport of canoeing meant so much to me as a youngster. I loved practising, learning to become skilful in a canoe and being able to travel and experience things as I hadn't done before, especially the excitement of learning to paddle on fast flowing rivers with big rapids.

David Florence, double Olympic medalist

Outcome 7 > personal qualities

Young people are demonstrating increased initiative, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance, tenacity and commitment.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- are actively involved in the planning of their outdoor activities
- arrive on time, properly equipped and prepared for activities
- undertake appropriate tasks with minimum levels of supervision and increasing independence
- demonstrate initiative in overcoming obstacles to their progress

- work towards self-reliance in outdoor adventure/challenge (e.g. unaccompanied expeditions)
- try hard to succeed at activities they find physically or emotionally challenging
- set realistic targets for themselves over an extended period, and keep focused until they succeed
- persevere with good humour in the face of discomfort (e.g. fatigue or inclement weather)
- take responsibility for their own safety and that of others
- take on positions of responsibility (e.g. as junior committee members)
- take care of their personal possessions, personal space and personal hygiene

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

"Experience of the outdoors and wild adventure space has the potential to confer a wide range of benefits on young people… Development of a positive self-image, confidence in one's abilities and experience of dealing with uncertainty can be important in helping young people face the wider world and develop enhanced social skills.

Ward Thompson *et al*, (2006) *Free range teenagers: the role of wild adventure space in young people's lives*. OPENspace research centre: Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University.

> **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.**

Curriculum for Excellence for Outdoor Learning, Learning and Teaching Scotland

Outcome 8 > skills for life

Young people are developing and extending their key skills of communication, problem-solving, leadership and teamwork.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- listen to instructions (e.g. safety briefings) and respond accordingly
- come up with ideas and are able to express them
- understand the importance of listening to the ideas and opinions of others
- are able to describe their experiences orally or in writing (or using video and IT skills)
- work co-operatively in planning activities and solving problems
- are willing to try out a variety of ideas in order to find out what will work
- vary and adapt what they do in response to changing circumstances
- understand how team members take on different roles to achieve success
- are able to take on a position of responsibility and leadership roles where appropriate
- are able to step back and allow others to take a leadership role
- are able to help their group arrive at a team decision and implement it
- undertake training in first aid and survival skills at an appropriate level

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

Outcome 9 > increased motivation and appetite for learning

Young people are displaying an increased motivation and appetite for learning that is contributing to raised levels of attainment and progress in other aspects of their development.

In a recent Education Endowment Foundation trial, pupils who went on trips were taught a structured approach to improving their writing using the trip as a source of inspiration. The pupils who received this intervention made an average of nine months progress compared to the control group.

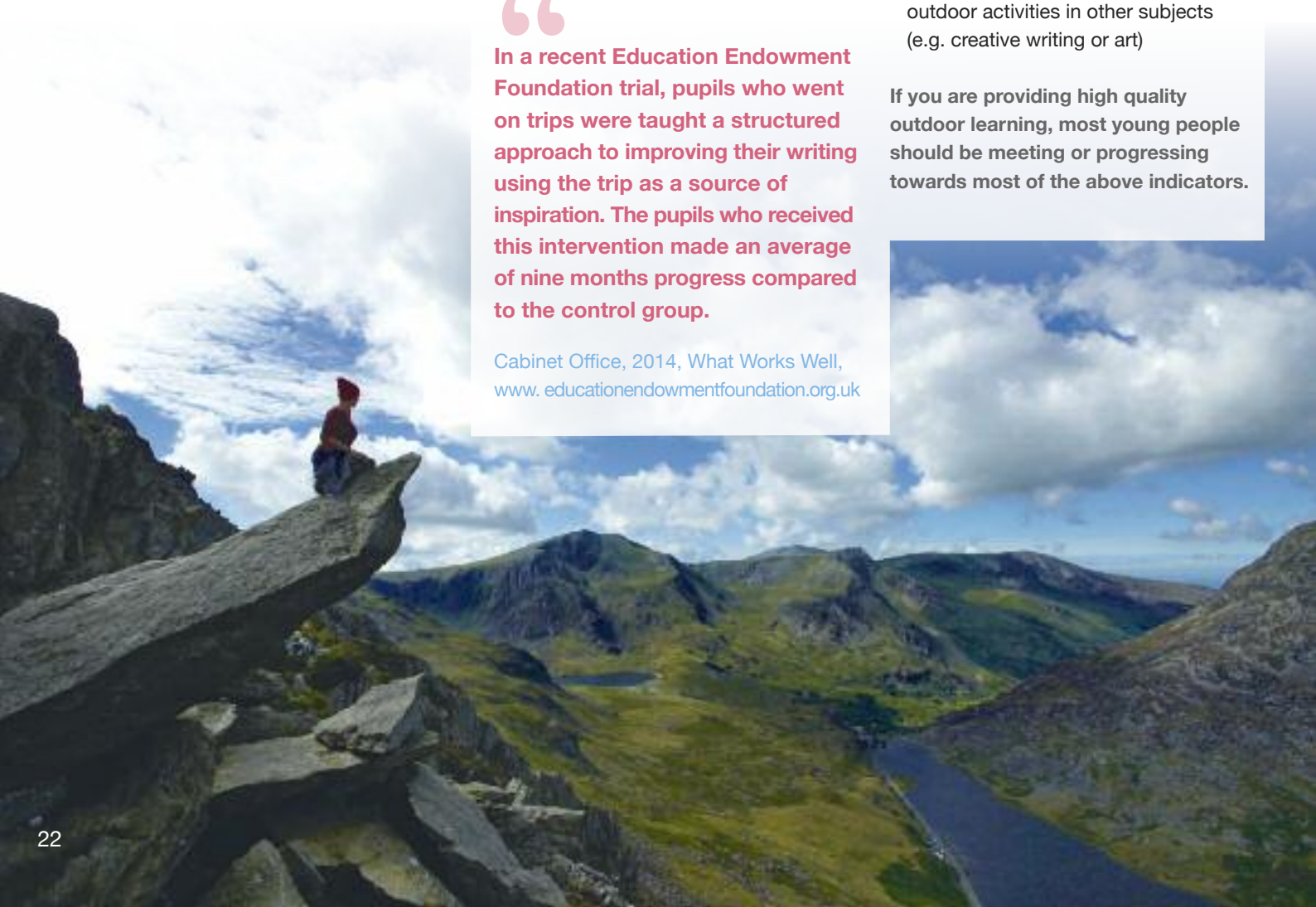
Cabinet Office, 2014, What Works Well, www. educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- always aim to achieve their best
- are, or are becoming, self-motivated learners
- show a desire for new challenges and learning experiences
- have good or improving relationships with teachers, youth workers or adult leaders
- display good or improving behaviour
- talk positively about learning and taking part in outdoor activities
- have a good or improving record of commitment
- demonstrate raised levels of attainment across the curriculum and beyond
- participate in a variety of aspects of school/club/organisational life
- draw inspiration from their outdoor activities in other subjects (e.g. creative writing or art)

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.



Outcome 10 > broadened horizons

Young people are broadening their horizons and becoming open to a wider range of employment opportunities and life chances, life choices and lifestyles.

Indicators

The young people you work with:

- perceive a wider range of career options open to them and talk positively about these
- appreciate the attractiveness to employers of self-reliance and commitment
- are exposed to, and are becoming, more aware of different environments and cultures
- are aware of the concepts of life-work balance and how to evaluate it
- are aware of opportunities to gain and use coaching qualifications in their chosen activity
- are becoming more open-minded
- respond to opportunities to volunteer their time to help others
- continue to participate in outdoor activities, independent expeditions or travel, after they leave your school or club
- always aim higher, and aspire to achieve in life to their fullest potential
- appreciate the work-place relevance of key skills such as communication and teamwork
- are aware, if appropriate, of employment opportunities in the outdoor sector, and the pathways to these

If you are providing high quality outdoor learning, most young people should be meeting or progressing towards most of the above indicators.

The chances of doing well in a job are not determined solely by academic success – the possession of character skills like persistence and 'grit' also matter. So too do wider opportunities including work experience, extra-curricular activities and careers advice.

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014, Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility

Working with others to improve quality

1. Towards effective partnerships

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to everyone being active and learning outdoors. The following settings and programmes, which could easily exist in isolation (or even opposition), all have an important role to play:

- Outdoor learning day and residential centres
- School sport
- School organised and run adventure activities including expeditions
- Teacher led outdoor learning and play
- Personal, social, health and economic education
- Youth clubs
- Sports clubs
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru
- Outdoor learning awards
- National campaigns

Mutual awareness and collaboration is important for the efficient and effective development of all children and young people across the physical, emotional, social and financial spectra. Effective links among schools, youth organisations, youth and activity clubs, etc., enable young people to:

- make the most of their experiences and learning in the different settings
- feel comfortable and confident in a range of settings
- be more likely to continue to be physically active outdoors when they leave school
- try new activities, in a range of new and challenging outdoor environments
- relate their experiences in one setting when they move into another

Different outdoor learning settings work well together when they:

- liaise closely with each other well before, during and after an outdoor learning programme
- respect each other's aims and ethos, and are prepared to adapt to establish a common, overlapping or complementary set of aims and objectives
- strive to provide opportunities for all young people to participate, regardless of their background
- identify common principles to working with young people and agree mutual expectations
- share a common approach to involving and informing parents and carers
- enable young people to build on what they learn across different settings
- agree procedures for recording and assessing young people's work and celebrating their achievements

When different partner organisations come together to deliver outdoor learning, all partners should:

- encourage all leaders, and delivery staff colleagues to contribute equally and effectively to all aspects of the learning
- encourage and enable visiting and centre staff to learn from each other's teaching, coaching or youth work styles and experience, and share expertise
- agree and clearly understand the division of roles and responsibilities between centre and visiting staff, and ensure these are communicated to the young people
- agree learning opportunities that can be followed up later with the children and young people

What makes an effective link?

When organisations work well together they:

- talk to each other and respect each other's contribution
- promote each other's activities
- provide opportunities for all young people, regardless of their background
- have mutual respect for each other's work and approach
- share a common approach to involving parents and carers and communicate well with them
- build on what young people learn in different settings
- collaborate in the development of teaching and coaching expertise
- share facilities, equipment and resources
- understand the framework within which the other partner operates (for example, the roles and responsibilities of local authority outdoor education advisers and national governing bodies)

The outcomes of effective partnerships

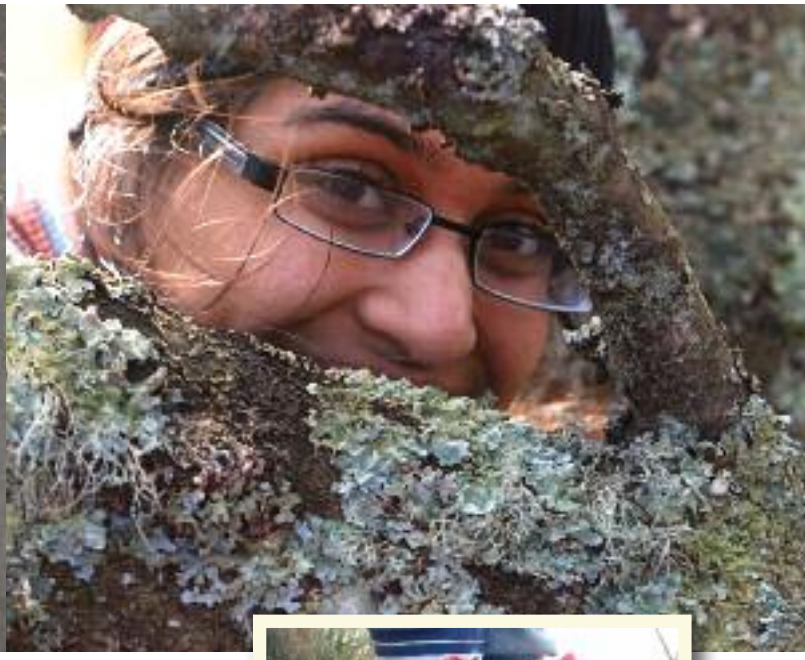
When organisations work well together, young people:

- understand how their experiences within and away from school complement each other, and are able to work confidently in different settings
- feel comfortable working with a range of people from different backgrounds and of different ages and abilities
- are able to develop their skills in new and challenging situations
- are able to balance their commitment to, and involvement with, their school, youth group or activity club
- are able to transfer their learning between different settings, and into their everyday lives
- become ethical, informed citizens able to sustainably manage the environment, now and in the future
- are able to contribute to a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

Summary

There is clear evidence that outdoor learning has a positive impact on young people, and when that learning is of high quality the impact can be life changing. For many, just being outdoors can have a huge benefit in terms of health and well-being, stimulating curiosity and developing an appreciation of the world around them. When such experiences are part of a progressive programme designed to support integrated learning in both formal and informal settings, the impact is greatly enhanced.

This guide identifies 5 core themes that characterise many outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor learning offers an environment where real world and progressive, practical learning skills can be developed. It is synonymous with developing self-confidence and character. It provides an environment where young people can practically manage risk and through residential experiences provides those truly memorable moments.



The 10 key outcomes of high quality outdoor learning are identified along with how they might be evidenced in an easily accessible manner. It is not designed as a quantitative research tool but offers support in recognising what the positive impacts on young people could look like. Using the indicators, simple 'checklists' identifying high quality outdoor learning can easily be developed and including young people in this process will add relevance and value.

Having a clear vision of what we want to achieve when using the outdoors is the starting point in the delivery high quality outdoor learning and early engagement of young people in this process is essential. Underpinning the successful delivery of high quality outdoor learning is the development of effective partnerships and partnership working. In many ways this is the key challenge and only when partners work effectively together will the full benefit of outdoor learning be realised and applied by learners in their everyday lives.

"Education in its broadest sense is not just about delivering a curriculum. It is about giving children the chance to extend their life skills. It is about developing their confidence. It is about fostering their resilience and sense of responsibility. And – let us not forget – it is about the enjoyment, engagement and excitement about venturing out into the real world, with all its capacity for uncertainty, surprise, stimulation and delight.

Tim Gill, 2010, Nothing Ventured… Balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors, English Outdoor Council, p.22.

Finding out more

The following websites provide information that can help you to sustain or improve the quality of outdoor learning whether in your school, club, outdoor centre or beyond.

General information...

The work of the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel and to find your local outdoor education adviser: **www.oeap.info**

National guidance for the management of off-site visits and learning outside the classroom: **www.oeapng.info**

The National Curriculum: **http://learning.gov.wales/resources/improvementareas/curriculum/?lang=en**

Wales Council for Outdoor Learning: **www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org**

Outdoor Learning Wales (OLW) is a national network, facilitated by Natural Resources Wales. OLW aims to increase the understanding, appreciation and sustainable management of natural resources in relation to Wales: **www.outdoorlearningwales.org**

The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority: **www.hse.gov.uk/aala**

Natural Resources Wales' purpose is to pursue sustainable management of natural resources in all of its work. This means looking after air, land, water, wildlife, plants and soil to improve Wales' well-being, and provide a better future for everyone: **www.naturalresources.wales**

National Parks **www.nationalparks.gov.uk**

RSPB Cymru: **www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/teachers**

Every Child Outdoors Wales: **https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/everychild_wales_eng_tcm9-314324.pdf**

Connecting with Nature: **https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/our-positions-and-casework/our-positions/nature-education/research**

The Institute for Outdoor Learning's work to develop standards in outdoor learning encourage participation and provide professional development for outdoor learning practitioners: **www.outdoorlearning.org/wales-cymru**

Education Endowment Fund – Outdoor adventure learning toolkit: **https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/outdoor-adventure-learning/**

Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Learning Away: **https://www.phf.org.uk**

The National Trust: **www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/big-issues/nature-and-outdoors/natural-childhood**
The inspection of schools and LA outdoor education centres: **www.estyn.gov.uk**

AdventureSmartWales promotes the safe enjoyment of Wales' natural outdoor resources by providing clear safety messages, live information and education opportunities for the many people who enjoy our coastline and countryside every day.
www.adventuresmartwales.com

Information on outdoor education/activity centres...

The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres: **www.ahoec.org**

The British Activity Providers Association: **www.thebapa.org.uk**

For fieldwork...

Field Studies Council: **www.field-studies-council.org**

National Association of Field Study Officers: **www.outdoor-learning.org**

For expeditions...

Young Explorers' Trust: **www.theyet.org**

For information on activity clubs affiliated to the national governing/representative bodies for outdoor adventure activities...

Canoe Wales: **www.canoewales.com**

The British Orienteering Federation: **www.britishorienteering.org.uk**

Mountain Training: **www.mountain-training.org/cymru**

The British Caving Association: **www.british-caving.org.uk**

The Royal Yachting Association: **www.rya.org.uk**

National awards and programmes...

The John Muir Award: **www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp**

Urdd Gobaith Cymru: **www.urdd.cymru**

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award: **www.dofe.org**

Scout Association: **www.scouts.org.uk**

Girl Guiding UK: **www.girlguiding.org.uk**

Eco-schools: **https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/ Pages/Category/eco-schools**

Healthy Schools Wales: **http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/82249**

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The references below provide much of the evidence to support the value and benefits of outdoor learning. This is only a small selection of the work that has been undertaken. The Wales Council for Outdoor Learning maintain an up to date body of evidence on their website.

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About the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel

For information about the work of the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel and to find your local outdoor education advisor, and to obtain further copies of this booklet visit **www.oeap.info**

About the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning

For information about the work of the Wales Council for Outdoor Learning visit **www.walescouncilforoutdoorlearning.org**

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