

High Quality Outdoor Learning 2025

A Guide For All

Voice · Community · Workforce · Standards

Institute for Outdoor Learning

www.outdoor-learning.org



Contents

Foreword

Welcome to High Quality Outdoor Learning 2025

This first edition is published on #GlobalOutdoorLearningDay to celebrate the powerful impact of the outdoors on education and personal development. Global Outdoor Learning Day is an opportunity to showcase diverse outdoor learning activities, share best practices, and inspire a love for the natural world in learners of all ages.

The field of outdoor learning is broad and incredibly rich. A wide variety of approaches, delivered by volunteers, professional practitioners and providers, engage participants of all ages and backgrounds in experiences that have the power to be life changing. With significant societal challenges including climate change, equality & diversity in the outdoors, mental health and wellbeing, this guide sets out what good practice looks like, supporting practitioners and providers to deliver the best possible outcomes to their participants.

At the heart of the IOL's core purpose is a commitment to high quality outdoor learning, and High Quality Outdoor Learning 2025 has a strong heritage. The original document, High Quality Outdoor Education, was written by members of the Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel in 2005 to complement the good practice already identified in Physical Education. A decade later, the changing landscape of the outdoor sector led the English Outdoor Council to update the original, broadening its scope to encompass the wider field of outdoor learning. Both publications had at their heart ten outcomes that were indicators of high quality practice. The ever-expanding body of research into the value of outdoor learning has evolved understanding about what constitutes quality. This alongside increasing opportunities to engage with different sectors to help meet their goals means that a further update is both necessary and timely.

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference for others. IOL is driven by a vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society, and our Members have a shared vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society.

IOL helps set standards and collaborates with many organisations to improve the quality of outdoor learning in the UK. This document offers a framework for providers, practitioners, funders, policy makers and clients to understand the factors involved. It explores the elements of practice and the underlying structures that contribute to the achievement of quality outcomes. Drawing on the expertise of numerous organisations, academics and practitioners, it sets a benchmark for quality across the field of outdoor learning.

High Quality Learning 2025 is here to be used and shared with those who make a positive difference to others, society and the environment. We hope the printed copies are soon well thumbed, marked up and shared. Digital versions likewise - these are freely available from **https://www.outdoor-learning.org/standards/high-quality-outdoor-learning-2025.html.**

This document marks the Outdoor Learning Sector's latest desire and intention to collaborate, think anew and create strategies for the future on how Outdoor Learning can make its full contribution to UK society and beyond.

Brian Kitson,
Chair of IOL Trustees

Jo Barnett,
CEO

Introduction

This guide builds on the previous document published by the English Outdoor Council in 2015, **High Quality Outdoor Learning**[1]. Greater awareness of the benefits of outdoor learning, supported by a rapidly increasing evidence base[2], makes a review necessary in order to ensure that practice remains relevant, informed and connected.

The original document focused on children and young people. While this age range makes up the core of much outdoor learning practice, recent developments in the health and care sectors mean that there are developing opportunities to work with more adults in an outdoor learning context. Accordingly, this guide recognises outdoor learning as something that can happen across a person's lifetime, and that outdoor learning also happens in recreational contexts.

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This guide is intended to support the development of high quality outdoor learning practice by:

- Setting out the context for outdoor learning.
- Establishing a framework for assessing quality.
- Identifying the core components of good practice.
- Describing the outcomes that can be achieved through outdoor learning.

The guide is intended for:

- Those directly involved in outdoor learning with children, young people and adults, including teachers and support staff, youth workers, youth leaders, care workers, health professionals, instructors, coaches and parents.
- 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.
- Policy and decision-makers who wish to understand more about the benefits and impacts of outdoor learning for children, young people and adults.

The guide is not a 'how to' guide. The breadth of the outdoor learning field means that no one-size can fit all as different settings and approaches will inevitably lead to a variety of interpretations of quality. By drawing on teaching and youth work standards and frameworks, academic research, industry standards and practice-based experience, the guide sets out what might be regarded as common good practice. For providers and practitioners, it can provide a framework for internally assessing and developing good practice. From that starting point the guide may also be used to help inform observers 'looking in', highlighting elements of good practice that they may inherently recognise but not necessarily be able to consciously articulate.

The guide draws on research and practice from around the world but is written from a UK perspective. Readers are invited to consider local context, culture and practice when applying to non-UK settings.

Part 1 provides an overview of outdoor learning, its benefits, and the broader societal context that it relates and contributes to.

Part 2 introduces a model for examining quality in outdoor learning, before exploring the structures, practice and outcomes associated with high quality provision.

Part 3 looks forward to how quality can be further developed.

A note about terminology

In this guide we use the terms **provider**, **practitioner**, and **participant**:

'Providers' refers to organisations using an outdoor learning approach, for example, schools, clubs, youth groups, outdoor centres, environmental / conservation organisations. They may be public bodies, charities, private companies or sole traders.

'Practitioners' are the individuals that facilitate learning. They include teachers, instructors, coaches, tutors, leaders, therapists, educators, facilitators, etc.

'Participants' may be clients, group members, guests, accompanying adults / staff, coaches, students, pupils etc.

Acknowledgements

HQOL24 has been compiled by Dr Dave Harvey, on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning, drawing on sector standards, evaluations, reports, conference workshops and academic research. It expands and develops the previous High Quality Outdoor Learning guide, published by the English Outdoor Council in 2015, and acknowledges the work of Martin Smith, the EOC members who contributed to that publication, and members of the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel who wrote the original High Quality Outdoor Education document in 2005.

We would like to thank the following people for their enthusiasm, time and critical input to this document: Dr Roger Hopper, Dan Cook, Graham French, Clive Atkins, Martin Smith, Elspeth Mason, Glen Probert, Neal Anderson, Richard Retallick, Luschka van Onselen, Louise Edwards and Andy Robinson.

Part 1

An overview of outdoor learning

1

An overview of outdoor learning

Outdoor learning is a term that covers various approaches to engaging with the outdoors for learning and developmental purposes.

Outdoor learning can be, and is, applied in different contexts and interpreted in numerous ways. School-based practitioners, for example, may have different views to instructors working in outdoor adventure settings, while personal and organisational definitions may vary again depending on the country where it is taking place. The specific intention of outdoor learning programmes will vary accordingly, leading to different outcome goals and ways of achieving them. Central to all of them is the role of the practitioner, whether regarded as a facilitator, instructor, teacher, coach, educator, therapist, tutor or guide. All of these identities place the practitioner at a critical point in the process where they can act as a catalyst, accelerating the journey towards desired outcomes.

One of the outdoor practitioner's key roles, therefore, is to facilitate learning.

Experiencing the outdoor environment first-hand is what makes outdoor learning unique as an approach. However, the use of outdoor learning in different contexts means that it is necessary to acknowledge the role of the indoors and technology as well. As the scope of this guide embraces the field of outdoor learning it adopts a broad interpretation[3]:

'Outdoor learning is an umbrella term for actively inclusive facilitated approaches that predominantly use activities and experiences in the outdoors which lead to learning, increased health and wellbeing and environmental awareness'

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

- Involves being outdoors as a central part of the experience.
- Strives to be inclusive and accessible.
- Seeks to engage with the outdoor environment as a place where experiences are transformed into knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours.
- Always respects the environment.
- Is often cited as being both memorable and fun.

Outdoor learning can include:

- A challenging, adventurous element.
- A residential component.
- Physical activity.

Outdoor learning may include recognised activities with an adventurous component that are also undertaken for recreation and leisure, such as canoeing, climbing, hill walking, camping, orienteering or sailing; outdoor activities purposely designed for their educational impact, such as fieldwork, curricula subject lessons, forest schools, trails, bushcraft, initiative challenges and rope courses; and the use of the outdoors as an experiential environment for both cognitive, non-cognitive and therapeutic development. Such experiences may occur at or close to a school, club or centre site, at a distance from that site or during a residential or expedition experience in the UK or abroad.

Outdoor learning is primarily an approach to teaching and learning through these and other similar activities and through broader experiences in the outdoors. The most noticeable outcomes are achieved when outdoor learning is designed as a frequent and progressive activity relating to broader learning that links to everyday experiences in a specific setting (such as a classroom, youth club or community hub) and to real-life experiences beyond. However, it must not be forgotten that the experiences are often hugely memorable in themselves and, more often than not, highly enjoyable, having merit as experiences in their own right.

1.1

How people participate

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, health settings and in peer and family groups.

While a great deal of outdoor learning provision exists to meet identified needs (e.g. through schools, youth projects, health, etc), many people access outdoor learning experiences for their own personal reasons. The degree of autonomy a person has, which increases for many people in adulthood, means that provision can reflect a wide variety of reasons for engagement with the outdoors, overlapping with recreation. They may wish to increase their activity skills, be supported to achieve a particular goal or improve their knowledge of the natural environment.

Outdoor learning takes place, not only in the formal education sector and through outdoor providers, but equally in youth services and voluntary youth organisations.

Schools

Schools have a central role to play in delivering high quality outdoor learning. They may provide outdoor and adventurous activities within the PE curriculum; fieldwork in science or geography; regular forest school sessions or curriculum linked lessons outdoors. Many schools offer out-of-school-hours learning opportunities through clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, plus day and residential visits to field study centres and outdoor education/activity providers.

Apprenticeships and trainee schemes

Apprenticeships and trainee schemes offer alternative training pathways to formal academic qualifications.

Youth programmes

Youth programmes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the National Citizen Service and similar awards, are being delivered through a range of agencies.

Further and higher education establishments

Further and higher education establishments offer courses that develop knowledge, skills and values relating to the field of outdoor learning and which lead to formal academic qualifications. University programmes include Degree, Masters, PhD and teacher education programmes. Students on non-outdoor related courses may also benefit from outdoor learning programmes focused on personal and social development.

Youth services and groups

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 have a long tradition of work in this field (the terms 'youth services' and 'youth organisations' are used interchangeably in this document). 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.

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Uniformed youth groups

Uniformed youth groups, for example, the Girlguides, Scouts and Cadets, offer opportunities to engage in outdoor learning experiences through badges, awards, expeditions and adventure training.

Outdoor education/ activity providers

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 also engage with family and adult groups, often working in partnership with social, health, justice, faith-based and adult (lifelong) learning agencies. Outdoor learning approaches are also used with businesses to support the development of early-career apprentices, employees and managers.

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 participants.

Many providers also offer activity courses, open to individual recruitment, for example in holiday periods, providing further opportunities for young people and families to benefit.

Outdoor activity clubs

Outdoor activity clubs, community projects and environmental groups, all offer valuable opportunities to access recreational, environmental and adventure activities, including in a competitive context. Clubs provide an environment that encourages belonging to an outdoor community and progress towards high levels of performance and skill, whilst also contributing significantly to broader learning, personal growth and life-long recreational experiences. Community projects and environmental groups enable participation in a wide range of activities that meet local needs and engage with the local area, often conserving and improving local nature spaces.

Overseas visits and expeditions

Overseas visits and expeditions, whether provided by a school, commercial or voluntary organisations, offer extended opportunities for adventurous activities, advanced scientific field skills, community work, and heightened cultural and environmental awareness. Additionally, participants 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.

Family members or peers

Family members or peers have often been influential in initiating and supporting a young person's engagement in outdoor activities, and this should not be forgotten in any holistic planning linked to increasing participation.

Awarding Bodies (ABs) and National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs)

Awarding Bodies (ABs) and National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) provide a range of coaching, leadership and personal skills awards that enable individuals to gain recognition for their personal experience. Awards overlap with high quality learning outcomes and enable progression into employment (either paid or voluntary).

Green social prescribing

Green social prescribing is increasingly being used to support people's mental and physical health through nature-based interventions and activities. It includes 'green' (i.e. nature-based) and 'blue' (i.e. water) activities, often delivered through community projects and organisations.

1.2

The benefits of outdoor learning

An increasing volume of research evidence[4] [5] supports the implementation of outdoor learning approaches, the quality of which has improved significantly since the publication of HQOL (2015).

A summary of the evidence base supporting outdoor learning in the UK[6] found that nearly all interventions had a positive effect. Evidence supports positive impact on building social capital, fostering pride, belonging and community involvement[7], while a growing number of Social Return on Investment Studies (SROI) are showing a significant return on investment in relation to wellbeing and preventing poor mental and physical health[8], and positive learning outcomes[9].

Outdoor learning has been shown to improve health and wellbeing, engage students and develop personal competencies[10]. Numerous studies demonstrate that experiences in nature promote learning, fostering nature connection leading to pro environmental behaviour and develop leadership, communication, problem solving and critical thinking skills[11].

Academic performance has been shown to be positively affected by repeat outdoor learning experiences over multiple weeks[12] [13]. Evidence of the long-term benefits of outdoor learning in school settings was established through the Natural Connections Demonstration Project which ran for four years with 125 schools in the south-west of England from 2012-2016.

Benefits for children included improved enjoyment of lessons, connection to nature, social skills, engagement with learning, health and wellbeing, behaviour and attainment. Significantly, the project also showed that there were benefits for teachers as well in terms of positive impacts on teaching practice, health and wellbeing, professional development, job satisfaction and teaching performance[14].

> "The available evidence suggests that experiences of nature help children acquire some of the skills, attitudes, and behaviors most needed in the 21st century."

Kuo et al (2019) Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Relationship. Front. Psychol. 10:305. p.6

While increasingly acknowledged as an approach to effective teaching and learning that is incorporated into formal education through national curricula, outdoor learning also offers an alternative pathway for those who might struggle with mainstream approaches, with improvements seen in behaviour, peer to peer relations, cooperation, enjoyment and student-teacher relations[15].

Outdoor learning is also applicable to adult and family contexts. Research shows the value of outdoor settings to inspire curiosity and interest, and continuing engagement with the outdoors promotes healthy lifestyles, resilience and flexibility[16].

Family projects, where parents or carers and their children engage together in social care interventions offer the potential to improve family resilience and improve school engagement[17].

There is significant qualitative research supporting the benefits of residentials[18] [19] [20], overseas expeditions[21] [22] and sail training[23]. Outdoor based approaches to therapy also have a growing evidence base[24].

The benefits of outdoor learning can also be framed in terms of the outcomes and longer-term impacts that high quality practice leads to. These outcomes are explored further in **Part 2**.

> "...it is time to take nature seriously as a resource for learning and development. It is time to bring nature and nature-based pedagogy into formal education – to expand existing, isolated efforts into increasingly mainstream practices."

Kuo et al (2019) Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Relationship. Front. Psychol. 10:305. p.6

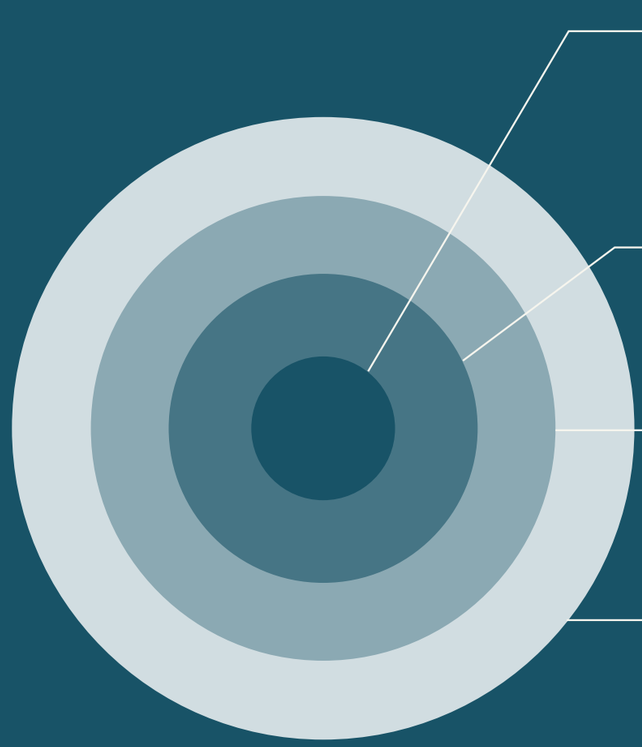

Figure 1. The benefits and impacts of outdoor learning (Anderson, 2024)[25]

1.3

The context for outdoor learning

Outdoor learning is always influenced by a number of key agendas that drive policy and practice. At the time of writing, these include:

- Increasing numbers of children with mental health disorders[26] and significant percentages of the adult population either overweight or obese[27].
- Growing health inequalities and child poverty[28].
- Increased anxiety levels, post Covid, in children and adults, with overall wellbeing ratings declining across all measures[29].
- Inequitable access to and success in education[30].
- Conflicts around the world leading to community-level challenges[31], demanding empathy and understanding to promote cohesion and integration.
- Digital technologies and artificial intelligence changing the world of education and employment[32].
- Accelerating biodiversity loss and climate change[33].
- Increasing urbanisation, time spent indoors and a loss of 'nature connection'[34].
- Inequitable access to the outdoors[35] and outdoor learning[36].
- The Global Goals for Sustainable Development (known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs)[37].

For individuals and groups, these challenges have meaning at four levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and global (figure 2). Outdoor learning interventions on their own cannot address all of these, but with its specific focus on the natural environment, and along with education, health, the arts, youth work and sports-based approaches, they can contribute to them by helping children, young people and adults to thrive[38]. Table 1 connects the potential benefits with the outcomes of high quality outdoor learning (see **Section 2.3**).

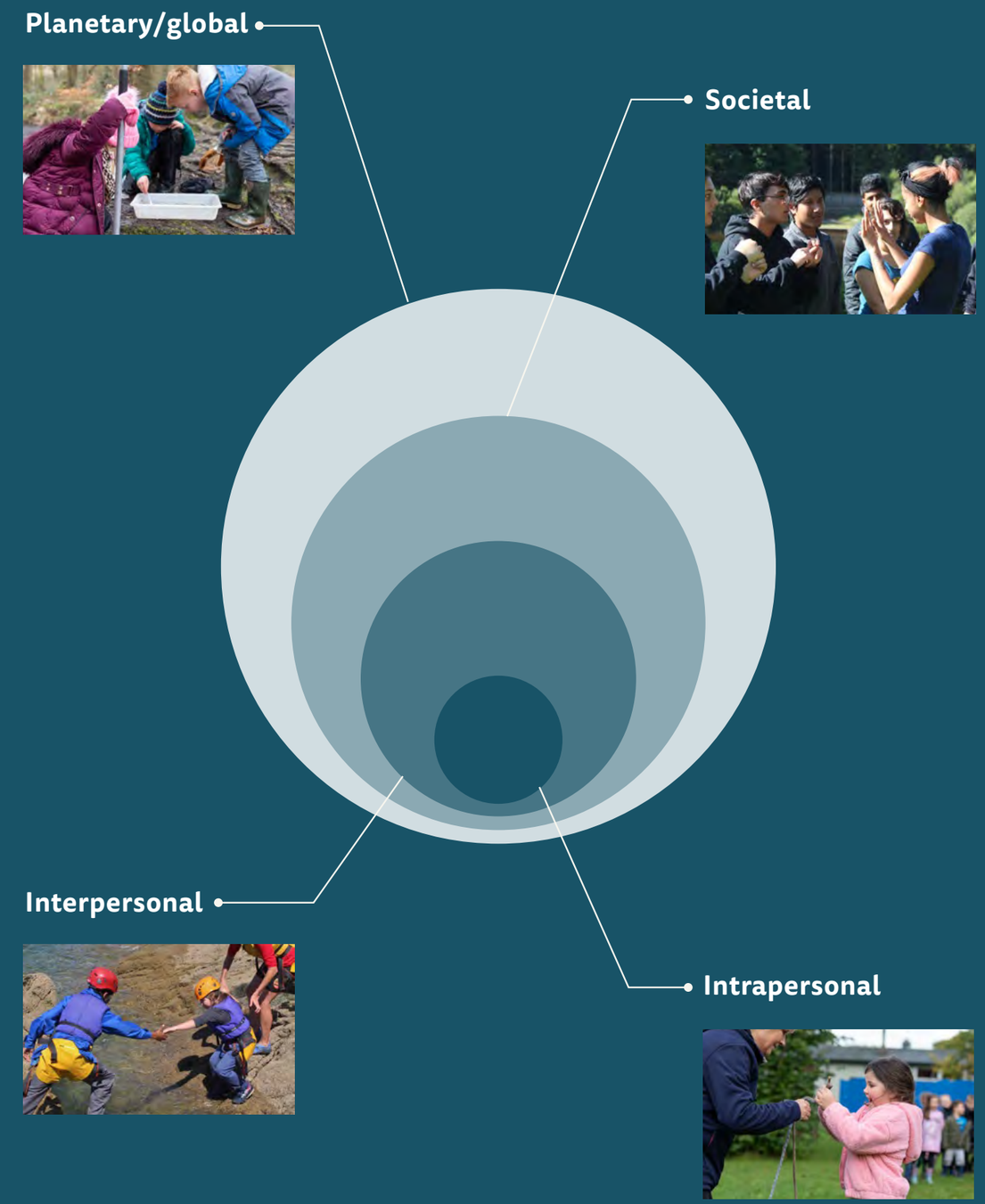

Figure 2. The context of outdoor learning
Based on Hannon, V. (2017) Thrive. London; Innovation Unit

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At an intrapersonal level, participants can:

» Become aware of their strengths, where they can develop, and the choices available to them.	**(Outcomes 2, 10)**
» Develop personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing and recognise how they can achieve this through time spent in the natural environment.	**(Outcome 1)**
» Learn to be comfortable in the outdoors.	**(Outcome 6)**
» Seek encounters with nature for enjoyment, recreation and health.	**(Outcomes 1,4,9)**
» Gain the knowledge and skills to safely and enjoyably explore nature while minimising impact.	**(Outcomes 4,6)**
» Gain a sense of self through recognising their place in the world.	**(Outcome 7)**

At an interpersonal level, participants can:

» Gain the skills to develop effective relationships in diverse, ageing and technologised societies.	**(Outcomes 2,8)**
» Understand and value interrelatedness between humans and nature.	**(Outcome 3)**
» Develop the skills associated with effective communication, teamwork and leadership.	**(Outcomes 2,8)**

At a societal level, participants can:

» Become equipped to navigate an uncertain and changing landscape of work.	**(Outcomes 7,8,9,10)**
» Be prepared to participate effectively in their community and more widely.	**(Outcomes 9,10)**
» Develop an understanding and sense of place from both personal experience and academic investigation.	**(Outcome 3)**
» Engage with and develop connections to community and place.	**(Outcomes 5,9)**

At a global level, participants can:

» Learn to live sustainably within the Earth's resources, taking care of its ecosystem and biodiversity.	**(Outcome 3)**
» Develop an emotional connection with the Earth and all living things.	**(Outcome 3)**
» Maintain sustainable environmental beliefs and practices informed by principles of ecology, critical thought, judgement and action.	**(Outcome 3)**
» Recognise, understand and embrace the differences and the similarities in different cultures and peoples	**(Outcomes 2,10)**

Table 1. The potential outcomes of high quality outdoor learning

1.4

The relationship between outdoor learning and outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation – which can lead to informal learning – can be the main reason that many people access the outdoors beyond school[39] [40].

In the UK, outdoor recreation is often seen as distinct from outdoor learning and is generally regarded as activity undertaken voluntarily for relaxation or pleasure. While outdoor recreation for some involves more 'extreme' activities with a higher degree of objective risk, it also includes a wide range of outdoor activities that are traditionally used in facilitated outdoor learning contexts e.g. walking, climbing, high ropes courses, mountain biking and paddle sports. The coaching, guiding or facilitating of these experiences forms a significant part of the outdoor recreation economy, and many practitioners work in both recreational and facilitated settings, often introducing participants to lifelong participation. Other outdoor activities used in more informal contexts, such as gardening and nature watching, are also significant recreational pastimes which can be facilitated with the help of community volunteers, coaches and guides. There is, therefore, a clear link between learning and recreation that provides opportunities for practitioners to encourage and foster connections for their participants that enable greater access to the outdoors for its benefits.

Part 2

Understanding high quality outdoor learning

2

Understanding high quality outdoor learning

Within the outdoor sector there are multiple interpretations of quality, reflected in the range of available frameworks, qualifications, accreditations and awards. Ideas of quality can vary depending on a wide number of factors that relate to what is being assessed (e.g., a product, an experience, a facility, a service, etc.), expectations, value for money and the meeting of needs.

Any assessment of quality in outdoor learning contexts is often a compound of many different feelings, observations and experiences from before, during and after the experience itself. The structures in place that lead to effective outdoor learning experiences, including the pre-programme needs analysis, the delivery of the experiences and the outcomes achieved as a result all play a part. Perceptions of quality also reflect the cultural and societal expectations that are current at the time.

Different groups of people make quality judgements about outdoor learning practice.

Beyond the providers' own in-house quality systems, there may also be judgments being made by people involved in formal staff training and assessment, performance management or accreditation inspections, funders (or whoever is paying for or commissioning the service, including parents) and government agencies. Activities that happen in the public eye are also subject to judgement from other practitioners, recreational participants and casual passers-by.

Also passing judgment are the participants themselves, and the accompanying adults/leaders if the participants are a group. Accordingly, there are different perspectives gained from experiencing and /or observing as a participant (potentially 'in the moment', experiencing something and supported by the facilitator), as an observer (with a different view that may enable them to see certain things that the participant is not consciously aware of), and, beyond that, as an observer with expert knowledge who will see an additional layer of practice evidence. However, for non-expert observers, it is important to recognise the difficulties that exist in trying to assess quality in a field in which they themselves are not an expert.

A model for understanding quality

In this guide, overall quality is seen as a blend of quality of structures (the physical and organisational characteristics of the provision), practice (what is delivered to the participants) and outcomes (the effects the programme has), all of which can be connected by a 'theory of change' that makes clear the link between what is delivered, the context in which the learning is situated, and the intended outcomes (Figure 3)[41].

Underpinning structures

The physical and organisational characteristics of organisations that deliver high quality outdoor learning are integral to effective practice and achieving successful outcomes. A shared vision, underpinned by organisational values and beliefs provides the platform for a supportive and enabling culture with effective policies and procedures. **Section 2.1** explores this aspect in more depth.

Practice

Outdoor learning can be interpreted in many ways, but in its broadest sense is as an umbrella term that incorporates numerous approaches. An alternative, and more specific way of defining it is as either a process or an outcome. This guide considers both, taking a position that practice and outcomes are interrelated. It focuses on the aspects of provision that bind the activities themselves together, and that can be controlled and influenced by the practitioners and providers. By concentrating on the quality of practice the intended outcomes are far more likely to be achieved than by focusing solely on the outcomes. **Section 2.2** focuses on the development of high quality practice.

Outcomes

Whether the outcomes of high quality outdoor learning are targeted and specific, or more open ended, they provide a focus for activities and experiences that can also frame assessment and evaluation processes.

Desired outcomes can be developed in a variety of ways. They may be co-generated by the provider and participants, by the provider themselves, by a funder or service commissioner or be entirely generated by the participants themselves.

They can simply reflect a known characteristic of the group that there is a desire to develop (e.g. 'teamwork') or be part of an outcomes framework that a particular organisation uses.

Section 2.3 describes the potential outcomes of high quality outdoor learning.

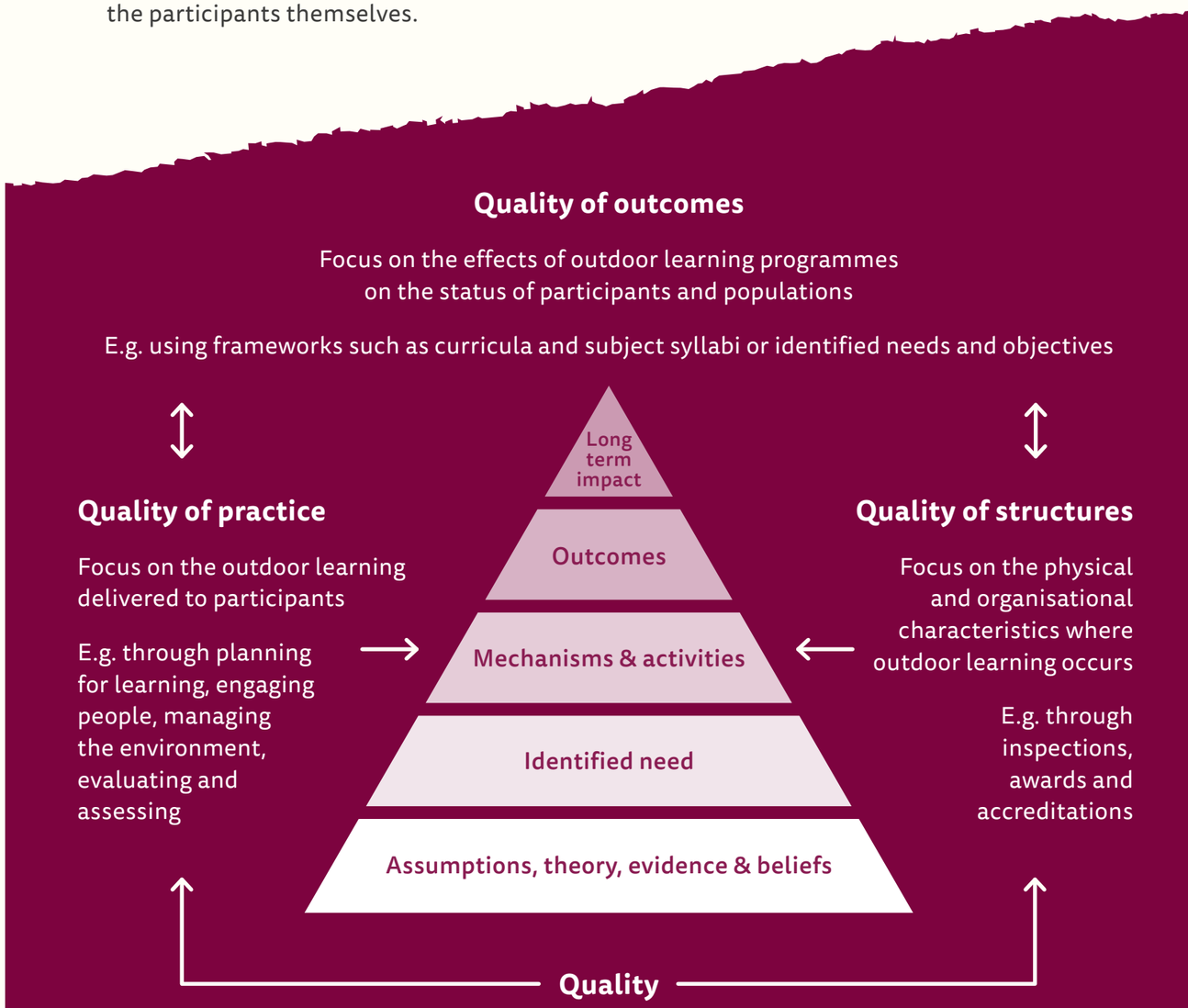

Figure 3. A conceptual model for understanding quality in outdoor learning (after Harvey, 2023)[42]

2.1
Structures

All outdoor learning practice is built upon a foundation of a shared vision and values, effective systems and an enabling culture (Figure 4). In addition, organisational values and culture contribute to the conditions that enable effective delivery and the successful achievement of outcomes, as well as providing opportunities for practitioners to reach their potential.

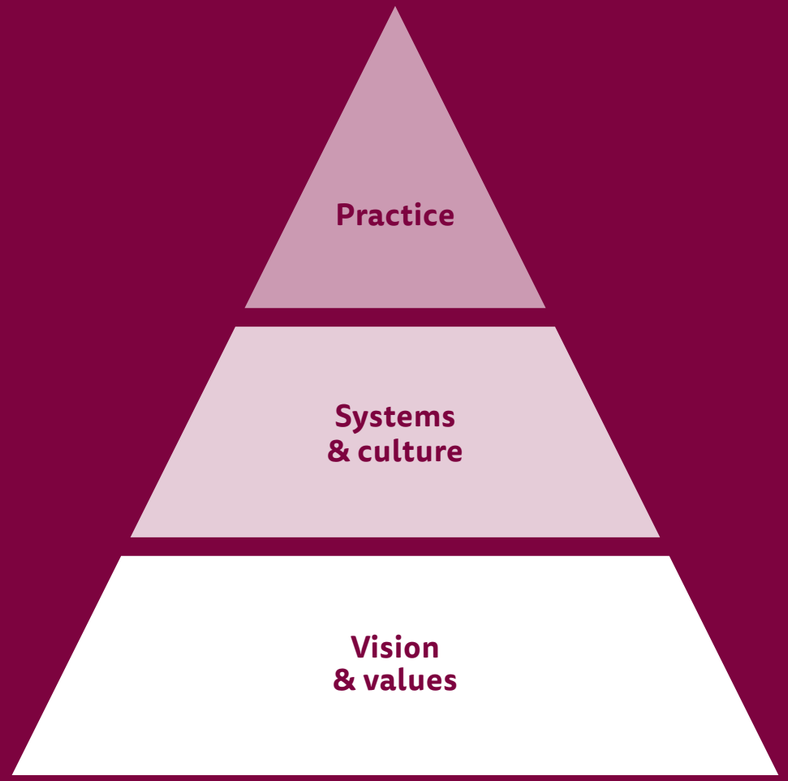

Figure 4. Outdoor learning enabling structures

2.1.1
Vision and values

An organisation's direction and purpose, expressed through vision and mission statements, drives its practice and provides a focus for strategic direction and decision making. Membership organisations (e.g. IOL) express their values through codes of conduct or practice and require members to adhere to them.

Organisational codes of conduct and statements of good practice provide further guidance. For example, see the IOL's **Code of Conduct**, **Statements of Good Practice**, Position Statements and publications relating to **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place, providers:

- ✓ Are clear about their organisational values and how they influence their practice.
- ✓ Are able to articulate their values through a clear vision for their provision of outdoor learning.
- ✓ Have a mission statement that sets out their purpose.
- ✓ Are committed to inclusive, sustainable practice.
- ✓ Promote the value and benefits of outdoor learning.
- ✓ Are legally compliant.
- ✓ Comply with and promote sector good practice.
- ✓ Comply with codes of practice of membership organisations that they are part of.

2.1.2
Systems and culture

The systems and culture that exist within an organisation are the direct expression of their values, influencing what is delivered and how it is supported. As well as an increased likelihood of achieving desired outcomes for participants, systems (i.e. work practices) and an enabling and supportive culture create the positive conditions for staff wellbeing and development.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place, providers:

- ✓ Have clear leadership and management structures in place.
- ✓ Have a learning culture that values practitioner involvement and development, and shared learning.
- ✓ Have clear policies and operating guidelines in place.
- ✓ Understand and apply the concept of risk-benefit analysis to their risk management procedures.
- ✓ Have effective safety and safeguarding measures in place.
- ✓ Consider progression and continuity within and beyond the session or programme.
- ✓ Can describe a theory of change that links the programme activities with the intended outcomes.
- ✓ Are committed to evaluating and learning from the outcomes of programmes.
- ✓ Seek out and engage with partners to enhance their outdoor learning offer, gather external advice and support, and maintain and develop staff knowledge and skills.

2.1.3

Practice

Providers, whether sole traders or multi-person, have specific responsibilities for ensuring that they or their staff are appropriately equipped to deliver outdoor learning sessions in their particular context. Practitioners working for a provider also have responsibilities to themselves, the organisation and their participants, as well as for the specific teaching and learning goals.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Providers are responsible for ensuring that practitioners:

- ✓ Are selected, inducted and deployed appropriately.
- ✓ Are appropriately competent and experienced for the activity.
- ✓ Understand overdue response and emergency procedures.
- ✓ Are monitored and receive feedback on their performance.
- ✓ Have safeguarding, disability and diversity awareness and first aid training.
- ✓ Are up to date – political, socio-economic trends, sector trends, current social trends e.g. AI, technology use.
- ✓ Are supported to develop professionally by:
  - » Developing technical competence.
  - » Developing subject knowledge.
  - » Developing pedagogic, andragogic and heutogogic knowledge.
  - » Understanding participants needs e.g. Special Educational Needs, EDIB.
  - » Appreciating the wider sector and associated challenges.

Practitioners are responsible for:

- ✓ Practitioners are responsible for:
- ✓ Upholding the values of the organisation they are working for.
- ✓ Contributing to policy development.
- ✓ Reporting safeguarding, accident and near miss incidents.
- ✓ Raising practice concerns with managers and colleagues.
- ✓ Understanding and applying necessary policies and procedures.
- ✓ Being aware of the theories that underpin their work.
- ✓ Reflect on their own practice and that of others and applying any learning.
- ✓ Maintaining competence and currency through on-going, relevant Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

2.1.4

External assessment of quality

Many of the underlying structures can be assessed through existing externally accredited quality schemes that are appropriate to a particular learning setting.

Health and safety law and statutory schemes, such as the **UK's Adventure Activity Licensing Authority (AALA)** inspections of some adventurous activities for children, are supplemented by a range of externally assessed voluntary accreditations. These cover broadly similar areas of provision including health and safety policies and procedures, emergency procedures, staff competence, safeguarding, accommodation and transport (where appropriate) and data protection. Some schemes, but not all and to varying degrees, also assess teaching and learning.

In addition, National Governing Body qualifications provide external assessment of practitioner competence within specific activities, and some also offer provider approval.

Examples of UK voluntary quality approval schemes:

- » **AdventureMark**
- » **Learning Outside the Classroom (LOTC) Quality Badge**
- » **LOTC Mark**
- » **AHOEC Gold**
- » **Forest School Association Recognised Provider**
- » **Green Care Quality Mark**
- » **BAPA**
- » British Standard **BS8848**
- » **RYA**

2.2
Practice

This section describes the elements of good practice that make up high quality outdoor learning delivery.

In addition, practice is also informed by societal trends both within and beyond the sector.

Critical agendas include:

1. Safety management and safeguarding.
2. Equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
3. The importance of effective and meaningful relationships.
4. Environmental awareness and sustainability.
5. An understanding of what the intended outcomes are and how the activities will contribute to those goals (a 'theory of change').
6. An understanding of continuity and progression.

The following sections introduce each of these critical agendas as core components of outdoor learning practice. Questions are then suggested to stimulate discussion and help practitioners and providers reflect on their practice. Each section concludes with suggested further reading.

2.2.1

Safety management and safeguarding

Outdoor learning, with its acknowledgement of risk and the associated benefits of taking part in outdoor activities in the natural environment, provides a blend of physical, mental and emotional challenges that will be experienced uniquely by each participant. Encountering risk in facilitated outdoor learning settings enhances awareness and develops judgement skills that have transferability to other contexts[43].

The benefits of overcoming these challenges can be significant but the risk element means that they may also have negative consequences if not managed sensitively and empathetically. Providers of outdoor learning have a duty under law to identify the significant hazards and put in place measures to either reduce or manage them. They should also make participants aware of the risks and their role in managing them.

Operating, first aid and emergency procedures form the basis of effective and safe practice when combined with appropriately deployed competent staff.

Questions to develop practice:

- Are practitioners clear about the benefits of participants encountering managed risk as part of their development?
- Do practitioners contribute to risk management systems, policies and procedures?
- Are practitioners inducted, trained and monitored appropriately?
- Is there an open culture of incident reporting and learning?
- Is there a robust risk management system in place?
- Are practitioners aware of their responsibilities regarding risk management?
- Are practitioners deployed appropriately? Are they suitably competent i.e. qualified / experienced / current?
- Are practitioners aware of emergency and critical incident management procedures?
- Do practitioners have the appropriate skills for their operating context to quickly adapt their sessions to changing conditions, be they environmental or situational?
- Are providers and practitioners aware of lessons learned from previous incidents and in communication loops about local and national practice requirements?

Practitioners and providers of outdoor learning should ensure that they:

- ✓ Understand their operating remit.
- ✓ Have an awareness of the environmental, technical (equipment/technique/skill related) and human related hazards relevant to the activity and environment.
- ✓ Have an appropriate level of technical competence, judgment and decision-making capability
- ✓ Can understand and apply the risk-benefit approach to risk management.
- ✓ Can develop generic, specific and dynamic risk assessments that reflect the hazards inherent in an activity.
- ✓ Can set and manage appropriate routines and boundaries that reflect the needs of the group, the environment, and the activity.
- ✓ Understand and question their own practice to challenge assumptions and accepted behaviours.

> “Providers of outdoor learning have a duty under law to identify the significant hazards and put in place measures to either reduce or manage them.”

continued >

Safeguarding

Everyone in outdoor learning should be involved in providing a safe, inclusive environment that actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect. Safeguarding is enhanced when providers and practitioners consider both prevention and response.

Prevention reduces the risks children and adults may face from practitioners, participants or colleagues.

Response is the set of activities that are undertaken when a safeguarding concern has been reported to, or come to, an organisation's attention.

Harassment and abuse can be based on any grounds, including the protected characteristics of age, race (including skin colour, nationality, ethnicity or national origin), gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. In addition, it may also be based on language, philosophical beliefs or athletic ability. It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. It may be in person or online. All abuse is rooted in the improper use or attempted creation of a position of influence, power or authority by an individual against another person. It may be between practitioner and participant, between participants, or between practitioners and other staff or volunteers.

Questions to develop practice - providers:

» Does your safeguarding policy state the welfare of participants and staff as a primary concern and is it made available to all who access our services?

» Do your safeguarding procedures clearly identify those with responsibility for safeguarding and provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take in responding to safeguarding concerns?

» Upon joining the organisation, how are staff informed about where they can access information and guidance?

» Do you encourage or require staff to undertake appropriate safeguarding training?

» Are ongoing safeguarding risk assessments carried out and steps taken to minimise any risks identified to reduce the possibility of harm?

» How is safeguarding learning covering behavioural expectations and treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity, and fairness included in programmes?

» What is your safe-recruitment process?

» Are your safeguarding reporting policies and procedures clear and understood?

» How do you work with partners to safeguard participants and staff and share learning?

» How do you ensure your safeguarding policies and guidance documents are relevant, appropriate and up to date?

Providers of outdoor learning should ensure that they:

✓ Have policies in place to safeguard and protect children, young people and adults from harm.

✓ Follow these policies and ensure compliance with them.

✓ Have clear lines of accountability for the commissioning or provision of services.

✓ Have senior staff or board members with the required knowledge, skills, and experience to take leadership responsibility for the organisation's safeguarding arrangements.

✓ Have a culture of listening to participants and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services.

✓ Have clear whistleblowing procedures in place.

✓ Have clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies.

✓ Have arrangements which set out clearly the processes for sharing information, with other practitioners and with safeguarding partners.

✓ Have a designated person with responsibility for safeguarding.

✓ Adopt safer recruitment practices and ongoing safe working practices for individuals who work regularly with children, including policies on when to obtain a criminal record check.

✓ Provide appropriate supervision and support for staff, including undertaking safeguarding training.

✓ Provide safeguarding training at induction.

✓ Create a culture of safety, equality, and protection within the services they provide.

✓ Have checked country specific and local safeguarding requirements

Practitioners should ensure that they:

✓ Are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and protecting children, young people and adults from harm and promoting their welfare.

✓ Know how they should respond to safeguarding concerns and how to make a referral to local authority children's social care or the police, if necessary.

[Adapted from statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (Chapter 4)]

Further reading

International Safeguards for Children in Sport

International Safeguards for Adults in Sport

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (Chapter 4 - England)

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland

Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice (Wales)

Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

Keeping Children Safe in Education

Mental health

With the current desire to improve access to the outdoors for all for health and wellbeing benefits there is a risk that participants can be exposed to potential harm, as those experiencing mental or emotional challenges may inadvertently be placed in situations with practitioners insufficiently trained to deal appropriately with their needs.

'Providers must ensure their approach values the individuality and diversity of participants as well as being clear about the ethical framework and related code of practice being upheld.'

IOL Outdoor Therapy Statement of Good Practice (Richards, Hardy and Anderson, 2023, p.2)

Trauma-informed approach

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual and considered by them to be harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally the experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects, limiting the ability to function and achieve mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being[44]. Traumatic stress may have happened to more than 50% of people[45] and providers and practitioners should safeguard participants and staff from further harm by upholding the six principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and inclusivity[46].

Where high quality outdoor learning is taking place:

Practitioners and providers:

- Are familiar with the **Outdoor Mental Health Interventions Model** and where their work falls in terms of their competence, professional responsibility and leadership in a particular intervention.
- Remain within the boundaries of their own professional competence.
- Recognise the signs, symptoms and widespread impact of trauma.
- Respect boundaries by upholding choice, consent, confidentiality.
- Use neutral, respectful language, showing empathy, avoiding labelling or judging.
- Avoid re-traumatisation by considering locations, approach, pace, breaks, support.
- Consider the potential impact of activities for individuals, group members, others involved, and their wider family and community.

Questions to develop practice - providers:

- Are you aware of HSE accepted risk management and good practice?
- Do you build high quality, effective, non-judgemental relationships?
- Does practice support self-directed development and change?
- Are you mindful of the health and wellbeing needs of the people you are working with?
- Can you recognise when your clients are experiencing fear, and do you have strategies to deal with this?
- Are you aware of mental health first aid approaches?
- Do you know where the limit of your competence lies with regard to dealing with mental health issues?
- Is your therapeutic knowledge, skills and experience in-line with the service offered, and appropriate to the needs of your client(s)?
- Can you demonstrate competence for safely leading activities appropriate to the client(s) in the outdoor environment in which you work?

Further reading

IOL Outdoor Therapy statement of good practice

Managing risk in outdoor learning Education Scotland

Nothing Ventured – Balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors *(Tim Gill, 2010)*

Safety, risk and adventure in outdoor activities (Bob Barton, 2007)[47]

Challenging assumptions of fear *(Jack Reed and Heidi Smith, 2021)*[48]

No Fear (Tim Gill, 2007)[49]

2.2.2

Equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging

High quality outdoor learning can be achieved through respecting and promoting the rights, responsibilities and dignity of individuals within all our professional activities and recognising the value of every person. (IOL webpage)

Equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) play a central role in high quality practice. In turn, high quality practice has the potential to influence wider participation and employment opportunities.

"For participants, the sense of belonging they experience within the group or setting will reflect how successful EDIB strategies are."

Equity

Equity focuses on the individual needs that people have. It differs from equality which allows for the same opportunities being available for all but does not allow for individual capability to access those opportunities.

Diversity

Diversity refers to the multitude of ways that people can differ from each other. It includes, amongst others, gender identity, race, religion, ability, sexual orientation and age.

Inclusion

Inclusion means addressing individual needs in striving towards equality.

Belonging

Belonging is the result when all other aspects of equity, diversity and inclusion are in place and felt by the participant. When these aspects are met, learning is likely to be most effective[50].

Assessing current practice

Understanding the context you are working in is crucial to understanding how to effect change, and how to forge new partnerships.

Where high quality outdoor learning is taking place

Practitioners and providers:

- Choose language that includes rather than excludes.
- Choose language that acknowledges, accepts and celebrates differences.
- Choose language that is welcoming to everyone.
- Consider how they can make their practice more equitable.

Addressing diversity, inclusion and equity can be, for many, a journey that involves self-discovery as well as changes to practice. For participants, the sense of belonging they experience within the group or setting will reflect how successful EDIB strategies are. The BASICS model (Belonging, Aspiration, Safety, Identity, Challenge and Success) offers one way of gauging success from a participant perspective (Figure 5).

Questions to develop practice:

- How do your own cultural and social beliefs and experiences influence your practice?
- How might your participants' cultural and social beliefs and experiences influence your practice?
- How can you develop your inclusive practice?
- How do the images and stories you use in displays, reports and marketing reflect the communities you serve?
- How is your practice equitable, i.e. how do you respond to individual needs?
- Do you regularly review your practice in terms of personal knowledge, values and actions and in response to relevant feedback?
- What is your level of knowledge around current terminology and issues related to EDIB?

Further reading

INclusivity in the OUTdoors: Insights and recommendations from the 2021 Raising Our Game Webinar Series[51]

UK Sports Councils **Moving to Inclusion Framework**

continued >

The BASICS model

As a participant, do I feel a sense of belonging, aspiration, safety, identity, challenge, and success?

Belonging

- Do I feel listened to?
- Do I feel respected as an individual?
- Do I feel valued?
- Am I asked for my opinion? And does that opinion matter?

Aspirations

- Do I feel that the learning has a purpose?
- That the activity makes sense?
- Are there meaningful and realistic goals and targets?
- Do I buy into those goals and targets?
- Do I have an understanding of the 'big picture' about the session and not just what is going to happen next?

Safety

- Do I feel safe? Emotionally, physically, psychologically?
- Do I feel comfortable and safe within the group and the environment?

Identity

- Am I helped to learn things about myself in a supportive and positive way?
- Am I allowed to be me?
- Is there an atmosphere that promotes and celebrates success?

Challenge

- Am I bored? Am I terrified? Or am I experiencing an appropriate level of challenge?
- Can I say no if I want to?

Success

- Do I get to experience success as part of the session or sequence?
- Do I receive meaningful praise when I succeed or guidance if I am struggling?
- Do I recognise the success?

Figure 5. The BASICS model (based on Smith, 1996)[52]

2.2.3 Developing relationships

Meaningful relationships with others and the 'other than human' contribute to positive mental health, wellbeing and happiness[53] [54].

The development (or reawakening) of effective and caring relationships, whether interpersonal or between people and nature, is both a valuable outcome in its own right and key to achieving additional successful outcomes through outdoor learning.

Research shows that participants achieve improvements in self-confidence, communication skills and the ability to face and overcome challenges as a result of the behaviours and attitudes displayed by practitioners[55].

The practitioner plays a central role in fostering relationships at all levels, and how they view or perceive those relationships influences the range of facilitation skills they use to achieve positive outcomes.

Practitioner attributes that promote positive relationships include:

- ✓ Patience, knowledge, empathy and care.
- ✓ The ability to inspire and enthuse.
- ✓ Being approachable and relatable.
- ✓ Fostering the development of autonomy and decision-making capability.
- ✓ Raising awareness for participants, of self, others and the environment, and the choices that they can make.
- ✓ Setting appropriate levels of challenge.
- ✓ Being authentic, developing trust and listening actively.
- ✓ Setting and managing expectations for behaviour and outcomes.

Further reading

Adams, D., Lewis, C. and Hughton, C. (2024) Bee-ing and feeling of place in Rawlings-Smith, E. and Pike, S. (eds) Encountering Ideas of Place in Education Routledge: New York

Chawla, L. (2020) **Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss.** *People and Nature, 2(3), 619–642.*

French, G., Edwards, A., Martin, I., and Tatam, J. (2024) A place-based pedagogy for outdoor education in Rawlings-Smith, E. and Pike, S. (eds) Encountering Ideas of Place in Education Routledge: New York

Louv, R. (2005) Last Child in the Woods. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

Human – nature relationships

The relationship that people have with the natural environment is increasingly regarded as critical for developing pro-environmental values, behaviours and attitudes[56], and repeated interventions that enable people to maintain - or rediscover - the connection have been shown to be the most productive[57]. Again, practitioners play a key role in facilitating opportunities to engage with the natural environment beyond a solely activity-focused approach.

Of equal significance are the views, values and beliefs held by the participants themselves. For example, different peoples (for example, indigenous populations of Aotearoa New Zealand[58], Australia[59], North America and India[60] [61]) view their relationship with place very differently to western societies, meaning that outdoor learning practice based on a western perspective may be in conflict with deeply held beliefs, and consequently both culturally inappropriate and ineffective.

For practitioners and providers, this represents an opportunity to both understand the cultural background of their participants in order to meet their needs and also an opportunity to learn from their participants[62].

Developing human-nature relationships is explored further in **Section 2.2.4**.

Questions to develop practice:

Do practitioners:

- » Consider the language (verbal and non-verbal/body) they use?
- » Consider and allow for their own emotions, values and biases?
- » Allow for individual hopes and fears when planning and delivering sessions?
- » Ensure everyone feels valued and welcome?
- » Ask for and listen to participants' points of view?
- » Answer their questions with respect?
- » Offer opportunities for participants to share their thoughts and feelings?
- » Foster an environment that enables everyone to feel safe, physically and emotionally?
- » Adopt fully inclusive practices?
- » Make an effort to learn names?
- » Use praise, and encouragement appropriately?
- » Provide opportunities for time outs and breaks for participants?
- » Set and maintain appropriate behaviour expectations?
- » Allay fears and provide alternative strategies to enable participants to maintain dignity in the face of fear?
- » Recognise where participants often get stuck with something and have strategies to help them move past the difficulty?
- » Develop participants cooperative skills as well as their individual and technical skills?
- » Provide opportunities to engage with nature?
- » Consider the cultural background of their participants and how this influences their relationship with nature?

2.2.4

Outdoor learning, the environment and sustainable practice

'Sustainable practice' and 'sustainability' are concepts that are increasingly being incorporated into learning programmes, leadership and skills syllabi and curricula. This section takes a practitioner/participant perspective focusing on environmental impact through awareness of climate change, biodiversity loss and responsible engagement with the natural environment. A wider provider perspective also includes business and social elements of sustainability.

High quality outdoor learning has the potential to have a positive impact on the environment, both directly and indirectly. Practitioners engage with the natural environment through their day-to-day practice and must constantly balance the demands on the natural environment for recreation and learning with the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental damage. All practitioners should therefore be aware of the impact of their own practice on the environment and the opportunities they have to influence the behaviour of others.

Personal practice

National governing body and professional associations' coaching and leadership awards all recognise the importance of:

- ✓ Adopting a minimal impact approach.
- ✓ Keeping up to date with environmental knowledge and having sufficient understanding to engage in relevant conversations with participants.
- ✓ Considering the environment in course and session planning, aiming to reduce negative impact while increasing positive understanding.
- ✓ Promoting positive values concerning conservation and use of the countryside.
- ✓ Acting as a role model for conservation and environmentally sustainable behaviours.
- ✓ Being aware of, and minimising their impact on, local communities, other users, physical environments and settings.
- ✓ Setting and managing expectations for behaviour and outcomes.

Encouraging in others

Practitioners should seek to develop their own and others understanding of the environment and the behaviours that can positively impact it. Relationship building with the natural environment lies at the heart of developing participants' understanding of sustainability issues[63].

Research into the relationship between knowledge acquisition and emotional connection has shown that direct experience through spending time in nature is more likely to lead to pro-environmental behaviours[64].

There is a range of evidence as to how nature connectedness occurs or is fostered in both children and adults, and a growing body of evidence that supports the impact of outdoor learning on nature connectedness[65].

Initial engagement with outdoor learning can involve simply being outdoors. Spending time in nature in facilitated settings can help children, young people and adults who are not accustomed to time outdoors to become comfortable outside, leading to increased likelihood of further engagement[66].

continued >

Connecting people with nature:

- ✓ Allow time to encounter nature at participants' own pace, developing their own interests.
- ✓ Take time to notice the natural environment.
- ✓ Allow people to overcome fears in nature or fears of particular species through gradual interactions at their level of comfort.
- ✓ Share examples of people's enthusiasm and care for nature.
- ✓ Enable people to record their observations and experiences in a variety of ways.

(see Chawla, 2020)

Practitioners should understand and plan for progression, recognising that people are at different points in their relationship with nature and have differing opportunities to engage once back in their day-to-day settings.

Further reading

Mountain Leader Candidate Handbook

Learning for Sustainability and the GTC Scotland Professional Standards for Teachers

IOL Sustainable Practice - Future Footprints

UN Sustainable Development Goals

Natural Resources Wales **A Natural Progression**

Chawla, L. (2020) **Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss.** *People and Nature, 2(3), pp.619-642.*

Questions to develop practice:

- » In what way are you an advocate for the natural environment and environmentally sustainable behaviour?
- » What opportunities are there to develop a place-responsive approach to practice, engaging with local culture and ecology?
- » What opportunities exist in your practice for participants to experience and interact with nature? What aspects of nature can be experienced through different activities?
- » What opportunities exist in your practice to raise awareness of environmental issues? E.g. through informal discussions around food miles, transport, land use, littering, etc., or embedded practices at outdoor learning facilities.
- » What do you do to foster a culture of respect for self, others and the environment?
- » How do you enable participants to become partners in helping to protect the natural world?
- » What signposting or opportunities do you offer to support participants in being able to continue and develop their engagement with the natural environment?
- » In what ways will you (or do you) provide information about pro-environmental actions that participants can do?
- » How will you (or do you) provide information to participants about how they can engage with nature through play, recreation, work, gardening, studying natural history or geography, caring for wildlife etc.?

2.2.5

Theory of Change

A theory of change is not an academic theory. Rather, it is the thinking (theory) behind the change a programme or service wants to achieve. It makes very clear the rationale which the work is based upon. It's also been called a 'roadmap' for all to see and understand and, in this sense, needs to be logical. A theory of change is simply a tool - or model - that can show the link between the needs in a specific context and the impact a particular programme or service is intended to have on those needs.

A theory of change can:

- Ensure a shared understanding of how a programme or organisation is trying to make a difference.
- Make explicit different views, assumptions and theories about the change process, especially seemingly obvious ones, enabling you to quickly communicate your strategy.
- Help people focus on the programme purpose and long-term aim rather than starting from, and maybe getting too caught up in, current activities.
- Identify the key things to measure that will show whether progress is being made towards the end goal.
- Help when making a case for support when making approaches to, e.g. funders, donors, policy makers, client organisations, etc.
- Enable a review of why and how a programme or approach works, and hence whether it is likely to work in other contexts. As well as supporting us to articulate our intention and impact, a theory of change provides a foundation for evidencing our impact. By developing a common language, we can better collectively evaluate and show the impact of the outdoor learning sector.
- Enable clarity of programme design and delivery that increases the likelihood of reaching desired outcomes more quickly and effectively.

There is no standardised way of presenting a theory of change, and although the components will broadly be the same the terminology and emphasis may vary between organisations and practitioners. Figure 6 summarises the key components.

"A theory of change is simply a tool - or model - that can show the link between the needs in a specific context and the impact a particular programme or service is intended to have on those needs."

How does it work?

Developing a theory of change starts from the position that we should all want to understand whether positive change is created through our work with and for children, young people, adults and organisations, as well as why and how that change happens. The primary reason we want to understand the what, why and how of this change is so that we can continuously reflect on and improve the quality of our work. By doing that, we will increase the impact we have on the lives of the people with whom we work.

There are two ways to approach writing a theory of change: backwards, looking at the bigger picture of what you do as an organisation; and forwards, using it as a planning tool to develop a framework for delivering a specific programme. The process involves bringing key stakeholders together to co-create it, drawing on different perspectives to arrive at a shared vision of what is intended and the means of achieving it.

The subsequent enaction of the theory of change provides a framework for identifying what, where, when and how leaders and participants will gather data to evidence the desired outcomes and impact, as well as ensuring quality across the delivery team.

The theory of change (ToC) begins with the context and identified need that a programme or intervention aims to address. The 'mechanisms of change' created by providers of outdoor learning include not just the activities but the conditions that will contribute to the outcomes achieved by participants. In turn, these outcomes contribute to the impacts, the longer-term effects of the programme, which in turn contribute to the needs and context. Underpinning the ToC is 'quality', which considers consistency across different practitioners and participants and depends on the criteria agreed to gauge success.

continued >

Figure 6. Theory of change key components (Anderson, 2020)

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Providers and practitioners:

- ✓ Know why they do what they do.
- ✓ Are able to articulate the link between programme content and the experiences they provide or facilitate and the intended outcomes.
- ✓ Are able to explain the choice of activities and their relevance to the intended outcomes
- ✓ Are aware of any evidence supporting their chosen approach, either from academic research or from previous programmes.
- ✓ Use a theory of change as a basis for:
  - » Evaluating outcomes.
  - » Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of practice.

"A Theory of Change links together the structures, processes and outcomes that together form the basis for developing and assessing quality of provision."

One way of developing a theory of change is through asking a series of questions about what you want to achieve, and how you are going to do it:

- » How can participants be involved in co-creating the theory of change?
- » Which other stakeholders could be involved?
- » What is the starting point of your participants? What are their needs?
- » How do you know? What evidence are you using to base this knowledge on? What assumptions are you making?
- » What are you trying to achieve? What drives you, as a practitioner or provider?
- » What is the long-term impact that you hope your input will contribute to? Participants will achieve this for themselves, so how does what you do contribute to this journey? What outcomes is your programme aiming for?
- » What are you giving the people you work with – and the people that bring them to you - that they can use to develop further after they leave you?
- » What do you want your participants to feel, practice and experience while they are with you? If they do these things then how will they help to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that you hope for?
- » What activities are you going to use to achieve the programme goals? How do the activities you are using (or planning to use) help to achieve these aims?

Evaluation and impact measurement

A theory of change also provides the basis for an evaluation and impact monitoring framework. Evaluating outcomes and progress gives an overall sense of the success of a programme or areas where improvements can be made. Data can be gathered at different stages that can be used to both inform practice and demonstrate the value of a particular programme, and could, for example, be in the form of evaluation forms, reflections, scoring scales, case studies, numbers of people participating, etc.

The way that data is collected should be considered from an ethical point of view, as how the data is collected will influence the quality of data that is gathered. Cultural beliefs, organisational priorities and practitioner knowledge, skills and experience are important considerations to ensure ethical practice.

Using a ToC to influence quality

A Theory of Change links together the structures, processes and outcomes that together form the basis for developing and assessing quality of provision. The outcomes and intended long term impact that the programme or session is hoping to achieve, the activities and experiences that will contribute to them, and the mechanisms (i.e. the structures) that enable effective practice to happen are all identifiable through the ToC.

A Theory of Change makes certain assumptions about your practice. For example, you may state that your approach will be based on experiential learning.

Having made this assumption you can now ask whether all your staff team have a shared understanding of what experiential learning is, and then address any training needs that may become apparent. Knowing what these are also provides a basis for monitoring all aspects of the programme from planning through to evaluation.

Questions to develop practice:

- » Have the staff got the necessary skills and resources to deliver what is planned?
- » Are the conditions for learning that were identified as being critical for success in place and being enacted?
- » Does the programme design match the needs of the group?
- » Are participants experiencing what you intend them to?
- » Are any adaptions that you have made previously working?

Further reading

Noble, J. (2019) **Theory of change in ten steps**. *London: New Philanthropy Capital.*

Anderson, N (2020). Theory of Change. Institute for Outdoor Learning. **https://www.outdoor-learning.org/standards/outdoor-learning/theory-of-change.html**

Association of Sail Training Organisations Theory of Change

2.2.6

Continuity and progression

The idea of continuity and progression in learning is a cornerstone of learning practice[67]. In many settings, learners are viewed as individuals who already possess a range of prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which influence how they relate to and interpret the world. New experiences lead to new learning as learners build on their previous knowledge and experience. Learning is not a series of unconnected events, rather it is pathway of development that links related knowledge and skills.

Progression is inherent in many outdoor learning contexts and can be viewed from content, outcomes or opportunity perspectives. It can be considered over the course of a single session or over many years. National Governing Body awards and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, for example, provide opportunities to develop levels of commitment, skills and knowledge. Formal curricula offer varying opportunities for outdoor learning progression, often dependent on government policy and teacher training and education, and where policy explicitly supports outdoor learning, teachers are encouraged to build on existing outdoor learning experience.

In learning settings other than formal education establishments, for example residential centres, environmental venues, care farms, etc., practitioners can encourage continuity by considering the place of the session(s) within a wider context of past and future participation and the context within which the programme is situated.

"To benefit from a progression of outdoor learning, participants and providers need to be aware of (and agree) what progression looks like"

Underlying the idea of progression is a sense of purpose that links decisions about content, delivery and assessment, all of which can be articulated through a theory of change. To benefit from a progression of outdoor learning, participants and providers need to be aware of (and agree) what progression looks like, and what the opportunities and benefits are. Providers should be aware of their participants' start points, their needs and intended outcomes, and understand how they fit into a progression model and what they can contribute to it.

Further reading

Harvey, D. (2022) Progression into outdoor learning. Horizons (98)

Natural Resources Wales **A Natural Progression**

Gauging progress

The integration of assessment and progression depends on being able to recognise the things that are either hindering or blocking progress as well as being able to assess where a learner has got to on their particular journey. It is possible, of course, that where provision is limited to a single session or sequence, the programme might finish with the intended outcomes desired by the client. Responsibility for continuity may then rest with the person who organised the course, although it does not prevent practitioner input to at least signpost to further opportunity or thinking. For providers or practitioners, the question then becomes one of what they can do to help their participants build on the learning post-session.

Underpinning the idea of effective learning transfer is being able to help learners who are achieving their goals with next steps. There is also value in practitioners helping their participants become empowered to evaluate, judge and make their own choices, ultimately making their, i.e. the practitioner's, initial role redundant. For children, participation is likely to be influenced by adult notions of desired outcomes, but as they age, participants gain greater capacity to influence what and how they participate. Practitioners should be aware, however, that availability of opportunities does not necessarily lead directly to access, as there may be multiple intersecting factors that prevent or hinder engagement.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners:

- Understand the purpose of the session they are delivering.
- Consider how their input relates to participants' previous experience and what might come next.
- Are aware of the opportunities available to participants to develop their learning further.
- Are able to help their participants to carry learning forwards.

Questions to ask to develop practice

- What is the purpose of the session(s) you are delivering?
- What opportunities exist for progression? E.g. staff continuity, activity/ challenge progression, opportunities for skill development, to be involved in planning, or leadership, etc
- How does your practice contribute to continuity / progression? What can be done to improve it?
- How can you link what participants are doing with what came before or could come next, in the programme itself, or with life at home, in the community?
- What additional knowledge and skills do you as a practitioner need to develop your participants' autonomy with regard to accessing future opportunities?
- What opportunities and support systems need to be in place to enable participants to capitalise on future opportunities?

2.2.7

High quality outdoor learning in practice

What makes a 'high quality session', and who is qualified to make a judgement? Bringing together various standards related to teaching and youth work, it is possible to identify a common core of elements that are likely to lead to positive outcomes for participants.

The following overview is intended to inform practice and can also be used to inform observations. It has been developed from a variety of sources including:

- Teachers' standards (England[68], Scotland[69], Wales[70], Northern Ireland[71], Ireland[72], New Zealand[73], Canada[74], USA[75], Singapore[76] and Australia[77])
- UK Youth Work standards[78]
- National Governing Bodies qualification syllabi[79] [80]
- The **Level 3 Outdoor Activity Instructor Apprenticeship** standard[81]
- The **Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist Apprenticeship standard**[82]
- Practitioner conference workshops[83]

It also draws on teaching and instructing frameworks, including Barak Rosenshine's 'Principles of Instruction'[84], Robert Gagne's '9 steps of instruction'[85] and Alistair Smith's 'Accelerated Learning Cycle'.[86]

The role of academic theory

The wide variety of approaches to outdoor learning is underpinned by an equally broad range of theories[87]. This guide, with its cross-field scope, cannot reflect all the theories that may form key foundations for specific approaches to outdoor learning. Instead, learning about relevant theories should perhaps be an essential part of the practitioner's make-up, helping to uncover assumptions while providing explanations of how and why some things work and some things don't, and prompting the discovery of new aspects of practice. Theory is not just limited to headline academic theories, as numerous models have also been developed through practice and small-scale research projects (see, for example, the IOL's Horizons publication). Any model that practitioners draw on to inform their practice constitutes a theory, and there are a great many of them – e.g. the comfort zone, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Kolb's learning cycle etc. All theory should consider the context in which the learning takes place, as some will be more appropriate than others depending on circumstance.

The role of the practitioner

The field of outdoor learning includes many practitioner identities including, for example, teachers, facilitators, coaches, instructors and tutors. Being a practitioner involves continuous reflection and personal commitment which, for many, can be lifelong. Practitioners are also, at times, participants themselves, engaging with others as they develop their experience, skills, knowledge and qualifications.

Just as the practitioners have multiple identities, so do the beneficiaries. Whether they are regarded as (or regard themselves as) participants, peers, students, guests, clients, customers or patients, they all share a common goal of moving further along a desired path than they would otherwise do without the facilitated experience offered by the provider/ practitioner. The role that practitioners adopt and how effective they are is therefore critical to success.

The components of a high quality session

Outdoor learning sessions can be isolated or part of a longer sequence. The context of the programme or session will have a significant influence on the design of the learning, how it is approached, the outcomes that can be achieved and the activities themselves. From an observation point of view, this means that different aspects of quality will be observed in different settings.

High quality outdoor learning involves planning, initiating, delivering, assessing and consolidating learning. Although there may be some organisational involvement, beyond the structural aspects outlined above, the responsibility for the delivery of safe enjoyable outdoor learning experiences rests with the practitioner.

continued >

Planning

The specific session(s) will require appropriate planning to meet learners' needs. Without a sense of direction and what is hoped to be achieved, it is very difficult to gauge success.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners prepare for learning by:

- ✓ Understanding the context (social, educational, recreational, etc.) of their group or client.
- ✓ Understanding the needs and aims of the participants / group leaders.
- ✓ Knowing about and preparing for any individual special educational or additional learning needs.
- ✓ Addressing known inclusion issues to ensure that the sessions are accessible to all potential participants.
- ✓ Planning activities intended to meet group aims.
- ✓ Having thought about alternative plans to their preferred option given changes to weather, group dynamics, etc.
- ✓ Preparing resources and liaising with colleagues.
- ✓ Ensuring that participants are ready to learn e.g. by having undertaken any necessary prior activity or learning.

Initiating

Any outdoor learning session, whether a single one-off experience or part of a sequence delivered over a longer period of time, involves an initial phase, pre-activity, where the positive conditions for learning are established.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners and providers create the positive learning environment by:

- ✓ Being ready (not rushed).
- ✓ Generating a positive and welcoming atmosphere.
- ✓ Explaining what the session(s) will involve and their purpose.
- ✓ Setting expectations for behaviour.
- ✓ Addressing fears.
- ✓ Establishing intended outcomes for the session(s).

See also – Establishing effective relationships

Session delivery

The most visible aspect of outdoor learning practice is the delivery of the experience itself. The success or otherwise of the planning is borne out in the delivery of the session and the outcomes achieved as a result. Practice can be divided between management of people and management of learning.

Managing people

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners -

- ✓ Establish effective relationships with participants and accompanying adults through:
  - » Their manner, presence and enthusiasm.
  - » Learning and using names.
  - » Developing effective rapport.
  - » Setting expectations for behaviour.
  - » A culture of learning and respect.
  - » Allaying fears.
  - » Use of appropriate language and body language.
- ✓ Set the scene for the session(s), connecting prior learning by:
  - » Asking what has been done before? What do they remember? How will this build on that?
  - » Linking what is to come so as to be relevant.
  - » Creating continuity between sessions.
  - » Involving, where possible, participants in the planning of the session(s).
- ✓ Set objectives and achievable targets that complement the overall aims for the session/ programme.
- ✓ Explain the intended outcomes / plan for the session.
- ✓ Adopt a stepped approach with appropriate challenge, adaption to meet individual need and scaffolded support - over a sequence, or considered in terms of what students need to know in order to achieve the current challenge.
- ✓ Understand the potential for harm to mental and emotional health as well as physical, and manage safety and risk in a positive way, balancing risk with benefit, accordingly.

continued >

Managing learning

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners focus on activity, participation and involvement by ensuring that:

- ✓ Instructions are clear and understood.
- ✓ Demonstrations are clear and effective.
- ✓ Participants have a chance to ask questions.
- ✓ Facilitation approaches vary according to need.
- ✓ Participants are actively engaged with the session for the majority of the time.
- ✓ Where appropriate, opportunities for independent learning are offered.
- ✓ Where appropriate, opportunities for leadership are offered.
- ✓ Where appropriate, participants experience increasing autonomy, taking responsibility for their engagement and learning.
- ✓ By understanding what the wider learning context could be, appropriate pace, momentum and flow are maintained.
- ✓ Unplanned opportunities for learning are taken when presented.
- ✓ Needs and wants are managed appropriately.
- ✓ Participants have opportunities to achieve based on their individual aspirations and capabilities.
- ✓ Participants are challenged appropriately without being pressured into taking part.

Assessing learning

Assessing outdoor learning can be challenging as it invariably depends on what the aim for the session(s) was. More academic objectives will suggest a different set of assessment strategies to, for example, spiritual, personal, social or health related ones. Outcomes related assessment offers one route, and this may take the form of observed actions, behaviours, skills or knowledge. Whatever the approach though, if there has been an identified aim at the beginning it makes sense there is some way of gauging progress towards it.

Longer term assessment of progress can also be gauged through the achievement of accreditations and awards, for example, Awards and Badges achieved through **Girlguiding** and the **Scouts**, the **Duke of Edinburgh's Award**, the **National Outdoor Learning Award** and NGB skills or leadership awards.

Academic awards, for example the Agored Cymru suite of **Learning in the Outdoors** qualifications (Wales), provide an academic pathway that can continue through all levels to Further and Higher Education.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Participants have opportunities to demonstrate learning/ understanding through:

- ✓ Activity skills.
- ✓ Sharing knowledge (verbal, written, performance, coaching others, etc.).
- ✓ Demonstrating values.
- ✓ Behaviours.
- ✓ Taking on new challenges with increasing amounts of autonomy.

Demonstration could be through independent activity in the session, through questioning at the end of the session, through leadership opportunities, through the next activity or through learning shared, for example, back in the classroom.

Practitioners feedback to participants:

- ✓ Using appropriate use of praise and encouragement.
- ✓ Offering correction where appropriate.

continued >

Consolidating learning

Reviewing supports both participants and practitioners to consolidate learning. How experiences are interpreted is a very individual thing; what may be challenging for one person could be the opposite for another, for example. Many outcomes, therefore, are unique to the participant in how they are interpreted and the meaning they hold. The reflective process, involving structured time to review the experience, can reinforce learning and/or lead to new insights. It has the potential to lead to changes in behaviour, values and thinking for both practitioner and participant alike.

Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners:

- ✓ Review to encourage retention and recall.
- ✓ Help participants know what they have achieved and what they can do next.
- ✓ Connect forwards, supporting onwards progression.

Participants:

- ✓ Have appropriate opportunities to reflect on their experiences.
- ✓ Have access to a range of resources, both indoors and outdoors, to aid reflection.
- ✓ Have the opportunity to review and articulate their experiences in a safe environment.
- ✓ Have the opportunity to make meaning from their experiences, and where relevant relate these to real life experiences elsewhere, e.g. at home, school, in the community or at work.
- ✓ Can make connections between what they are currently doing or have done and what has gone before and is yet to come.

continued >

Further reading

Beard, C. and Wilson, J.P. (2013) Experiential learning: A handbook for Education, Training and Coaching. London: Kogan Page.

Moon, J.A. (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning. Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer.

Roger Greenaway - **Your Guide to Active Reviewing**

The '21st Century Practitioner': A summary of behaviours

Practitioners should:

- ✓ Act as positive role models.
- ✓ Demonstrate inclusive values and practice.
- ✓ Demonstrate good subject knowledge and know how to help when people are 'stuck'.
- ✓ Exhibit 'visible' enthusiasm and passion for the outdoors and the activity being delivered.
- ✓ Promote connection with nature / pro-environmental behaviour / sustainability.
- ✓ Understand and be able to explain where the outdoor learning fits into the wider context.
- ✓ Take opportunities to discuss their practice with others.

The role of the practitioner is critical. At different times they may need to:

- ✓ Maintain motivation and purpose.
- ✓ Manage distractions and capitalise on unexpected learning opportunities.
- ✓ Manage behaviour.
- ✓ Manage expectations.
- ✓ Manage learning.
- ✓ Manage safety and risk in changing weather, terrain and environments.
- ✓ Adopt appropriate leadership styles depending on the context, participants and conditions.
- ✓ Manage welfare and wellbeing.

The core components of good practice include:

- ✓ Safety and safeguarding.
- ✓ Recognition of the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
- ✓ Developing effective and meaningful relationships.
- ✓ Environmental awareness and an appreciation of the challenges relating to sustainable practice.
- ✓ An understanding of what the intended outcomes are and how the activities will contribute to those goals (a 'theory of change').
- ✓ An understanding of continuity and progression.

(IOL Annual Conference workshop output 14/10/23)

The '21st Century Practitioner': A summary of characteristics

The 21st Century Practitioner is:

- ✓ Self, socially and culturally aware.
- ✓ Open minded.
- ✓ Up to date.
- ✓ Respectful, relatable, compassionate, loving and kind.
- ✓ Inclusive, welcoming and engaging.
- ✓ Passionate, enthusiastic and encouraging.
- ✓ Innovative and creative.
- ✓ Needs-focused.
- ✓ A role model for sustainable, open minded, responsible, ethical and inclusive practice.
- ✓ Reflective and committed to their own development.
- ✓ Current, appropriately qualified and professional.
- ✓ Resilient and adaptable.
- ✓ Intentional and critical.
- ✓ Holistically informed.
- ✓ Part of a community of practice, sharing good practice and lessons learned.

They:

- ✓ Understand their personal values and know why they are doing what they do.
- ✓ Can explain the thinking behind their approaches to teaching and learning.
- ✓ Strive to learn.
- ✓ Understand the value of personal empowerment and the futility of forcing growth / change.
- ✓ Speak up or act when things aren't right.
- ✓ Live their stated values in practice.

(IOL Annual Conference workshop output 14/10/23)

2.3 Outcomes

Successful outcomes are interlinked with, and a measure of, effective, high quality outdoor learning practice.

They can be formalised as intended goals, assessed as part of a particular programme, or achieved in other ways resulting from the individual participant's interpretation of the experience. Some unintended outcomes can be negative of course, and may be beyond the control of the facilitator, and it is important to acknowledge this possibility as part of the risk benefit analysis of the activity. Considering the positive learning environment, listening to participants' concerns, and addressing issues as they arise all contribute to reduced likelihood of negative experiences and greater chances of meeting intended outcomes.

Not all outcomes will be achieved - or achievable - with every session, or with every practitioner. Programmes may be specific in their goals or have a more general focus. Some outcomes may be staging posts on the way to others. Enjoyment, for example, may be the key to longer term engagement in education, understanding personal health and self-awareness, or to developing healthy relationships with others or the natural environment. Similarly, other outcomes could contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing, a result of many contributing factors.

2.3.1

Assessing outcomes

Assessing outcomes is not always necessary. Sometimes, providing an experience that enables participants to develop their own outcomes is entirely appropriate. More commonly, however, the requirements of funders, policy makers, clients and participants themselves means that gauging the success of a programme or intervention is necessary.

Being clear about both what can be achieved and what has been achieved provides a pathway to greater effectiveness and an increased likelihood of success. Using the Theory of Change model (see **Section 2.2.5**), understanding the desired outcomes suggests the appropriate activities, conversations and approaches that are most likely to achieve success. Assessing whether those outcomes have been met helps providers to both prove the value of their programme and to improve their practice.

The indicators relating to each High Quality Outdoor Learning outcome provide a basis for designing participant surveys, impact assessments or observation records.

2.3.2

Outcomes frameworks

Many participants will already be involved with an organisation that may be using outdoor learning themselves to achieve their own identified goals and outcomes or working with providers to achieve them.

Examples of outcomes frameworks include:

- School / academic qualification curricula
- NYA National Youth Work Curriculum[88]
- Youth Link Scotland National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework[89]
- Centre for Youth Impact Outcomes Framework 2.1[90]

When individuals take part in outdoor learning activities, they may have their own goals in mind that providers help them to meet. At a personal and social development level, youth work and education frameworks share common aspirations, aiming to achieve[91] [92]:

- Healthy, confident individuals.
- Self-directed, capable and creative learners.
- Sociable, connected and confident people.
- Effective contributors to their communities, workplaces and society.
- Active, responsible global citizens.

The ten outcomes of high quality outdoor learning (Box 1) are broad themes that incorporate a wide range of more specific outcomes. They bring together experience from practice across the field of outdoor learning, outcomes frameworks from youth and education sectors and academic research (see **Section 1.2**). The outcomes demonstrate how outdoor learning can be used as an approach to meet a wide range of intended goals, identified through theories of change, across health, wellbeing, environment, education, community, economy and recreation sectors (**Section 1.3**).

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.

When providers and practitioners are delivering progressive high quality outdoor learning, they and other observers will see participants who are:

1. Learning to appreciate the benefits of physical fitness and the lifelong value of participation in healthy active leisure activities.
2. Developing their self-awareness and social skills, and their appreciation of the contributions and achievements of themselves and of others.
3. Becoming receptive to the natural environment and understand the importance of conservation and pro environmental behaviour.
4. Developing a positive attitude to challenge, learning and adventure.
5. Developing personal confidence and character through taking on challenges and achieving success.
6. Acquiring and developing a range of skills and knowledge as a result of, and in support of, their participation in outdoor activities, recreation and exploration.
7. Demonstrating increased initiative, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance, tenacity and commitment.
8. Developing and extending their key skills of communication, problem-solving, leadership and teamwork.
9. Displaying an increased motivation and appetite for learning that is contributing to raised levels of achievement and progress in other aspects of their development.
10. Broadening their horizons and becoming aware of a wider range of recreation and employment opportunities and life chances, life choices and lifestyles.

Box 1. Ten outcomes of high quality outdoor learning

Outcome 1

Health and well-being

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

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Understand the benefits of keeping themselves fit through regular physical activity.
- Are aware of the benefits of spending time in 'green' and 'blue' spaces.
- Are aware of the links between, and importance of, physical and emotional well-being.
- Have or are developing a positive self-image.
- Talk about the benefits to their mental, physical and emotional health through spending time in nature and participation in outdoor activities.
- Understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating appropriate to the demands of their activities.
- Walk, wheel or cycle, where this is a realistic and appropriate option, or take other regular exercise.
- Want to continue their interest in outdoor activities beyond their current experience and throughout their life.
- Independently participate in follow-up opportunities where these are available.
- Understand how much exercise is required to remain healthy.

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

Outcome 2

Social and emotional awareness

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

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Are learning to recognise their own and others' strengths and current limitations, valuing the contribution of others.
- Are learning to or can manage their emotions.
- Are able to ask for help if they need it.
- Are developing the ability to relate to others with empathy and compassion.
- Are able and willing to 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 others or their environment.
- Recognise and applaud the achievements of others, regardless of how these compare with their own.
- Are developing, managing and valuing friendships.
- Are developing the ability to form relationships with people beyond their friendship groups.
- Take on roles of responsibility for planning and organising activities, fulfilling the role of junior or assistant leaders.
- Take responsibility for their own safety as well as that of others.
- Respect others' personal space, property and feelings.

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

Outcome 3

Environmental awareness

Participants are becoming receptive to the natural environment and understand the importance of conservation and environmentally sustainable behaviour.

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Have regular access to the outdoors as a learning resource.
- Appreciate the benefits of spending time in nature.
- Are comfortable and confident in the natural environment.
- Experience a range of different environments in different conditions.
- Are developing and nurturing a meaningful connection with nature.
- Value the interrelatedness of humans and nature.
- Understand the impact of human activities on the environment.
- Are aware of issues around sustainability, climate change and biodiversity.
- Are familiar with opportunities to access green and blue spaces in their own locality.
- Know about pro-environmental actions they can take to protect and enhance nature.
- 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.
- Have opportunities to experience 'awe and wonder' in response to the natural beauty of wild environments.
- Appreciate the value of their local area for learning and recreation as well as places further afield.

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

Outcome 4

Positive learning experiences

Participants are developing a positive attitude to challenge, learning and adventure.

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Experience memorable and significant moments of learning.
- Can see the positives even when faced with challenges.
- Have, or are working towards having, control of their own learning.
- Achieve a degree of competence or mastery in the experiences or activities they undertake.
- Achieve success through meaningful challenges.
- Feel safe through a sense of belonging.
- Know if they want to repeat experiences either now or after review and reflection.
- Make reasoned choices about how they engage meaningfully with activities.
- Are learning how to manage feedback.
- Have a growth mindset.
- Would like to participate in the activity or engage with the outdoors voluntarily in their free time.
- Reflect on and 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).

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

Outcome 5

Confidence and character

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

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Overcome their apprehensions to take part in new opportunities and experiences and challenging activities.
- Want a second go at things they find challenging first time.
- Show determination and perseverance to achieve their goals.
- 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.
- Can recognise, reflect on and learn from their mistakes.
- Can apply learning from one setting to another.
- 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, club or community.
- 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 people should be meeting or progressing towards some of the above indicators.

Outcome 6

Skills and knowledge

Participants are acquiring and developing a range of skills and knowledge resulting from, and in support of, their participation in outdoor activities, recreation and exploration.

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Know how to dress appropriately for outdoor activities according to the conditions and level of challenge.
- Understand how to keep themselves comfortable when outdoors in a variety of environments
- Appreciate the impact of the weather on their participation.
- Understand the need for appropriate planning when undertaking adventurous activities.
- Develop physical skills that they adapt and apply effectively in outdoor activities.
- Develop relevant mental skills (e.g. Determination, co-operation, resilience, reflection).
- Know how to assess potential risk and make appropriate decisions.
- Develop their understanding of theoretical concepts through practical application.
- Acquire environmental knowledge and ecosystems awareness.
- Recognise the value of training and practice to develop and refine skills.
- Are aware of relevant countryside and access codes of practice.
- Are aware of the potential benefits and challenges associated with using digital technology in the outdoors.
- Understand something of the history and ethics underpinning outdoor sports and leisure activities.
- Respond positively in challenging environments (e.g. darkness, inclement weather).
- Know the value of seeking and accepting additional coaching input to improve performance.
- Recognise the value of competition as a potential spur to high performance.

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

Outcome 7

Personal qualities

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

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Are developing increased self-awareness and positive self-regard.
- Are actively involved in the planning of their outdoor activities.
- Arrive on time, properly equipped and prepared for activities.
- Set their own goals relevant to the activities.
- Undertake appropriate tasks with reducing 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.
- Think critically, questioning and challenging assumptions.

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

Outcome 8

Skills for life

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

Indicators

The participants 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 and responding respectfully to the ideas and opinions of others.
- Work co-operatively and inclusively 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 the lead.
- Are able to help their group arrive at a team decision and implement it.
- Are able to reflect on and articulate their experiences.
- Undertake training in first aid and survival skills at an appropriate level.

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

Outcome 9

Increased motivation and appetite for learning

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

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- Are curious about the world and open to new ideas and perspectives.
- Set themselves challenging goals.
- Always aim to achieve their best.
- Have a desire to learn and are, or are becoming, self-motivated learners.
- Show a desire for new challenges and learning experiences.
- Have good or improving relationships with peers and/or people in positions of authority (e.g. Teachers, youth workers, health workers, etc.).
- Display good or improving behaviour.
- Talk positively about learning and taking part in outdoor activities.
- Know where to go to find out about opportunities and who can help to access them.
- Have a good or improving record of commitment or attendance.
- Demonstrate raised levels of attainment across the curriculum and beyond.
- Participate in a variety of aspects of school/club/community/ organisational life.
- Draw inspiration from their outdoor activities in other subjects or areas of learning, e.g. creative writing, art, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

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

Outcome 10

Broadened horizons

Participants are broadening their horizons and becoming aware of a wider range of employment and volunteering opportunities and life chances, life choices and lifestyles.

Indicators

The participants you work with:

- 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 becoming more open-minded.
- Are aware of the opportunities available to them in their locality or community and are keen to seek experiences beyond.
- Are able to apply their learning and skills in different contexts.
- Perceive a wider range of career options open to them and talk positively about these.
- Appreciate the workplace relevance of key skills such as communication and teamwork.
- Appreciate the attractiveness to employers of self-reliance and commitment.
- Are aware, if appropriate, of employment and volunteering opportunities in outdoor learning, outdoor recreation, and the pathways to these.
- Are aware of opportunities to gain and use coaching qualifications in their chosen activity.
- Respond to opportunities to volunteer their time to help others.
- Continue to participate in outdoor and environmental activities, independent expeditions or travel after they leave your provision.
- Always aim higher and aspire to achieve in life to their fullest potential.

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

Part 3

Developing outdoor learning

3 Developing outdoor learning

High Quality Outdoor Learning represents a further step on the continuing journey to improving the quality of outdoor learning.

Outdoor learning does not provide the answer to all society's problems and should not be treated as an isolated approach. Rather, it should be seen as one means to achieving outcomes alongside other approaches, for example, through the arts, sport or youth work. What makes outdoor learning unique is the combination of facilitated practice and the outdoor environment, practitioners and providers drawing on their values, knowledge and skills to help participants of all ages achieve their goals. In so doing, outdoor learning offers opportunities to experience the natural world and develop a relationship with nature that could have lasting impact at personal, societal and global levels.

The benefits of outdoor learning are widely understood, yet economic, political, cultural, environmental and social factors continue to shape the field. Although research supports the contribution that outdoor learning can make to some of our greatest challenges, access to the benefits is inequitable, whether as a participant or potential member of the workforce[93]. Education and health professionals, funders and policy makers all have roles to play in the adoption of outdoor learning approaches but may be unaware of their potential. There is a need, therefore, to promote outdoor learning at all levels of society, building bridges to participation and moving outdoor learning from an option for some to an entitlement for all.

Achieving these goals is not the responsibility of a single person or organisation. Practitioners, providers and advocates of outdoor learning can all contribute to leading the development of the field by:

- ✓ Using, promoting and sharing this guide.
- ✓ Sharing knowledge and good practice through communities of practice.
- ✓ Advocating for outdoor learning in all its forms.
- ✓ Supporting organisations that champion outdoor learning.
- ✓ Collaborating with other sector organisations.
- ✓ Exploring and developing new ideas to improve practice.
- ✓ Looking for ways to add value, shape and move the field of outdoor learning forwards.
- ✓ Engaging with research initiatives that demonstrate short term outcomes as well as long term impact.

By striving for and demonstrating high quality provision, practitioners and providers can achieve meaningful outcomes that have the potential to change lives. By contributing to the wider sector through advocacy, research and practice development, they can also help to raise awareness of and capitalise on the value of outdoor learning, moving towards a truly inclusive and equitable outdoor learning offer for all.

"Outdoor learning offers opportunities to experience the natural world and develop a relationship with nature that could have lasting impact at personal, societal and global levels."

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