

## Outdoor Learning

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### Education, Children and Families Committee

21 June 2011

#### Purpose of report

- 1 To inform Elected Members of the Children and Families Outdoor Learning Strategy for 2011 – 2014 (see Appendix 1).

#### Main report

2. Outdoor Learning in Children and Families is managed and delivered by the Sports and Outdoor Education Unit (SOEU). This includes the residential outdoor centres at Benmore and Lagganlia, and the centre in the city at Bangholm (which incorporates the Adventure Edinburgh project). It also includes the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the new accredited achievement award developed by the SOEU for P6 – S2 children, the Junior Award Scheme Scotland (this shall be the subject to a separate report in due course).
  - 2.1 In 2010, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) published *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*, which outlines the integral role outdoor learning has in the new curriculum. The document also states that 'all staff at every level of involvement with the education of children and young people have a responsibility to make the most of the outdoor environment to support the delivery of the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence'.
  - 2.2 The Outdoor Learning Strategy outlines Edinburgh's response to the LTS document and how outdoor learning will be developed. It understands outdoor learning as the whole spectrum of structured learning that can take place in the outdoors, from nursery children exploring their school grounds to organised expeditions in wild country.
  - 2.3 The Strategy contains five strategic objectives. These are:
    - Increase the range of opportunities for children and young people to take part in outdoor learning;
    - Increase the use/awareness of outdoor learning and the environment as a core context for learning (within the framework of Curriculum for Excellence);
    - Provide a pathway for progression and increased involvement in outdoor learning and the outdoors;

- Ensure outdoor learning provides options for accreditation and achievement awards for children and young people;
  - Promote outdoor learning as an effective means of working with, and improving outcomes for Looked After Children and other targeted groups of children and young people (for example; young people at risk, teenage girls).
- 2.4 The objectives of the Strategy are also congruent with the priorities for children's services in Edinburgh. Outdoor Learning has an important contribution to make in improving educational outcomes for the lowest achieving 20% of children, improving health outcomes and increasing the number of young people in positive destinations. It does this in a number of ways, most notably by supporting positive engagement with learning and by providing challenging 'real-life' learning situations that require effective communication, determination, resilience, commitment and teamwork.
- 2.5 In order to provide teachers and other educational practitioners with opportunities to improve their knowledge and practice of outdoor learning, a series of Continuing Professional Development courses were delivered in autumn 2010. These proved very popular with all sectors and were highly rated in participant evaluation. These courses will be further developed and delivered again in the new academic year.
- 2.6 In addition, Lagganlia and Benmore have offered free 'whole staff' weekends to Edinburgh schools. The purpose of these is to bring centre and school staff together to discuss and plan outdoor learning, to raise its profile and awareness of how it can be used, and to ensure that the centres continue to be responsive to the needs of the young people who attend on residential visits.
- 2.7 A pilot project is also being developed with Forrester and St. Augustine's High Schools. The focus of this will be to deliver to each school a series of outdoor learning activities targeted at transition groups. The schools will carry out an audit of outdoor learning activities in the school, an audit of the school grounds, and produce an action plan for developing outdoor learning across the curriculum. It is acknowledged that at present there is an inherent difficulty in collecting reliable information regarding Outdoor Learning as arrangements can be quite informal and often based on local surroundings. It is hoped that a pilot audit can assist with this process. Dependent upon the success of the pilot, the findings and good practice will be shared across the city's schools and, where possible, replicated. Furthermore, if we can establish a system for collecting more robust information about the levels of involvement in outdoor learning then the consideration of an entitlement in relation to outdoor learning becomes a much more realistic option.
- 2.8 For the Academic year 2010-11 a teacher from Craigroyston High School was seconded on a part time basis to undertake a survey of school usage of our Residential Outdoor Centres and to assist with various Outdoor Learning initiatives some of which are covered in the previous paragraphs. We intend to involve teachers in similar support activities in the future.
- 2.9 Learning and Teaching Scotland has set up a national outdoor learning network to bring together local authorities to develop and share good practice, and build a bank of mutually accessible resources. We attend these meetings and share the good practice that is taking place in Edinburgh.

### **Financial Implications**

- 3 At present there are no financial implications arising from the strategy.

### **Equalities Impact**

- 4 The strategy is aimed at all children and young people in Edinburgh and there are particular initiatives targeted at disadvantaged groups within the city.

### **Environmental Impact**

- 5 This strategy should encourage children to be more environmentally aware and appreciative of the natural environment.

### **Recommendations**

- 6 Committee is asked to note the report.

**Gillian Tee**  
Director of Children and Families

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Appendices	1. Children and Families Outdoor Learning Strategy
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Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	Supports National Outcome 6 – ‘we live longer, healthier lives’ and National Outcome 4 – ‘our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
Background Papers	



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## Sports and Outdoor Education Unit

# OUTDOOR LEARNING STRATEGY 2011- 2014

### Vision

Our vision for outdoor learning in Edinburgh is that:

- All children and young people participate in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are part of the curriculum;
- Schools, CLD and Centres provide regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond.

Outdoor learning will be available during curriculum time, after school, at weekends and during school holidays.

### Introduction

A young person's progressive experience from 3 to 18 years demands that a wide range of outdoor learning activities take place outside the school. This outdoor classroom can be found in a variety of locations: school grounds, urban spaces, rural or city farms, parks, gardens, woodlands, coasts, wilderness areas and more. In this context, the educational experience is no longer limited to adventure or environmental activities, but embraces an approach to the outdoors which can enhance and integrate a huge range of activities across the whole curriculum – activities which connect learners with their environment, their community, their society and themselves.

Many schools, including nurseries, already make good use of outdoor learning and the inclusion within Curriculum for Excellence of the outdoors as a core context for learning should lead to increasing use of these resources. Educational professionals can incorporate this within their normal practice and where necessary use other expertise to extend the learning into environments where they are less confident. Such experiences of the outdoors motivate our children and young people to become successful learners and to develop as healthy, confident, enterprising and responsible citizens.

The core values of Curriculum for Excellence, its interdisciplinary nature and principles of curriculum design match many of the longstanding key concepts of outdoor learning: holism and integration, challenge, enjoyment, relevance, depth, development of the whole person, and an adventurous and creative ethos.

Outdoor Learning provides a perfect platform for developing our children and young people as global citizens through sustainable development education, which is a key context for learning within Curriculum for Excellence. Sustainability issues feature prominently in the [experiences and outcomes](#) and offer learners an opportunity to engage with complex ethical issues relating to climate change, social justice, interdependence, health and wellbeing, and biodiversity.

The Children and Families Department have two residential Outdoor Education Centres at Benmore and Lagganlia. Within the city a new Outdoor Education Centre was also opened at Bangholm (North Edinburgh) in 2007. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the Green Team and Forest Education are also key aspects of the Children and Families Sports and Outdoor Education Unit provision.

In addition, Edinburgh Leisure runs a watersports facility at Port Edgar and the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena at Ratho. Community Learning and Development and various voluntary organisations such as CAPRO (Craigmillar Adventure Project in south Edinburgh) together with a range of other providers such as Fairbridge, Countryside Rangers and Alien Rock also deliver outdoor learning within the city.

A wide range of arts and cultural organisations and partners also offer creative outdoor learning opportunities.

## **Strategic Context**

Outdoor learning has an important contribution to make to the following Children and Families Department Strategic Objectives:

- SO1 – Our children have the best start in life, are able to make and sustain relationships and are ready to succeed;
- SO2 – Our children and young people are successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens making a positive contribution to their communities;
- SO3 – Our children and young people at risk have improved life chances;
- SO4 – Our children and young people are physically and emotionally healthy.

It also has an important contribution to make to the following Children's Services Priorities:

- CSP1 – Support in early years is improved and problems are identified and addressed early on;
- CSP2 – Educational outcomes for the lowest achieving 20% of children are improved, with a particular focus on early literacy skills;
- CSP4 – Improve children and young people's specific health outcomes (healthy weight, drugs and alcohol misuse, emotional and mental health, sexual health);

CSP5 – Reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour;  
CSP6 – Increase the number of young people leaving school with positive destinations, options and choices.

## **Strategic Objectives for Outdoor Learning in Edinburgh 2011 - 2014**

This plan outlines our strategic objectives and what we will do to achieve these.

We want to:

- Increase the range of opportunities for children and young people to take part in outdoor learning;
- Increase the use/awareness of progressive and regular outdoor learning experiences which are embedded in the curriculum and a core context for learning;
- Provide a pathway for progression and increased involvement in outdoor learning and the outdoors;
- Ensure outdoor learning provides options for accreditation and achievement awards for children and young people;
- Promote outdoor learning as an effective means of working with, and improving outcomes for, targeted groups of children and young people;
- Promote outdoor learning as a leading provider and contributor to Sustainable Development Education

To achieve these objectives we will need to build new partnerships and improve the range and quality of outdoor learning experiences.

### **1. Increase the range of opportunities for children and young people to take part in outdoor learning.**

We will:

- Promote outdoor learning to every primary, secondary and special school in the city;
- Promote outdoor learning to the Early Years sector;
- Increase teachers' and educators' knowledge, understanding and experience and scope of outdoor learning and their confidence to take groups out.

We will achieve this by:

- Delivering high quality CPD training and support in outdoor learning to all interested staff;
- Tracking and supporting staff who have attended training to monitor and develop increased use of outdoor learning
- Providing sustainable opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors on a regular basis and during the school holidays;

- Delivering BELA, Walking Group Leader, Summer/Winter Mountain Leader, Trail Cycle Leader and other appropriate qualifications to teachers and other educators;
- Improving the quality of our marketing and publicity materials for outdoor learning;
- Working with schools and youth groups to establish Outdoor Learning Champions;
- Establish, where appropriate, new partnerships to deliver and build extra capacity.

## **2. Increase the use/awareness of progressive and regular outdoor learning experiences which are embedded in the curriculum and a core context for learning.**

We will:

- Promote the scope and benefits of outdoor learning to senior management and head teachers;
- Work closely with Quality Improvement Officers to develop outdoor learning's role in schools and its contribution to cross-curricular subjects, i.e. literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

We will achieve this by:

- Providing outdoor learning in which all children and young people experience enjoyment, support and challenge with clear links to the curriculum;
- Introducing a series of pilot programmes that illustrate the benefits of outdoor learning and the potential for cross-curricular work, e.g. urban-based short courses, Forest Education;
- Highlighting good practice and sharing this with colleagues (particularly through GLOW);
- Offering progressive training opportunities for staff;
- Introducing new partners to deliver and build capacity.

## **3. Provide a pathway for progression and increased involvement in outdoor learning and the outdoors.**

We will:

- Offer a range of progressive opportunities in outdoor learning that are affordable, accessible and challenging.

We will achieve this by:

- Ensuring pathways in adventure activities are created at an earlier age (at Primary School);
- Further developing outdoor learning experiences leading up to and following residential weeks at Benmore and Lagganlia, e.g. through JASS;
- Developing the role and scope of Bangholm Outdoor Centre;

- Building on the success of 'Adventure Edinburgh';
- Developing our workforce of well-trained instructors and leaders;
- Introducing (in partnership with the Outdoor Centres and NGB's) Talent Development programmes and events;
- Working with new partners to deliver and build capacity.

#### **4. Ensure outdoor learning provides options for accreditation and achievement awards for children and young people.**

We will:

- Make available and promote appropriate and accredited achievement awards which incorporate an outdoor learning element.

We will achieve this by:

- Building on the success of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award;
- Promoting and supporting the Junior Award Scheme Scotland across Edinburgh;
- Offering other complementary achievement awards with a strong outdoor learning focus (e.g. the John Muir Award, Go Bike, NICAS);
- Developing leadership opportunities for children and young people;
- Introducing new partners to deliver and build new capacity.

#### **5. Promote outdoor learning as an effective means of working with, and improving outcomes for, targeted groups of children and young people.**

We will:

- Ensure our outdoor learning programme provides a range of high quality, appropriate opportunities for high priority targeted groups of children and young people.

We will achieve this by:

- Developing Bangholm Outdoor Centre as a provider of innovative, tailored and challenging non-residential outdoor learning interventions for targeted groups of children and young people;
- Promoting Benmore and Lagganlia as residential venues for high priority targeted groups;
- Building on the success of the 'Supporting Transitions' element of the DofE developed by Friends of the Award;
- Developing and promoting JASS as an effective support and intervention for upper primary and lower secondary children.
- Developing creative approaches to engaging young people with learning outdoors.



## **6. Promote outdoor learning as a leading provider of, and contributor to, Sustainable Development Education**

We will:

- Ensure that outdoor learning fosters a strong appreciation and understanding of the main aim of SDE: that all people throughout the world are able to satisfy their basic needs and improve the quality of their lives without compromising the quality of life for future generations.

We will do this by:

- Developing the role and contribution of outdoor learning to promote and reinforce the six principles of SDE: interdependence; diversity; carrying capacity; rights and responsibilities; equity and justice; uncertainty and precaution.
- Developing the capacity of outdoor learning to promote the main elements of SDE: ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability.