

Attainment and the John Muir Award in Scotland



This paper highlights how attainment is being interpreted in an education context in Scotland, and how the John Muir Trust's main engagement initiative – the John Muir Award – can contribute to an 'attainment agenda'.

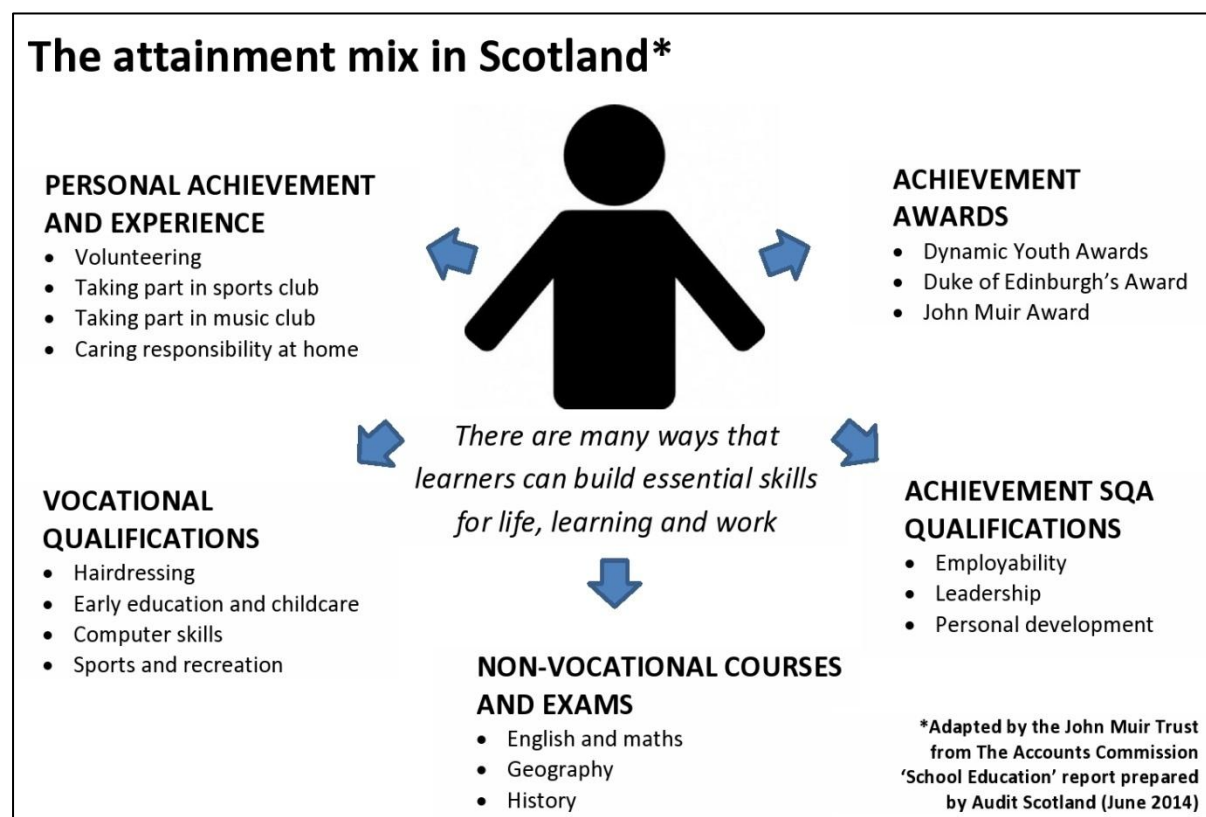
What is attainment?

Scottish Government describes attainment as a broad term, beyond a narrow definition of exam results or test scores:

'the measurable progress which children and young people make through and beyond school, and the development of the range of skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work'¹. This can be interpreted as the 'attainment mix'.

At its best, this requires partnerships between a range of learning and engagement parties including schools, clubs and third sector organisations, as well as participants and parents. It's also 'dependent on certain key foundations for learning; namely good **literacy, numeracy, and health & wellbeing**'².

The attainment mix in Scotland*



The challenge in Scotland – Closing the 'attainment gap'

An 'attainment gap' is frequently referenced, identifying a disparity in attainment levels of learners between different regions and socio-economic groups. Typically, it is noted that those from lower-income homes fare significantly worse at all levels of the education system than those from better-off homes³. This starts early and grows throughout primary and secondary education. The challenge identified is to address this inequality, raising attainment for all, and closing the attainment gap.

"If we are to want for every child what we want for our own children, we need an education system that is fair and which provides excellence to every child irrespective of background or circumstance." The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance (May 2015)⁴.

¹ Scottish Learning Festival 2015

² The Scottish Attainment Challenge www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rise to the challenge in education <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/>

Who is responsible?

The Cabinet Secretary indicated that every **school**, every **local authority** and all **teachers** have a role in understanding and acting on any attainment gap, and that **parental** involvement is seen as key⁵.

Also of note:

Education Scotland, the Scottish Government Executive Agency, states that:

‘All of the key priorities are focused on improving attainment, and schools, colleges and education authorities should consider them in the context of raising attainment for all whilst using the curriculum to close the gap in attainment between the most and the least disadvantaged.’⁶

Third Sector engagement has been identified as having a major role. According to the Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee the Third Sector ‘may be more effective than schools at delivering improved outcomes for certain children and young people’⁷.

A role for the John Muir Trust

The John Muir Award – the Trust’s main engagement initiative – is used to **encourage, recognise and celebrate achievements of individuals**. It supports people of all ages and backgrounds to **connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places**. It is used across numerous sectors including schools (primary, secondary, special and independent), youth work, further and higher education, outdoor learning, training & employment, and health. In Scotland, the John Muir Award is delivered through more than 600 diverse partner organisations – as well as family groups – throughout these sectors. 15,000 Awards are achieved each year across all 32 local authority areas.

In the 2015 ‘How Good Is Our Third Sector Organisation’ survey of organisations that deliver the John Muir Award in Scotland over 73% agreed that **‘the John Muir Award helps the people we work with improve attainment?’** Qualitative survey responses highlighted a role in ‘providing opportunities to develop new skills which lead to improvement in self-motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose’. Also, ‘John Muir Award achievement gives the chance to experience success – for the first time for many – and see that they are making a difference’⁸.

The Awards Network – a network of youth awards in Scotland – notes that ‘increasingly schools are looking to recognise the breadth of young people’s achievement, not simply their ability to pass exams’⁹. An Audit Scotland *School education* report highlights the value of award schemes that encourage and celebrate wider achievement ‘designed to allow pupils to develop skills for life such as self-management, problem solving, teamwork and communication. These are attributes that major employers value’¹⁰.

Integration of the John Muir Award through formal and informal learning helps provide opportunities to build skills, recognise achievement, and gain real life experiences. These can be referenced in many ways, including pupil profiling, personal statements, job/college applications and interviews, all of which can move people towards positive destinations and employment¹¹.



Photo © Katrina Martin

⁵ Rise to the challenge in education <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/>

⁶ The Curriculum for Excellence Implementation Plan 2015-16 www.educationscotland.gov.uk

⁷ Education and Culture Committee T3.40 (May 2015)

⁸ John Muir Award Provider Survey – Scotland (2015) www.johnmuiraward.org

⁹ Amazing Things – a guide to the youth awards in Scotland (Third edition) www.awardsnetwork.org

¹⁰ School education Audit Scotland (June 2014) www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

¹¹ Employability and the John Muir Award www.johnmuiraward.org

Inclusion and the John Muir Award

The John Muir Award is made available for free by the John Muir Trust. This is of particular relevance to efforts to close the attainment gap as it helps ensure that social circumstances aren't a barrier to opportunities to experience wild places and contributory experiences.

At least 25% of John Muir Awards in Scotland every year are achieved by people experiencing some form of disadvantage. In a report on the varied backgrounds of John Muir Award participation, a range of inclusion themes were identified – from young people disengaged with education to people who are unemployed, and from at-risk-families to people experiencing health difficulties¹².

Scottish Government 'Closing the Gap'¹³ – statements and responses

The Scottish Government recognises a need to secure consistent, continuous improvement within our education system to meet the needs of every child.

The draft **National Improvement Framework** for Scottish Education aims to drive improvement in our education system. It will bring together a range of key performance information to improve outcomes for every child in Scotland, particularly for the most disadvantaged¹⁴. The John Muir Trust will continue to provide the John Muir Award for free. We will also carry on providing Award data 'to help improve education consistency, transparency and robustness across the country'.

We will work with 600 educational organisations across Scotland each year, supporting 15,000 John Muir Awards – including pupils & parents who experience disadvantage. We will maintain a consistent approach to Getting It Right For Every Child.

The Scottish Government wants to enable schools to successfully manage their own local improvements that will allow them to meet the particular needs of students, families and communities.

We will continue to promote how the John Muir Award can be used with schools, families and wider non-school communities to develop how they use Curriculum for Excellence across a range of educational needs. We aim to recognise achievement across key foundations of learning such as literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing in the context of nature connection¹⁵. We will also focus on specific Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation areas highlighted by Scottish Natural Heritage including Dundee and Central Scotland.

And to equip teachers and professionals with the authority, resources and skills necessary to do this. We will continue to support Professional Development for Teachers in Scotland by providing training opportunities and promoting John Muir Award links to Professional Standards and themes of values, sustainability and leadership¹⁶. We will continue to support Learning for Sustainability as an approach to life and learning compatible with a sustainable and equitable society.

Conclusion

In recognising the challenge in closing the attainment gap the John Muir Trust sees our environment – and the protection and enjoyment of wild places through outdoor learning in schools and colleges, community and youth work – as contributing significantly and positively to Scotland's attainment mix.

This paper will be monitored and updated accordingly, feedback is welcomed (Oct 2015).



Photo © Mike Harvey

¹² Inclusion, wild places and the John Muir Award www.johnmuiraward.org

¹³ The Scottish Government 'Closing the Gap' www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools

¹⁴ Draft National Improvement Framework www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/7802

¹⁵ Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award www.johnmuiraward.org

¹⁶ The John Muir Award and Professional Development for Teachers in Scotland www.johnmuiraward.org

Example learning settings – how organisations using the John Muir Award have helped children & young people with attainment.

Example learning groups	How is the John Muir Award used?	How does this relate to improving attainment e.g. helped essential skills for life, learning & work?
Youth Group Ref: Amazing Things – a guide to the youth awards in Scotland	Encouraging a less formal approach to learning allowing for hands-on community project involvement.	“We work intensively with young people with self-esteem and confidence issues. They’ve benefited from a more informal way of learning – volunteering in their community and opting into taking part in the John Muir Award.” Youth worker, The Edge Youth Project
Primary School – residential Ref: Ardroy OEC John Muir Award Case Study	Helping an Outdoor Education Centre integrate adventure & team-building activities with an environmental/National Park context and focus.	“We’ve seen that pupils who participate in the John Muir Award become more resilient, confident, responsible, reflective, better at goal setting and at being team players. Strength in these attributes impacts on attainment, and using the John Muir Award definitely provides opportunities to develop them.” Depute Head Teacher, Donibristle Primary School
Secondary School Ref: Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award	Embedding a cross-curricular outdoor learning approach to promote interdisciplinary learning across a whole year group.	“It [John Muir Award] helps staff and pupils re-evaluate abilities – as pupils recognise their achievements, their ambition increases and discussions open up about alternative learning and career opportunities.” Teacher, Hillpark Secondary School
Special School Ref: Inclusion, wild places and the John Muir Award	Engaging young people experiencing behavioural or self-esteem issues which affect education attainment.	“It has opened up education. Pupils are keen to relate their outdoor activities with enthusiasm in science, English and even technical studies. The John Muir Award is getting through to young people that are often a struggle to reach at school.” Teacher, The Good Shepherd Centre
Independent School – residential Ref: George Watson’s College John Muir Award Case Study	Giving pupils the chance to spend time in and value Scotland’s remote and inspiring landscapes, and take personal responsibility for them.	“Now I’ve experienced such a wild area I can see the beauty and importance of maintaining these places throughout the world.” “[The John Muir Award] has made me feel that there is a lot more for us to discover with the wild places around us. There are a lot more places that are so near but we have never realised them, but now they have become more inviting.” Pupils, George Watson’s College
Youth Employability Programme Ref: Employability and the John Muir Award	Helping to measure, recognise and celebrate achievements in wild places in and around Glasgow.	“It is advantageous to mention awards in CVs and in personal statements for postgraduate study or employment. One student mentioned her John Muir Award on her successful application for a Talent Scholarship at the University of Glasgow.” Lecturer, Wider Access Programme, Glasgow Kelvin College