

John Muir Award in Scotland's Colleges 2018-19



Key headlines

- 421 students and staff achieved John Muir Awards during the 2018-19 academic year
- 81% of Awards achieved by people facing some form of disadvantage
- 59% of further education colleges in Scotland¹ were involved in delivering the Award
- 24% of Awards achieved at a progressive level



The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that helps people enjoy, connect with and care for wild places, from college campus greenspaces and urban nature to residential trips in our National Parks, mountains and coasts.

Each year, Scottish colleges use the Award to add value to a wide range of courses and subject areas, with many embedding it into their core curriculum. Examples include support for learning; mental health and wellbeing; employability skills; alternative curriculum and school-college transitions; adult learning; outdoor and adventure education; personal development; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); childhood practice; and sciences.

With increasing awareness of the importance of the natural environment for people's wellbeing and for our planet, many colleges are using the John Muir Award to offer a personal learning context for exploring sustainability through direct experiences of nature. Each Award participant takes responsibility for wild places, making a positive difference to nature and local communities, creating opportunities to engage with 'bigger-than-self' national and global issues.

Jim Metcalfe, Chief Executive of College Development Network (CDN) said:

"College communities have an important role to play in contributing to a sustainable society. Learning for Sustainability is embedded in the [Professional Standards for College Lecturers in Scotland](#), and it's fantastic to see the transformative learning experiences being delivered that are empowering learners to make a positive difference."

The examples on the following pages highlight some of the ways in which Scotland's colleges are demonstrating Learning for Sustainability in action through the John Muir Award.

Why do colleges use the John Muir Award?

Working towards a John Muir Award can provide a framework for new or existing activities, offer additional motivation for engagement with learning and give important recognition of achievements for a wide range of learners.

It contributes to delivery of national priorities including the Curriculum for Excellence, attainment, employability, health and wellbeing, and improving access.

It's frequently used to expand opportunities for those facing some kind of disadvantage, such as poor mental health, disability or poverty, and offers flexibility to suit individual needs and interests.

¹ Colleges involved - Borders College, Edinburgh College, Fife College, Forth Valley College, Glasgow Clyde College, Glasgow Kelvin College, New College Lanarkshire, North East Scotland College, University of the Highlands and Islands (Inverness, Perth and West Highland college campuses), West College Scotland. Activity at Cantraybridge College is also included.

Improving biodiversity and building life skills

At **Glasgow Kelvin College's** Springburn campus, the NQ Personal Achievement course focuses on skills-based learning and confidence building, allowing learners with additional support needs to build up their achievements in small steps. During 2018-19, exploring biodiversity in urban greenspaces opened up opportunities for active learning experiences, with students working in partnership with the Glasgow City Council Countryside Rangers in local parks and college grounds, including helping to create a wildflower garden. Working towards a John Muir Award added additional value, with external recognition bolstering the students' pride in their achievements, their new skillsets and in the improvements they made to Glasgow's natural environments.



© Colin Scott

Lecturer Colin Scott noted the difference that engaging students in hands-on learning made: *"It's been an outstanding success. In total they have completed in excess of 100 hours of activity working with myself at our college greenspace where they have done an amazing job of creating a wildflower garden and caring for the existing greenspace. They have been really fortunate to work with Countryside Rangers Fiona and Linzi over at Pollok Park as part of the Flower Power Programme. This has been the perfect blend of activities with the young people becoming really motivated and learning a host of genuinely important life skills...and a great beginning to their 'independent' lives in the great outdoors."*

STEM and youth social action

At **New College Lanarkshire's** Coatbridge Campus, students on the NQ6 Animal Biology and Conservation course embraced the power of youth social action for the environment. Benefitting from an interdisciplinary approach towards the STEM curriculum, the group developed their investigative and scientific skills through wildlife surveying and soil and water sampling, and improved their communication and research skills whilst learning about local habitats and Muir's conservation legacy. The students gained practical conservation experience with the support of North Lanarkshire Council Countryside Ranger Service in Drumpelie Country Park, undertaking tasks such as tree planting and invasive species removal.

Seeing the difference they were making helped to increase motivation and enthusiasm for taking responsibility to help nature to flourish, with their efforts being recognised by a parliamentary motion celebrating their achievements. Many students were passionate about expanding on activities in their own time, including getting involved in local conservation volunteering initiatives, starting up their own group to tackle local litter issues and attending a John Muir Trust marine conservation talk.



Lecturer, Michael Balzo, who co-ordinated the students' effort, said: *"It's been amazing to see how working towards the John Muir Award has boosted students' confidence and motivation. Students told us that it helped them to become more aware of the nature around them and to*

look after it while at the same time contributing to their local community. It made them realise they can really make a difference. We should all be inspired by the passion students put in their effort to create a more sustainable college and I am sure they will be a model for future generations of students."

Encouraging local action on global issues

At **Edinburgh College**, the John Muir Award is delivered across multiple campuses through the Access and Continuing Education department's courses, offering students opportunities to build their skills, challenge themselves and make a difference for nature in their local community.

For students on the Entry to Learning course, working towards the Award has offered valuable recognition of achievements and has been a natural fit with an SQA Environmental Issues unit. Investigating global challenges such as climate change, deforestation and pollution, and potential solutions including pro-environmental behaviour change and campaigning, was brought to life through hands-on conservation tasks in the college's community garden, reinforcing links between local actions and global issues. Hosting an event for the wider college community in the garden enabled the group to showcase their work, lead guided tours and gain pledges from visiting staff and students on how they will take action for a more sustainable future through their own choices, behaviours and volunteering.

Importantly, connecting with and enjoying time in nature together has also been at the heart of the students' work, as lecturer, Robbie Carruthers, explains:

"The John Muir Award has been great fun for not only the students involved but myself as well. It has allowed the students to get hands on experience and involvement in a rapidly growing part of the college and wider international community in an interactive and interesting way that can be easily tailored to suit their learning needs. Additionally, as a lecturer I have found it really beneficial to run the Award to challenge and develop my own skills away from the classroom. Our afternoons out working towards the Award are the highlight of my own and the student's weeks."



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Feeling inspired?

- Find out about the John Muir Award and how to get involved at www.johnmuiraward.org
- Download the Scottish Government's [Learning for Sustainability Action Plan](#) and consider how your organisation can contribute
- For ideas and initiatives to help explore sustainable development and climate action as part of your John Muir Award, see our [Sustainability Resource Guide](#)
- Share and find ideas using #JohnMuirAward on social media