

Professional Recognition in Outdoor Learning and the John Muir Award – Boclair Academy



Teachers can use the John Muir Award as a framework to work towards [Professional Recognition](#) in Outdoor Learning. This offers an opportunity for teachers to develop their professional learning and gain accreditation from the General Teaching Council of Scotland. Teachers can take a self-guided route or can participate through accredited learning programmes. 'Teaching in Nature' is one such accredited programme, delivered by [Grounds for Learning](#) where teachers commit to heading outside with their classes, and have the opportunity to use the John Muir Award to support outdoor learning.



Jennifer Crocket, Depute Head Teacher, and Ruth Bone, Principle Teacher for Geography, at Boclair Academy in East Dunbartonshire, worked towards Professional Recognition through Teaching in Nature. Jennifer and Ruth were asked to provide evidence of their professional actions for enhancing their knowledge, understanding and practice. They also had to critically reflect on their own practice and impacts on pupils, colleagues and the wider school community within the context of Teaching Professional Standards. Here, they share their experiences of planning and delivering the John Muir Award, based on extracts from their Teaching in Nature reflective learning logs.

Professional Actions

Jennifer is responsible for the development of Achievement at Boclair Academy:

"I chose to deliver the John Muir Award with a whole year group of S1 pupils and was keen to make use of outdoor spaces in the school grounds, a local park and woods. From the outset this opportunity to develop professional learning and gain accreditation seemed an ideal context to encourage learners to engage with the outdoors. We thought it would broaden understanding of what the 'wild' has to offer teachers and pupils – both as a place of enjoyment and contextual learning. To ensure that the John Muir Award would be fully embedded within the school curriculum, I set up a cross curricular working group to encourage staff to take the lead in taking learning outdoors and referencing back in the classroom. As a result, four departments got involved - English, Geography, Modern Languages and Science."

Getting other staff at the school on board was essential. Ruth led departmental meeting in the open air - to help staff modify a work unit across the S1 Geography curriculum.

"I felt this was important in order to get the staff talking, feeling motivated and fully engaging with the newly developed unit and a different teaching approach. Staff incorporated Geographical Skills for Level 3 of Curriculum for Excellence, along with various Health and Wellbeing outcomes. Numeracy was also a major part of the work undertaken. Pupils spent time outdoors creating scale maps and measuring trees."

The result was a project spanning six months, with all S1 pupils spending at least four days learning outdoors, with direct curricular focus. Students explored nature through different subject areas and took action to care for their local wild places by planting trees in the wood and school grounds, and - with support from a local residents' association - started the development of a wildlife meadow in the nearby park.

Critical reflection: Impact on pupils

Jennifer: "All learners at Boclair Academy gathered their evidence in order to discuss and share their John Muir Award experiences. Feedback from pupils showed that they enjoyed taking their learning outdoors. We can see the real benefits to the Health and Wellbeing of all of the young people that have taken part, and the development of a sense of pride in the practical work undertaken. One or two pupils in particular have shown a marked improvement in their behaviour and enthusiasm for learning when working outdoors. Staff are now working hard to harness this and continue to develop their positive attitude to learning back inside the classroom."

Ruth: "Pupils now use the school grounds regularly and are more confident as a result. They have become more creative from this exploration of their local environment and this has allowed pupils to build closer relationships with other students and staff. It has had a marked impact on work within the classroom and has increased pupils' productivity".

Critical reflection: Impact on teaching practice, colleagues and wider school community

Ruth: "We feel the work undertaken has forged a number of very strong cross-curriculum links within the school that will continue to grow and develop over the coming years. Staff across departments are now more confident in taking learning outdoors and finding new ways to creatively develop their skills."

Jennifer: "At the planning stages we hoped that delivering the John Muir Award would encourage the local community to engage with the school in a positive way, with direct improvements for local green spaces. This has definitely been one of the benefits of the project, with the involvement of local press."

Next steps

Boclair Academy is committed to creating further opportunities for pupils to meet curriculum outcomes outdoors, making more connections with local greenspaces, and learning new skills. The school is working with one of their cluster Primary schools to develop a transition programme which will encourage P7 pupils to learn about John Muir, as well as start engaging with the wild places being used for the S1 project. They feel this will help learners approach their John Muir Award in S1 with a fuller understanding of their local area and their own responsibility for caring for it.

For more information:

- [The John Muir Award and Professional Development for Teachers](#) – information on how the John Muir Award helps to meet Professional Standards.
- [The Curriculum for Excellence and John Muir Award](#) - the John Muir Award offers an ideal structure to support pupils and teachers in their engagement with the Curriculum for Excellence.
- John Muir Award [Scotland Providers Survey 2015](#) – leaders share their experience of impacts on learning and teaching.