



## Potential Impact of Defunding the Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist Apprenticeship

The proposed defunding of the Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist Apprenticeship from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 risks causing disproportionate harm to a small but socially valuable sector at the point when the standard is beginning to gain traction with employers.

The standard prepares practitioners to design and deliver outdoor learning programmes that support educational achievement; it also aligns with professional recognition through the Institute for Outdoor Learning.

This is not a marginal workforce route. A large proportion of Level 5 apprentices work directly within schools and education settings, where their contribution aligns closely with the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). Through structured outdoor learning, apprentices support young people's development in key EIF judgement areas, including:

- Personal Development
- Achievement and engagement with learning
- Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines
- Children's welfare and wellbeing
- Inclusion, particularly for SEND learners

Outdoor learning specialists support schools, residential centres, charities and specialist providers to deliver structured learning through outdoor experiences. At a time when policymakers are rightly focused on children's wellbeing, enrichment, SEND inclusion and workforce development, removing this apprenticeship would send the wrong signal.

The sector is small and specialist. Historic starts data is not a reliable measure for present or future need. Unlike high-volume apprenticeship markets, outdoor learning provision grows slowly through employer confidence, partnerships and workforce planning; employers are now using the standard confidently. Defunding it now would cut short an emerging progression route before it has had a fair opportunity to mature.

The impact on career development would be particularly acute. Many Level 5 apprentices progress directly from the Level 3 Outdoor Activity Instructor apprenticeship, making the Level 5 a natural and essential next step for young people at the start of their careers. Removing it would take opportunity away from those who are only just beginning to establish themselves in the sector.

The sector has not been consulted on the proposed defunding, despite being small, specialist and highly dependent on stable workforce routes. Without sensible transition arrangements, learners who are effectively ready to begin could lose their place despite employers having already committed resource and intent.

A policy intended to improve value for money should not unintentionally dismantle a pathway that supports children, communities and a growing specialist workforce.

MPs may therefore wish to press for one of three actions:

1. A pause in defunding this standard to allow proper consultation with the sector.
2. A longer transition period to protect learners already in recruitment pipelines.
3. A specific exemption for small and specialist standards where current employer demand is not reflected in historic starts.

**Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL)** Warwick Mill Business Centre, Warwick Bridge, Cumbria, CA4 8RR

+44 (0)1228 564580

[institute@outdoor-learning.org](mailto:institute@outdoor-learning.org)

[www.outdoor-learning.org](http://www.outdoor-learning.org)

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No 1149420) and in Scotland (No SC039561)



Voice



Community



Workforce



Standards