

## 4.0: Outcomes of outdoor learning

**Successful outcomes are interlinked with, and a measure of, effective, high quality outdoor learning practice.**

They can be formalised as intended goals, assessed as part of a particular programme, or achieved in other ways resulting from the individual participant's interpretation of the experience. Some unintended outcomes can be negative of course, and may be beyond the control of the facilitator, and it is important to acknowledge this possibility as part of the risk benefit analysis of the activity. Considering the positive learning environment, listening to participants' concerns, and addressing issues as they arise all contribute to reduced likelihood of negative experiences and greater chances of meeting intended outcomes.

Not all outcomes will be achieved - or achievable - with every session, or with every practitioner. Programmes may be specific in their goals or have a more general focus. Some outcomes may be staging posts on the way to others. Enjoyment, for example, may be the key to longer term engagement in education, understanding personal health and self-awareness, or to developing healthy relationships with others or the natural environment. Similarly, other outcomes could contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing, a result of many contributing factors.



## Assessing outcomes

Assessing outcomes is not always necessary. Sometimes, providing an experience that enables participants to develop their own outcomes is entirely appropriate. More commonly, however, the requirements of funders, policy makers, clients and participants themselves means that gauging the success of a programme or intervention is necessary.

Being clear about both what can be achieved and what has been achieved provides a pathway to greater effectiveness and an increased likelihood of success. Using the Theory of Change model, understanding the desired outcomes suggests the appropriate activities, conversations and approaches that are most likely to achieve success. Assessing whether those outcomes have been met helps providers to both prove the value of their programme and to improve their practice.

The indicators relating to each High Quality Outdoor Learning outcome provide a basis for designing participant surveys, impact assessments or observation records.





## Outcomes frameworks

Many participants will already be involved with an organisation that may be using outdoor learning themselves to achieve their own identified goals and outcomes or working with providers to achieve them.

Examples of outcomes frameworks include:

- » School / academic qualification curricula
- » NYA National Youth Work Curriculum<sup>1</sup>
- » Youth Link Scotland National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework<sup>2</sup>
- » Centre for Youth Impact Outcomes Framework 2.1<sup>3</sup>

When individuals take part in outdoor learning activities, they may have their own goals in mind that providers help them to meet. At a personal and social development level, youth work and education frameworks share common aspirations, aiming to achieve<sup>4 5</sup>:

- » Healthy, confident individuals.
- » Self-directed, capable and creative learners.
- » Sociable, connected and confident people.
- » Effective contributors to their communities, workplaces and society.
- » Active, responsible global citizens.

The ten outcomes of high quality outdoor learning (see overleaf) are broad themes that incorporate a wide range of more specific outcomes. They bring together experience from practice across the field of outdoor learning, outcomes frameworks from youth and education sectors and academic research. The outcomes demonstrate how outdoor learning can be used as an approach to meet a wide range of intended goals, identified through theories of change, across health, wellbeing, environment, education, community, economy and recreation sectors.

In providing high quality outdoor learning organisations, groups and individuals need to be clear about their intended outcomes and their wider vision for outdoor learning.

**When providers and practitioners are delivering progressive high quality outdoor learning, they and other observers will see participants who are:**

- 1.** Learning to appreciate the benefits of physical fitness and the lifelong value of participation in healthy active leisure activities.
- 2.** Developing their self-awareness and social skills, and their appreciation of the contributions and achievements of themselves and of others.
- 3.** Becoming receptive to the natural environment and understand the importance of conservation and pro environmental behaviour.
- 4.** Developing a positive attitude to challenge, learning and adventure.
- 5.** Developing personal confidence and character through taking on challenges and achieving success.
- 6.** Acquiring and developing a range of skills and knowledge as a result of, and in support of, their participation in outdoor activities, recreation and exploration.
- 7.** Demonstrating increased initiative, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance, tenacity and commitment.
- 8.** Developing and extending their key skills of communication, problem-solving, leadership and teamwork.
- 9.** Displaying an increased motivation and appetite for learning that is contributing to raised levels of achievement and progress in other aspects of their development.
- 10.** Broadening their horizons and becoming aware of a wider range of recreation and employment opportunities and life chances, life choices and lifestyles.



## References

- 1 NYA (2024) National Youth Work Curriculum. Available at: <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/5.3.1-0923-NYA-Youth-Work-Curriculum-DIGITAL1-03.24-1.pdf>
- 2 Youth Link Scotland (2022) National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework. Available at: <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youth-work-outcomes-skills/>
- 3 McNeil (B. and Stuart, K. (2022) A Framework of Outcomes for Young People 2.1. Available at: <https://www.ymcageorgewilliams.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Outcomes%20Framework%202.1%20FINAL1.pdf>
- 4 Harvey, D. (2022) Outdoor learning across the community: the development of progression and ecosystem models to enhance engagement. Doctoral thesis, University of Cumbria.
- 5 Malone, K. and Waite, S. (2016) Student Outcomes and Natural Schooling. Plymouth: Plymouth University.

## See also

- 2.6 Theory of change
- 1.2 The benefits of outdoor learning
- 2.0 Understanding quality in outdoor learning
- 3.0 High quality outdoor learning in practice

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