

JOHN MUIR AWARD AND THE CURRICULUM



PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA MARTIN

The John Muir Award is a UK-wide environmental award scheme, focused on wild places.

In a school setting, it can be used to support experiential learning outside the classroom, and celebrate achievement in and beyond formal education.

The Curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers develop exciting and stimulating lessons. Its aim is to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. It is just one element of a young person's education; wide-ranging experiences can be planned within the school day. A school approach that has suitable breadth, depth and relevance to meet the needs and interests of learners can embrace initiatives that support outdoor learning, such as the John Muir Award.

It is widely recognised that learning in the natural environment contributes to a varied and enriching curriculum¹. The John Muir Award can be used to support teachers' delivery of outdoor learning, incorporating practical, creative and engaging approaches that are inclusive and beneficial to all.

“Giving children the opportunity to discover, learn about and experience the natural world is hugely important - it can help create a sense of belonging rooted in their local environment, enhancing their health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.”

Transforming Outdoor Learning in Schools, Lessons from the Natural Connections Project. 2016²

¹Natural Connections Demonstration Project. 2012-2016: Final Report
www.publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6636651036540928

²Transforming Outdoor Learning in Schools: Lessons from the Natural Connections Project
www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/oelres-net/transforming

How can it contribute to learning in schools?

Use this document and its links to find out more about the John Muir Award and how it can be used:

- in teaching contexts to contribute to learning
- to help schools deliver rich experiences
- to support wider school priorities
- to recognise and celebrate achievement

“Taking part in the John Muir Award has been a great success at the school and a hit with all of the pupils involved. They now have a feeling of ownership of their wild spaces as they have helped to create them!”

*Andy Matthews, Outdoor Leader,
Unity Trust*

Introducing the John Muir Award

THE JOHN MUIR AWARD encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It's free, open to all and suitable for upper Key Stage 2 and above. For further guidance on suitability please see the 'Get Involved' section of the website prior to planning your involvement.

It provides a flexible framework within which activities identified by your school, college, or youth organisation can be tailored to meet the needs of the group, the wild place(s) chosen, and the curriculum. It is achieved at an individual level, and can be used with class groups, whole year groups, small groups of learners, individuals and families.

Four Challenges are at the heart of the John Muir Award. They are designed to promote a holistic approach to learning – including awareness, understanding and action – and reflect John Muir's wilderness experience (For more on John Muir, see discoverjohnmuir.com).

To achieve a John Muir Award each individual participant engages in a range of activities that meet the following four Challenges:

- **Discover a wild place(s) – this can range from school grounds to mountain ranges**
- **Explore it – do things to raise awareness, increase understanding**
- **Conserve it – take personal responsibility**
- **Share your experiences**

Summary documents demonstrating how the John Muir Award contributes to the education landscape are available at the Key Documents section of the Award website.

Search 'John Muir Award - England Education Overview'.

The John Muir Award helps children and adults to go outside and embrace their natural surroundings. It makes them understand how important the outdoors is.

Why use the John Muir Award in your school? Use it to:

- help meet priorities such as improving attainment, closing gaps in attainment and opportunity, improving behaviour and attendance, and increasing engagement with learning
- respond to the needs of all, including children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, or those learning outside mainstream education
- encourage an experiential approach to teaching curriculum subjects including the core subjects
- provide a flexible framework that helps to join up learning across subject or activity areas
- support and evidence a broad and balanced curriculum
- celebrate individual achievement with a nationally recognised award
- promote physical and emotional wellbeing
- reinforce values-based learning, promoting citizenship and character development
- provide Continuing Professional Learning and Development opportunities for staff
- be cost effective - it's free to use
- give focus and structure to a residential experience, field trip or visit, providing links between remote and school-based activity
- give context for social action projects, including practical activity within the local community
- provide opportunities for progression, increasing personal responsibility, leadership and challenge
- bring focus and learning context to extracurricular and enrichment activities
- utilise school grounds, local or more distant wild places, and make connections between them
- complement other award schemes and initiatives e.g. National Citizen Service, Eco-Schools, Forest Schools and Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- support parental, family and community involvement in shared outdoor experiences

PHOTOGRAPH: ARDROY OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

The John Muir Award in action in schools



Enhancing School Grounds and the Local Environment

Encourage students and teachers to get to know and improve the quality of local wild places, including school grounds and parks. Stimulate a process of engagement, valuing and taking ownership.

Balshaw's Church of England High School, Lancashire

Teachers use the John Muir Award as part of a school commitment to generate interest in sustainability and conservation at school, home and further afield.

Search 'John Muir Award case study Balshaw'

Cross curricular planning

Enhance subject delivery and promote cross curricular links and themes across learning.

Mill View School

The school uses the John Muir Award in its cross curricular approach to encourage all pupils with differing abilities and interests to achieve. Activities include: researching John Muir and creating a biography, environmental surveys, artwork, and conservation tasks to improve biodiversity within the school grounds.

Search 'John Muir Award case study Mill View'

Youth Work and Vocational Studies

Combine outdoor experiences with vocational studies such as ASDAN, BTEC, (alongside other youth work schemes such as the [Duke of Edinburgh's Award](#)). Use the John Muir Award framework to engage young people with education in practical ways, to enhance an appreciation for the outdoors, and develop new and important life skills and qualifications.

Fairfield High School, Herefordshire

As part of their BTEC First Certificate in Sport, students orienteer, gorge walk, mountaineer, navigate, cave, rock-climb and camp, as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions.

Search 'John Muir Award case study Fairfield'

Residential Experiences

A residential learning experience provides opportunities, benefits and impacts that cannot be achieved in any other educational context or setting (Learning Away Evaluation Report 2015). Use the John Muir Award to enhance awareness and understanding in relation to the stimulating natural environments in which they often take place, and to help bridge the gap between school and outdoor or field centre experiences.

Case study – Brilliant Residentials in the Lake District National Park

At Moorside Primary School, Lancaster pupils are engaged in outdoor learning throughout their school career. This culminates in a full term's worth of adventure-themed learning in Year 6 and a week-long residential in the Lake District National Park.

Search 'John Muir Award case study Moorside'

Learning Away – #BrilliantResidentials

Moorside School's use of the John Muir Award with Cumbria Outdoors embeds many key aspects identified in a significant five year study into residential experiences, 'Learning Away - Brilliant Residentials':

- fully integrated with a school curriculum and ethos
- part of a progressive programme of experiences
- planned with clear learning objectives to meet students' specific learning needs
- includes a wide range of new and memorable experiences
- designed to allow space for students to develop collaborative relationships with both peers and staff
- planned so that learning is embedded and reinforced back in school

Brilliant Residentials, Learning Away Report, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, June 2015

#BrilliantResidentials

Search 'Learning Away'

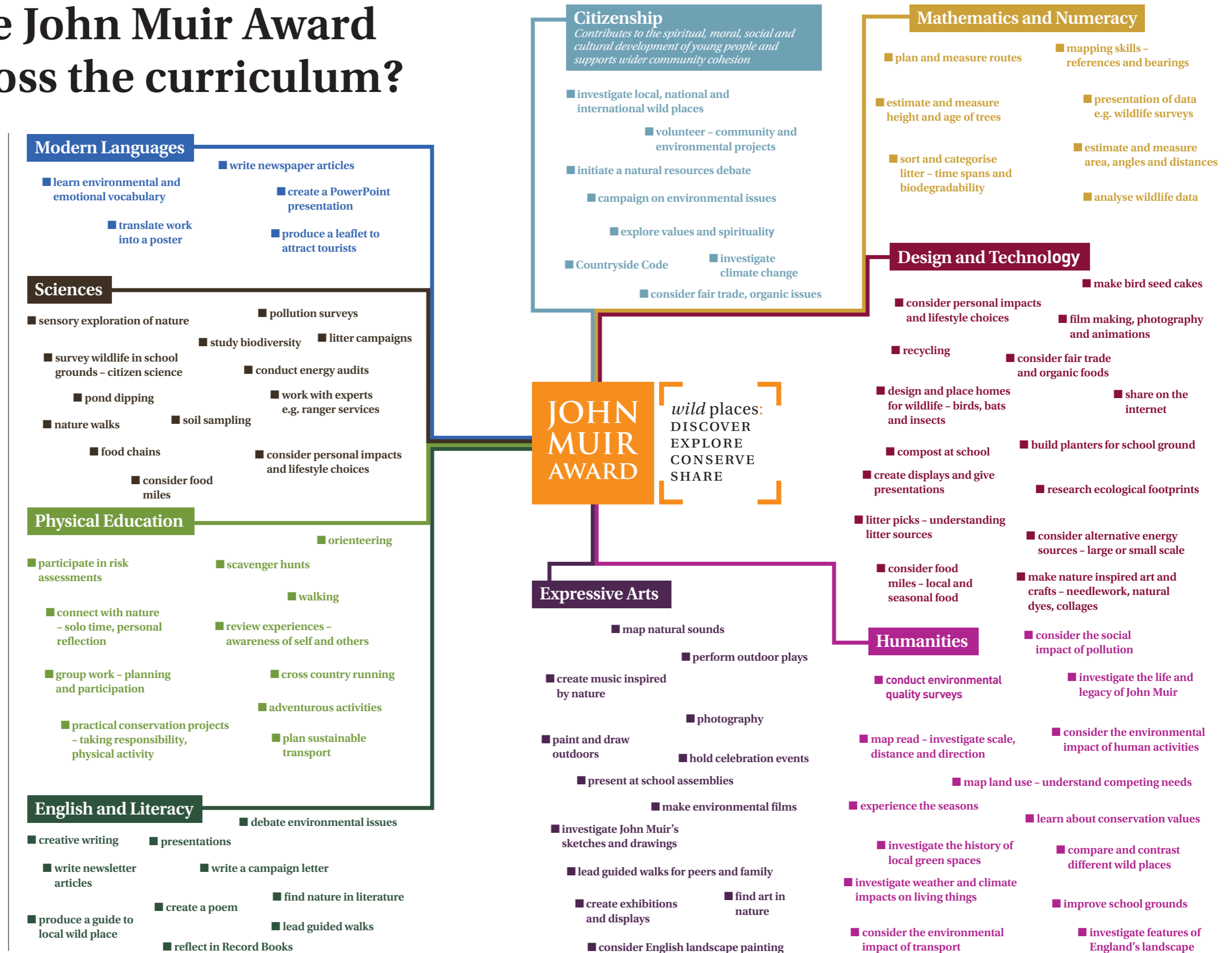


How can the John Muir Award be used across the curriculum?

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES and topics that have contributed to meeting the John Muir Award Challenges of Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share.

Activities can:

- take learning outdoors
- make connections across the Curriculum
- support whole school priorities such as core subject enrichment and strategies to close the attainment gap



How can the John Muir Award support school priorities?

The Core Subjects

Curriculum objectives in the core subjects can be met and brought to life via experiential approaches – which are at the heart of the John Muir Award. Use it to invigorate the teaching of core subjects, to encourage multi-disciplinary experiences, to try new things. The natural environment can inspire creativity and motivate high levels of educational engagement, leading to associated positive outcomes such as raised attainment.

Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

A key aim of the John Muir Award is to ensure that social and economic circumstances aren't a barrier to experiencing wild places. Every year at least 25% of people involved are experiencing some form of disadvantage. It is made available for free by the John Muir Trust and is open to all, regardless of background or location.

The John Muir Award is effective with many pupils who have additional educational needs. It can be used to engage and challenge pupils with support needs at a level suitable to them (providing its criteria are met) whilst remaining achievable and meaningful to learners. It can be used by schools and referral units, to support and re-engage young people in alternative provision settings to widen their educational opportunities.

Inclusion, Wild Places and The John Muir Award: a showcase of inclusion-related John Muir Award activity.
Search 'John Muir Award Inclusion Wild Places'

Progress and Attainment

The John Muir Award can be embedded within strategies and interventions used to improve progress and raise attainment. Teachers making use of it report an increase in pupils' motivation and confidence. They find it can help develop skills such as planning and decision making, reasoning and communication. For many it is a way to re-evaluate their abilities, see themselves achieving, and be more ambitious. These are seen as key to an engagement in learning and a foundation of attainment (see Natural Connections diagram below).

Outdoor Learning

The outdoors offers huge potential for learning that can be fun, adventurous, exhilarating, challenging and creative. It can offer a context for formative experiences that inspire confidence, awareness and appreciation, values and responsibility. Learning can take place in a broad spectrum of settings and timeframes, from spontaneous school grounds activities to expeditions in National Parks, from field study trips to residential at outdoor centres. The John Muir Award can inspire more activity outdoors, bridge indoor and outdoor learning, and give recognition for ongoing endeavors.

Evidence highlights that securing pupils' interest and engagement with learning through outdoor approaches has a part to play in raising attainment. It has wide-reaching and positive outcomes for pupils and teachers, including: improved relationships, behavior and attendance; enhanced health and wellbeing; enjoyment and engagement in learning. These are seen as foundations to successful learning (see Natural Connections diagram below).



Figure 1: The pathway to raised attainment through outdoor learning, Natural England 2016
Search 'Transforming Outdoor Learning in Schools'

John Muir Award Resource Guide- Outdoor Learning
Search 'John Muir Award Outdoor Learning Resource Guide'

Watch the short **Natural Connections Project Film**
Read the **Natural Connections Project Report** for further insight and examples of the benefits and impacts of outdoor teaching and learning.
Search 'Natural Connections Project'



Teaching

Teaching approaches that incorporate outdoor elements aren't second nature to everyone. It might be perceived that special skills are needed. That technical kit is required. That it's a bureaucracy-laden exercise, or the sole realm of the school's eco-rep.

The John Muir Award can be approached from an existing skills base. Any educator can use it, utilising their own attributes and teaching competences. For many, its structure (and guidance available) offers encouragement to take the first steps outside – in an educational sense. It can be used in the context of Continuing Professional Development, invite support and cross-departmental interaction, and help to remove barriers that can prevent learning in the natural environment.

Teachers using the John Muir Award report an increase in confidence in their leadership; that it gives them an opportunity to try a different learning approach and develop new skills. They also identify a positive impact on relationships with pupils, peers, staff, parents, senior management and wider community partners. This reflects findings from the Transforming Outdoor Learning in Schools, Lessons from the Natural Connections Project 2016.

Health and Wellbeing

There is a sizeable body of evidence demonstrating positive associations between learning in the natural environment and a range of educational, social, developmental, and mental or physical health outcomes. Schools have a key role to play in promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils and teachers. Many use nature as a backdrop for this, and the John Muir Award to support their activity. In a survey of John Muir Award Providers in Scotland, 87% agreed that participation helps people to be more active, with many citing that the very nature of being outdoors encourages physical activity. The Award can also be used as a tool to improve social, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Five Ways to Wellbeing illustrates how schools and outdoor centres have used the John Muir Award in this context.
Search 'John Muir Award Five Ways to Wellbeing'

Character Development

Participation in activities such as volunteering, fundraising and campaigning contributes to a thriving society and can build traits such as confidence, respect and empathy. Schools recognise that developing 'character' has a key role to play in raising pupils' attainment and aspirations. It also improves wellbeing and influences the capacity to reach their full potential. Many schools use the John Muir Award in their approach to developing character. Its flexible framework gives schools freedom to develop activities that reflect specific values and needs, and it recognises progress and achievement.

Developing Character and the John Muir Award highlights how the John Muir Award is used as a supporting approach to character development in schools.

Search 'John Muir Award Character'

Employability skills and preparing for the world of work

Involvement in John Muir Award-related activities can help young people to develop and practise core skills that can assist them to thrive academically and prepare for the world of work. This can provide positive, real life examples and experiences where skills such as problem solving, decision-making, communication and team-working are cultivated. It often brings young people into contact with a range of outdoor, creative and countryside-based roles and can provide positive examples to include in personal statements and discuss at interviews.

Employability and the John Muir Award gives an overview of how the John Muir Award is being used to help move Award participants towards employment.
Search 'John Muir Award Employability'

Volunteering and Social Action

Participating in activities to meet the 'Conserve' aspect of the John Muir Award provides a platform to take personal responsibility for the natural environment. It gives opportunities to take action, develop skills, make decisions and voice opinions, often as part of a collective effort. This can help to create a positive and lasting impact on the school environment or centre grounds, on communities, and on themselves. It's a catalyst for schools, pupils and teachers to be part of the growing youth social action movement.

The John Muir Trust supports the #iwill campaign and has pledged to continue to inspire social action from at least 100,000 young people www.iwill.org.uk/pledge
Search 'iwill John Muir Trust pledge'



PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA MARTIN

Planning your next steps

For further information visit our website www.johnmuiraward.org, where you can:

- Watch a 10 minute introductory film
- Download an Information Handbook – detailed guidance on delivering the Award
- Read Case Studies – see the Award in action in a wide range of settings
- Download Resource Guides on: Outdoor Learning, Biodiversity, AONBs, Wildlife Gardening, Sustainability, Surveys, Outdoor Access, Campaigning, National Parks and John Muir
- Find Key Documents online to plan and review an Award, including Proposal Form guidance
- Find out about John Muir at www.discoverjohnmuir.com

To register, outline your activities on a Proposal Form and email this to englandeducation@johnmuiraward.org. We will review and (if necessary) develop this Proposal with you.

“The John Muir Award has been the best thing we’ve done this year, giving our children experiences they never would otherwise have had, and feeding into a host of curriculum areas.”

Ian Butterworth, Class Teacher, Windmill Primary School



Supported in England by Heritage Lottery Fund

Training opportunities

Training is not a requirement - the Information Handbook and website provide all the information needed to run a John Muir Award. Training is available to complement this information, helping leaders find out more about the ethos of the John Muir Award and practicalities of delivering it. We offer two-day residential and one-day ‘John Muir Award in Schools’ courses. Training can, at certain times, be tailored to meet the needs of groups of leaders and runs for a single day or half day.

Please contact us to discuss use of the John Muir Award in your school, college, outdoor centre or organisation.

Contact

John Muir Award England Education Manager,
Peak District National Park Authority,
Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell,
Derbyshire DE45 1AE

Email: englandeducation@johnmuiraward.org

Tel: 01796 484968

Twitter: #JohnMuirAward, @JohnMuirTrust

The John Muir Trust is the leading wild land conservation charity in the UK. We love wild places and are dedicated to protecting and improving them for people and wildlife. Over 11,000 members support us in our work.
Find out more at johnmuirtrust.org

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