

John Muir Award and Education Recovery

Summary on how the John Muir Trust's engagement initiative supports restarting schools, equity in education and helps raise attainment in Scotland

COVID-19 has created stress and uncertainty across society. Lockdown has highlighted multiple barriers faced by people in some communities more than others, including inequities in health, access to outdoor space and digital connectivity. These barriers have significant impacts on education and learning.

Subject to public health guidance, the Scottish Government plans a blended model of learning to restart school education.¹ The education sector needs support adapting to new ways of working, including embedding Outdoor Learning approaches through Learning for Sustainability.²

Maximising use of outdoor spaces, encouraging nature connection and drawing on existing good practice can help enable physical distancing, meet curriculum outcomes and support the wellbeing of educators, learners and their families.

Over the past five years, the Trust has supported, monitored and researched how different learning establishments use the John Muir Award to support equity in education and raise attainment. This includes a four-year Scottish Attainment Challenge partnership with East Ayrshire Council.



Supporting education recovery	
Schools involvement with the John Muir Award ³ increases teacher confidence, particularly in approaches that focus on closing the equity gap for those pupils and families most disadvantaged.	
The John Muir Award is:	<i>Contributing to a new blended model of learning by:</i>
Focused on wild places such as school grounds, gardens and greenspaces	<i>maximising outdoor spaces and appropriate physical distancing safeguarding</i>
Popular with teachers, youth workers and pupils	<i>improving engagement, confidence and professional development in Outdoor Learning approaches</i>
Adaptable to a range of learning settings	<i>offering a framework and rich context to complement in-school and in-home learning</i>
Flexible to a range of learners and educators	<i>meeting needs in class, family, youth work, nurture, whole year, and professional learning settings</i>
Effective in engaging pupils and families most in need of support	<i>promoting engagement with education, nurture through nature, and celebrating achievement and success</i>
Rooted in key foundations for learning - literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing	<i>sharing a track record of curriculum mapping and demonstrating cross-curricular learning ideas</i>
Embedding Learning for Sustainability	<i>encouraging a personal learning context for exploring sustainability through direct experiences of nature</i>

¹ [Excellence and Equity During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Scottish Government & Local Government)

² National Network for Outdoor Learning Scotland [statement](#)

³ The John Muir Award is a national environmental award scheme www.johnmuiraward.org

John Muir Award in schools across Scotland

During the 2018/19 academic year:

- 19,430 John Muir Awards were achieved by pupils and staff
- 22% of Awards were achieved by pupils facing barriers to learning
- the John Muir Trust worked with 519 schools across all 32 local authorities



Impact:

- 73% of schools, youth and family services agreed that the John Muir Award helps raise attainment
- 87% agreed that participation in the Award helps learners to be more active
- 81% of Providers identified that the Award has helped people they work with be healthy
- 82% of East Ayrshire pupils enjoyed or greatly enjoyed their John Muir Award
- 90% of East Ayrshire teachers believe their confidence in Outdoor Learning has grown since beginning their John Muir Award

How the John Muir Award promotes social and emotional wellbeing

“...teachers should be confident in prioritising their pupils’ physical and mental wellbeing - over anything else - as the best way of supporting children and young people back into learning.” - Deputy First Minister John Swinney⁴



Spending time enjoying, immersed in and tuning into nature gives Award participants opportunities to develop a sense of place and belonging – important aspects for building self-esteem.

Each John Muir Award participant gives back to nature by conserving wild places. These opportunities to demonstrate personal responsibility are shown to improve wellbeing⁵, nature connectedness, and are associated with pro-environmental behaviours.⁶

Closing the equity gap

Alongside social and emotional wellbeing, Education Scotland has identified 12 ‘Approaches to closing the equity gap’.⁷ These include targeting learning needs; promoting literacy and numeracy; healthy lifestyles and tackling health inequalities; employability skills; engaging families and communities; and professional learning and leadership.

Download the Trust’s full report [‘Closing the Gap: how the John Muir Award helps raise attainment in Scotland’](#).

John Muir Trust recognises and thanks our educational partners and funders:



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⁴ Wellbeing of pupils to be prioritised [Scottish Government](#)

⁵ Five Ways to Wellbeing www.johnmuiraward.org

⁶ University of Derby [Five Pathways to Nature Connection](#)

⁷ Approaches to closing the equity gap [Education Scotland, National Improvement Hub](#)