

# John Muir Award Scotland Provider Survey 2015



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For an introduction to the John Muir Award see [www.johnmuiraward.org](http://www.johnmuiraward.org)

## 1. Summary

In 2015 the John Muir Trust conducted a John Muir Award Provider Survey in Scotland. The aim was to assess how using the Award impacts on participants, leaders and organisations that use it.

Below is a brief summary of the findings, followed by a full report.

Although Scotland sourced, this information is valid in a UK – wide context.

### Value, Connect, Care

We asked questions relating to parts of the John Muir Trust's vision – helping people to value and connect with wild places:

**94%** said the John Muir Award helps the people they work with **value wild places**.

*"Pupils' evaluations reflected a change in their ability to 'tune-in' to nature. Most pupils they showed a greater sense of value of their local woodlands".*

**89%** said John Muir Award participation helps the people they work with **put something back** for wild places.

*"The conserve aspect of the Award causes the youngsters to consider the value of the environment to us and how much we rely on it in so many ways".*

### Participant wellbeing

We asked about impacts on participants' wellbeing, specifically in relation to the Scottish Government's wellbeing indicators.

**88%** said doing the John Muir Award helped people be more **Included**

**87%** said involvement helped participants be more **Active**

**95%** said involvement in the Award helped participants to improve in **Achievement**

**73%** of Providers said that involvement in the John Muir Award has helped the people they work with improve **attainment**. The Scottish Government recognises achievement awards help people build essential skills for life, learning and work.

### Leaders' practice

We asked about the impact of using the John Muir Award on those leading it and their professional practice. They told us that using the Award:

- helps to **take learning outdoors**
- gives a **focus and structure** for learning and teaching and is a valued tool to link activities together and recognise activity
- helps **increase confidence** in leadership and teaching
- has given them an opportunity to **try a different approach** and develop new skills
- helps **develop partnerships**, community and parental involvement
- adds **value to volunteering** – keeping motivation and interest.

*"It has ingrained an appreciation of the value of connecting with nature and working outdoors. It has changed my teaching practice"*

Providers' next steps included delivering to more people and helping participants progress through Award levels. Providers also identified some ways that the John Muir Trust can give further support to them and to the process of getting involved.

## 2. Introduction and background

We're always keen to hear from Award Providers - organisations that run the John Muir Award - about their experiences. This year in Scotland we asked for feedback through a Provider Survey. Our aims were to assess impact of using the Award on participants, leaders and organisations, and to gather information that could influence and help improve the way we work. Although Scotland sourced, this information is valid in a UK – wide context.

We asked questions based on three themes: the John Muir Trust Vision, wellbeing, and leaders' practice. This report summarises and interprets the feedback we received.

The Provider Survey was conducted as part of a pilot of a new self-evaluation resource from Education Scotland - 'How Good is our Third Sector Organisation?' To find out more about the resource and to read a case study about our involvement visit the [Education Scotland website](#).

## 3. Attribution

There are three broad reasons for involvement in the John Muir Award:

**First time** – for those new to the outdoors it gives focus, structure, ideas and support.

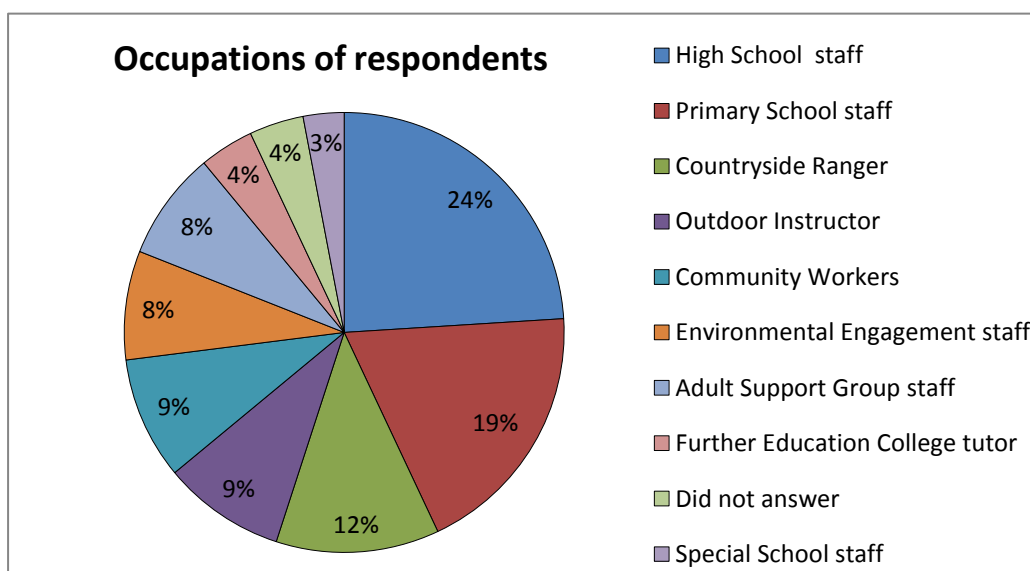
**Doing more** – those already doing some activity outdoors use it as a catalyst for more, for partnership links and integration.

**Recognition** – those already engaged with a wide range of activity use it as a means of recognition.

These varied motivations for involvement are reflected in the responses to the survey. With this in mind, we recognise that it is not possible or appropriate to separately identify and attribute the impacts reported on in the Provider Survey solely to John Muir Award participation. Rather, this information reflects on activity that the John Muir Award is a part of: some activity would take place with or without an Award element; for some the John Muir Award has been the key reason for engagement. Many of the responses to the survey made particular reference to this, and suggested that the John Muir Award is a 'contributing factor' to the impacts discussed, but that it was difficult to consider Award related impacts in isolation. Such partnership approaches are key to success and we are proud to be a part of these collaborative ways of working towards positive outcomes.

## 4. Who responded?

Approximately 600 organisations are involved in the John Muir Award in Scotland each year. We opened the Provider Survey up to all Award leaders across the country to complete voluntarily. 67 people (11%) got involved, from a wide range of organisations, working with a broad range of participants. This is a representative reflection of the full picture of Award take-up.



## 5. Connect, enjoy and care for wild places.

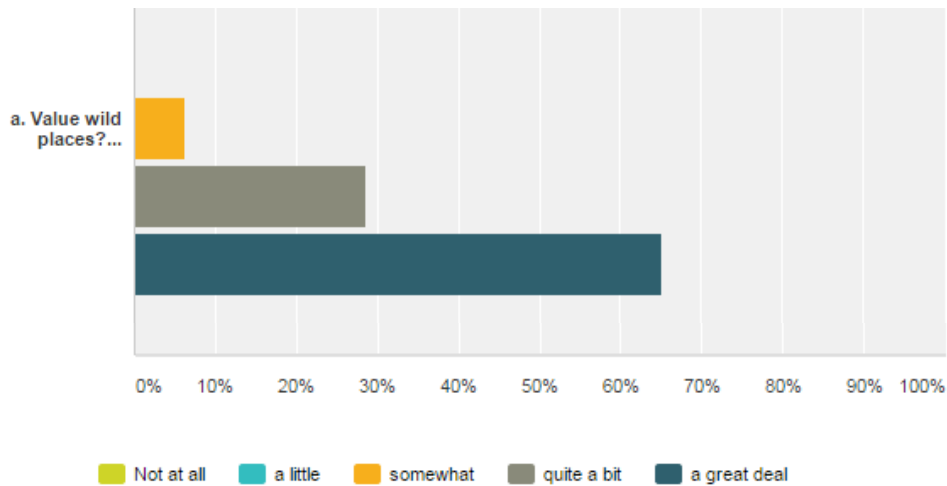
We were keen to find out about whether use of the John Muir Award was contributing to the vision of the John Muir Trust. We asked people if they felt their involvement in the John Muir Award played a role in working towards the vision that:

Wild places are valued by and for everyone.

People of all backgrounds can connect, enjoy and care for wild places.

Q. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with value wild places?

A. 94% said yes.



(0% said 'not at all' and 'a little', 6% said 'somewhat', 29% said 'quite a bit' and 65% said 'a great deal'<sup>1</sup>)

Q. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be connected to nature?

A. 84% said yes.

Q. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with put something back? (Make a positive contribution)

A. 89% said yes.

Providers were given the option to comment further on their answer.

Comments most commonly referenced the John Muir Award as having a positive impact on participants' **awareness and understanding** of wild places. Many said that without their John Muir Award focused activities, participants would not have had the **opportunity to visit and explore** wild places. Respondents commonly referenced the Award as an effective **tool for engagement** with the outdoors, and a **useful framework** for activity to encourage connection and care.

*"The students have learnt how to appreciate wild places in their local communities that they have never noticed before. The John Muir Award is an introduction, a first experience of nature for pupils and staff."*

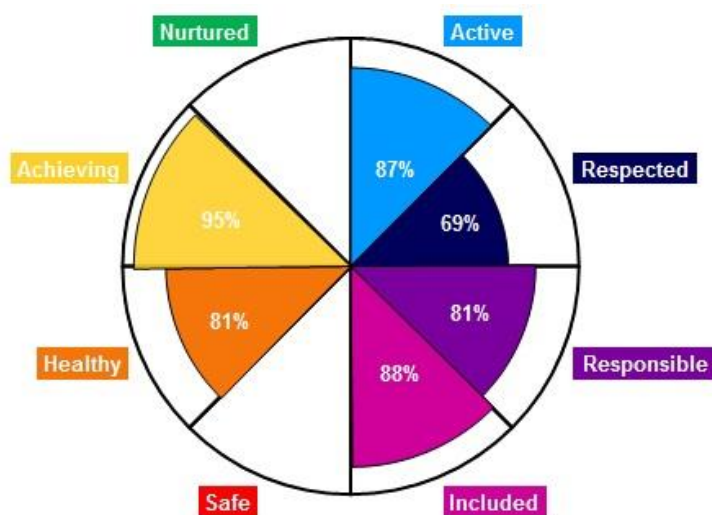
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<sup>1</sup> For all scale questions respondents chose from these five options. Throughout the report we reference the percentage of 'quite a bit' and 'a great deal' responses combined.

## 6. Wellbeing

Does using the John Muir Award contribute to the Scottish Government's Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) policy? Centred on a partnership approach, GIRFEC aims to improve wellbeing for children, young people and families and uses a shared understanding of wellbeing based around eight indicators<sup>2</sup>. We asked Providers about six of these, those most relevant to the John Muir Award. The chart below shows the percentage of Providers who said involvement in the Award helps their participants improve in each area.

Further comments for each indicator are summarised below.



We asked about six of the eight indicators – those most relevant to the John Muir Award.

### a. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Healthy?

Healthy: Having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, and support in learning to make healthy and safe choices<sup>3</sup>.

#### 81% said yes.

Half of the people who chose to expand on their answer made reference to the **psychological benefits** of being outdoors. They noted an improvement in the mental wellbeing of participants, including increased motivation and reduced stress. *“Both physical and mental health is improved through activity, being outdoors and social interaction.”*

A further third specifically mentioned seeing **increased physical activity** for their participants. *“Our weekly activities required the children to walk to different sites in the woods and some had steepish paths. Pupils commented that they had slept well the night they had been at the woods, or that they had fallen asleep on the sofa when they got in from school!”*

Many also referenced the simple benefits and **enjoyment of being in the fresh air**.

Some comments also mentioned that it is difficult to answer this question about the John Muir Award in isolation, so answered more generally about their activity outdoors (see section 9: attribution).

*“Pupil comments indicate how much they enjoy the activities. Also I can see the engagement and the impact it has on pupils who are often switched off by more formal classroom learning and who can have difficulties with social skills.”*

<sup>2</sup> Although the SHANARRI indicators are designed for use with children, young people and families, we believe they are relevant for people of all ages, so asked the same questions of Providers working with adults as well.

<sup>3</sup> definitions are from the Scottish Government GIRFEC policy SHANARRI indicators <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/background/wellbeing>

### b. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Achieving?

Achieving: Being supported and guided in their learning and in the development of their skills, confidence and self-esteem at home, at school, and in the community.

#### 95% said yes.

More than half of the comments we received about 'Achieving' reported on **seeing improvements in participants' self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of belonging**. Many referenced the Award framework and ethos (flexibility to design activity that is challenging and achievable for each individual) as key to this. *"Learning as part of the John Muir Award is informal and takes place at each individual's own pace."*

The John Muir Award **certificate as a recognition** of achievement was frequently noted as very important. This was mentioned for all participants, but we also saw repeated comments about the importance of the certificates for those who are less academic, or had not previously achieved an award of any kind. This directly contributes to closing the attainment gap<sup>4</sup>. *"For some the Award ceremony was the first time parents were involved in celebrating the success of their children - it was well supported and highly valued. The young people seeing themselves achieve is highly beneficial."*

Some responses made particular reference to the importance of the **Conserve Challenge**: *"There is a really strong 'feel good factor' from the conservation work - a feeling of pride"*. The **Share Challenge** was noted as promoting a sense of achievement, giving a structured opportunity to reflect on achievement and for this to be celebrated within and beyond the group.

*"They gain in confidence through giving presentations with peers, assemblies, writing etc. Pupils take on leadership roles, cooperative working and more responsibility. It helped with literacy skills - gave real and relevant context for listening, reading, writing and talking."*

### c. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Active?

Active: Having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to healthy growth and development, both at home and in the community.

#### 87% said yes.

The majority of comments reflected that the very nature of **being outdoors encourages physical activity**. Some made more specific reference to the John Muir Award **promoting adventure and exploration**, which encourages active participation. *"The exploration of different environments from sea caves, rocky shores, Galloway Hills, to managed woodlands is all based on active participation."*

Many respondents reflected on John Muir Award activity in relation to their participants' normal life – for some the Award required an increase in activity, for others it was in normal parameters of their daily activity.

*"The work in the Angus Glens was very physical. Not only did they have to hill-walk to reach their destination, they then had the physical input of the days work and they were out in the fresh air. This was a 'first' for some of these pupils who often refuse to do PE in school."*

5 respondents also noted that they had observed an increase in physical activity, which had been **sustained after their John Muir Award** was completed.

*"Pupils and supporting parents have since returned to the woods site out with school for a walk."  
"Being outside we cannot help but be active!"*

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<sup>4</sup> For more see [Attainment and the John Muir Award in Scotland](#)

#### d. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Respected?

Respected: Having the opportunity to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them.

##### 69% said yes

Developing **respect for each other** within Award groups was commonly referenced. Specifically many referred to the importance of **working together** during John Muir Award activity, and participants **taking on responsibility** for planning and taking ownership of their Awards (risk assessing, completing Proposal Forms, choosing Conserve tasks). *“All participants were involved in the planning and evaluation of each session. Where pupil or adult knowledge or skill was identified they were the ‘expert’ and shared this with the rest of the group.”*

Some also commented that **completing the John Muir Award encourages respect** from others beyond the group. *“They gain the respect of their peers and the staff within the prison and at the office.”*

We recognise that impact on ‘respected’ is lower than the others indicators we asked about. Some referenced that ‘respect’ does not have the same impact as some of the other indicators, particularly for groups whose Awards are planned and delivered by leaders. *“We operate the Discovery Award and very much plan the activities beforehand as we have our own knowledge of what can work and is needed in the park”.*

*“The John Muir Award promotes a general attitude of respect.”*

#### e. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Responsible?

Responsible: Having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles in their schools/communities and wild places and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision and being involved in decisions that affect them (responsible citizens).

##### 81% said yes.

There were two distinct responses to this question in relation to responsibility for place, with an even balance of comments for each.

**Individual responsibility:** having a sense of ownership over their activity, and taking personal responsibility for wild places that participants spent time in.

**Collective responsibility:** an increased sense of community responsibility, within and beyond the Award group, for nature and the environment more generally.

*“The pupils gain an understanding of collective responsibility, e.g. learning that litter is pollution, and picking up litter is something that everyone should do to prevent wildlife (and humans) from being hurt or made ill by it - regardless of whether it was them that dropped it in the first place.”*

Other comments referred to increasing responsibility for **safety** (using tools and equipment, making and managing fires etc.) and also **general conduct** whilst in the outdoors through adhering to Access Codes and Leave no Trace principles.

*“The activities we pursued required greater pupil responsibility: lighting and cooking on fires, carrying and using specific pieces of equipment, personal responsibility on a group task, behaviour around others including the public, responding to litter and vandalism in a positive way to address the problem, and behaviour in set activities especially the biodiversity study of the burn and their care for the wildlife.”*

Some also commented specifically that the John Muir Award does not contribute to improving responsibility for their participants as all ownership tends to be with the leader.

#### f. Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with be Included?

Included: Having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

##### 88% said yes.

The most common comment relating to ‘included’ was that John Muir Award involvement allows space for **less able participants to succeed**. Those who may not do so well in traditional learning settings often

excel outdoors, which has an impact on their place in a group. *“The joy of outdoor education is that the child struggling in a classroom setting has space to shine, the non-competitive aspect of the John Muir Award really helps with this.”*

We also received multiple comments about how the **John Muir Award ethos and structure encourages inclusion**. Specific references included that it is open to people with a range of abilities and from diverse backgrounds, that it is free to use, and that it does not require specialist equipment. Some made specific reference to the Share Challenge: *“changes in some team members are noticeable as they become engaged in the Award. The use of the Share Challenge in particular encourages communication and self-expression”*.

Many people made reference to their participants **improving social skills**, building friendships and overcoming shyness: *“We have found that it has also helped children who struggle socially, as everyone is regarded as an equal and the emphasis is on working together to achieve”*.

For more on wellbeing and the John Muir Award see [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#).

## 7. Attainment

**Does the John Muir Award help the people you work with improve attainment?**

**73% said yes.**

The Scottish Government describes attainment as the measurable progress which children and young people make as they advance through and beyond school, and the development of the range of skills, knowledge and attributes needed to succeed in learning, life and work<sup>5</sup>.

Providers identified an **increase in self-motivation and self-confidence**. For some Award participation was a chance to experience success, often for the first time. It helped them *“re-evaluate their abilities and see themselves as achieving and be more ambitious”*.

Providers highlighted that the **structure and framework of the John Muir Award helps to set, work towards and achieve goals**. It provides opportunities for participants to **develop new skills** such as planning and decision making, reasoning and communication skills.

A more general point was made around the positive reaction to learning outdoors, the way that this approach *“caters for so many different learning styles”*, and how this helps with individual attainment. *“The certificate helps towards employability but the soft skills the young people develop through the process also build confidence, communication and self-motivation”*.

Some Providers felt that it was difficult to pick out the specific role of the Award in young peoples' attainment.

*“We feel that pupils that participate in the John Muir Award become resilient, confident, responsible, reflective, setting goals and more of a team player. Strength in these skills will impact on attainment and the Award provides opportunities to develop these skills. This is a natural way in which to provide pupils with opportunities to develop skills they will need for life”*.

For more see [Attainment and the John Muir Award in Scotland](#).

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<sup>5</sup> This Scottish interpretation of 'attainment' relates to a combination of 'academic attainment' and 'character education' in England.



## 8. Leadership, learning and teaching practice

### Has using the John Muir Award had an effect on you - in terms of your own work - leadership/mentoring/learning/teaching practice?

The most commonly referenced outcome was that the John Muir Award provides **opportunities for taking learning outdoors** and for many an increased awareness and appreciation of the value of connecting with nature.

Providers referenced the *“power of nature and green spaces as a learning environment”* and the importance of providing *“those less fortunate than ourselves the opportunity to discover these places for themselves”*.

Another common theme we found identified how use of the Award gives a **focus and structure** for learning and teaching. It was seen as a valued tool to link activities together and validate activity.

Many identified an **increase in confidence in their leadership and teaching** and specifically mentioned how it had given them an opportunity to **try a different ‘learning’ approach** and develop new skills. For some, implementing the John Muir Award had helped them gain knowledge in new areas such as sustainable development education. They described delivering the Award as a *“rich learning experience”* and *“an invaluable professional experience”* giving them **greater job satisfaction**. Another mentioned that they felt *“more valued in my role and my motivation to work with young people has increased”*. Providers also identified a **positive impact on relationships** with pupils, peers, staff, parents, senior management and wider community partners.

*“The John Muir Award gives us a structure to link activities together - provides a thread or theme that is really useful. It gives me the confidence to do new stuff too....it offers an alternative, slightly wacky, fun, nature focused approach to learning. The John Muir Award validates experiential learning.”* Outdoor Education Instructor

*“It gives me the understanding that people learn outdoors probably more than sitting in my classroom.”* College Lecturer

*“It has given me new approaches to teaching which I can (and have) used in other areas. It has allowed me to develop my teaching skills and use the outdoors as a teaching environment.”* Primary School Teacher

*“It has ingrained an appreciation of the value of connecting with nature and working outdoors. It has changed my teaching practice.”* Art Tutor

For more see [John Muir Award – Professional Development for Teachers in Scotland](#).

## 9. Wider outcomes

### Have there been any outcomes for colleagues/volunteers, or wider (school) community?

The role of the John Muir Award in **supporting outdoor learning** is a common theme referenced throughout the survey. Providers identified that using the Award has helped **raise awareness** of the benefits of outdoor learning and the value of this approach is increasingly being recognised by colleagues. Teachers felt that it provides *“momentum and drive”* for outdoor learning, and encourages more classes to use the outdoors on a regular basis. Building on this, many school-based Providers identified that they were working towards a long term approach of **embedding the Award/Outdoor Learning in the curriculum**. Some Providers identified how this helps **develop a positive ethos** and contributes towards the life of the school. For some schools, using the John Muir Award was helping them to towards a **whole school approach** to delivering the curriculum and make links to Learning for Sustainability.

Providers highlighted that their Award activity has helped **develop partnerships** with a range of agencies, forged **links with the community** and increased **parental involvement**. It has also added **value to volunteering**, often helping to motivate volunteers, keep their interest and continue their involvement. For some participants there has been a progression onto the next level of the John Muir Award, volunteering with outside agencies and for some young people their Award experiences have contributed to other Youth Awards and wider achievement.

*“As a school we are now adopting a whole school approach to outdoor learning and this has been held up as excellent practice within Fife. Within school my colleagues are now seeing outdoor learning as an approach to learning and not as an additional core subject”. Primary School Teacher*

*“The John Muir Award is an excellent focus for raising the standards in education, providing children with a sense of purpose in their learning and I thoroughly value the Conserve strand where we feel we are contributing, albeit in a small way”.*

*“Such examples of outdoor learning help to create a positive ethos within the school” High School Teacher*

## 10. Next steps and further support

### Do you have any next steps in your own use of the Award? If so, how can the John Muir Trust help?

There was a real variety of responses to this question, demonstrating the diversity of how people use the John Muir Award. However, the most commonly referenced next step was to support participants through the **next level of the Award**. Many planned to increase participation levels and spread John Muir Award activity across other areas of their organisation, whilst the same amount of respondents planned to repeat their successful delivery and keep activity levels the same. Some Providers commented that they are keen to link their John Muir Award activity with **other Award schemes** and courses (Youth Achievement, NVQ modules), and a few said they were keen to **increase their own skills** and attend other training that relates to outdoor and environmental activity.

The most frequently referenced way the John Muir Trust could help Providers was through **continued support and advice**. Some also said they would appreciate more **ideas for engaging with wild places**. Many also commented that they would like further training and networking opportunities through the John Muir Award. Others would appreciate help with evaluating their Award activity.

We will continue to consider how we can best support Providers and respond to these requests. We want to ensure needs are met and Providers feel confident, supported and motivated to continue to help people of all backgrounds can connect, enjoy and care for wild places through the John Muir Award.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took part for sharing their experiences and reflections.



This project is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage