

<b>Institution: The University of Edinburgh</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 26 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism</b>
<b>Title of case study: Outdoor learning and education policy development in Scotland</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Outdoor learning is a multi-dimensional concept embracing three dimensions: 'outdoor/adventure-sport activities', 'personal development' and 'environmental/sustainability education'. Its potential across curricula has been recognised in UK and international policy contexts. Research by Beames, Higgins, Nicol and Ross, and collaborators since 2000, has led directly to national and international developments: 1. Scottish Government (SG) policy on local outdoor learning; 2. SG and General Teaching Council for Scotland policy on sustainability education and outdoor learning; 3. specialist degree programmes, and continuing professional development for UK and overseas teachers. Related work has supported policy developments on recreational and educational countryside access.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The roots of outdoor learning lie in the UK (e.g. Outward Bound movement), Scandinavia ('friluftsliv'), Germany (e.g. erlebnispädagogik), and more recently North America/Australasia. From 1950 to mid-1980, 'outdoor education'/'outdoor recreation' received little academic attention. From 1990 to mid-2000 significant conceptual work emerged from the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education (MHSE), notably from Higgins (at UoE since 1992, Professor since 2006), Nicol (p/t and f/t since 2000), Beames (p/t and f/t since 2005) and Ross (since 2004). Scottish Government grants (£61k, 2005-2007) facilitated work with teachers and Local Authorities (1) and staff conducted MHSE-funded research with Scottish school-children (2).</p> <p>The conceptual support for Scottish outdoor education policy lies in our work of the mid-1990s and features the now standard multi-dimensional concept of outdoor education (defined above). Our work emphasised the importance of research-informed concept-based programming (3). Our concept of local 'outdoor learning' as a pragmatic place-based approach has been further developed, with staff focussing on curriculum/policy, and philosophical, sociological, practical and recreational aspects of the field (4). Our critique of short-duration, weakly curriculum-linked, strictly regulated adventure activities has been a major influence on international re-examination of outdoor learning and its evidence-base (2). Government and charitable-trust funding supported our studies of local authorities, schools and teachers, and recognition of pupils' achievements (1), consequently facilitating policy development for locally-based outdoor learning. Related work on the socio-economics of land-ownership and access to the countryside, and the centrality of access for education and recreation established links to a broader policy agenda. Our research-informed <i>Learning Outside the Classroom</i> (4) has become a standard text.</p> <p><b>1) Children, teachers and local outdoor learning</b></p> <p>Our research on teachers' attitudes to the natural heritage (1) indicated barriers to involvement in outdoor learning. This, with work above, led to conceptual developments (e.g. a model emphasising initial local learning before progressing further afield and then residential), and associated research (2) called 'Outdoor Journeys' based on pupils 'developing questions about the local area', 'researching' and 'sharing findings'. Findings from the studies above led to Esmée Fairbairn Trust funding for a two-year action-research initiative (2011-13) examining outdoor learning provision for the early secondary phase in Scotland. This has led to greater understanding of the conditions that facilitate improved outdoor learning, and by comparing findings with our 2006 study (5), demonstrated significant growth and interest in outdoor learning, related to the policy developments we have supported.</p> <p><b>2) Outdoor learning and sustainability education</b></p> <p>A consistent theme of our work (members of staff plus research fellow, research assistant, five PhD students (three graduated since 2008) since the 1990s has been the relationship between outdoor learning/recreational experiences and sustainability education. Our research reviews</p>

demonstrated a link between formative outdoor educational experiences and an orientation towards sustainability, and reconceptualised the discipline by exploring the potential of outdoor experiences to operate as moral impulses in the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.

### 3. References to the research

1. Nicol, R., Higgins, P., Ross, H. & Mannion, G. (2007). Outdoor education in Scotland. A review of recent research. Glasgow: Learning and Teaching Scotland. (This is a summary of seven studies commissioned by Scottish Government agencies undertaken by the authors). <http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/education/ocreportwithendnotes.pdf>
2. Beames, S. & Ross, H. (2010). Journeys outside the classroom. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 10(2), 95-109. DOI: [10.1080/14729679.2010.505708](https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2010.505708)
3. Nicol, R. (2002). Outdoor education: Research topic or universal value? Part one. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*. 2 (1), 29–42. DOI: [10.1080/14729670285200141](https://doi.org/10.1080/14729670285200141)
4. Beames, S., Higgins, P. & Nicol, R. (2011). *Learning outside the classroom*. New York: Routledge. Supplied on request.
5. Ross, H., Higgins, P. & Nicol, R. (2007) Outdoor study of nature: teachers' motivations and contexts, *Scottish Educational Review*, 39(2), 160-172. (based on SG-funded research) <http://www.scotedreview.org.uk/pdf/184.pdf>

### 4. Details of the impact

#### 1) Children, teachers and local outdoor learning

Our research has informed policy development by Scotland's Ministers for Education since 1999 and led to Higgins' appointment (2006-10) to successive Ministerial Advisory Groups on outdoor learning in Scotland (*Outdoor Connections Advisory Group* (2006-2008), *Outdoor Learning Strategic Advisory Group* (2008-2010)) which reported on provision and guided policy. The reports and curriculum guidance were based on our research and led to 'development officer' appointments at Education Scotland (ES) (2006 – continuing), website development and 'Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) through Outdoor Learning' (2010) (5.1) (CfEtOL). These developments were informed by part-Government-funded research linking learning outdoors with CfE (Beames, Ross), teachers' approaches to learning outdoors (Higgins, Nicol, Ross). CfEtOL is the first such national policy in the UK or elsewhere. The ES website (5.2) addresses issues highlighted in the research and the work of the advisory groups. The 'Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland' section of the website uses our conceptual framework and research (citing Beames, Higgins, Nicol, Ross). In 2010 ES instigated a national CPD programme for teachers based on 'Outdoor Journeys'. Whilst having international relevance it relates specifically to CfE, and is delivered in nationwide in-service programmes for teachers (~1000), pre-service training at MHSE (~100 students/year), Singapore, Ireland, Italy (~100 students).

Christie et al. (5.3) surveyed schools throughout Scotland and found that use of primary-school grounds had increased markedly, and secondary schools indicated an increased desire to develop outdoor learning since 2006. This shows that our research on local OE (Section 2 above), support materials and in-service provision (e.g. Outdoor Journeys) has had an impact. In addition, over the past 10 years most Local Authorities have established 'outdoor learning groups', and residential outdoor centre use has remained stable since our 2006 study despite widespread budgetary pressures.

\* Education Scotland' is the Scottish Government's education advisory agency. Until 2011 it was called 'Learning and Teaching Scotland' prior to merger with Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. For simplicity all references here are to 'Education Scotland'.

#### 2) Outdoor learning and sustainability education

In 2011 the Scottish Government made a manifesto commitment to explore 'education for sustainable development'/'global citizenship' and, 'outdoor learning' in Scottish schools, and in recognition of our work, Higgins was appointed chair of the Government's 'One Planet Schools Ministerial Advisory Group'. The group's 'Learning for Sustainability' (LfS) report (5.4) drew upon

our existing research and commissioned literature reviews (Christie, Higgins). The report made 31 recommendations which were all accepted by the Government (March, 2013), including an internationally rare *entitlement* to learning for sustainability and outdoor learning (5.5). The Government's 'Learning for sustainability implementation group' (Higgins as chair) will implement the recommendations throughout Scottish schools.

Our research on outdoor learning and sustainability resulted in Ross's involvement in the revision of the *General Teaching Council for Scotland's* 'professional standards', which now require teachers to address 'learning for sustainability' and 'outdoor learning' in their practice (5.6).

Higgins, as the Scottish member of a UNESCO network on *Reorienting teacher education to address sustainability*, initiated and guided the development of the UN University 'Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development for Scotland' (5.7). This was approved in December 2012 and, following our research, has a significant focus on outdoor learning. The Centre (located at MHSE) provides advice to Scottish Government and aids delivery of the LfS report recommendations (5.5).

Based on this research, staff deliver presentations and workshops for professional and academic audiences throughout the UK and internationally, extensive week-long CPD for Scottish and European teachers (EU Comenius programme), and their approaches have been widely adopted by others for international workshops (over 800 European teachers from 27 countries) (5.8). Materials have been translated into Swedish, built into degree programmes at Linköping University, University of Bologna, and Ministry of Education, academic and professional bodies in Singapore (e.g. Republic Polytechnic). Our book 'Learning outside the classroom' is the standard text supporting this work.

A recent UK report for UNESCO highlights the UK significance of the Scottish policy direction to which, as noted above, we have contributed (5.9).

Our research for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on '*Building the Scottish outdoor access code and responsible behaviour into formal education and other learning contexts*', '*The economic impact of water-related recreation and tourism in the catchment of the River Spey*' and '*Sporting Estates and Recreational Land Use in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*' (ESRC) informed Government access policy (5.10), (Higgins gave evidence to three Parliamentary committees on the Land Reform Bill and advised SNH).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Webpages have been archived at: <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+26>

5.1 Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning (Education Scotland policy document):  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/outdoorlearning/curriculumforexcellence/index.asp>

5.2 Outdoor Learning – Education Scotland report:  
<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/index.asp>

and the guidance document 'Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland':

[http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport\\_tcm4-675958.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport_tcm4-675958.pdf)

5.3 Christie, B., Beames, S., Higgins, P., Nicol, R. & Ross, H. (in press). Outdoor learning provision in Scotland. *Scottish Educational Review*. Available on request from HEI.

5.4 One Planet Schools Ministerial Advisory Group:  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools>  
and the report, 'Learning for Sustainability':  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/LearningforSustainabilityReport>

5.5 Scottish Government response to 'Learning for Sustainability':  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/GovernmentResponse>

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- 5.6 General Teaching Council for Scotland revised professional standards for teachers and education professionals consultation:  
<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/about-gtcs/Consultations/consultation-revision-professional-standards.aspx> (includes a requirement that all teachers will include 'learning for sustainability' in their practice).
- 5.7 Website of UN University accredited Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development for Scotland at the University of Edinburgh:  
<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/> (see Scotland application for vision and role of outdoor learning)
- 5.8 Comenius programme central administration, Kinda, Sweden:  
<http://www.kinda.se/barnutbildning/kindalarcentrum/utomhuspedagogik/outdoorenvironmentaleducation.4.6e89e88e12e7bcdeae08000239684.html>
- 5.9 UK National Commission for UNESCO (2013). Education for Sustainable Development Policy in the United Kingdom: Current Status, Best Practice, and Opportunities for the Future. Policy Brief No. 9. London: UNESCO:  
<http://www.unesco.org.uk/uploads/Brief%209%20ESD%20March%202013.pdf>
- 5.10 Scottish Natural Heritage. Scottish Outdoor Access Code:  
<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/access/full%20code.pdf>