

This factsheet shows you how to set up your outdoor learning site. It includes design tips and tricks and how to fund and find resources for your site. You can also see examples in our case study factsheets.

WHAT IS OUTDOOR LEARNING?

Outdoor learning is a term that broadly relates to discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting with the natural world by engaging in environmental and adventure activities. It is more than simply taking what could happen indoors outside.

IDENTIFY YOUR OUTDOOR LEARNING PROJECT'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Before you start looking for a suitable site, it's important to consider the needs of your learners and what experiences you would like them to have outdoors. For example do you want a space to encourage contact with nature, calmness and social interactions? Is the aim for your group to learn about managing risk? – and the emotions which go with everyday physical, emotional and social risk-taking? Or are you aiming to improve health and wellbeing amongst your participants? Whatever your starting point, figuring this out is vitally important. Your outdoor learners also need to be part of the consultation process. They are the ones who will be outside the most and will probably have the best ideas!

FINDING A SUITABLE SITE

The next step is to locate and identify the right space for your group. Woodland, fields, beaches, and parks can all offer outdoor learning opportunities. Even a concrete playground can be made into a useful outdoor learning environment. The minimum required from a site is some shelter which could be as simple as a temporary tarpaulin with some sit mats underneath.

The ideal setting for outdoor learning would:

- Be a well managed site with a diversity of smaller broad-leaved or mixed woodland trees for shelter, shrubs and open areas.
- Have good mobile phone reception in case of emergencies.
- Ideally, be accessible on foot/wheelchair.
- Have a clear access point at the entrance for emergency vehicles and an external parking/drop off point for transport if required.
- Have easy access around it with opportunities to explore off the main paths.
- Have minimal public access, and no accessible open, deep water nearby.



Tarpaulin in a woodland

Walk around your community to find potential sites, then identify who owns that site and contact them directly. Often you can find out who owns a piece of land by asking around or by speaking to your local greenspace charity, local authority environmental services, countryside ranger, environmental or planning department. Try an online map service such as Scottish Natural Heritage's [Greenspace Map](#) based on Ordnance Survey data. [Registers of Scotland](#) provide a property search



Outdoor learning area in a park



OUTDOOR LEARNING: SETTING UP YOUR SITE

service to find the owner of properties in Scotland which will incur a small charge.

The landowner's permission should be sought for your chosen site. If the space you have identified is already being used by other groups, consider how your project can work with them and what impact this will have on your chosen space.

CREATING YOUR SPACE

If you are lucky enough to be able to change your site, a site design is the next step. This will not only enable you to overcome any challenges on your site but can also be key to learner involvement and buy-in. The steps to achieving your design are as follows:-

- **Site survey**

This includes measuring the diameter of your site as well as level changes. You should also note down on your survey drawing – site aspect, shady and sunny areas, drainage issues, soil type and pH, habitat and biodiversity, wind direction and movement of the sun and any permanent structures you want to keep. Also is there access to water and electricity? This can be a great activity to involve your learners in.

- **Site Design Plan**

Before you start to come up with a design, it's important to create a wish list of what you need from your site. This should be linked with your project's aims and objectives and take account of the learners' abilities and needs. This list can be written down or you can create '**mood boards**' by cutting out images from magazines and sticking them onto a large piece of paper. You can then work out where these features could go on your plan. For example, it may be important to include features e.g. dens or structures, for learners with additional support needs/autism where they can go to feel safe, but be guided by their/carers input.

It's important that your final design is drawn up on a scale plan. The scale of your drawing depends on the size of your paper and the size of your site! It's simplest to use a scale like 1:100, 1:50 or 1:25. This means that when you come to mark out your design on your site it's easier to interpret.

- **Site Clearance**

One of the first things to do before or during the site design stage, is to clear your space. This will provide a visual sign that progress is being made and will maintain enthusiasm for your project. If there is a lot of work to do, corporate volunteers from local companies can help. You will need public liability insurance and risk assessments in place before any work begins.

There are many learning opportunities in the survey and design so it's important to involve your group in the design and consultation process. For example they could be measuring the site for the survey or creating mood boards of what they want to see in the outdoor space.

FINDING RESOURCES

Once you have cleared your site and marked out your design you will be thinking about how to build your outdoor learning space on a budget. It's important to make a list of what you need. You can then approach local suppliers armed with your list! This could include – construction companies, nurseries and garden centres (Dobbies often have community champions), tree surgeons, foresters, your local ranger service, local businesses, learners and their families and friends. It's important to think about sustainable sources for your outdoor learning project. Plants such as elder and willow are great for outdoor crafts.

SOURCES

<https://www.ros.gov.uk/services/ask-us-to-conduct-a-search>

<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/planning-and-development-advice/placemaking-and-green-infrastructure/greenspace-map>

https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/system/files/community_growing_resource_pack_scotland.pdf

https://trellisScotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/general/trellis_start-up_guide.pdf

**For more gardening activity ideas, visit www.trellisScotland.org.uk/activities
Need help, advice, or further information? Email info@trellisScotland.org.uk**