

Scotland's Outdoor Play & Learning Coalition Position Statement

Playing outdoors is fundamental...

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.

Playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing.

- It improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing physical activity¹⁻⁴ and equipping them with the skills and attributes essential for living a healthy and active life, thereby contributing to reducing health inequalities⁵⁻⁸ and supporting the aims of national health policies.
- It promotes mental, social and emotional wellbeing⁹⁻¹¹ by helping to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and confidence, develop emotional resilience¹²⁻¹³, and build children and young people's confidence in their own capabilities and ability to manage risks and deal with uncertainty¹⁴⁻¹⁵.
- Importantly, it is fun! And through that fun, it promotes the development of essential social skills, helping children and young people to develop compassion and empathy and to build lasting and loving relationships¹⁶⁻¹⁹.
- It supports wider learning by helping to boost creativity, imagination and understanding. These benefits are enhanced further when playing outdoors in diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes, particularly when the play is led by the child or young person. This provides multiple and enjoyable challenges and creates and enhances learning opportunities. It can also prepare children and young people for more structured learning, thereby supporting the aims of national education policies²⁰⁻²⁴.
- It brings people together, connecting children and young people with their local areas and communities and helping to develop a sense of place and feeling of belonging and inclusion. It provides a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activity, enhancing community cohesion, reducing social isolation, and helping to build inclusive, resilient communities²⁵.
- It is a powerful tool through which children and young people learn to understand the world around them and their place in it, creating a sense of ownership of all of Scotland's landscapes. Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity²⁶⁻³¹.

We commit to life-enhancing outdoor play and learning for all of Scotland's children and young people by:

- Widening access to the high-quality, diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes that exist throughout all our communities to ensure that all children, young people and families have easy, local access to excellent outdoor play.
- Opening up more of our communal and publicly-managed spaces for playing and learning outdoors, ensuring that children and young people know they are entitled to access these spaces and feel safe and comfortable using them.
- Enhancing and enriching urban greenspace and built environments to be inviting, play-friendly places, offering easy access to the outdoors and nature close to home.
- Empowering every adult involved in the lives of our children and young people with the confidence, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support them to play and learn outdoors.
- Generating and sharing knowledge and evidence-based research to promote better understanding of the benefits of playing and learning outdoors.

We will work together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and we will celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

Signatories

Inspiring Scotland

Scottish Government

Active Scotland

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Children in Scotland

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College Development Network

Community Woodlands Association

Development Trusts Association Scotland

Dynamic Earth

Early Years Scotland

Education Scotland

Fathers Network Scotland

Forestry Commission Scotland

General Teaching Council for Scotland

Glasgow City Council

Glasgow Science Centre

Greenspace Scotland

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Historic Environment Scotland

International Play Association Scotland

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National Day Nurseries Association

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Play Scotland

Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

Scottish Canals

Scottish Childminding Association

Scottish Land and Estates

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Out of School Care Network

Scottish Social Services Council

Skills Development Scotland

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Supporting Document

We are starting from a very positive position. Our policies and legislative framework in Scotland are very supportive of outdoor play and learning to the extent that other countries are beginning to look to us for advice on how to deliver outdoor play.

Scottish Government and Inspiring Scotland have been working together on the promotion, delivery and development of outdoor play for many years with a range of partners. As the significant benefits of play delivered outdoors to children's physical health and mental, social and emotional wellbeing have become clearer, dialogue has developed between a wide range of groups involved in outdoor play and learning; those in regulation and registration, in training, in the management of outdoor spaces, researchers and environmentalists.

Through this dialogue, it became clear that providing outdoor play and learning for children and young people supports the aims and objectives of public bodies and organisations across a number of sectors, including addressing pressing issues such as poor health outcomes and health inequalities and supporting national efforts to close the attainment gap in education. It became apparent to a growing number of people and organisations that enabling more playing and learning outdoors could go a long way to ensuring the best outcomes for Scotland's children and young people.

At the same time, discussions about how to achieve Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 1,140 hours of funded nursery hours to all 3 to 5-year-old and eligible 2-year-old children by August 2020 were taking place. That commitment will nearly double funded provision which brings huge benefits but will also require challenges to be overcome such as the limited suitable physical infrastructure to expand provision within existing nursery provision sufficiently. One way this can be addressed is by significantly increasing outdoor nursery provision.

The concurrence of these developments led to Inspiring Scotland and the Scottish Government convening a roundtable discussion co-hosted by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, and Celia Tennant, Chief Executive of Inspiring Scotland, and involving leading international experts in the fields of health, education, childcare and the environment.

That group recommended the establishment of a Coalition for Playing and Learning Outdoors in Scotland to bring together all those organisations involved in outdoor play and learning, those who can influence the development of public spaces and organisations whose work influences how children in Scotland grow up. 50 organisations came together in person in June to start the process of drafting a shared position statement. The text was further refined with input from those attendees and other organisations with 50 bodies signed up to the final position statement. This position statement represents a commitment from the signatories to work together to embed playing and learning outdoors in the way children and young people are raised in Scotland.

Beyond the commitment of the signatories, this statement is intended to give support and encouragement to those already involved in outdoor play and learning and to those who recognise its potential but have yet to make the first step. We also hope that this statement and the commitment of the signatories will serve as an inspiration to all those who are in a position to deliver or to enable outdoor play and learning but have not previously considered it.

There is already innovative practice taking place in Scotland and, whether in our major cities and towns or our coastal, island or rural communities, we want to build on that to make the opportunity to play and learn outdoors a universal part of growing up in Scotland.

Policy Framework in context

The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of quality outdoor learning experiences. There have been a number of Scottish Government policies and guidance over recent years which set out national expectations and continue to highlight outdoor learning experiences for children as being key to provision of high quality learning. The most relevant are Scotland's National Performance Framework (2018), Getting it Right for Every Child (2008), Curriculum for Excellence 3-18 (2008), Health and Social Care Standards (2017), the Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (2013), the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, The STEM Education and Training Strategy for Scotland (2017) and the Mental Health Strategy (2017). The value of outdoor play to children and young people cannot be over-emphasised and the links across these frameworks demonstrates the wide ranging benefits for health and wellbeing.

Definitions

Playing and learning outdoors

The Position Statement uses the phrase “playing and learning outdoors” as a singular and broad-ranging term. We believe learning is an inherent quality of play and, therefore, use of this phrase is not intended to suggest playing and learning are separate and mutually exclusive activities. As such “playing and learning outdoors”, as used in this statement, can refer to activities in which no specific learning outcome is intended. However, this statement also refers to outdoor play practice in which learning is a specific and intended outcome such as in a school, childcare or other educational setting. In every case covered by this statement, the playing and learning referred to must be outdoors.

Diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes

The Position Statement uses the phrase “diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes” to cover the wide range of place types available for playing and learning outdoors in Scotland. It is intended to be inclusive of but not limited to urban public parks, gardens, commons, open green areas, and play parks as well as natural, wild landscapes such as woodlands, forests, beaches and coastal areas, hillsides, meadows, moors and mountains held in the public gift or open to the public. Use of the phrase “greenspaces” is not intended to exclude the urban built environment but, reflecting the commitment in this statement to enhance and enrich the urban built environment, implies a preference for urban areas to include, as much as possible, the diverse flora of Scotland.

Children and young people

The Position Statement uses the phrase “children and young people” to mean anyone under the age of 18 years old, as well any young people whose additional needs or circumstances mean they may benefit from playing and learning outdoors beyond the age of 18. “Young people” has been included in the statement, in favour of the United Nations definition of a child as anyone under 18 years old, to reflect our intention to demonstrate that playing and learning outdoors should not be limited to younger children but encouraged for all young people.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Position Statement supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically, it refers to the rights conferred in Articles 31, 28 and 3:

Article 31(1)

Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Article 28 (1)

Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.

Article 3 (1)

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The Evidence

The claims made in the Position Statement are supported by robust evidence and research from around the world, some of which is listed below. Please note, this list is not exhaustive and was not compiled as comprehensive literature or evidence review and should not be taken as such.

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The Evidence continued

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