

# Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

## Outdoor Learning and Sustainability (SCQF level 7)

**Unit code:** J7DD 47  
**SCQF level:** 7 (16 SCQF credit points)  
**Valid from:** session 2023–24

### **Prototype unit specification for use in pilot delivery only (version 1.0) June 2023**

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year.

This unit specification is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information required to deliver and assess the unit.

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## Unit purpose

This unit helps learners to develop an understanding of outdoor play and learning opportunities in early years and playwork settings, and the importance of a sustainable approach.

The unit is suitable for learners who would like to gain knowledge and skills to work with children and young people in outdoor learning and play settings. This includes:

- ◆ early years settings with playground areas
- ◆ the use of woodland
- ◆ the use of natural green space
- ◆ settings that operate outdoors on a full-time basis

Learners can carry out the unit as part of the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Childhood Practice or as a continuing professional development (CPD) opportunity for qualified practitioners.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion; however, we recommend that learners have relevant qualifications at SCQF level 6 or experience of working in the childhood practice sector.

Learners who complete the unit as part of the HNC in Childhood Practice may have the opportunity to progress to further learning, including Higher National Diploma (HND) or degree-level courses.

## Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

- 1 describe a range of outdoor settings, including the outdoor learning context at their placement or work (practice) setting
- 2 describe a range of appropriate ways to plan for play and learning outdoors, including planning in the moment (PITM)
- 3 plan and evaluate outdoor experiences
- 4 explain the benefits of outdoor learning to children and young people's holistic development and wellbeing
- 5 analyse sustainable approaches to outdoor play and learning

## Evidence requirements

Learners must provide knowledge evidence and product evidence for the unit. Learners' evidence for the unit must cover the knowledge and skills across all outcomes, while they work with children or young people in a practice setting.

### Knowledge evidence

#### All outcomes

Learners' knowledge evidence relates to all outcomes and is the underpinning knowledge for the product evidence. The knowledge evidence could be oral or written, or a combination of both, and captured in a range of media.

Learners' knowledge evidence must demonstrate that they can:

- ◆ discuss and describe a range of outdoor approaches that support play and learning, considering both national and international approaches, and highlighting the approach taken in their practice setting
- ◆ describe ways to plan for outdoor learning, exploring a variety of approaches including the one taken in their practice setting
- ◆ explore why outdoor play and learning are important to children and young people's development and wellbeing, providing evidence from current literature
- ◆ define what a sustainable approach is in the context of outdoor learning, considering the environment, resources and materials needed to support outdoor play and learning, as well as staff and children

### Product evidence

#### Outcomes 3 and 4

Learners must provide product evidence for outcomes 3 and 4. The product evidence relates to the practical activities that learners carry out for these outcomes. Learners must provide evidence of PITM on at least three occasions.

Learners' product evidence must demonstrate that they can:

- ◆ capture the experience, outlining the activity and the risk assessment process
- ◆ explain how they involved children in the planning process or how they supported children's spontaneous ideas
- ◆ explain how they included children and supported their needs and interests
- ◆ explain how they considered sustainability for the land used, the resources and materials used, and the staff and children involved
- ◆ evaluate the benefits of outdoor learning to the development of the children and young people involved
- ◆ reflect on their own development as a practitioner through outdoor learning activities

Learners must use the planning approach of their practice setting. In some cases, they follow a completely child-led approach, while other settings may have a blend of adult and child-led approaches to planning.

Learners' evidence should be produced over a period of time in lightly-controlled conditions and it requires authentication.

## Knowledge and skills

The following table shows the knowledge and skills covered by the unit outcomes:

Knowledge	Skills
<p><b>Outcome 1</b> Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ different outdoor settings, used both nationally and internationally</li> <li>◆ the context of their outdoor practice setting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 1</b> Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ research national and international outdoor settings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome 2</b> Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ a child-led approach to planning</li> <li>◆ an adult-led approach to planning</li> <li>◆ a blended approach to planning</li> <li>◆ the PITM approach</li> <li>◆ differences in planning approaches, depending on setting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 2</b> Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ research a variety of planning methods, including long-term, mid-term and short-term planning, as well as PITM</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome 3</b> Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ the planning methods used in their practice setting</li> <li>◆ reflective practice and the benefits of evaluating outdoor experiences</li> <li>◆ the risk assessment process</li> <li>◆ sustainability in the context of outdoor learning</li> <li>◆ the benefits of outdoor learning to children and young people's development</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 3</b> Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ use plans to provide experiences outdoors that relate to children's interests, rights and needs</li> <li>◆ plan in the moment and, when necessary, assist children in taking play interests forward, facilitating and supporting ideas if invited to</li> <li>◆ reflect on experiences and evaluate the beneficial aspects, areas of interest, and possible lines of development</li> <li>◆ use outdoor play experiences to evaluate their own development as a practitioner</li> </ul>

Knowledge	Skills
<p><b>Outcome 4</b>                      Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ the benefits of outdoor play experiences to children and young people’s holistic development and wellbeing, evidenced from play experiences in their practice setting</li> <li>◆ how outdoor play experiences can support the development and wellbeing of all children and young people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 4</b>                      Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ identify and explain the benefits of their own planned outdoor experiences</li> <li>◆ research wider benefits cited in news articles, journals and books, to support own findings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcome 5</b>                      Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ sustainability in the context of outdoor learning and play, considering the land used, kit and other loose parts, and human resources (staff)</li> <li>◆ the importance of a sustainable approach to support quality outdoor play and learning, and why this must be considered</li> <li>◆ the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome 5</b>                      Learners can:</p> <p>evaluate sustainable approaches to outdoor play and learning used in their practice setting</p> <p>research sustainability for outdoor play and learning</p> <p>research wider sustainable practices — social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability</p>

## Meta-skills

Throughout the unit, learners develop meta-skills to enhance their employability in the early years and childhood practice sector.

### Self-management

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ focusing: researching, understanding and evaluating through planned outdoor learning experiences
- ◆ integrity: discussing, evaluating and sharing findings through a workplace portfolio
- ◆ adapting: working with others to plan for outdoor play and learning
- ◆ initiative: displaying PITM ability; planning ahead; being proactive in taking outdoor play and learning forward

### Social intelligence

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ communicating: discussing plans with children and staff; teamwork outdoors during play; sharing evaluations and possible next steps
- ◆ feeling: exploring and understanding others' positions in connection to being outdoors to play and learn; using findings to inform practice
- ◆ collaborating: working with children and staff to support quality outdoors experiences
- ◆ leading: being proactive; taking ideas forward, including children's ideas and own ideas that support children and young people's interests, rights and needs; developing children and young people's skills, abilities and knowledge outdoors

### Innovation

This meta-skill includes:

- ◆ curiosity: observing children and young people at play and learning outdoors; seeking and listening to opinions
- ◆ creativity: using imaginative ways to support outdoor play and learning sourced from children and/or combining own ideas
- ◆ sense-making: evaluating practical outdoor experiences to connect with wider reading; making links to current research
- ◆ critical thinking: analysing and evaluating plans and outdoor experiences in their practice setting

## **Literacies**

Learners develop core skills in the following literacies:

### **Numeracy**

Learners develop numeracy skills by:

- ◆ supporting outdoor experiences involving counting, measurement of height, length, circumference, and weight
- ◆ managing a time-sensitive workplace portfolio

### **Communication**

Learners develop communication skills by:

- ◆ discussing plans with workplace staff and children
- ◆ sharing findings
- ◆ discussing sustainable approaches
- ◆ recording details of plans and evaluations, and crediting sources of information used to support practical work

### **Digital**

Learners develop digital skills and computer literacy by:

- ◆ using digital platforms to access information to support learning and understanding
- ◆ using a PC or digital device to develop a coherent portfolio
- ◆ using devices such as a camera or iPad that support outdoor experiences



## Delivery of unit

You can deliver this unit as a stand-alone unit or as an optional unit in the HNC in Childhood Practice.

Learners carrying out the unit require a workplace or placement in an early learning and childcare practice setting, so they can plan and deliver outdoor learning experiences.

You can integrate the unit with common themes across other units in the group award, such as safeguarding and understanding additional support needs (ASN). You should identify these themes, integrate them into assessments, and deliver them holistically to learners.

Links to practice may be relevant to the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) in the group award and you should identify any opportunities to integrate assessment.

The notional design length for the unit is 80 hours, however the amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion. We suggest the following distribution of time, including assessment:

- Outcome 1** — Describe a range of outdoor settings, including the outdoor learning context at their placement or work (practice) setting  
(15 hours)
- Outcome 2** — Describe a range of appropriate ways to plan for play and learning outdoors, including PITM  
(15hours)
- Outcome 3** — Plan and evaluate outdoor experiences  
(15 hours)
- Outcome 4** — Explain the benefits of outdoor learning on children and young people's holistic development and wellbeing  
(15 hours)
- Outcome 5** — Analyse sustainable approaches to outdoor play and learning  
(20 hours)

## Professional recognition

This is an optional unit in the HNC in Childhood Practice, which is a registrable qualification with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

## Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Learners can evidence the unit in a workplace portfolio. They should produce plans for outdoor play, including PITM.

When exploring outdoor settings, learners can include:

- ◆ forest kindergarten
- ◆ forest school
- ◆ nature play
- ◆ outdoor learning
- ◆ woodland play

Learners can access further reading to support outdoor play and learning, including sustainability. Useful sources at the time of writing include:

- ◆ Scottish Government (2020), Out to Play — creating outdoor play experiences for children: practical guidance
- ◆ Scottish Government (2010), Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning
- ◆ The John Muir Award
- ◆ Care Inspectorate, My world outdoors
- ◆ Play Scotland, the national expert in play
- ◆ Warden, C. (2022), Green Teaching: Nature Pedagogies for Climate Change & Sustainability, Corwin UK
- ◆ Creative Cascade UK Ltd
- ◆ A summary of learning for sustainability resources
- ◆ UN SDGs

We recommend that the unit is delivered outdoors where possible. This can include using:

- ◆ green spaces on campus or at learners' practice settings
- ◆ outdoor classrooms
- ◆ local parks, woodland and green spaces (with permission of landowners). For local parks and woodland, you may be granted permission by the local authority park ranger. Please note that if a landowner is not apparent, you should check the [Land Register of Scotland](#)

If local access is not readily available, we recommend that you visit outdoor nursery and school settings.

Key topics and themes that you should cover throughout the outcomes are:

- ◆ risk assessment
- ◆ risk-benefit assessment (see Managing Risk in Play Provision, available from [Play Scotland](#))

- ◆ creating a base camp and setting boundaries (for teaching the unit on campus)
- ◆ boundary setting using visual aids (such as ribbons and rope) or through natural features (such as tree stumps and pathways)
- ◆ play in nature — open-ended experiences; nature as an enabling environment; natural loose parts as play provocations
- ◆ nature as an inclusive space, to support all play types and people
- ◆ outdoor essentials:
  - first aid kit
  - shelters (tarpaulins)
  - mats for seating
  - toilet and handwashing kit
  - dry bags for storing and transporting kit
  - trolley or back packs for transporting kit
  - register of learners and contact details
  - resources for play and to support learning: these may be small pots and pans for mud kitchen play, books, nature identification books, cards and any other resource that supports play outdoors in nature (see [Muddy Faces](#) for a wide range of resources and ideas)
- ◆ sustainable use of land and resources. Consider access to various sites to minimise land compaction from overuse. Think about maintaining land, litter-picking and reporting any damage of land to landowners (see the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)). Consider careful use of resources and maintenance to ensure longevity, and access to a space to clean and dry equipment
- ◆ planning for play outdoors: PITM and ideas stemming from learner interests, supported by advance planning. Use of floor books and other ways of capturing conversations with learners when discussing upcoming outdoor experiences
- ◆ ways to capture experiences outdoors to share with others (parents, carers, and other stakeholders). Photographs, videos, posts on learning apps, such as See-Saw and the Family App, for sharing children's experiences

The unit corresponds with the workplace element of the HNC in Childhood Practice. It also relates to Forest Kindergarten at SCQF level 7.

Learners can study the unit as a stand-alone unit for CPD purposes. A workplace with outdoor play and learning practices in place is necessary.

For assessment, learners must plan, implement and evaluate a minimum of three outdoor play and learning experiences. For learners studying the HNC in Childhood Practice, this integrates with the workplace element of the course. Learners' plans should be signed by the placement supervisor or mentor.

For learners carrying out the unit as CPD, we recommend the same assessment — three outdoor experiences that are planned, implemented and evaluated. These should be signed by a workplace manager.

## **Equality and inclusion**

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You should take into account the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs is available on the assessment arrangements web page:

[www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements).

## Information for learners

### Outdoor Learning and Sustainability (SCQF level 7)

This information explains:

- ◆ what the unit is about
- ◆ what you should know or be able to do before you start
- ◆ what you need to do during the unit
- ◆ opportunities for further learning and employment

### Unit information

This unit develops your understanding of outdoor learning and sustainability. You experience outdoor play and learning opportunities in an early years and playwork setting, and learn the importance of a sustainable approach.

Outdoor settings include early years settings with playground areas, use of woodland, natural green space areas and settings that operate outdoors on a full-time basis.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion; however, we recommend that you have relevant qualifications at SCQF level 6 or experience of working in the childhood practice sector.

On completion of the unit, you can:

- 1 describe a range of outdoor settings, including the outdoor learning context at your placement or work (practice) setting
- 2 describe a range of appropriate ways to plan for play and learning outdoors, including planning in the moment (PITM)
- 3 plan and evaluate outdoor experiences
- 4 explain the benefits of outdoor learning to children and young people's holistic development and wellbeing
- 5 analyse sustainable approaches to outdoor play and learning

Completing the unit in a practice setting, such as a work placement or your place of employment, provides you with invaluable opportunities to develop and apply your knowledge, skills and understanding and to meet the evidence requirements. As you progress through the unit, you become increasingly confident at linking your knowledge and understanding to your practice, and we encourage you to make links between the learning completed in the unit and others in the group award.

You develop meta-skills, such as self-management, social intelligence and innovation, during your placement or in your work setting, and you reflect on your role as a practitioner.

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The unit is an optional unit in the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Childhood Practice. The HNC in Childhood Practice is a recognised qualification for registration with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and employment in early years sectors.

On completion of the unit, you may have the opportunity to progress to further learning, including Higher National Diploma (HND) or degree-level courses.

# Administrative information

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## History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Note: please check [SQA's website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.