

John Muir Award in Scotland's Colleges 2019-20

The [John Muir Award](#) is an environmental award scheme that encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It's the main engagement initiative of the John Muir Trust and is used by colleges across Scotland to inspire and connect both young people and adult learners with nature.

The Award is used as a tool to support a range of priorities and across a variety of departments, courses and projects, including supporting transitions, interdisciplinary student engagement and skills for learning, life and work. Working towards a John Muir Award can create space for curiosity and discussion, building and demonstrating transferable skills, growing self-esteem, nurturing wellbeing, celebrating achievement and embedding Learning for Sustainability through positive, practical actions that care for both people and planet.

During 2019-20:

- 411 John Muir Awards were achieved by college students and staff in Scotland – 87% by young people, and 13% by adults
- 77% (317) of Awards were achieved by those facing barriers to learning
- 21% (88) of Awards were achieved at a progressive level, with participants demonstrating increased responsibility, challenge and initiative
- 76% further education colleges in Scotland were involved in delivering the Award¹

Courses integrating the Award included those focused on support for learning; personal development; outdoor education, sports and adventure; health and social care; employability; childhood practice; sciences; English for Speakers of Other Languages; community engagement; mental health; and school partnerships.

John Muir Award in action

Students on a NQ Countryside Skills and Ranger Training Programme, being run jointly by UHI West Highland College, Nevis Landscape Partnership, John Muir Trust, Woodland Trust Scotland and Jahama Highland Estates have engaged with and reflected on the impact of practical nature conservation. UHI West Highland College lecturer, Heather McNeill, describes how the group got creative to overcome the challenges of lockdown: *“The students got together online once Lockdown had occurred and some students had returned to their homes. They decided to put together an [Instagram page](#) on which they could post and share and celebrate what they learned and achieved as a group and their individual reflections.”*



UHI Rangers Instagram

Education recovery and outdoor learning approaches

The uncertainty and challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic has had wide-reaching repercussions across society, including on colleges, staff and learners. Lockdown highlighted multiple barriers faced by people in some communities more than others, including health inequities, differing access to safe outdoor spaces and varied digital connectivity – all of which impact on education. As restrictions shift and change, increasing attention is being paid to the longer-term implications for both people's health and wellbeing, as well as employment, training and volunteering prospects.

¹ Colleges involved – Borders College, City of Glasgow College, Dumfries & Galloway College, Dundee & Angus College, Edinburgh College, Fife College, Forth Valley College, Glasgow Clyde College, Glasgow Kelvin College, New College Lanarkshire, North East Scotland College, University of the Highlands and Islands (Inverness, Perth and West Highland College campuses), West College Scotland. Activity at Cantraybridge specialist college is also included.

The John Muir Trust is also aware of positive discussions and sharing of good practice around maximising the use of outdoor spaces, such as college grounds and nearby green/blue spaces. This has potential to help enable physical distancing whilst delivering the benefits that connecting with nature can offer both students and staff – including creating space for students to bond, socialise and re-engage with learning; improving health and wellbeing; building skills, confidence and resilience; and taking positive action for the environment.

Throughout the pandemic, we've continued to support Award Providers, including colleges, that have been in a position to remotely support participants to safely adapt and complete their John Muir Awards through spending time connecting with nearby nature, from local parks, canals and hills to back gardens and balconies; as well as supporting those organisations that decided to pause planned Award activities. For a snapshot of John Muir Award activity that we've seen through lockdown and the creative ways organisations and individuals have adapted to supporting outdoor activity remotely, see our compilation of stories – [John Muir Award activity during the pandemic](#).

Below, we've highlighted just a few starting points, resources and ideas that can help staff looking to make the most of taking college learning and experiences outdoors:

- [John Muir Award and Education Recovery \(Scotland\)](#) – a summary of how the Award supports equity in education and helps raise attainment in Scotland.
- See our [John Muir Award in Scotland's Colleges 2018-19 summary](#) for examples of the Award in action, including links with Learning for Sustainability, STEM and youth social action priorities.
- [Sustainability in Learning and Teaching](#) – this College Development Network blog shares how Scotland's colleges have been embedding Learning for Sustainability in practice.
- [Five Ways to Wellbeing and Wild Places](#) – developed by the New Economics Foundation, the evidence-based *Five Ways* offer a great framework for improving mental health and wellbeing on an individual level; read how connecting with nature can help learners put these into action.
- [Employability and the John Muir Award](#) – taking learning outdoors can help prepare people with practical and transferable 'soft' skills that can build confidence for further training, work and life; find out how the Award can help participants move on to positive destinations and offer valuable recognition of achievements.
- [Getting started with youth work outdoors through the John Muir Award webinar](#) – While aimed at youth workers, this session from summer 2020 shares guidance, ideas and good practice relevant to college settings and adult education. Watch back to find out about the benefits of engaging with nature; troubleshooting of some common concerns/challenges; an introduction to the John Muir Award; and resources that can help get started.
- Awards can be a fantastic way to get outdoors whilst supporting skills development, confidence building and celebrating achievements – visit the [Awards Network](#) for information about youth awards in Scotland.
- [10 tips for Outdoor Learning and Curriculum for Excellence in recovery phase](#) - this National Network for Outdoor Learning blog offers a concise summary of the potential for outdoor learning approaches to be a part of education recovery.

Further information

- Want to find out more about the John Muir Award? Visit www.johnmuiraward.org
- Are you already involved in the John Muir Award, but your planned activities have been impacted by Covid-19? See our [updated FAQs](#) for guidance relating to common queries.
- See the College Development Network's [Covid-19 Information Centre](#) for guidance relating to the pandemic's impact on colleges.