





Developing excellence in wellbeing, play and learning outdoors

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centre number 61656

www.outdoorsthinking.co.uk







Outdoors Thinking, Certificate in Outdoor Practice

Concept, text and images @ Jan White, Liz Edwards and Janet Packer (2021)

Cover image by Carol Duffy. Photographs @ Carol Duffy, @ Menna Godfrey, @ Jan White, @ Liz Edwards, @ Janet Packer, @ Ann Thompson, @ Vanessa Lloyd

Many thanks to the children, adults and settings who have so generously contributed images for this booklet.

The contents of this training have been provided to help increase the understanding and confidence of practitioners aiming to develop outdoor play with young children. As with any aspect of early years provision, it is always necessary to carry out ongoing benefit-risk assessment and management according to the specific children, situation and conditions pertaining.

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Welcome to *Outdoors Thinking*, a training and development organisation that supports educators to establish high quality outdoor provision and practice in early childhood settings across the UK.

We are working hard to help you develop wonderful outdoor provision that makes the most of being outside and is effective and enjoyable for everyone.

Our **vision** is for every child in every setting to have on going access to deep, rich and satisfying high quality outdoor provision.

Our core **mission** is to empower and enable practitioners and teachers to make the most of being outdoors for nurturing children's wellbeing, learning and development in their educational setting. Our goal is to greatly increase the number of enthusiastic educators with a deep belief in the value of learning through real experiences and play outdoors and who share a commitment to upholding **every child's right** to spend ample time outdoors every day throughout the year.

To work towards this, *Outdoors Thinking* provides training and resources that empower practitioners in harnessing the tremendous potential of the outdoors to enable children to thrive and grow.

We do this by:

- Promoting the deep exploration of the value and importance of being outdoors.
- Enabling practitioners to make best use of their outdoor provision through a three cornered approach tackling the why, the what and the how of really good outdoor play.
- Ensuring that our professional development resources are fully relevant, meeting the needs of the workforce for working well with the outdoors, and widely accessible nationally.
- Supporting participants on our training courses with on-going high quality customer services, a growing bank of printed and online materials, and further CPD training & gualification opportunities.
- Enabling strong peer support through communities of practice networks.



What makes us the leading training organisation for outdoor provision in early years settings?

The content and process of Outdoors Thinking training is underpinned by extensive **research-informed knowledge and practice** about outdoor provision and learning outdoors. With the **combined experience of over 80 years** in developing outdoor environments, provision and practice, the qualification has been carefully developed by **leading thinkers and specialists** in early years outdoor play and learning:

- Professor Jan White, B.Sc., M.Sc., PGCE has been awarded honorary Professor
 of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity St David for outstanding leadership
 in the field, and is co-founder/director of Early Childhood Outdoors and awardwinning author of Playing and Learning Outdoors (3rd edn. Routledge 2020)
- Liz Edwards, B.Sc. is founder of Muddy Faces, an innovative resource supplier specialising in Forest School, Outdoor Play and Learning. Liz founded one of the first Forest School training companies in the UK and brings over twenty years' experience of working and supporting others in the outdoors.
- Janet Packer, B.Ed, M.Sc. is co-founder/manager of Growing Wild Outdoor Nursery, Barnsley's first fully outdoors setting. She has over twenty five years experience in the sector, including primary, further and higher education, Forest Schools, nursery management and consultancy.

Outdoors Thinking's considerable experience in working outdoors with young children puts us in a unique position to really know how to support educators to take learning outdoors, thanks to a combination of four critical strengths.

- A deep understanding of young children and early childhood education.
- Extensive expertise in working with the outdoors.
- Substantial experience working in further and higher education at the interface between research and practice.
- · Highly effective adult professional development.

The outdoors has so much potential to offer to young children and there are exciting times ahead for the field of outdoor play and learning!

To explore how we can work together to unlock this fabulous treasure trove, visit **www.outdoorsthinking.co.uk**





The Certificate in Outdoor Practice

The Certificate in Outdoor Practice focuses on the outdoor provision you make **onsite in your setting** for all of your children on a daily basis. With a strong emphasis on **early childhood care and education pedagogy**, it continues the learning journey begun in your initial training in early childhood education and care, deepening understandings of both child development and the support you can provide for nurturing young children's wellbeing, learning and development.

This booklet gives an overview of how the three modules work together to make up the full certificate, and how it has been designed to encourage development of wonderful outdoor provision that makes the most of being outside. It also explains how you can work your way through the qualification in the way that works best for you while maximising the benefits for your setting, colleagues, children and families.



Who is the course for?

The course has been specifically designed to extend the understanding and expertise of anyone in the early years sector who has at least 3 years experience working with young children between 2 and 6 years old. You will need to have a sound knowledge and understanding of child development and early years practice, along with a keen interest in working outdoors.

To achieve the qualification you need to be in a position to implement physical changes in an early years setting; you will therefore need to be working as a childminder, be in an advisory role, or be employed or volunteer in an early years setting or an early years class in school.



Undertaking the Certificate in Outdoor Practice will:

- Build up your **understanding and commitment to** the outdoors as a powerful environment for learning in the early years.
- Foster the practical skills needed for creating a continuously available outdoor
 environment that really harnesses the special nature of being outdoors to meet
 how young children are most able to feel good, learn and develop.
- Support you to feel truly **comfortable**, **confident and competent** in working in your setting's outdoor environment.
- Empower you to enact effective early years pedagogies in your work setting.
- Help you create wonderfully rich outdoor provision that works successfully to
 provide your children with exciting learning experiences that best meet the way
 they are designed to learn.
- Enable you to provide an outdoor environment that works well throughout the whole year, so that children and staff alike love being outdoors for lots of time, every single day.

What does the course do?

Intent – the purpose of the qualification is to guide you to:

- deeply understand child development and outdoor pedagogy, strengthening your ability to support learning and development outside;
- create a strong, enabling outdoor learning environment that matches how young children learn with the special nature of the outdoors.

Implementation – during the course you will:

- develop provision that provides a rich menu of possibilities for learning through a combination of real experiences and play;
- build a pedagogy for making the most of the unique and different nature of the outdoors to enable young children's learning;
- solve organisational and management issues to make your outdoor provision work really well.

Impact - by the end of the year you will:

- be comfortable, confident and competent in working with everything the outdoors has to offer;
- have a rich and powerful outdoor environment that is effective and enjoyable for all, demonstrating leading practice for others;
- find children enthusiastically engaging in active hands-on, holistic and deep learning, motivating critical and creative thinking in all aspects of your curriculum;
- have fostered every child's health, wellbeing, self-regulation and confidence as a learner.



What makes the Certificate in Outdoor Practice unique?

The qualification is content focused, incorporates active learning and supports collaboration and gradual progress. The course is:

- Focused on the early years of childhood (2-6) and child development and wellbeing.
- Focused on **onsite outdoor provision** and on **continuous provision** that makes best use of the special nature and features of the outdoor environment for learning.
- **Develops the setting** itself as an integral part of the course, resulting in continuously improving provision that operates well throughout the year.
- Supports participants in working with their statutory curriculum framework in the outdoor context.
- Has an enabling and empowering process, working on comfort, confidence, competence, and the ability to articulate to others.
- Centered on research-informed effective **early years pedagogies** that integrate **theory with practice**.
- Carefully designed with the express intention of embedding training into practice, drawing explicitly on what is known from research about what makes CPD effective.
- Focuses on personal development of the participant through a coaching and action research style of training, including development of the staff team they work with.
- Provides the participant with a professional qualification as an outdoor specialist.
- Prepares the participant for a progressive range of training and qualification opportunities, broadening the outdoor context (such as Local Nature Play or Forest School) and/or increasing the academic level.





Outcomes: Making a difference for practitioners and children

The Certificate in Outdoor Practice from Outdoors Thinking has an enabling approach with the following ongoing impact and outcomes for practitioners, managers and settings:

- becoming comfortable and confident about working outdoors;
- becoming competent in being able to see the potential and in working with what the outdoors has to offer;
- knowing how to make the most of its special nature;
- knowing how to best support learning through play outside;
- becoming proactive in enhancing provision, practice and management of the outdoor environment for wellbeing, play, learning and development;
- belonging to peer support networks to sustain developments after the training and continue the journey;
- having essential and solid first steps in continuing on to Forest School or Outdoor Nursery training and qualifications.

How does it work?

Employing a **coaching approach**, the course supports you to gradually develop a firm basis of understanding and competences in a **long-term**, **incremental and stepped way**. The step-by-step structure allows you to **gradually develop your own expertise** across the year, providing a slow, regular and manageable approach.

Utilising a **blended mix** of face-to-face experiential sessions, in-person or online discussion and analysis sessions and guided study, you will be supported to work things out for yourself. Constructive observation, implementation and evaluation in your own setting's outdoor space ensures that new understandings become embedded into your practice and are maintained. We aim for this training to work for everyone and to involve **actual development of your setting's outdoor provision and practice**.

Timescales

The time plan of how the course is delivered may differ depending on who commissions the course and whether they wish to complete the qualification or just attend training.

An example of a standard delivery of the full award would be one training day per month, then return to your setting to **implement gained knowledge and experience**. In this way you would complete a module every 4 months and complete the whole certificate over a 12 month period.

This can be done over a shorter timescale but it is very important to allow enough time between each unit before moving on.

KEY

Woven throughout the Award are the **3 core aspects of understanding and practice** - the **environment**, the **child** and the **adult**.

Colours and icons



The **environment** available for exploration and discovery



The **child** as an enthusiastic learner



The many roles of the **adult**



Each certificate is structured into the **3 critical dimensions of thinking and development** - the WHY, the WHAT and the HOW of really good outdoor play.



WHY

is playing and learning outdoors so important in the early years of childhood?



WHAT

do we need to put in place to achieve excellent outdoor provision and practice that is effective and satisfying for both children and practitioners?



HOW

can we make rich experiences that really work available as part of children's everyday outdoor play?

Qualification pathway

Three Modules are available focusing on the 1 Environment, 2 Child & 3 Adult.

The full level 3 Certificate in Outdoor Practice is gained once all three Modules have been undertaken in order and their assessments completed.

Month



- Natural materials, loose parts and construction play
- Imaginative and creative play
- Playing with the stuff of the earth
- Experiencing the living world and life beyond your gate

Module 1

(5 credits) Creating rich experiences outdoors





Level 3 **Certificate in Outdoor Practice** on completion of all three modules



- Thinking through the body
- 6 Thinking through action in the real world
- Thinking with others and building theories
- 8 Thinking through play and representation

Module 2

(5 credits) Supporting learning outdoors



½ day **Discussion & analysis** rest of month

Implementation

- 9 Getting ready to be outside
- 10 Sorting out materials and resources
- 111 Planning challenging and child-led experiences
- 12 Ensuring everyone feels included, happy and confident

Module 3

(5 credits)

Making your outdoor provision work well





Certificate in Outdoor Practice Module 1 Creating rich experiences outdoors (5 credits)

This module is about creating an outdoor environment that provides a rich landscape of stimulating, meaningful and worthwhile possibilities that draw on what the outdoors is particularly able to offer young children, and which are difficult or impossible to provide indoors. We take an in-depth look at the incredible potential in the 'super-ingredients' of excellent outdoor provision and develop these in your own setting.

Enabling the practitioner to develop ideas, skills and confidence in providing the core elements of outdoor play provision.

The 'Creating rich experiences outdoors' module is designed to **get you started** in developing your outdoor provision so that it becomes an environment that really enables young children to be the intensely curious and interactive beings that they are meant to be: asking their own questions and following their own fascinations; learning from the real world and other people; and constructing the right foundations for happiness and success throughout their lives.

This component of the Certificate is about harnessing the **material possibilities of a nature-rich outdoor space** to greatly extend, enhance and complement the experiences you provide for indoors. Through making the most of what is different and special about what can be offered outside, we will focus upon creating opportunities that the indoors cannot provide. An emphasis on natural materials and processes also follows children's inborn drive to connect with nature, nurturing a deep relationship with the natural world.

Through the rich and holistic provision ingredients explored in this module, children will be encouraged to interact, wonder, explore, investigate, experiment, discover, develop their own working theories, imagine, innovate, create, relax, build relationships and, importantly, form memories that will stay with them throughout their life – just as memories of our play outdoors have stayed with us.





TO Experiencing

Over four half-day units of experiential sessions outdoors, you will be introduced to the eight best 'ingredients' the outdoor environment can offer, opening your eyes to the incredible range of fabulous opportunities that these core ingredients of outdoor provision can make possible in any outdoor space, however uninspiring it might currently seem. Through having plenty of time to explore and play with each ingredient yourself, in a small group with other practitioners, you will be able to gather



ideas, develop skills, share questions and thoughts, talk things through and gain confidence in both offering this element of provision in your own setting/placement and being able to make the most of what it can offer for your children.

Each ingredient is super-rich in itself, but when more than one is provided they work with each other to offer a limitless menu of possibilities for discovery and opportunities for learning!

Unit 1 Natural materials, loose parts and construction play

Providing for construction and den play outdoors; providing for natural materials and loose parts outdoors

Unit 2 Imaginative and creative play

Providing for imaginative play and story outdoors; providing for creative and expressive play outdoors

Unit 3 Playing with the stuff of the earth

Providing for water play and mud play outdoors

Unit 4 Experiencing the living world and life beyond your gate

Providing experiences with plants and creatures and venturing beyond the garden

For each ingredient, you will be able to investigate and test out a range of easy to gather materials and resources that can get you started in developing this aspect of provision in your own outdoor space.



P Digging Deeper

The half-day indoor sessions are structured around analysis and group discussion to draw out the amazing array of learning and development that each aspect of outdoor provision has the potential to stimulate and support. As children explore and uncover their own personal curriculum through each ingredient, our discussions will help you to understand how your statutory framework can be used to support each child's journey of adventure and discovery. These discussions will also explore adult roles and interactions in both offering experiences and responding to what children do with them, and consider how the curriculum framework that guides your practice works with provision outdoors to enable every child's individual pathway of learning and development.



Putting it into practice

For gaining the Certificate in Outdoor Practice Module 1, the qualification will focus on encouraging you to use the understanding you have gained through **implementing each ingredient** in your own setting or placement, demonstrating how you have done this. We will guide you to make your **own additional studies** through expected and recommended reading, watching video clips of children at play and adults' practice, and exploring other resources. You will be encouraged to keep a portfolio to organise what you find, including a journal to record your ideas, thoughts and actions. We want the assessment to be **providing something useful** for you and for your setting. So this can be done in whatever way works best for you, such as photographs with explanatory text, written descriptions with comments from parent/carers or other practitioners, or video with commentary – or a combination of these.



Certificate in Outdoor Practice Module 2 Supporting learning outdoors (5 credits)

Building upon learning from the previous module, this step in the qualification pays detailed attention to making sure that the environment being provided is capturing the special nature of the outdoors to best effect and meeting the ways that children are designed to go about exploration and discovery in their early years. We explore in depth the natural learning methods of early childhood and work to transfer these into actual practice through developing your educational role.

Enabling the practitioner to understand and believe in learning through play outdoors. Developing confidence and skills in making good use of the unique and different nature of learning through play in the outdoors.

Building on the previous component of the course, which explored key ways in which you can develop your outdoor environment, the focus of Module 2 is **the child and children's learning**. It explores what we know about how young children need to go about exploring and making sense of the world they inhabit – that is, **how young children learn best**.

One of the very strong reasons why we should take learning outdoors is that it empowers young children to engage with discovery and understanding in the very way that evolution has crafted them to do so: through **self-driven**, **hands-on**, **playful and active interaction with the real world**. We will investigate how the outdoors, with its **special nature and characteristics**, is the perfect fit for learning and development in the early years – and how learning can become so much more effective and satisfying for young children when we work with these features.

This element of the Certificate is designed to support you in **making the most of the ingredients** of outdoor provision you have developed, through capturing the differences between indoors and outdoors. By deepening your understanding of how young children need to go about their learning, you will be able to improve the ways in which you **allow, encourage and support** your children to interact with the provision you offer outside.





TO Experiencing

Four half-day **experiential sessions outdoors** will examine each of the **central mechanisms of early learning** - how young children's minds, bodies and spirits work in a united way to engage deeply with their world and build the ability to think about it.

Through practically **exploring each of these natural learning methods for yourself**, you will be able to gain a personal understanding of how this feels and works for the young children you support. Working in **small groups with other practitioners** will allow you to share thinking and concerns, hear ideas, learn informally from others and build the confidence and skills for extending your own practice.

There is a huge amount for young children to discover about both **the physical** and **the human world**, and core to this is needing to find out about themselves and how *they* fit into this world. Children are full of self-driven curiosity and self-motivated methods for doing this; so rather than 'teaching', our role is to **empower these learning mechanisms** to operate at their best.

Working in small groups to gain a deep feel of how this mode of learning works for young children, we will explore:

Unit 5 Thinking through the body

Multi-sensory experiences and movement; sensory processing, embodied learning and spatial reasoning

Unit 6 Thinking through action in the real world

Real life, hands-on experiences from the real world; acting on the world, making things happen and scientific thinking

Unit 7 Thinking with others and building theories

Imitation and social learning with other children and adults; problem finding and solving; language for thinking and sharing

Unit 8 Thinking through play and representation

Play as a means of processing experiences; pretending and symbolic thinking; creativity and emergent literacy

For each learning mechanism, you will be able to investigate a range of ways in which this can be encouraged through provision and practice outdoors.





Digging Deeper

Each experiential session is matched with a corresponding half-day unit investigating just how much young children are taking in through everyday explorations and play in a stimulating outdoor environment, and how much they are constructing their own brains and thinking abilities in doing so.

These sessions will draw out how the unique nature of the outdoor environment is so well suited to supporting each natural early learning mode, and it will become easy to see that the way young children need to learn = the way that the outdoors can offer learning.

Combining our focus on how young children learn with how the outdoors operates in enabling learning will also prompt thinking about **how practitioners can help the outdoors** do its best work for children. Drawing upon the **guidance of your statutory framework**, we will consider how adults' attunement, behaviour, communication, interaction and responsive preparation ensure that learning through play outdoors is made most effective.

Putting it into practice

This module is designed to enable you to work with the special nature of the outdoors to create a **powerful early learning environment** that fits really well with the ways young children are naturally designed to learn. The implementation component of this module is about further developing how the 'ingredients' of your outdoor provision are engaged with by **applying the thinking and learning** you have gained - demonstrating how you have done this and reflecting upon what you see happening as a result.

As for Module 1, this element of the course should be enjoyable and practically useful, **fitting with the way you prefer to think and learn**. So, submissions will be through our *Outdoors Thinking* online platform and can be done in whatever way works most fruitfully for you and your setting.



Certificate in Outdoor Practice Module 3 Making outdoor provision work well (5 credits)

Great provision and exciting opportunities will only work effectively when outdoor provision and practice is managed well by all involved. Making learning outdoors enjoyable and rewarding for all - and keeping this sustainable over the long term - requires attention to a range of key organisational aspects that need the involvement of staff, children and parent/carers. Through focusing on organisation and management, this third step of the award supports you to make the most of developments in the two prior modules and to continue unlocking the fabulous potential of taking learning outdoors.

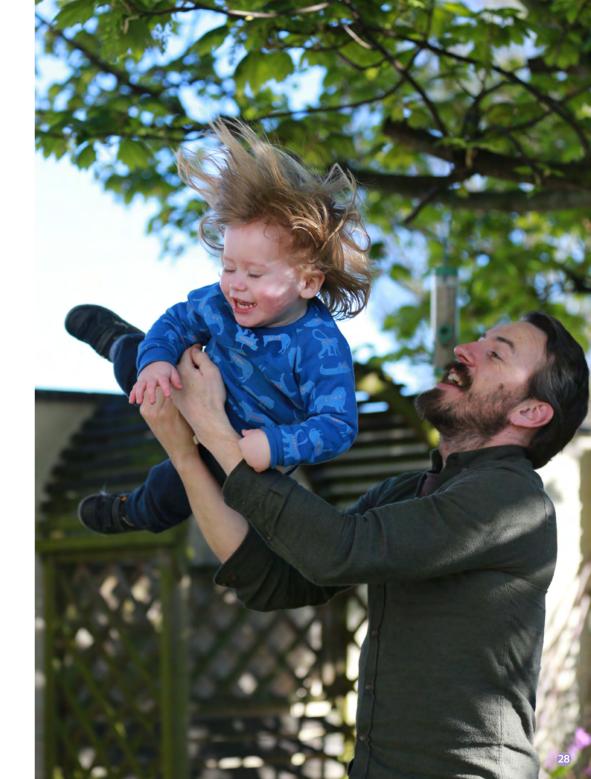
Enabling the practitioner to be confident both in practicing and in articulating the role of outdoor provision in their setting. Developing the knowledge, practices and competences to make best use of the outdoor part of the early learning environment.

This section of the qualification adds a further, and vital, layer through **addressing the key organisational and management issues** that allow outdoor provision to work most successfully, making learning outdoors enjoyable and rewarding for children and adults alike - and a place that everyone wants to be for long periods every day.

It can feel like there are all sorts of things getting in the way of **achieving the outdoor provision you would love to share** with your children. Many early years settings have to work with issues like difficult access to the outdoors, limited or uninspiring outdoor spaces, lack of storage, restricted funds for design, resources, training, outdoor clothing and so on, staff who are early on in their own journey of working well with the outdoor environment, and parents who are not yet fully on board with the aspirations and intentions for learning outdoors you might have.

What do *you* need to do to unlock and open up the wonderful and stimulating landscape of possibilities the outdoor environment could provide for your children? Drawing upon awareness and thinking developed in the previous two stages of the course, in this module you will be guided to **mobilise positive thinking and constructive action** to work on the key obstructions in your own setting or placement.





TO Experiencing

Working in **interactive small groups outdoors**, each training session will explore and tackle in a practical way two of the most widely experienced issues and problems in operating provision outdoors that providers commonly encounter.

With **ample time to consider** the current situation in your setting, ponder together and problem solve with **other practitioners facing similar situations**, these outdoor sessions will prompt new ways of thinking and provide rationales for making practical decisions that work. You will gain confidence in managing operational elements of provision and practice so that they can make the best contribution to the success of your day-to-day outdoor play.

Adding the third side of the Environment-Child-Adult triangle, Module 3 'Making outdoor provision work well' attends to the roles that adults play in setting up, operating and sustaining an enabling environment that really meets what young children want to find out about and do, supporting the most advantageous ways for them to go about these explorations.

We'll take a solution-focused approach to tackling the issues and barriers commonly presented by taking learning outdoors, through working on the very elements that have the most leverage in making learning through outdoor play work in the way it should do.

Across four half-day units of **experiential sessions outdoors**, you will be able to identify difficulties and explore solutions to clusters of related concerns shared by your practitioner colleagues. Working practically in small informal groups will enable honest evaluation of your current practices and **supportive**, **practical solution finding** in these areas:

Unit 9 Getting ready to be outside

Weather and clothing; parents' understanding and cooperation; timetabling and routines

Unit 10 Sorting out materials and resources

Materials, resources and experiences; bringing in nature; storing and organising resources

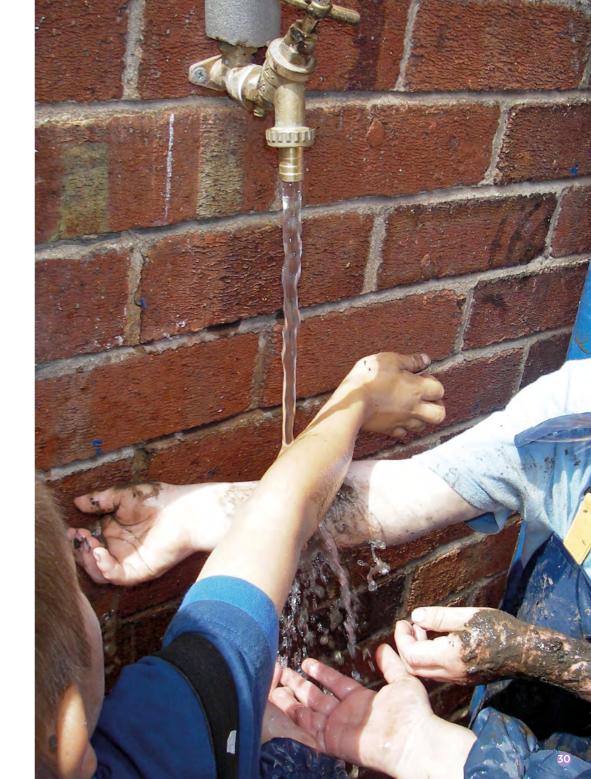
Unit 11 Planning challenging and child-led experiences

Child-led curriculum and planning; challenge and risk; health and safety

Unit 12 Ensuring everyone feels included, happy and confident

Inclusion and accessibility; comfort and security; adults wanting to be outside

For each of these issues, you will be supported to investigate and try out solutions and strategies that have been found to make provision for learning through play outdoors work well, so that it becomes both enjoyable and effective for children and practitioners alike.



P Digging Deeper

Following on from the hands-on outdoor sessions, associated half-day 'digging deeper' discussion sessions indoors explore wider solutions for overcoming barriers and difficulties.

During the hands-on sessions outdoors you will have drawn out some detail about the issues currently facing your setting or placement, and shared and explored some practical solutions within your group. Each of these practical sessions forms the basis for **corresponding half-day discussion units** that lead to more in-depth analysis and action planning for whole-setting changes.



Facilitated by a tutor well versed in facing common challenges and managing well-functioning outdoor provision, these indoor sessions in a larger group will **take thinking**, **solution sharing and problem solving much further** so that you can work out the right approaches for your unique situation.

Putting it into practice

Assessment for Module 3 is designed to guide operational improvements in your outdoor provision and practice through an action-research approach. Having identified four key aspects to work on, you will need to demonstrate the changes made, along with explaining the rationale for your actions and evaluating the impact you feel these have had for your setting and team as a whole.

This element of the Certificate in Outdoor Practice is designed to help you find the organisational aspects of your settings' outdoor provision and practice that have the most influence on how well things work and how enjoyable it is for everyone to be outside. This step is particularly important in ensuring that new understanding is put into real practice, in an effective way that improves everyone's experience for the long term.





Join a course

Outdoors Thinking courses run in many locations around the UK, generally starting in either April or September. Visit our website to see which courses are currently available.

Booking - www.outdoorsthinking.co.uk

You can book easily online - Purchase Orders are accepted Alternatively email **info@outdoorsthinking.co.uk** with your enquiry.

Payment - At the checkout choose pay by Card or by Purchase Order*

*Purchase Orders - Once the order is placed we will send you an invoice for your place/s. Please note places are provisional and are only secured once payment has been received.

When you have booked

Once your places are booked, we will send you a link to a participant's details form; a separate form needs to be completed for each participant.

We will then liaise directly with the participants to ensure they have everything they require to prepare and attend the course and we have all the information we need to support them.

If you are interested in helping set up a course to run in your area please contact info@outdoorsthinking.co.uk



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