

Regional Outdoor Learning Research Hubs – Terms of Reference

Note: For ease, the acronym LINE or the phrase ‘outdoor learning’ are often used by Natural England as shorthand for learning in natural environments.

Context

There is increasing interest in advancing the number, diversity and frequency at which people of all ages can benefit from experiences in the natural environment through play and learning; in order to support delivery of outcomes including those related to health, wellbeing, education and pro-environmental behaviours.

The Government’s ambition as set out in the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper ¹states ‘*everyone should have fair access to a good quality natural environment*’, recognising the health and social benefits derived from contact with the natural world.

Purpose

The Strategic Research Group for Learning in Natural Environments (SRG LINE) was established in 2012 to support the advancement of policy and practice in this area by facilitating a more integrated and strategic approach to research, evaluation and use of evidence. Until this time, there was no forum for enabling this integrated approach.

The Strategic Research Group was established by Natural England and Historic England and is a growing partnership of the leading relevant academic institutions in this area, plus key individuals and agencies such as Public Health England. In 2015, The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC) joined as a partner, specifically to lead and support delivery of the Group’s objectives around improving links between research and practice in LINE. .

Scope

The scope of the SRG LINE includes research relevant to learning in natural environments at **all ages and in all contexts, including formal and informal settings**. The important characteristics of these activities are that they are: **outdoors** (as opposed to indoors) within **natural environments** (whether in urban or rural settings etc), and are about **learning**. Collectively the Group volunteers their expertise and skills to define, prioritise and scope delivery of a strategic research programme for LINE.

The SRG LINE works closely with other groups on shared agendas and projects. Notably:

- Specialist research networks represented by SRG members
- CLOtC’s newly established Sector Working Group, to enable a much needed improvement in links between the LINE research and delivery sectors. Group members bring links to their own wider networks across many disciplines and research interest areas

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-environment-white-paper-implementation-updates>

- The Strategic Research Group for Outdoors for All, with members contributing to joint projects as appropriate.
- The plan is to work with Local Hubs for Outdoor Learning Research and Practice (established Jan 2017) managed by the University of Cumbria and Institute of Outdoor Learning

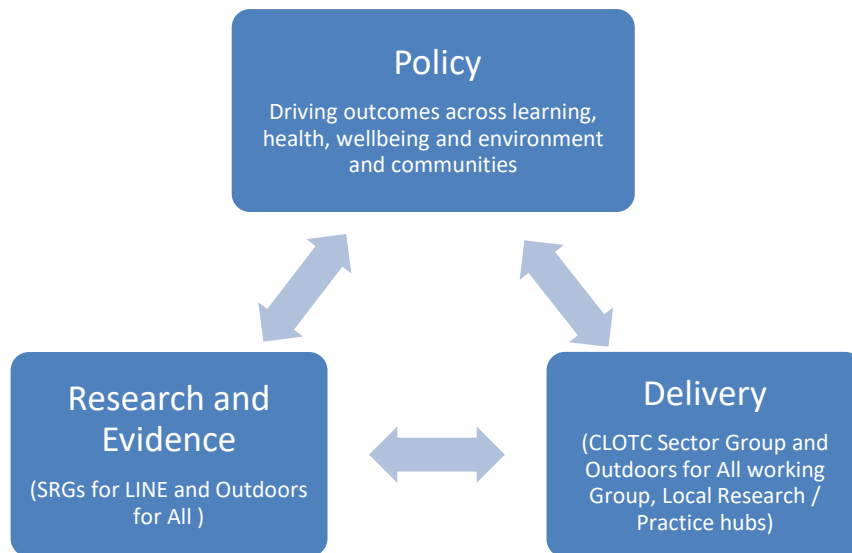


Figure 1: Illustration of the role the SRG plays in enabling an integrated and strategic approach to research, evaluation and use of evidence

Objectives

The SRG LINE will:

- identify the issues and research questions needed to inform policy and practice and to inform future research agendas
- establish a more integrated, collaborative and hence strategic approach to research and evaluation in this area
- share results of existing and ongoing research and evaluations more widely, adding value and preventing duplication
- inform more effective strategies for collecting evidence on impact and to move towards common frameworks for evaluation
- support the use of existing evidence on the range of benefits more effectively, for example to support presentation of more compelling rationales for learning in natural environments

Outputs and Impact

Research priorities are agreed by the Group and determine scope of work undertaken. Over the period 2012-present, the research programme has focused on improving learning and health

outcomes for children and young people under 24. In 2016 the Group agreed to expand the representation to better reflect natural and cultural heritage interests.

Although the investment required to enable the SRG LINE research programme is modest, the work of the group has enabled extensive partnership working and is leveraging considerable added value, both in kind and financial. By identifying the need for and then gathering new evidence, the Group's work programme has had real practical application, for example through the creation of new national indicators, and in evaluating new delivery approaches via large scale demonstration projects. The work of the group also aligns with and is able to inform the evidence needs of the Governments 25 year environment plan and Natural England's Conservation Strategy.

Governance and Resourcing

Natural England provides a secretariat for the Group and together with Historic England and CLOT, is committed to continue to secure resources to support progression of the strategic research priorities through operation of the group thereby enabling better communications and links between communities across research, policy and practice with an interest in LINE.

Operation of the group and delivery of its programme is supported by a SRG LINE Development Manager funded through partnership projects.

Membership

The Group includes representatives with expertise in learning in natural environments drawn from:

- UK academic research, with international representation as appropriate via e-networking
- research agencies and institutions
- independent researchers

The Research Group will also work to build and develop links with a much wider whose membership will include representative from:

- Funding bodies
- Government depts.
- Delivery Sector Working Groups
- Training bodies
- Media

Strategic Research Group LINE

Organisation	Name
University of Hertfordshire	Dr Frances Harris Senior Lecturer, Geography, Geology and Environment School of Life and Medical Sciences

Council for Learning Outside the Classroom	Elaine Skates Chief Executive Officer
Ernest Cook Trust	Victoria Edwards
Historic England	Sandra Stancliffe Head of Education and Inclusion
Historic England	Sandra Stancliffe Laura Clayton
Institute for Effective Education University of York	Dr Jonathan Sharples (currently on secondment to EEF) Manager of Partnerships at the IEE
Institute of Education London	Dr Sue Rogers or ano as Sue has limited capacity Senior Lecturer and Head of Department Department of Early Years and Primary Education
Kings College London	Dr Melissa Glackin Lecturer in Science Education Prof Becky Francis Professor of Education and Social Justice
Monash University	Dr Mark Rickinson Associate Professor Associate Dean (Engagement) Faculty of Education
National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement	Paul Manners /Sophie Duncan Director /Asst Director
Natural England	Jim Burt Principal Adviser Outdoor Learning and Outdoors for All Programmes, Natural England Martin Gilchrist Lead Adviser, Valuing the Environment team Sarah Preston Senior Adviser , Valuing the Environment team
Open University	Dr Katy Layton-Jones
Public Health England (PHE)	Dr Helen Duncan Programme Director National Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network Jenny Stewart Child Obesity & Physical Activity Programme Manager Children, Young People & Families Team

Royal Holloway University London	Dr Deborah Harvey
SRG LINE Development Manager	Dr Anne Hunt
University College London	Prof May Cassar
University of Aberdeen	Dr Donald Gray Senior Lecturer, School of Education
University of Bath	Dr Elizabeth Barratt-Hacking Lecturer in Education, Dept Education Prof William Scott Professor Emeritus
University of Bristol	Professor Justin Dillon Head of Graduate School of Education Jon James Lecturer in Science Education
University of Cumbria	Dr Chris Loynes Reader, Outdoor Studies
University of Derby	Dr Miles Richardson Head of Psychology & Deputy Head of Life Sciences College of Life and Natural Sciences
University of East London	Dr Neil Herrington Principal Lecturer, School of Education and Communities
University of Edinburgh	Dr Simon Beames Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Learning/School Director of QAE Education, Teaching and Leadership Dr John Telford Lecturer and Programme Director MSc Outdoor Education and MSc Environment and Sustainability Education
University of Essex	Professor Jules Pretty Professor of Environment and Society
University of Exeter	Dr Mat White Senior Lecturer, Medical School
University of Glasgow	Dr Ria Dunkley Dr Rebecca Madgin
University of Gloucester	Dr Stuart Lester/Dr Wendy Russell Senior Lecturers in Play and Playwork
University of Leeds	Dr Helen Graham
University of Newcastle	Dr David Webb

University of Oxford	Dr Ann Childs Lecturer, Dept Education
University of Plymouth	Prof Debby Cotton Professor of Higher Education Pedagogy, RedRIO & Educational Development Dr Sue Waite School of Education (Faculty of Health, Education and Society) Dr Jim Rogers Director of Plymouth Teaching School Alliance at Plymouth Learning Partnership
University of Sheffield	Dr Sarah Barnes
University of Sussex	Dr Helena R Howe School of Law, Politics and Sociology
University of Western Sydney	Prof Karen Malone Sustainability theme leader, Centre for Educational Research