



National Outdoor Learning Award

by Dr Roger Hopper and Neal Anderson

For professionals in the outdoors, a theory of change for how you can make a difference with others is essential when coaching participants to achieve personal development outcomes. Similarly, capturing data on the efficacy and results of outdoor learning benefits your customers and therefore your organisation and its supporters. Enabling IOL Members to evidence the learning and impact of their work can help the Institute as well. Being able to make the outputs of an outdoor learning experience more visible supports the Institute to promote its vision of Outdoor Learning as a highly valued form of development, education and employment in UK society.

Responding to this challenge, the Institute is delighted to have partnered with the creators of the National Outdoor Learning Award (NOLA) to provide a way to recognise and capture the personal development outcomes of participants during a residential or regular outdoor learning experience. NOLA is a FREE resource for the outdoor sector.

NOLA in a nutshell

The National Outdoor Learning Award (NOLA) provides evidence of development in three areas - self, others and the environment.

- NOLA can be used with different ages, needs, outdoor environments (on-site, woodland, hill, sea etc.), different activities (outdoor, adventure, field study, environmental) and with single and multiple session programmes.
- NOLA assists learners to develop high levels of motivation, esteem, skill, knowledge and desire to learn.
- NOLA gives outdoor learning professionals and organisations the opportunity to embed personal development into their delivery.

Development of NOLA

Dr Roger Hopper (co-author) designed and first used the concepts of the NOLA award while working at a Pupil Referral Unit (Horizons, 2008). The NOLA award is based upon long standing research into outdoor learning's impact on personal development and continued to be developed by trialling it in practice within a Special Needs School (Horizons, 2011). One of the main aims of the NOLA award is to capture and celebrate the personal and social change created by outdoor learning, in a measurable manner. The desire to quantify a primarily qualitative change was born out of countless times of not being able to evidence developments. In comparison to mainstream curricula, outdoor learning therefore appeared ineffective.

The current format of the NOLA award, and resources, were developed by Dr Hopper, with support from Heatree Activity Centre. A national steering group was formed in 2014 to further the direction of the award.

IOL Launch of NOLA

NOLA was launched on the IOL website at the end of December 2017. By mid-February 2018, over a hundred outdoor providers had downloaded the Record Sheets.

Geographically, enquiries range from England, Scotland Wales and Canada.

Outdoor provider enquiries include: pre, infant, primary, secondary and independent schools; universities; National Parks; residential centres; sole providers; and sail training boats.



Is NOLA for you?

The National Outdoor Learning Award is particularly useful for any organisation (including sole providers) that is passionate about capturing and celebrating outdoor learning in a very non-intrusive way. If personal development is central to a programme, then NOLA could be for you.

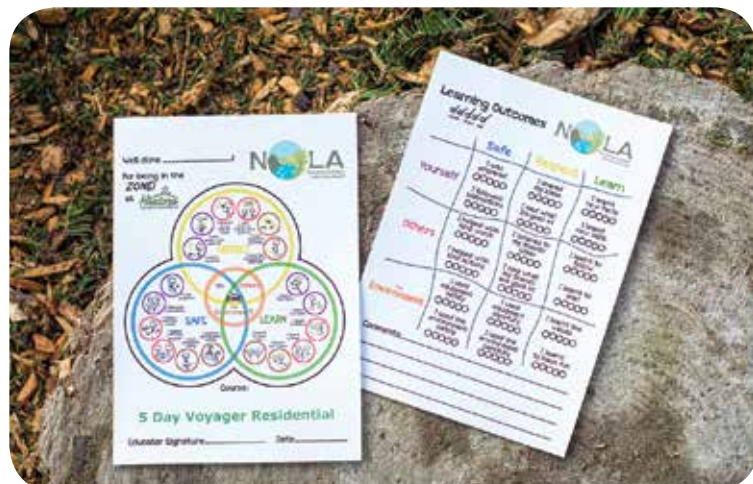
Whilst assessment is inevitable with any award, with the NOLA award the focus is on personalised learning and self-assessment through reflective practice. Developing reflective practice in learners supports a lifelong skill at the heart of outdoor learning.

Use of the National Outdoor Learning Award as part of your organisation supports marketing. It also helps develop local and national social capital. Furthermore, using an IOL supported award links your provision to national recognition.

The scope of NOLA

The National Outdoor Learning Award is designed to celebrate and capture personal development in any outdoor learning experience. The award focuses on 18 personal development skills which stem from six core rights and responsibility values: associated with “safe, learn, respect, yourself, others and the environment” (see below). The model is simple, but it is this simplicity that makes it so robust and adaptable.

- We have the right to stay safe and the associated responsibility to keep ourselves and others safe and use the environment in a safe manner.



- We have the right to be respected and the associated responsibility to treat ourselves, others and the environment with respect.
- We have the right to learn and the associated responsibility to be ready to, learn to support the learning of others and learn about the environment.

The award can help outdoor educators develop their own planning and delivery as it supports both outcome and process. The award supports reflective practice both in and on action. At the heart of the award is the pedagogical practice of personalised learning. Consequently the learners themselves develop high levels of motivation, esteem, skill, knowledge and desire to learn.

The NOLA Record Sheet itself acts both as a way of recording the learning and as the certificate to ultimately celebrate the learners achievements. A badge can accompany the certificate. Programme leaders (Teachers, Managers etc.) can use the Record Sheets as both quantitative and qualitative evidence of learning.



Using NOLA

Achieving the NOLA award is not a series of hoops to jump through but a model for change and a model of change. As a model for change it has the capacity to help us develop our outdoor professional practice and as a model of change it has the possibility to evidence (capture) and celebrate the scope and impact of outdoor learning.

NOLA is a FREE resource available to download via the IOL website: <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/National-Outdoor-Learning-Award> or download directly from the NOLA website: <http://nola.education>

Having downloaded a copy of the Record sheet the provider adds their organisation and course name. We recommend printing on A5 medium weight card. Pencils and plastic wallets are useful if seeking to use the record sheets outside.

When first using NOLA it helps to pre-plan which skills to focus on with a particular session. Initially we recommend focusing on a couple of skills at a time and using structured, on action reviews. As outdoor educators become more familiar with the 18 skills, this pre-planning and structured style, isn't as necessary because the skills occur naturally,





can be reflected upon in action and ultimately become less intrusive to the flow of the session. As the learners themselves begin to understand NOLA, they take ownership and the whole process runs itself by the individual.

The aim is to get the learners to identify for themselves how they are going to or when they have demonstrated a skill. It helps to turn the skills into specific behaviours (something that the learner would say or do – something that others can hear or see).

Each skill is personalised to the context of the activity, environment and individual. For example one of the skills is “being prepared”. For a pre-school child on a forest school session this might be, have they got their wellies on the correct feet. For a student doing a three day walking expedition, have they packed their rucksack, done a route card and are wearing appropriate clothing for the expected weather conditions.

The record sheet has five small circles against each skill. These are used to fill in when a learner has demonstrated that skill. The five circles represent demonstrating the skill progressively; some, more or all of the time. Initially

assessment can be by the outdoor educator, however peer and ultimately personal assessment is the aim.

We recommend not creating “rules” about how many skills a learner must demonstrate to attain the award. The emphasis is on capturing and celebrating the learning. The outdoor leader has an opportunity on the Record sheet to write some personal feedback for the learner.

Future development opportunities ...

Providers of the award are encouraged to use it to track basic user data. We are hoping to then use this data to gather some indicative information about the impact of NOLA. We are planning, subject to securing funding, to conduct a more thorough piece of research into the wider impact of NOLA and develop an App for use. Anyone who is particularly interested in being involved with this research, especially if, you are, or know of a potential funding or research partner, is invited to contact IOL or the NOLA team at Heatree Activity Centre. ■

References:

- Hopper, R. (2008) Excluded and Challenging but Able to Learn. Institute for Outdoor Learning. Horizons (44).
Hopper, R. (2012) Teaching Skills as a Core Part of a School Curriculum. Institute for Outdoor Learning. Horizons (58).

About the Authors

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Photos and illustrations all from Dr Roger Hopper at Heatree.

