**Case Study – Maximising the use of outdoor space to deliver the new extended free entitlement (EFE)**

**The new EFE for three and four year olds**

The new EFE three and four year olds which comes into effect from September 2017 will principally be available to children whose parents are working 16 hours or more per week and earn at least an average of 16 times the national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW). At the current rate, this means that a parent must earn a minimum equivalent of £115.20 for over 25 year olds and around £107 for a 21 year old. The upper limit is £100,000. In two-parent households, both parents will have to be working and meet the criteria individually. For more information about the eligibility criteria please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section of the toolkit in [**Overview**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/overview-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit).

Currently 94% of three year olds and 99% of four year olds nationally are using some or all of the current EFE entitlement (the universal offer)[[1]](#footnote-1), although there is some variation locally, with lower uptake in more deprived areas.

Children whose parents do not meet the criteria for the new EFE will continue to have access to the universal offer.

**Why a partnership approach?**

The local authority had identified the approximate number of new places that would be required to meet the likely EFE and was aware that capacity of existing providers to accommodate the additional demand was limited. The authority was also aware that there was a significant amount of outdoor space, which if used creatively, could go a long way to meeting the demand.

**The partnership**

This case study is based on work undertaken by the Family and Childcare Trust with a local authority that was keen to explore options for increasing the supply of early education for three and four years olds through outdoor learning. The local authority had identified a range of open spaces including public places such as wetlands, forests/woods, parks and sports grounds as well as open spaces attached to schools and nurseries.

A partnership, led by the local authority, was set up and involved an outdoor education centre, a PVI provider, a federated nursery and teaching school, a children’s centre, a nursery school and children’s centre and an infants’ school.

These partners were brought together a) because they had expressed an interest in outdoor learning or play, b) because they had access to outdoor space (either on their own premises or elsewhere) and/or c) because they could potentially bring added value such as capacity to develop and deliver staff development and learning.

The local authority, with support from FCT, convened a number of partnership meetings to scope out the challenges, opportunities, benefits and risks. These included for example identifying possible venues (space attached to nurseries and children’s centres as well as public spaces such as forests/woods, meadows etc), staffing (how staff would respond to delivering outdoor learning, their training and development needs etc), likely demand by parents and what concerns parents might have (children being outside in all weathers, safeguarding etc), costs (set up and running) etc. To help identify and address issues the partnership went on a structured visit to an established outdoor learning provider.

**Challenges and how the partnership approach addressed these**

* **Creating additional places** – the local authority recognised that additional places could be created through better use of outdoor space and wanted to explore delivery options. Two options that emerged were:
	+ Providers making better use of their existing outdoor space to increase the number of places available
	+ Providers making use of the outdoor education centre and bringing children from their nursery for an agreed number of hours per week thus releasing space at the nursery.
* **Identifying new space from which to deliver the offer** – the fact that the partnership was led by the local authority meant that the partnership had access to information about spaces that could be used to deliver outdoor learning. This included for example unused community and leisure facilities. The local authority, through its internal channels, was able to make contact with the team that deals with the disposal of unused assets and talk to that team about the viability of using some of these to support outdoor learning. Local authority staff were also able to speak to colleagues in planning, building control and parks about issues associated with managing changes of use and were able to liaise with councillors to understand and manage the expectations of local residents and other community members.
* **Maximising existing space** – a number of the partners who already provided early learning and childcare were chosen because they had easy access to outdoor space. One of them for example had adjacent land as part of their premises that was not being used. Another was using some of its space as an outdoor play facility but mainly for school-age children. Through the partnership these providers were able to explore if and how they could make better use of these spaces. One provider had a wooden building that, with some adaptation, could be used as ‘base camp’ for meals and storytime or during inclement weather.
* **Staffing including learning and development** – one of the challenges that the partnership identified was how to support staff to feel confident about delivering EYFS through outdoor learning. The outdoor education centre and the teaching school were planning to work together to develop a bespoke training programme for staff as part of a pilot project that the local authority agreed to fund during 2016-17. Providers would be asked to take part and nominate an outdoor learning champion who would receive the training and cascade learning to other staff within the setting.
* **Working with parents** – a significant unknown within the partnership was the likely demand from parents and whether parents would respond to, or shy away from, the idea of their children taking part in outdoor learning. The partnership developed a short [**Outdoor Learning Survey**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Exemplar%20outdoor%20learning%20survey.docx#overlay-context=dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit) to gather parents’ views on outdoor learning and the amount of time they would feel comfortable with their children accessing.
* **Delivery models** **–** a number of delivery options were explored and the local authority agreed to run a small number of pilots during 2016-17. The models included:
	+ children spending up to half their time accessing outdoor learning
	+ children spending a half to a whole day each week accessing outdoor learning
	+ children accessing outdoor learning at weekends or during holiday periods
	+ only children accessing the free entitlement accessing outdoor learning

The rest of this case study presents some background to how outdoor learning can benefit children and the issues and challenges explored by the partners including costs and practicalities (ratios, logistics, equipment, resources and clothing).

**Why outdoor learning?**

Outdoor learning is gaining in popularity with a number of recent reports and research papers highlighting the benefits of children’s experiences in natural environments. A recent paper *Student Outcomes and Natural Schooling: Pathways From Evidence To Impact Report* 2016 by Professor Karen Malone, Centre for Educational Research, Western Sydney University and Associate Professor Sue Waite, Plymouth Institute of Education, Plymouth University highlights a range of benefits including health through increased physical activity, wellbeing through enhancing social and intrapersonal qualities and educational attainment through developing ‘characters’ of resilience and confidence as precursors to successful learning. Furthermore maximizing the use of outdoor spaces such as woodlands, parks, recreational grounds, wetlands, outdoor spaces attached to existing early education nurseries and land owned by a third party such as church diocese) presents an opportunity to respond creatively to the new entitlement for working parents by creating new outdoor places thus easing pressure where there is limited indoor space.

Delivering early education and childcare through outdoor learning therefore presents opportunities but it also presents challenges. This case study seeks to address some of these issues.

**Risk assessment and benefits**

One of the first things that people think about when they think of outdoor learning is the risks associated with it, in particular concerns about the safety of children, especially if they are in open and public spaces. However it is important to remember that there are significant benefits to outdoor learning and that children learning to manage risks can, in itself, be a huge benefit.

Risk assessment forms a part of everyday planning within any early learning provision and outdoor learning in this respect is no different. Where outdoor learning can bring an additional benefit is that it provides an opportunity for children to learn how to assess and manage risks themselves.

Some ways of managing common risks involve

* Teaching children to always ask an owner before stroking a dog and to stand still, fold their arms across their chests and look up – rather than scream and run away - if a dog comes running up to them.
* Doing a ‘site sweep’ before setting up camp looking out for fox or dog mess, bottles or cans, jagged stones etc.
* Ensuring children are grouped together with their key worker and they all wear clothes – either waterproofs or high visibility vests – of the same bright colour so children associate themselves with the yellow group or blue group etc. Some providers allocate children into groups by age – each with a specific colour.
* Marking out the camp boundary with stones and making a game so that if someone steps outside the boundary everyone makes an alert noise.
* Playing games of stop and freeze during a walk or 123 where are you.

**Costs**

Outdoor learning brings some additional or different costs but there are also savings compared to indoor learning. For example:

*Costs which are likely to be cheaper*

* Premises (however there may be a charge by the landowner for using outdoor spaces)
* Resources are mainly those naturally occurring and are generally cheap
* Insurance is also a consideration
* Food

*Costs which are likely to be higher*

* Staffing as ratios tend to be higher
* Storage

*Other costs to be considered*

* Transport for children and resources to and from ‘base camp’

**Ratios**

Most outdoor learning providers operate with ratios of between one adult to every three children and one adult to every five children, with 1:4 being the most common. Nursery providers, independent and maintained schools and childminders must ensure that they comply with the ratios as set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and/or any additional guidance set by the local authority.

**Logistics**

Logistics considerations should include:

* The amount of time children spend outdoors - some providers are wholly outdoors (except in very inclement weather) whereas others spend part of the day outdoors and part of the day indoors
* How children, resources and equipment are transported to and from site - some providers start and end the day in a building (village hall, existing nursery, community centre etc) where children are helped to change into their outdoor clothes before being either transported (cost attached) or walked to a ‘base camp’ (a park, a common, woodland etc) others have agreed drop-off and pick up places
* Drop off and pick up – these need to be agreed in advance with mothers/ fathers/ carers (parents) and can vary depending on where children will be at the start and end of each day
* Storage – is there storage close to the outdoor space? A number of providers use trollies to transport their resources and equipment to and from the site each day
* Food – who will provide morning and afternoon snacks and lunch? Where will these be eaten? Some providers supply food whereas others insist that parents provide food and give them a list or advice on what meals should consist of, some have access to a nearby café. Some providers have all their meals in the outdoor space whereas others take children to a building. All of this will depend on where the outdoor learning is taking place and its proximity to other facilities
* Toilets – most providers take a toilet tent or yurt, some have a nappy tent and/or a portable potty, others support children to have ‘wild wees’.

**Into the Woods** is a wholly outdoor provision based in a local woods. Children generally go out in all weather – except high winds because of the danger of falling branches. If it rainschildren are appropriately dressed in waterproofs and boots, the trees provide a natural canopy and tarpaulins are used to create more shelter to play under if necessary. In very cold weather the children will be dressed up warmly and remain active. Natural breaks in the day enable children to sit and talk or just relax. There is a pop-up tent with sleeping bags for cold weather and hammocks for warmer weather. Children are provided either a hot lunch in a nearby café or a picnic in the woods. A toilet tent and facilities to change children are transported to site. Time is split between time at a ‘camp’ and walking.

**Location**

Location will be determined by what is available locally, whether there is transport, whether there is a nearby building etc.

* Some providers have fenced off areas either on the site of their nursery or elsewhere
* Some providers use open spaces such as heathland, common land, woodland or large parks
* Some providers have a building which acts as a base or have negotiated access to a café for example in a park or woods
* Some providers use different locations depending on the weather and the curriculum being delivered.

**Resources and equipment**

A lot of the learning resources are found naturally – sticks, stones, plants, insects etc. Equipment that is needed includes:

* Toilet tent, nappy changing tent, porta-potties
* Hand washing station and towels
* First aid kit
* (Pop up) tent (some providers use yurts) with sleeping bag and mat – for quiet time
* Tarpaulins to provide some cover during wet weather
* Ropes, wool
* Mud kitchen (pans, spoons, cutters etc)
* Binoculars
* Magnifying glasses
* Tools such as a saw, drill, scissors etc

**Clothing and kit list**

All providers require children to have a rucksack in which to carry their kit around – some providers charge parents an enrolment or resources fee which they use to supply basic kit essentials such as a rucksack and waterproofs. Other suggested kit items include:

For warm weather

* A waterproof jacket
* Layers so that they can be ‘peeled’ off - a short sleeved t-shirt / top and a long sleeved t-shirt / top or jumper/sweat shirt
* Long trousers rather than shorts to prevent stings and bites (waterproof in wet weather)
* Closed toe shoes – waterproof in wet weather
* Socks
* A sun hat
* Sun cream (such as all-day or 10 hour sun cream)
* Insect repellant
* A water bottle

For cold weather

* A warm winter coat
* Thermal base layer – leggings, long sleeve top and long thermal socks
* A long sleeved jumper or fleece
* A thinner long sleeve top
* Cosy trousers i.e. tracksuit pants (NOT jeans) and long waterproof trousers – some providers suggest waterproof dungarees
* Neoprene or fleece lined ‘wellies’ or waterproof walking boots
* A warm hat and scarf or a snood
* Waterproof gloves or mittens – some providers suggest two pairs
* A water bottle

**EYFS curriculum**

Some providers deliver their entire curriculum outdoors whereas others deliver through a combination of indoor and outdoor learning. Literacy is often the most challenging, particularly when delivering wholly outside but through the creative use of book tents and activities that involve letters and sounds, singing, acting, making up and telling stories etc literacy does not need to be a challenge.

**Useful links**

**Some existing providers of outdoor learning**

*Into the Woods – Queen’s Woods (London)* [www.intothewoodsnursery.co.uk](http://www.intothewoodsnursery.co.uk)

*Hackney Forest School and Children’s Centre*[www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/Catalogue/School-Improvement/Hackney-Forest-School](http://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/Catalogue/School-Improvement/Hackney-Forest-School)

*Little Forest Folk - Chiswick and Wimbledon (London)* [www.littleforestfolk.com](http://www.littleforestfolk.com)

*Beyond the Walls – Roddlesworth Woods, Lancashire* [www.beyondthewalls.co.uk](http://www.beyondthewalls.co.uk)

*The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery – Letham Village, Fife*

[www.secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk](http://www.secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk)

**Resources**

**Muddy faces** – [www.muddyfaces.co.uk](http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk) - forest school, outdoor play and learning

**Cosy direct** – [www.cosydirect.com](http://www.cosydirect.com) - outdoor learning resources for early years

**Insurance**

A number of the outdoor nurseries and other early education and childcare providers use Morton Michel insurance [www.mortonmichel.com](http://www.mortonmichel.com)

**Associations**

**Forest School Association** – [www.forestschoolassociation.org](http://www.forestschoolassociation.org)

UK professional body for Forest School

**Publications**

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder by Richard Louv

Outdoor learning in the Early Years by Helen Bilton

Forest School and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years by Sara Knight

Developing a Forest School in Early Years Provision by Katherine Milchem and Jenny Doyle

The Outdoor Classroom in Practice, Ages 3-7: A month-by-month guide to forest school provision by Karen Constable

1. The current entitlement (the universal offer) is 570 hours per annum of free early education for all children commencing the term after their third birthday. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)