

The Priorities Assessment Tools (PAT) Guidance

Plymouth University



The Natural Connections Demonstration Project was one of the largest outdoor learning projects in the UK. The project worked across the South West of England to increase the number of school aged children experiencing the full range of benefits that come from learning in natural environments. It found that embedding outdoor learning was most effective when it aligned with schools' own priorities.

The Priorities Assessment Tools (PAT) helps schools to evaluate impacts at a local level but can also contribute to wider evidencing of the value of outdoor learning. Schools and any partners involved identify what priorities they wish to address through outdoor learning and what success will look like.

With PAT, schools **define success themselves** not according to other people's priorities (Waite, Bromfield and McShane, 2005). The tools

- a) make clear the priorities of the school, and the challenges they face, in working towards aims through outdoor learning
- b) support those involved in outdoor learning in schools to create an action plan to work towards those aims
- c) **help those involved in outdoor learning to assess the success of particular initiatives**
- d) combine the aspirations of a school and their local circumstances with a way of scoring to help show the degree of success in meeting school priorities through outdoor learning.

How to use the PAT

Once you have identified which initiative/project you will be assessing, the PAT set of tools form a simple **six step** procedure.

PAT – Form 1

Step 1: Write up to 5 statements about what **outcomes** you think the project will ideally achieve. These are your school/class top 5 priorities.

Step 2: Identify the **most significant challenge** for you in achieving each desired outcomes.

Step 3: Score each outcome from 5 to 1 with 5 for most **important** to 1 for least important.

Step 4: Assess the challenge to decide how **likely each outcome is to be achieved**, scoring 5 for very likely to 1 for not very likely.

This process helps to clarify what are the most desired outcomes and where the major sticking points might be, so these can be tackled upfront. It's sometimes helpful to do this in a team or you could create several of these in a whole school INSET for different classes to take forward.

PAT – Form 2

Step 5: Devise and implement an **action plan** to support the achievement of these outcomes, addressing specific identified challenges with a date for review. There is a template for an action plan, if needed, or you can use your own. The important thing is that the plan considers and addresses the identified priorities and challenges.

PAT – Form 3

Step 6: Revisit the priorities identified in step 1 on the **Priorities Assessment Measure** on the agreed **review** date to assess how far the outcomes have been achieved, the extent to which challenges have been overcome and the proportion of the outcome that is primarily attributed to the project. This recognises that many things may affect outcomes in real life educational contexts, but establishes a reasoned estimate of outdoor learning's contribution.

This measure also provides a summary of the degree to which the intervention you planned has been successful. You could use pre- and post- tests of learning objectives or standard measures of wellbeing, nature connectedness etc to support your professional judgements.

If you would like to contribute to a wider evidence base on outdoor learning, you should send copies of the completed documents *including your action plan* so we can analyse these across schools.

For further guidance and support in the use of the Priorities Assessment Tools (PAT), please contact: oelresnet@plymouth.ac.uk