



**THE OWL
COLLABORATION**

AN ERNEST COOK TRUST PROJECT

**Outdoor Learning Centre
Grant Application Information**

The OWL Collaboration

The OWL Collaboration is a £2.8m funding-plus project led by The Ernest Cook Trust over four years (and beyond).

The OWL Collaboration has been devised to assist disadvantaged young people struggling with mental health problems, domestic abuse, social development, school achievement and job prospects.

The programme will bring together in a united project:

- Funders (selected for year 2 onwards).
- Schools (primary, secondary and special).
- Outdoor Learning Centres (environmental/farm-based).

It will enable both students and teachers to experience high quality residential Outdoor Weeks of Learning (OWLs).

The weeks will be designed by carefully chosen Outdoor Learning Centres, with an emphasis on environmental and/or farm-based learning.

The participants (teachers and pupils) will be monitored and evaluated over time, using a bespoke App, designed by The Ernest Cook Trust. Evaluation of improvement will be monitored in ten fields of impact:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Nature-connectedness | 6. Knowledge, skills & understanding |
| 2. Pro-environmental behaviour | 7. Cohesion |
| 3. Resilience, self-confidence & sense of wellbeing | 8. Leadership, co-design and facilitation |
| 4. Engagement with learning | 9. Transition |
| 5. Achievement | 10. Pedagogical skills |

The OWL Collaboration was devised as an immediate response to three problems:

- Experiences of disadvantaged young people during Covid-19;
- Financial circumstances of outdoor learning centres due to the pandemic;
- Ongoing climate and environmental crisis.

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Project Terminology

ECT	The Ernest Cook Trust
Outdoor Learning Centres	Environmental and farm-based centres
The OWL Collaboration	The project name
OWL Steering Group	Advises on direction of the project and application decisions
OWLs	Outdoor Weeks of Learning



Dear Outdoor Learning Centre Applicant

Thank you for your interest in The OWL Collaboration. We hope the information in this pack will explain fully how this exciting new programme will work and help you with your application.

We have great ambitions for OWL to be a true collaboration with meaningful impact assessment, so please take the time to ensure that this project is suitable for your organisation and that you will be able to fulfil its necessary monitoring and evaluation requirements.

The impact of Covid-19 on the ways that we work and live has been wide-ranging and unpredictable in many aspects. The traumatic effects of the pandemic felt by our young people from areas of high infection, often living in high-rise buildings, without gardens and limited access to green space, have been a particular concern. Our ambition is to assist in the recovery process and provide vulnerable and disadvantaged young people with an opportunity to experience the recognised benefits from an Outdoor Week of Learning, allowing them to appreciate our natural environment and re-connecting them with nature.

We are also aware that as residential outdoor learning centres providing environmental and farm based experiences your cash flow has been considerably affected through 2020. Participation in this programme and our forward-buying initiative is designed to help you remain viable through the next difficult months. Your survival is vital.

We thank you for your interest in being part of this programme. This document should provide you with all the information you need to go ahead with your application.

Best of luck!

Dr Victoria Edwards OBE
Chief Executive
The Ernest Cook Trust

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The Ernest Cook Trust

The Ernest Cook Trust is an educational charity. We facilitate learning from the land, through management of our rural estates, grant giving and direct provision of learning outdoors. Our vision is for an environmentally engaged society.

www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk

What is The OWL Collaboration? The Three Problems:

Problem #1 Urban Communities and Covid-19

Nowhere can the strain of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic be felt more than in areas of high infection. Urban communities, often in high-rise buildings, without gardens and limited access to greenspace have been hit particularly hard by the conditions of lockdown. These families are often multi-generational, living in compact spaces and with a high proportion of key workers. Families from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities have been disproportionately affected by fatalities. The coronavirus pandemic has shown us more than ever how important green spaces are for our mental and physical health, but has also highlighted the inequalities in who has access to the outdoors.

While the young are less likely to be direct casualties of Covid-19, the NSPCC's *Childline* has experienced an unprecedented demand for its services as the pandemic starts to affect children's lives. Children are being counselled for their mental and emotional health around issues like isolation, arguments at home and removal of professional support from schools, social workers and the NHS.

In recognition of the enormous social, financial and emotional impact of the pandemic on those already facing deprivation and challenging circumstances, we need to start planning for recovery.

More than ever, vulnerable young people, those with special needs, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds need help in rebuilding their confidence and capability, making them more resilient.

Problem #2 Environmental Imperatives

Covid-19 has captured the world's media attention and left an equally important and urgent issue in the shadows once more: climate change and environmental degradation.

As we rebuild to a new normal, an environmentally engaged society is even more crucial. Society's eyes have been opened to the environmental imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve our land management.

Understanding the environment, our place *in* it, and our effect *on* it, are fundamental prerequisites to an improved quality of life.

People from low socio-economic groups, particularly those living in urban deprived areas and from BAME backgrounds are significantly less engaged in the natural environment than the rest of the adult population in England. According to research conducted by Natural England:

- People from BAME communities visit the natural environment 60% less than the rest of the adult English population.
- People living in urban deprived communities visit the natural environment 40% less than the rest of the adult English population.
- People from socio-economic groups D and E visit the natural environment over 20% less than the rest of the adult English population.

Disconnection with the natural environment has significant implications for a person's:

- Health;
- Social inclusion; and
- Educational attainment

Problem #3 Outdoor Learning Centres

Outdoor learning centres offer urban children a unique opportunity to live and work together, usually for a week at a time, in the heart of the countryside.

The 'learning through doing' experience of a different life gives children, many of whom may not know where their food comes from, an opportunity to explore safely the exciting outside world of nature, woodlands, rivers and farming.

Charities operating as residential outdoor learning centres rely on the fees from school visits and other income opportunities (mostly corporate activities and special events) to maintain their valuable work: income that has disappeared overnight due to the pandemic. Current cash flow is crucial in ensuring that centres remain viable until they are able to reopen.

Sadly, it is unlikely that outdoor learning centres will be able to welcome back children until Spring 2021 at the earliest because of the problems of social distancing during overnight stays and also the logistics of socially-distanced coach travel. In reality, only the availability of a vaccine will unlock residential visits for children.

Without financial assistance now, many residential farms and environmental centres will not survive.

A likely long term impact for financially depleted outdoor centres that *do* survive is that they are less likely to be able to offer young people from disadvantaged backgrounds access to their activities.

Forward-buying Outdoor Weeks of Learning for disadvantaged young people and provides the short-term emergency funding needed to help the sector survive until centres can re-open and start to rebuild, while ensuring that the benefits of outdoor learning reach *all* young people in the UK.

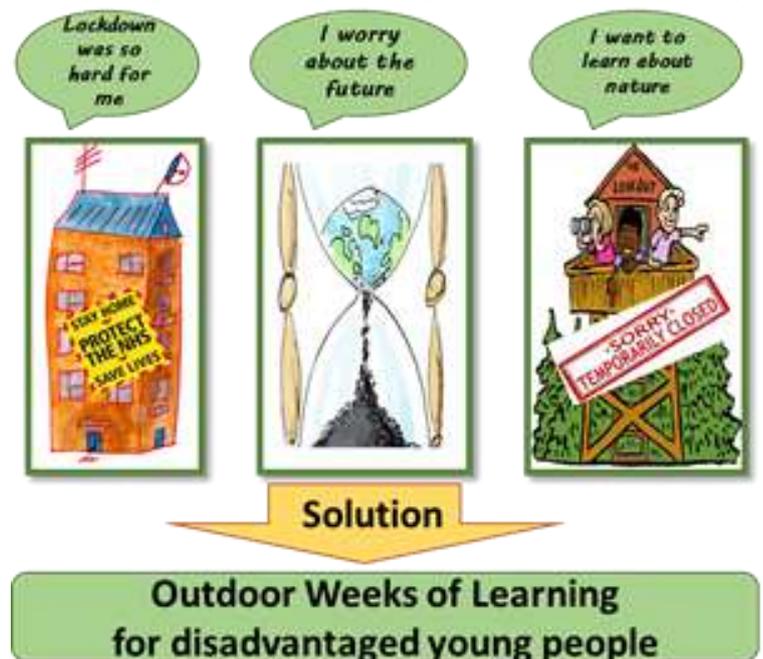


The Solution - Outdoor Weeks of Learning (OWLs) to build young peoples' resilience

We will provide a specific fund to provide young people with the opportunity to experience the outdoors and reconnect with the natural world. Access to nature and green space provides children with a myriad of cognitive, emotional, and physical benefits, such as increased ability to concentrate, improved academic performance, reduced stress and aggression levels, and reduced risk of obesity.

Independent evaluation by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation has shown that high-quality residential visits provide opportunities, impacts and benefits for young people that are very hard to achieve in any other educational context. Their research concluded that far from viewing residential learning as an *enrichment* activity, we should see it as each young person's *entitlement*.

Attending high quality residential visits is not common for schools from disadvantaged areas. Most residential centres offer reduced rates for schools with disadvantaged students, based on Pupil Premium, percentage of Free School Meals and/or multiple index of deprivation data, during their shoulder periods. However, taking even these less expensive, out-of-season weeks can be problematic for schools who struggle to pay for transport.



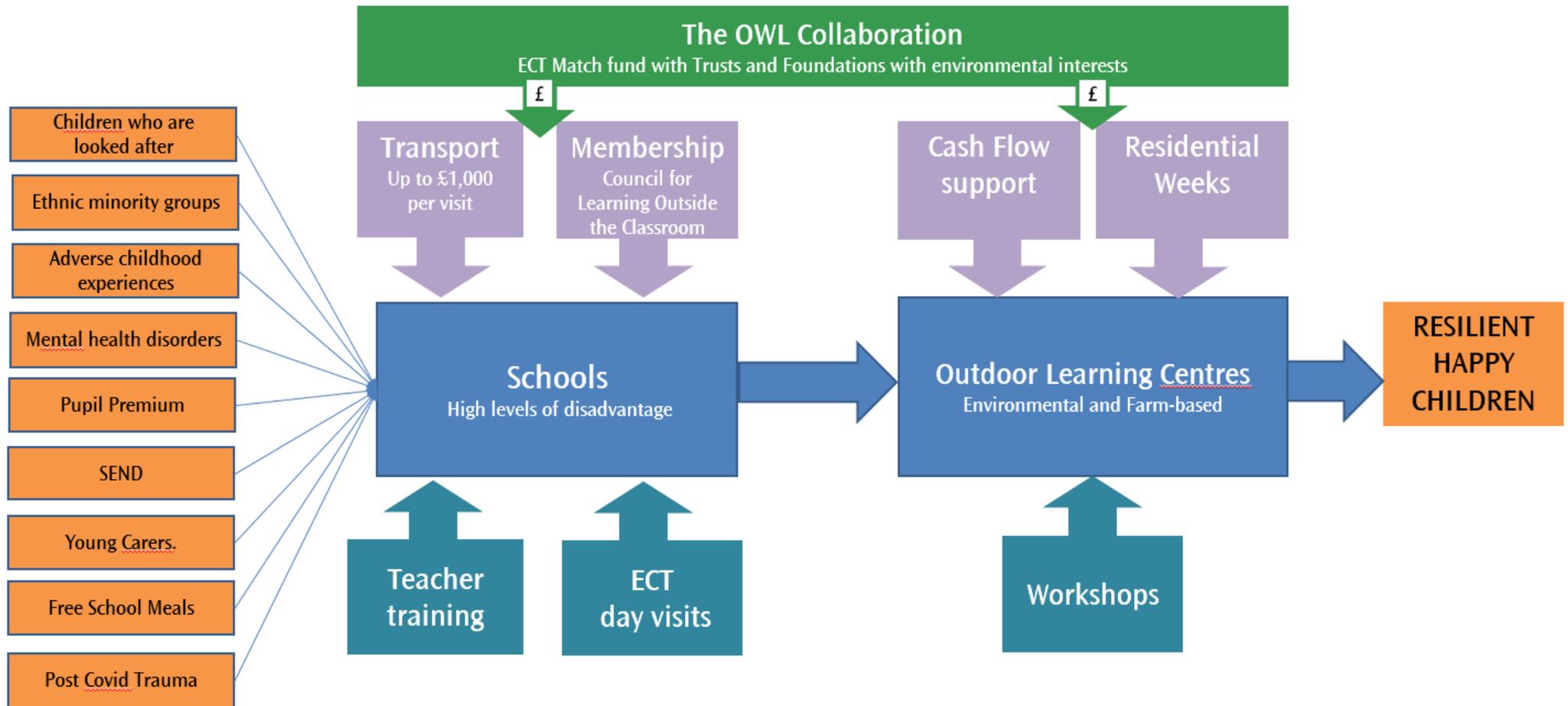
Additional barriers, such as gaining the confidence of parents, or equipping the children both physically and mentally for the experience, can be enough to deter schools from offering residential experiences at all.

The Concept

Outdoor Learning Centres will be selected according to their existing performance at providing meaningful weeks for disadvantaged young people. It is envisaged that a combination of experienced centres and those wishing to improve their learning experience for disadvantaged pupils will be selected. An important part of the collaboration will be knowledge transfer from centre to centre, from schools to centres and from centres to schools.

Appropriate Schools will be directed to an online application process managed by The Ernest Cook Trust. Eligible schools will become a member of The OWL Collaboration and in doing so make a commitment to contributing to ongoing research and evaluation of the project. It will be the school's responsibility to feed data and information into OWL, and to select, each year, pupils who might benefit from an Outdoor Week of Learning. The school will be able to indicate a preference for the outdoor learning centre they would like to attend, but the total number of places allocated to each centre will be predetermined each year. This will afford the outdoor learning centres a degree of certainty as to how many weeks and when they will be expected to provide OWLs. The pupils attending will benefit from a high ratio of adult/pupil involvement at each centre.

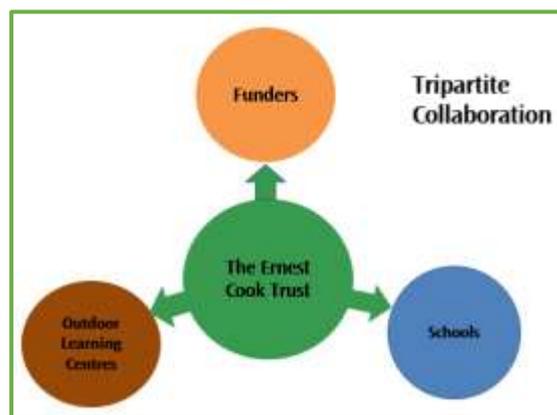
The OWL Collaboration Concept



What do we expect from the Outdoor Learning Centre?

Being part of this collaboration means we would like you to:

1. Build on an excellent track record of providing residential learning experiences for young people and focus on developing new or existing relationships with schools in the deprived areas that have been most affected by Covid-19.
2. Demonstrate that you consider diversity and inclusion throughout your organisation.
3. Maintain a quality residential programme of outdoor learning which will be available when government guidance is revised and school groups can return to residential stays.
4. Consider providing a training weekend for teachers.
5. Develop an early and lasting a relationship with the schools visiting you by providing learning support before and after the visits.
6. Make connections via the school with the young peoples' families to provide reassurance on the safety, security and beneficial nature of their forthcoming visit.
7. Be open to being part of a collective network involving other Outdoor Learning Centres in order to share experience and understanding.
8. Be committed to providing data and information for evaluation and to measure impact, and liaise with our internal and external research evaluators. This will involve monthly submission of statistics into our Information Management System (via an App currently under development).
9. Provide effective and timely reporting (see below) and make available annual accounts and financial projections.
10. Be committed to ensure sustainability beyond the four year duration of the programme.
11. To agree to pre-arranged monitoring visits from The Ernest Cook Trustees and staff.
12. Have robust safeguarding, health and safety and GDPR policies and procedures.



And - Be willing to communicate 'good news' stories to our communications team, including sharing of pictures (with permissions), media and press releases, and to participate in a social media campaign.

What are the reporting requirements?

Reporting on the programme will include qualitative and quantitative data and information on well-being benefits of the young people and impact on communities.

Monitoring	Report details
Check-ins	Monthly informal online meetings and check-ins by The Ernest Cook Trust Project Officer.
Nature Connection Index Wellbeing scale	Encouraging young participants to fill out measurements scales at the beginning and end of each stay in order to gauge changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of the residential stays.
Online database	Completing online reporting database with demographic data on participants.
Annual funding reports	Reporting through The Ernest Cook Trust funding database, using case studies, demographic data and details of project spending.

What funding is available?

The OWL Collaboration will grant advance payment to cover costs per pupil for a week's residential visit. Within the application you will be asked to state how many bed space nights you can offer The OWL Collaboration per year. The initial grant payment will be for one year, however this is a four year scheme and you will be offered the opportunity to apply for multi-year funding providing that you have fulfilled the project's reporting requirements.

In addition, some centres will be funded to provide training weekends for accompanying teachers, prior to the school's visit.

As part of The Owl Collaboration participating schools will also be able to apply for:

- Transport to the outdoor learning centre, up to £1000 per visit.
- Annual membership of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom.
- A training weekend for the teachers involved, based at one of the centres.

Each Outdoor Learning Centre will also be involved in an annual workshop, swapping ideas between centres and contributing to the impact evaluation work.

Key Dates

The OWL Collaboration	
Friday 20 November at 12 noon	DEADLINE – application process closes
w/c 30 November	ECT Grants meeting – Outdoor Learning Centre Host Organisations chosen
w/c 7 December	All applicants informed of the results of their application

Application and Due Diligence

In order to be considered as an OWLs Host Organisation you must complete an online application. The link is available [here](#).

During the application process you will be asked to provide the following:

- Proof of charitable status (e.g. registered charity number)
- Registered address
- A copy of your
 - Safeguarding Policy
 - Complaints Procedure
 - Health and Safety Policy
- A recent set of financial accounts
- Demonstration of a reasonable level of financial reserves including a financial forecast incorporating the latest estimate of Covid-19 impact
- A sample programme timetable for a residential visit.

Safeguarding

The Ernest Cook Trust works to ensure the safety of all children and young people. We expect every organisation that we work with to have a comprehensive safeguarding policy and practice. All staff members that work with young people, whether directly or indirectly, should be fully trained in recognising signs of abuse and how to report them. Every member of staff should be fully DBS checked and have this updated regularly.

Data protection

The Ernest Cook Trust will process your data in accordance with current GDPR regulations. All applications for funding are processed through a central database which includes contact details and copies of application forms. Information on applicants will be shared internally and with other Trust and Foundation partners. You will also be asked for your consent to share photos and case studies for reporting purposes.

What's next?

If you are successful in your application, we will then collect BACS payment information and ask you to sign and agree the grant offer.

We look forward to working with you!

Contact

For further information contact: Suzie Paton, Head of Grants, The Ernest Cook Trust
OwlCollaboration@ernestcooktrust.org.uk