VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies Units 1 to 4: 2024–2028

Outdoor experience hours: School and teacher guidance

Context

Experiential education is the foundation of VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies. Students are required to connect practical experience with the theoretical content they study in each unit.

VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies has a strong focus on encouraging students to spend time in outdoor environments to develop human relationships with Country, while educating them about Indigenous Australians’ knowledge, culture and history. The intention is that students learn the key knowledge within each unit of the study design 'through' practical outdoor experiences and, more importantly, 'in' different Victorian outdoor environments, both local and further afield.

Outdoor experience hours: What is the requirement?

The revised study design (2024–2028) recommends that to complete each unit, students must spend between 25 and 50 hours participating in practical outdoor experiences. This excludes time spent travelling and sleeping.

Why has a requirement for outdoor experience hours been established?

The establishment of a required number of outdoor experience hours ensures that all students have the same access to learning through practical outdoor experiences and in outdoor environments.

Additionally, this clarity and consistency of message supports teachers and school leadership in organising programs.

Has the requirement for outdoor experience hours increased in the revised study? How was this figure established?

No. For most schools, continuing with the same approach to practical outdoor activities should ensure they meet the new documented 25–50-hour requirement for outdoor experience hours.

Schools are expected to operate anywhere within the 25–50-hour range. The required number of hours should be achieved through a range of outdoor activities varying in duration from multi-day, journey-based activities to half- or whole-day activities and class-time activities on school grounds or in the nearby local environment. The 25–50-hour range also provides flexibility and recognises the unique context of each school in relation to their location, resourcing and what their current program already offers.

While the previous study design did not recommend a specific number of outdoor experience hours, it did require students to complete at least two practical experiences per unit as part of the journal or report assessment task. The time spent on those experiences, combined with the time required for the practical activities completed during class time in order to deliver the key knowledge and develop the key skills as intended in a practical subject, should have equated to the 25–50 hours required in the revised study.

Meeting the requirement for outdoor experience hours by instilling a ‘local first’ approach

While teachers are encouraged to seek a range of outdoor environments and outdoor experiences that vary in duration, the delivery of a VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies program should rely heavily on utilising local outdoor environments. The advantage of local environments is that they can be engaged with readily, during class time and at minimal cost. They offer rich opportunities to develop and apply theoretical concepts through and in outdoor environments, in both urban and rural areas.

Teachers should make it clear to students that they will spend much of the required outdoor experience time in local environments and that they should value these opportunities to develop theoretical concepts in authentic outdoor environments rather than a classroom setting. Whole-day or multi-day outdoor activities can be built in as features of the program but should not be relied upon as the only outdoor experience opportunities that students are exposed to.

A list of sample outdoor experiences and outdoor environments is provided in the [Planning](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/outdoor-and-environmentalstudies/Pages/Planning.aspx) section of the support materials for teachers.