

ONBOARD
RYA

Learning OnBoard



Learning and personal development
for young people with
RYA OnBoard

Contents

03 Why sport and physical activity matter for young people

04 Character: the new currency for success

05 OnBoard character attributes

08 Case studies

09 Our impact so far



Why sport and physical activity matter for young people

Sport and physical activity offer wide-ranging benefits for young people beyond just physical health. Research from Sport England and the UK Chief Medical Officer highlights improvements in mental wellbeing, cognitive function, social development, and academic performance*. They also help create positive early experiences and build confidence to support an active lifestyle.

OnBoard – more than just a sport

These benefits are especially powerful in outdoor sports like sailing and windsurfing, where both mind and body are challenged. RYA OnBoard programme builds on this by helping young people develop life skills through structured, fun, and safe sessions.

OnBoard gives 8–18-year-olds the chance to try sailing and windsurfing at local clubs and centres. Learning and personal development are at the heart of the programme.



‘OnBoard helps young people build teamwork, confidence, and communication – skills that matter on and off the water.’

Pete Snowdon, Medway Watersports

* Sources: Sport England’s ‘Active Lives Children and Young People Survey’ (2023) and the UK Chief Medical Officer’s Guidelines (2019), which show that regular activity is associated with improved mental wellbeing, physical literacy, academic performance, and social development in young people

Character: the new currency for success in life

For many years, we believed that success came from being the smartest or having the highest IQ. We thought that excelling in exams was the key to a great career and a wonderful life. But if you look around, you'll see that success depends on much more than just exam results.

Why character matters: Insights from Professor Bill Lucas



Professor Bill Lucas, Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning, explains that in today's fast-changing world, character, and capabilities—such as resilience, creativity, curiosity, and teamwork—are essential for lifelong

success. He highlights the importance of learning agility: the ability to adapt, unlearn, and relearn as circumstances change*.

We also need the ability to manage our focus and energy—to know when to pause or shift direction—perseverance to bounce back from setbacks, curiosity to explore the world, and creativity to find new solutions. Most importantly, we need a growth mindset**, which means seeing every challenge as an opportunity to learn and improve. This mindset helps us continually develop and adapt, beyond what traditional tests can capture.

Sailing and windsurfing offer young people valuable opportunities to develop social skills and improve performance both within their communities and in the classroom.

Fixed mindset



'This is hard, I'll never be a sailor'
'I only like to do things I'm good at'
'I was the only person to capsized. That's really bad'
'I shouldn't help the others, they might get better than me'

Growth mindset

'I like to do new things as I can learn new skills'
'I am finding it hard to know when to tack. But if I keep practicing, I'll get better'
'It's great that I capsized as I learnt how to get the boat upright by myself'
'If I help the others, we'll push each other and get better together'



*Lucas, B. (2021). Real-World Learning: Preparing young people for the future. Centre for Real-World Learning, University of Winchester.

**Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. Random House.

OnBoard character attributes

OnBoard's character attributes are based on the idea of growth mindset, seen as key capabilities that support a successful life. Developed with the University of Winchester, these attributes are grounded in research and adapted to be relevant for young sailors and windsurfers, helping them become more confident, resilient learners on and off the water.



Sailing and windsurfing often involve unpredictable conditions, so young people learn to think **creatively** to solve problems and adapt. They develop the ability to spot patterns and make connections between different things—whether it's reading the weather or adjusting their strategy. These creative skills help them not just on the water, but in many areas of life where uncertainty is common.

Key learning outcomes

1. Ability to have a good idea when needed
2. Can see how different experiences can be connected



Taking part in OnBoard means working closely with others, which helps young people develop key **teamwork** skills. They learn to listen carefully, show kindness, and support their teammates. Sailing and windsurfing also teach them how to give and receive constructive feedback—an important skill for successful collaboration both in sport and everyday life. Appreciating the differences between people and valuing everyone's contribution makes the experience more positive for all.

Key learning outcomes

1. Can communicate well with others
2. Capacity to see the world from someone else's perspective

'Sailing and windsurfing have helped me to realise that I can achieve anything in life if I put my mind to it'

Tom, age 13



OnBoard helps young people learn how to express their ideas clearly and listen carefully to others.

Communication isn't just about talking—it also includes writing, body language, and non-verbal cues. When sailing or windsurfing, participants often explain what they've done or will do, sometimes even teaching others. This builds skills in giving and receiving clear feedback, which is useful both on and off the water.

Key learning outcomes

1. Able to listen carefully and offer an opinion
2. Can match language to audience



Sailing and windsurfing can be tough and unpredictable, which teaches young people to keep going when things get hard. They learn how to handle setbacks, find new solutions, and keep trying without giving up. These experiences build resilience and **determination**—qualities that help them succeed in all parts of life.

Key learning outcomes

1. Sticks with difficulty
2. Bounces back after set-backs





Independence

Taking part in OnBoard helps young people grow their **independence** by learning to take care of their own boat, make decisions, and solve problems on their own. Knowing how to manage tasks independently is an important skill for adulthood, helping them become confident and capable in many areas of life. At the same time, they learn when to ask for help and work with others.

Key learning outcomes

1. Can make a decision
2. Happy to ask for help or advice as required

Confidence

Confidence grows from believing in yourself and your ability to improve. OnBoard encourages a growth mindset—understanding that practice and effort matter more than natural talent. Young people learn that making mistakes is normal and part of getting better. Facing challenges on the water helps them build confidence they can use in all areas of life.

Key learning outcomes

1. Self-belief
2. Happy to learn from mistakes

Case studies



My Blue Pass — opening doors to new experiences

My Blue Pass leverages OnBoard's school-friendly approach to bring sailing to over 170 local children annually—many trying it for the first time. By focusing on adventure, curiosity, and relationship-building, the programme helps spark lasting enthusiasm and strengthens ties with local schools and families.



Netley Sailing Club — developing leadership and resilience

At Netley Sailing Club, OnBoard fosters personal growth by encouraging young sailors to lead, support their peers, and reflect on their progress. This focus on leadership, problem-solving, and resilience equips participants with skills that extend beyond sailing, benefiting both individuals and the wider club.



Medway Watersports — growing confidence through adventure

Medway Watersports engages young sailors with OnBoard's exciting mix of land and water activities. The lively, well-planned sessions nurture confidence, teamwork, and clear communication, creating a positive, supportive atmosphere where kids thrive both on and off the water.



Winsford Flash Sailing Club — building racing confidence

Winsford Flash uses OnBoard's inclusive games to introduce juniors to racing in a relaxed, supportive environment. Focusing on boosting communication and self-belief, the club helps young sailors become independent racers who take pride in their progress and feel truly connected to the club community.

Our impact so far*

OnBoard has already helped thousands of young people build confidence, make friends, and develop vital life skills through sailing and windsurfing. Backed by research and real-world results, participants can expect fun, inclusive sessions that encourage teamwork, independence, and a sense of adventure.



3 in 4

felt better able to do
some things
independently



4 in 5

felt they were
better able to
think creatively



81%

felt more confident
in themselves



82%

were better able to
work as a team



84%

liked being around the
water more following
an OnBoard
session



88%

felt that sailing/windsurfing
showed them they
could do new things
if they tried



Find more information or to search
for your nearest OnBoard club:



rya.org.uk/onboard



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