



# Chair of Trustees' Annual Report

## **The Institute for Outdoor Learning (Company Limited by Guarantee) annual report for the year ended 31 September 2025**

The directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law. It is my pleasure as Chair is to present this report of the charity in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The trustees who served the charity during the year and since the year end are as follows with their newly agreed 'Area of Focus.'

- Chair – Brian Kitson
- Vice-Chair – Louise Edwards
- Treasurer – Steve Randles
- Secretary – Vacant
- Voice – Andy Robinson
- Community – Vacant
- Workforce – Heather Crawford
- Standards – Dan Cook
- Volunteers – Nick O'Loughlin
- Marketing & Comms – Jim Whitaker
- Fundraising & Projects - Vacant

### **Objectives and Activities**

The Institute for Outdoor Learning exists to champion high quality outdoor learning, supporting individuals and organisations to deliver safe, inclusive and impactful experiences. Through professional recognition, training, research and advocacy, the Institute works to ensure that outdoor learning makes a full contribution to individuals, society and the environment.

### **Strategic Development and Performance**

This year marks the completion of the Institute's three-year Strategic Development Plan. Developed during a period of uncertainty, the plan set out a clear pathway to stabilise and strengthen the organisation, while building capacity for future growth.

Following a period of consolidation, I am pleased to report that the Institute has delivered against the objectives set out in the plan and has returned to a small surplus. This reflects improved financial oversight, careful management of resources and a strengthened operating model.



## Chair of Trustees' Annual Report – year ending 31.09.25

### **Digital Development and Membership**

A significant focus during the year has been the continued development of the 'Ready Membership' platform. This has required considerable investment in both time and financial resources, reflecting the Institute's commitment to modernising its offer and improving accessibility for members.

The platform provides secure and efficient access to integrated services, including events, networking, website functionality and member services. The website now attracts an average of 32,000 visits per month enabling clearer communication of the Institute's services and opportunities.

The impact of this work is evident in improved member engagement. Organisational membership renewal rates have strengthened, with 82% renewing early, and the overall churn rate has reduced to 0.9%, the lowest recorded. In addition, 73% of individual members now pay via digital Direct Debit, reflecting a shift towards more streamlined and sustainable processes.

The Institute currently supports over 500 organisational members and 800 individual members, with an estimated reach of over 17,000 across the outdoor learning sector.

### **Supporting the Sector**

The Institute continues to provide a wide range of support to the sector. This includes an extensive programme of online delivery, such as webinars, workshops, surveys and CPD resources, alongside increased levels of engagement across our communities alongside, lobbying and representation activity.

Over the past year, 68 events have been delivered, engaging more than 1,500 delegates, while over 71,000 newsletters have been distributed to members and stakeholders. These activities are supported by a broad communications approach, including quarterly publications, blogs, social media and conference presentations.

The Institute's work continues to influence policy and practice, supporting the development of a skilled, confident and diverse workforce across outdoor learning. During the year, the suite of evidence based guides to high quality outdoor learning have been added to and are available on the public website and free to download.

### **Global Engagement**

A key highlight of the year was the successful preparation of the International Online Conference for Global Outdoor Learning Day. Taking place across global time zones and connecting participants from eight continents, the conference is providing a platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange and shared learning from multiple cultural perspectives.



## Chair of Trustees' Annual Report – year ending 31.09.25

The success of this event reflects the growing international reach and influence of the Institute and reinforces its role as a global convenor for the sector.

### **Publications and Research**

During the year, the Institute responded to member feedback by returning *Horizons* magazine to print. Each quarter, over 1,300 copies are distributed using fully compostable packaging, providing a valued resource for the sector.

The Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning continues to perform strongly, with over 201,000 article downloads recorded in the year, representing a 68% increase since 2021. This growth reflects increasing international recognition of the Institute as a publisher of high-quality research.

High Quality Outdoor Learning – a guide for all was published on Global Outdoor Learning Day to celebrate the powerful impact of the outdoors on education and personal development. With significant societal challenges including climate change, equality & diversity in the outdoors, mental health and wellbeing, this guide sets out what good practice looks like, supporting practitioners and providers to deliver the best possible outcomes to their participants.

### **Professional Standards and Recognition**

The Institute continues to deliver professional accreditation, with nearly 1,500 practitioner awards delivered to date. During the year, a direct entry route to the Leading Practitioner (LPIOL) award was developed and launched in April 2025, responding to member feedback and supported by the LPIOL Community of Practice.

The IOL Round Table continues to bring together representatives from across the community to improve communication and ensure member input into the Institute's strategic direction.

### **Governance and Financial Review**

The trustees have undertaken a review of governance arrangements during the year to ensure that structures remain robust, effective and fit for purpose. This has included strengthening oversight, clarifying roles and enhancing decision-making processes.

Financial controls have been a particular focus. Improvements in budgeting, monitoring and financial reporting have provided greater transparency and accountability. These measures have contributed directly to the organisation's improved financial position and the return to a surplus.

The trustees consider that the charity is now operating on a more stable financial footing, with systems in place to support sustainable growth.



## Chair of Trustees' Annual Report – year ending 31.09.25

### **Future Developments**

With the completion of the current strategic plan and delivery of its operational roadmap, the Institute is well positioned to move into the next phase of development. The focus will be on building on the progress made, attending to the detail of IOL core functions and extending its offer and growing its partnerships. The Institute is working to ensure its credibility across the sector and its wider influence when advocating for high quality Outdoor Learning. At the heart of the Institute's strategic planning is ensuring long-term financial, environmental and operational sustainability.

### **Acknowledgements**

The trustees would like to place on record their thanks to the staff team, members, volunteers and partners whose continued commitment and support underpin the success of the Institute. Their energy and engagement remain central to the delivery of the Institute's objectives.

Brian Kitson, Chair of Trustees, Institute for Outdoor Learning

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026