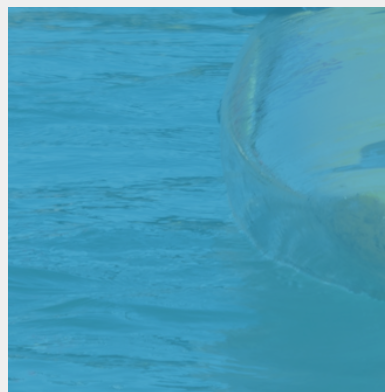
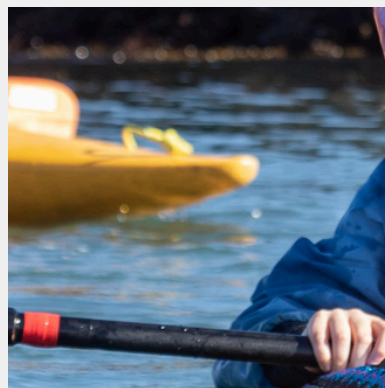


Impact Report

The Institute for Outdoor Learning is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference to others.



Welcome

This period has been an exciting chapter for the IOL, marking the final year of our Strategic Development Plan 2022-25. Throughout this time, we have established our key priorities: Voice, Community, Workforce, and Standards, which have steadfastly guided our mission to 'Champion Outdoor Learning'.

A significant achievement has been the investment in a digital membership services platform. This advancement represents a major step forward for the IOL, enhancing operational management, improving administrative efficiency, and offering better engagement opportunities for our members.

Activity within the IOL has steadily increased, supported by this new system. For instance, we have re-established the All Party Parliamentary Group for Outdoor Learning and formed new specialist groups, including the Association for Outdoor Therapy and Outdoor Learning and Youth Work. This year, we have also progressed the IOL Awards and Fellowship, developed Bushcraft qualifications, and expanded the High Quality Outdoor Learning Guides. Innovative research has begun into proactive safety management through the Collective Knowledge Survey.

The IOL is becoming increasingly international, with initiatives such as our online conference, collaboration with Hong Kong Outdoor Learning Association and partnerships with National Experiential Learning in France. Our academic publication, the Journal for Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, continues to increase its reach supported by an editorial team drawn from around the globe.

The IOL remains committed to championing outdoor learning and supporting the dedicated individuals who work, study, train and volunteer within this field.



Jo Barnett

CEO, Institute for Outdoor Learning

Brian Kitson

Chair, Board of Trustees

Focus

Adventures Away from Home Funding

By David Watts & Sharon Mackintosh | UK Youth



A key outcome in 2025-26 is to grow partnerships, with those that are also driven by a vision of Outdoor Learning as a highly valued form of development, education, and employment in UK society.

An outdoor learning programme (for young people aged 11–18, or up to 25 for SEND) designed to break down barriers to opportunity and develop socio-emotional and life skills, wellbeing, and positive relationships with movement and physical activity, building confidence to engage with the outdoors.



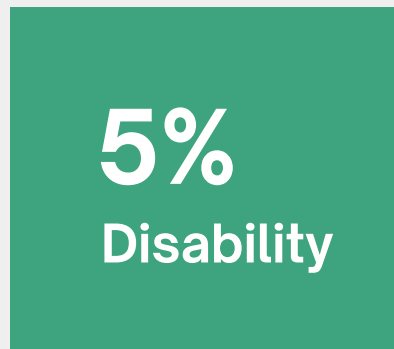
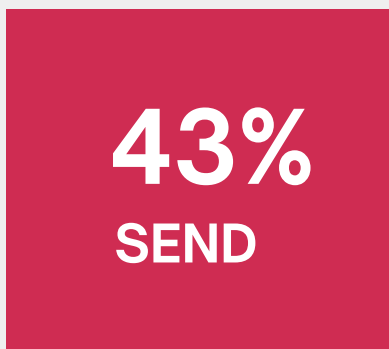
Coordinated by UK Youth, in partnership with DCMS, and supported by the Institute for Outdoor Learning and delivered by 100 grassroots outdoor learning providers between October 2025 and March 2026 across the nine regions of England, it provides fully funded outdoor learning experiences, removing barriers to access.



It uses a diverse and inclusive range of experiential outdoor learning approaches, including adventure, sport, farming, the environment, and the arts. It is about more than outdoor learning; it's about sparking courage, connection, and hope.

To support young people, we intentionally embed socio-emotional learning into our work. These skills are essential for young people to navigate life confidently and meaningfully. Why Socio-Emotional Skills Matter:

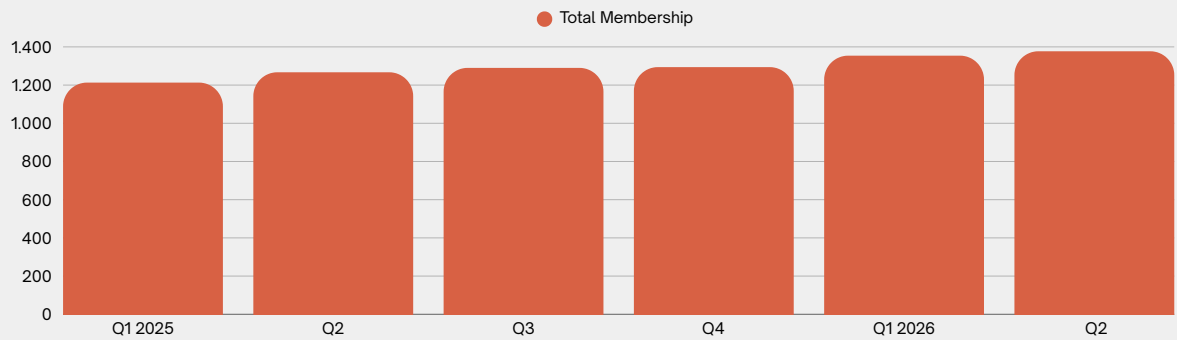
- Build Life Skills
- Promote Mental and Physical Well-Being
- Enhance Learning and Academic Success
- Encourage Environmental Stewardship
- Support Social & Emotional Development
- Foster Individual Growth



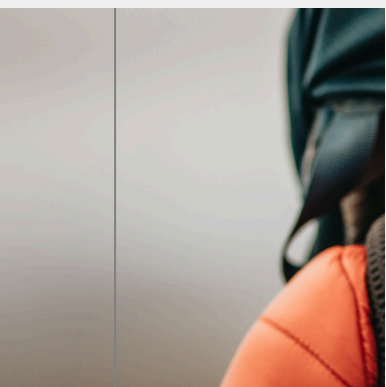
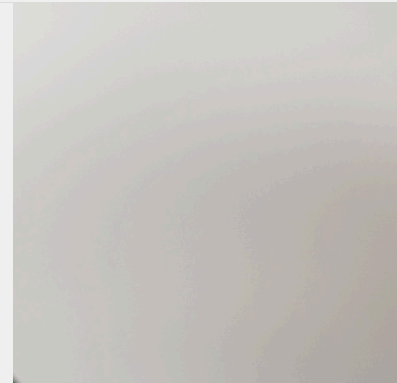
Membership

The Institute continues to attract new members across both individual and organisational subscriptions. At the same time, a successful membership retention strategy combined with record numbers of Direct Debit subscriptions point to a lower turnover in membership and maintains the average churn rate for all subscriptions to well below the 1% target.

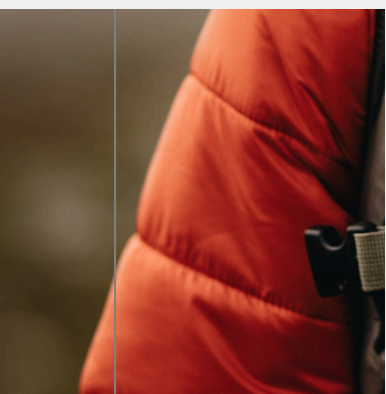
Development Plan 2.1: Maximise use of ReadyMembership and improving the offer to members leading to increases in retention and recruitment.




“We would highly recommend the Institute for Outdoor Learning to any business looking to add an extra layer of quality and credibility to their training awards, alongside the many other benefits of membership.”

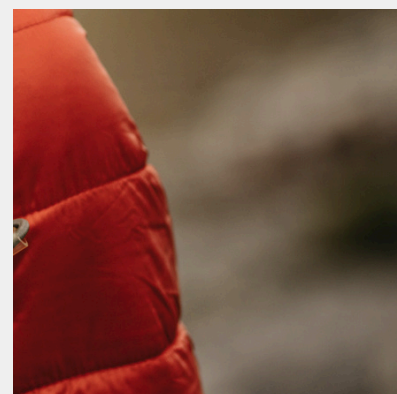


 **863**
Individual Members



 **0.2%**
Churn Rate

 **491**
Organisational Members



International Conference

“ Learning about outdoor learning in Asia and Africa ”

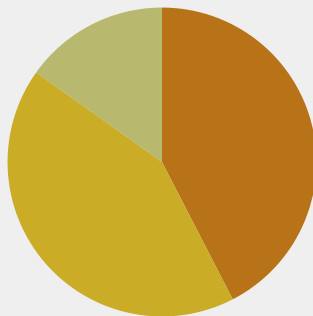
“ The range of excellent workshops from around the world ”

The inaugural International Outdoor Learning Conference, launched on Global Outdoor Learning Day 2025, saw speakers, presenters and delegates from across the globe come together online to celebrate and share outdoor learning practice.



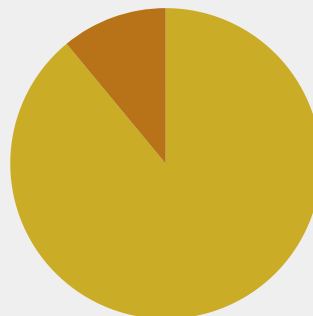
How would you rate the quality of the conference?

● Excellent ● Very Good ● Good



Will you join the next IOL conference?

● Yes ● Maybe



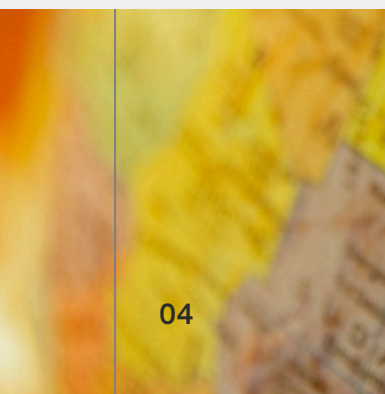
“ Exploring different perspectives from across the globe on the power of outdoor learning. ”

“ hearing about IOL from an Asian perspective was really thought provoking. ”

7
Continents

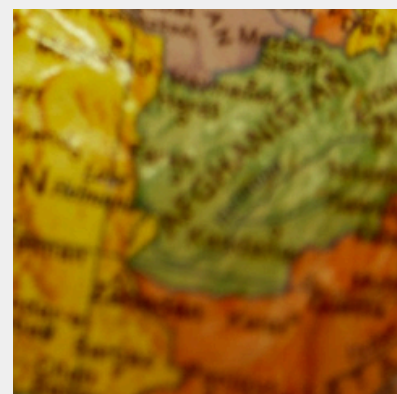


184
Delegates



21
Time Zones

62
Speakers & Presenters



In Their Words

IOL Members Reflect on 2025

It has been clear how much membership of the Institute has influenced both my professional practice and personal connection with the outdoors. IOL continued to provide clarity and professional engagement in my role as an Outdoor Education Adviser throughout 2025. Conversations with schools, senior leaders and partner organisations gain the increased credibility that IOL membership brings, enabling educational value and learner wellbeing to the heart of each discussion.



Resources such as the High Quality Outdoor Learning Guide have provided very well-structured guidance. I have also greatly appreciated IOL's engagement with government through the APPG for Outdoor Learning, which has championed the sector with purpose and professionalism. What I've valued most, though, is the people ...

... IOL brings together a wide range of highly experienced professionals, each contributing their own insights, ideas and passion for outdoor learning. I have gained much from the conversations, shared practice and collective wisdom that flow naturally within IOL spaces.

This year I've taken part in several stimulating and inspiring IOL workshops, conferences and webinars, including the Strategic Leadership Workshop, the IOL North West Conference, the Adventure for All Conference, the online AGM, and the IOL International Conference.

Overall, the Institute for Outdoor Learning has brought energy, clarity and inspiration to my year. It has strengthened my practice, enriched my thinking and deepened my personal connection to the natural world. I feel inspired to be part of this community and wholeheartedly encourage anyone with a passion for outdoor learning to become involved.

David Armstrong

Outdoor Education Adviser
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council



Focus

Collective Knowledge

By Peter White | UHI North, West and Hebrides

Development Plan 4.2: Promote and communicate outdoor learning research.

The Snapshot Survey 2026 is a 12-month project collecting and analysing participation and incident data from across the UK Outdoor Learning sector. It is a joint project, working with IOL in collaboration with UHI (North, West & Hebrides) and the Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee. The aim of the project is to enable the sector to have a greater understanding of:

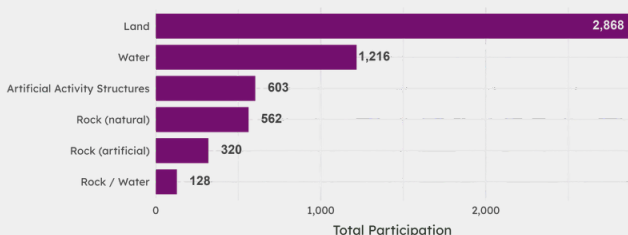
- Participation levels, including across activities and client groups
- Residential and expedition overnight stays, and Incidents and their features, comparing them against participation levels

The intention is for the survey output to promote a greater understanding of the sectors work, awareness of factors associated with incidents, and strengthen its lobbying and promotion with data-driven knowledge.

As of April 2026, the survey has 60 organisational participants, with a combined total of 108 different sites participating in the research. As we gather more data from future blocks, we will be able to present more information around seasonal variations in participation, across client groups, and start to look more carefully at incidents and their related contributory factors.

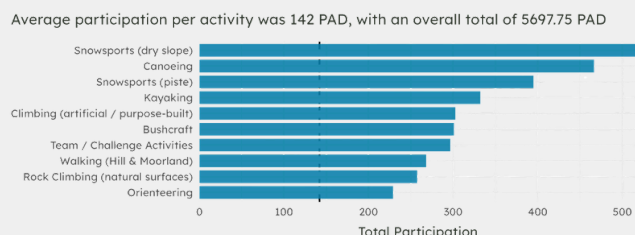


Participation by Grouped Activities



Taken from total of 40 activities over one 2-week block in January & February 2026. Participation is based on 1 person for 1 day, equaling 1.

Top 10 Participated Activities



Taken from total of 40 activities over one 2-week block in January & February 2026. Participation is based on 1 person for 1 day, equaling 1.



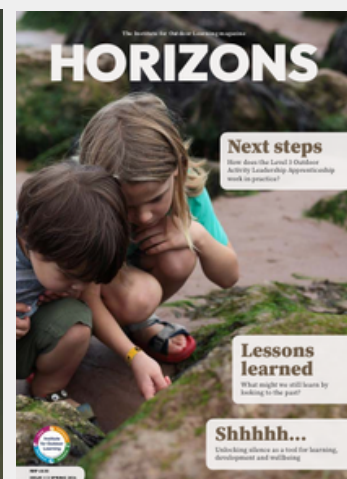
In Their Words

Reflections on 2025

I've worked with the IOL for almost four years, and each year has brought unique opportunities and benefits. Over the last twelve months, this work has allowed me to continually further my graphic design skills and editorial skills in a fast-moving environment. I've had the opportunity to stretch my creative muscles while imagining new ways to engage the IOL's readership in the content Horizons covers.

For me, these are wholly transferable skills which have enabled me to extend the graphic design and editorial work I undertake with other clients.

As Editor, I engage with a variety of people across a breadth of different outdoor professions – be that outdoor instructors, students, school teachers, centre managers, policymakers, expedition leaders, academics and researchers.



As such, over the last twelve months I've continued to learn a great deal about how the outdoors affects people in the UK and beyond. As a part-time Professional Gardener, this has furthered my understanding of how clients' may look to engage with their outdoor spaces, again benefiting my professional practice.

Finally, working with the many inspiring people who contribute to Horizons Magazine over the last twelve months has been an absolute pleasure.

Catherine Dunn
Horizons Editor
Institute for Outdoor Learning



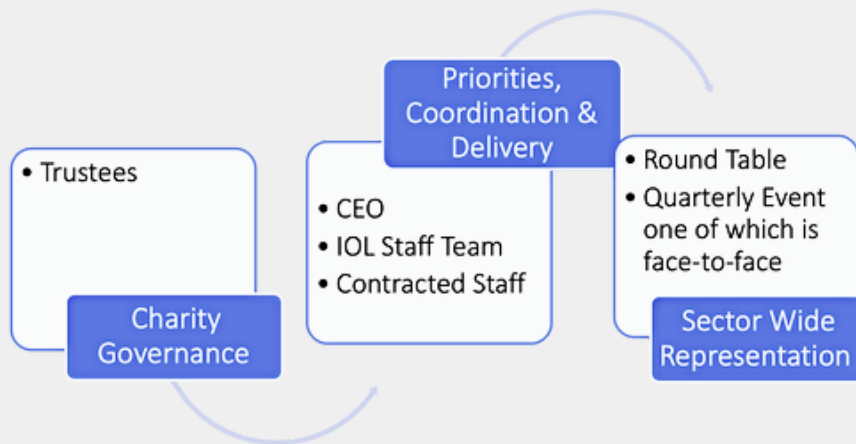

1,004
Archived
Articles

The Round Table

The IOL Round Table brings together representatives of all the IOL's regional, national and sector specialist groups.

The aims of the IOL Round Table are:

- To improve communication between the IOL Groups, the IOL Staff Team and the IOL Trustees
- To inform and share between all the IOL Groups
- To inform the IOL of the priorities/issues of Members and develop the work of the IOL



Development Plan 1.4

Develop the Round Table as an effective IOL management group.



 **12**
Regional
Groups

 **9**
Specialist
Groups

In Their Words

IOL Members Reflect on 2025

Over the last year, I became an Accredited Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (APIOL). I began the accreditation because I was keen to challenge myself professionally, and gaining APIOL recognition has helped me to be more deliberate and reflective in my outdoor learning practice and to better understand why I make the decisions I do and the type of learning experiences I want to offer in future.

One of the most valuable elements of my APIOL journey was working with a coach during the application process. Having the opportunity to talk through ideas, add context to my written responses, and be questioned on my assumptions helped me articulate my practice more clearly.

Completing APIOL alongside a colleague also had a meaningful impact. Sharing the process helped maintain motivation and created space for professional dialogue that might not otherwise have happened within the pace of day-to-day delivery. This sense of shared reflection reinforced the idea that professional development in outdoor learning does not need to be isolated but can instead be collective and supportive.

Alongside APIOL, engaging with IOL webinars over the past year has helped me maintain a sense of connection with the wider sector, reinforcing that reflective practice is ongoing rather than something tied to a single qualification.

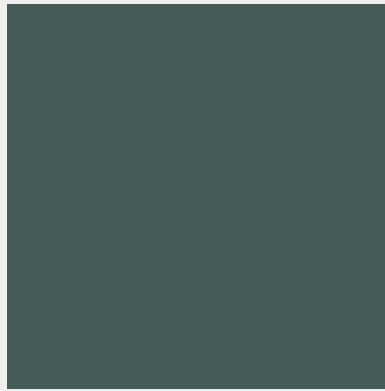
Overall, my experience of IOL this year has reinforced the value of space, support, and professional challenge in outdoor learning. For the sector, opportunities such as APIOL demonstrate how structured reflection and dialogue can strengthen practice without prescribing a single way of working, something that feels increasingly important within a complex and evolving professional landscape.

Holly Wilson APIOL

Tutor, Bendrigg Trust

Bendrigg is a registered charity and IOL Corporate member. They make adventure accessible, working together to overcome barriers and transform lives via residential activity breaks for people of any age or ability at their activity centre in Cumbria.





Focus

The IOL Fellowship

Development Plan 3.2: Develop and promote IOL Fellowship based on the IOL Awards and Professional Recognition scheme.

Since 2024, the IOL and LPIOL Community Group has been reviewing its Awards and professional recognition pathways, culminating in the IOL Fellowship. The Fellowship will bring benefits for members and the wider outdoor community:

- Terminology that is also used and understood by other sectors
- Choice in accreditation pathways
- Opportunity for progression in professional recognition
- Improved potential for inclusivity, collaboration and impact by design
- Entitlement to use the post-nominal ‘Fellow/Senior Fellow’ of the IOL
- Recognition in the IOL Professional Directory
- The Fellowship website forum

There are two routes to the IOL Fellowship, either through the developmental Awards, which include a mentoring process or through the Professional Recognition Scheme for members already at that level. Work is continuing as we roll out the full IOL Fellowship this year, including:

- Senior Professional in Outdoor Learning, developed by Dr Roger Hopper, as a method of recognition at the highest level to complete the Fellowship.
- Roger Hiley, LPIOL, SFIOL, appointed as IOL Awards Process Coordinator, ensuring quality assurance and professional integrity.
- Current Award holders will automatically be included in the Fellowship, receiving email notification and certification.

The aspiration is that the Fellowship will allow outdoor professionals to congregate, communicate and collaborate in driving outdoor learning forward for the benefit of all.





In Their Words

IOL Members Reflect on 2025

Whilst I have been a member and actively involved with the work of IOL for many years, my involvement in the past year has been one of opportunities and highlights. I reflect on the past year with appreciation for the collaboration, network, and collective achievements this has afforded me in contributing to the growth of professional sector agendas, as a researcher and practitioner.

As Chair and founding member of the Association for Outdoor Therapy (AOT), a key highlight was the start of the journey to actively build the AOT professional community. This brought together interdisciplinary professionals across the UK and shared insights on ethical perspectives in outdoor therapy.

Supporting contributions to IOL's International Conference, AOT seminars, and other national sector events have helped me to continue to evaluate current developments and needs of this important arena of professional practice.

Another valuable opportunity over the year has been contributing to the important agenda of how outdoor learning helps tackle health inequalities for children and young people. In supporting the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Outdoor Learning, I was given the opportunity to directly engage with policy makers, presenting evidence to MPs on outdoor learning pathways for improving children and young people's mental health.

Connection and collaboration with organisations and applied practice are essential in making research have real-world impact. Being a member of IOL can continue to surprise you as to what is possible, as it has for me over the past year, when you hang out with like-minded, passionate and committed outdoor learning professionals.

Kaye Richards

Dr Kaye Richards (CPsychol, FHEA, FRSA)
Senior Lecturer in Psychology
Liverpool John Moores University



Webinars & Events

Development Plan 2.1: Maximise use of ReadyMembership and improving the offer to members leading to increases in retention and recruitment.

‘A sense of community’, ‘networking’ and ‘conferences and events’ continue to be the main reasons why members choose to join the Institute.

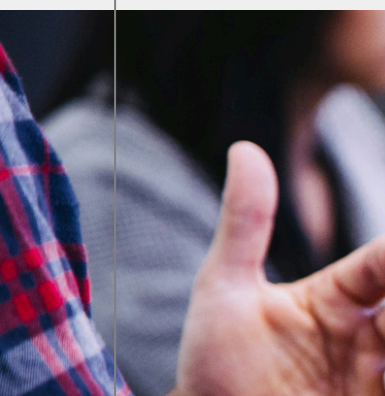
To support our members’ desire to connect, IOL held sixty-six online and face-to-face workshops, events, conferences, courses and webinars over the last twelve months. Highlights included monthly Making the Most of Your Membership webinars that encourage new members to meet each other, interact with IOL services and build rapport with IOL staff.

The inaugural International Outdoor Learning Conference, launched on Global Outdoor Learning Day 2025, saw speakers, presenters and delegates from across the globe come together online to celebrate and share outdoor learning practice.

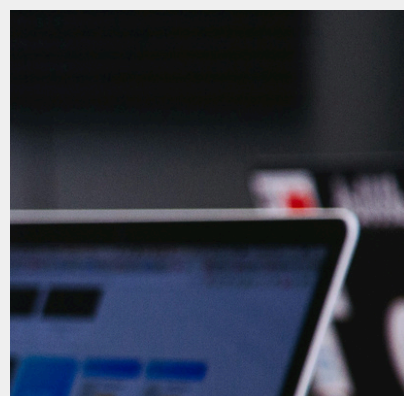
“ The content of the course was well thought out. Good balance between practical / outdoor & theory / indoors. ”

“ An excellent course that definitely had something for everyone. ”

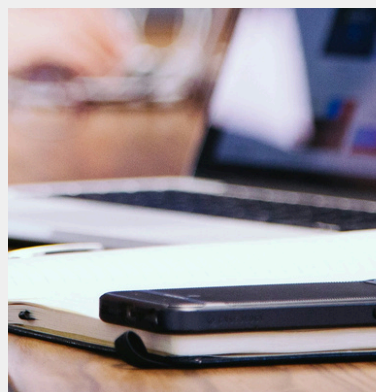
“ A superb course that helped me to begin to develop my strategic leadership and my role within the Trust. ”



66
Online &
P2P Events



1,123
Delegates



12
New member
webinars

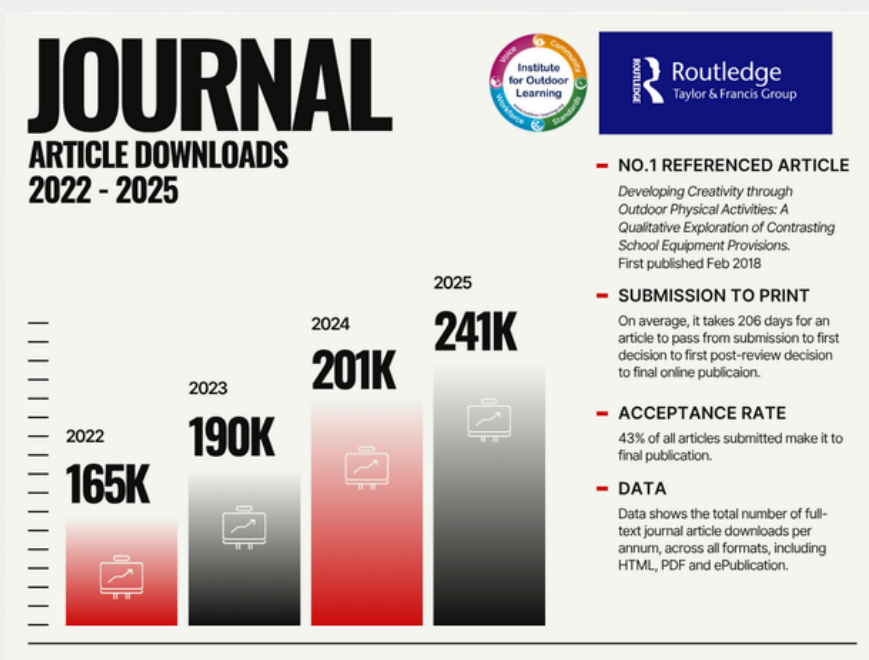
Communications

‘Effective communication is 20 percent what you know and 80 percent how you feel about what you know.’ — Jim Rohn, author

IOL Communications

Data from 12 month period from 01.05.25

Horizons Magazine	5,831 Copies Total Readership 17, 250
E-Newsletters	67,569 Sent 25,058 Opens Engagement 10.5%
Social Media	38,742 Followers 328,570 Reach
Journal (printed)	175
Journal (downloads)	241,900 Articles
Website	301,774 Hits



Focus

High Quality Outdoor Learning

High Quality Outdoor Learning (HQOL) was first published on Global Outdoor Learning Day to celebrate the powerful impact of the outdoors on education and personal development. Over the last year, the Institute has published 3 new versions of HQOL:

HQOL for Educational Settings is designed to help leaders, teachers, practitioners and support staff create the conditions for outdoor learning to flourish, recognise high-quality practice, and evaluate the resulting outcomes.

HQOL Bite-Sized has been broken down into thirty-one downloadable resources available free to Institute members.

HQOL Traditional Chinese Version has been translated by the Hong Kong Outdoor Learning Association and rests at the heart of our mission to build a thriving outdoor learning community in the Special Administrative Region.



Our thanks go to the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres for funding the design of HQOL and EVOLVE Advice for funding the design of HQOL Bitesize Resources.

HQOL has been compiled by Dr Dave Harvey, on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning.

Focus

The Outdoor Learning Stakeholder Group

By Louise Edwards | S.O.L.D | IOL Trustee

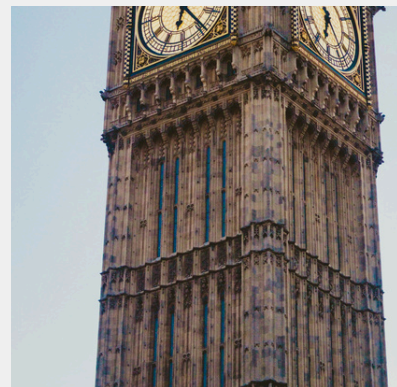
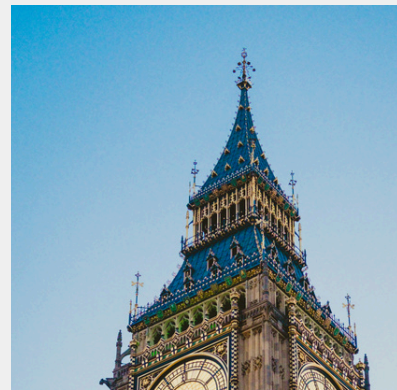
IOL provides the secretariat role for the newly revived Outdoor Learning Stakeholder Group (OLSG). This involves convening four online meetings per year bringing together a wide range of people representing Outdoor Learning organisations from across the UK.

The meetings provide space for sharing updates and developments such as Government Policy relating to the outdoor learning sector, campaigns or projects which are relevant to the outdoor learning sector and requests for collaboration or support for something benefitting the outdoor learning sector.

Each meeting includes a presentation on some specific research or development which we feel will interest and resonate with members. This group is a place for sharing, understanding, supporting and collaborating with colleagues from a diverse group of stakeholders who prioritise outdoor learning as a core purpose.


There have already been benefits in terms of shared learning relating to working with different Governments, writing policy, and designing strategy, understanding where there might be future funding or grant opportunities and supporting colleagues on future campaigns within the outdoor learning sector.

The impact has been very positive and well-received by the IOL membership so far.



Development Plan 1.1

The Outdoor Stakeholder Group is a wider Sector consultative body which includes the APPG-OL Secretariat. Managed response to Government consultations.

 **665**
Pins on the
MP OL Map

In Their Words

IOL Members Reflect on 2025

Over the past year, our partnership with the Institute for Outdoor Learning has catalysed a bold, international vision linking Jamaica, Yorkshire, Scotland, and the wider Commonwealth.

What began as parallel commitments to equity, access, and community-led outdoor learning has grown into a shared movement that crossed continents.

The IOL has been the connective tissue in this emerging ecosystem - offering credibility, shared standards, and a professional home for work that spans continents, cultures, and lived experience. Through the IOL network, we have been able to align our approaches to EDI in outdoor learning, community-rooted programme design, and international youth development.

In Jamaica, The Village Academy's work with eighteen young women, many of whom face significant social and economic barriers, demonstrates what inclusive, dignity-centred outdoor learning can achieve.

This Jamaican model is now informing the redevelopment of an Outdoor Centre in Yorkshire, where Open Roam C.I.C is designing a parallel approach rooted in the same principles: representation, cultural humility, and community leadership.

Our partnership with Equal Adventure, led by Suresh Paul, has been central to this evolution. Suresh's decades of work in inclusive design have helped us embed accessibility and equity into the foundations of both programmes, ensuring that equipment, environments, and experiences are inclusive.

Meanwhile, at the WeTwo Foundation, Dwayne Fields' leadership in representation and youth aspiration has strengthened our commitment to ensuring that young people, especially those from underserved communities, can see themselves in the outdoors, in leadership, and in global citizenship.

Together, this collaboration represents a new chapter: a Commonwealth-rooted, internationally connected model of outdoor learning that is culturally responsive, socially just, and community-led. The IOL has not only supported this work - but it has also amplified it, giving us the platform, relationships, and shared language to build something bigger than any one organisation could achieve alone.



Nick Stubbs

Open Roam CIC



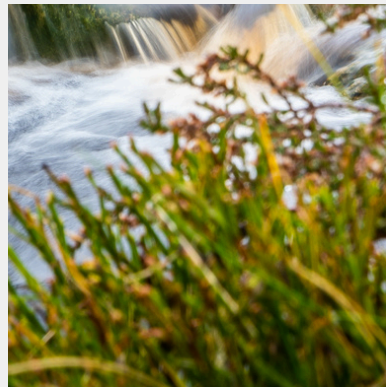
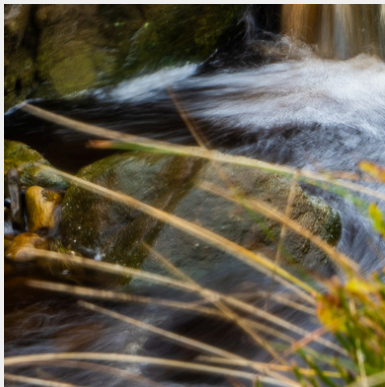
Sydney Henry

The Village Academy




Suresh Paul

Equal Adventure




Thank You

To all our staff, members, supporters, trustees and volunteers.

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 www.outdoor-learning.org