Annual Report 2024-25

SAPOE
The Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education

Chair's welcome

At the end of 2023, we were delighted to introduce ***Curriculum Beyond the Classroom***, our five-year strategy for 2024 to 2029. It provides a fresh articulation of our vision, mission and values, and shows how our work aligns with a wide range of national strategies and policies.

It sets out our ambition for a fundamental transformation of Scotland's learning landscape, so that every young person in Scotland can access regular, high-quality outdoor learning experiences. It identifies three key themes, lays out specific outcomes and the actions needed for each, to encourage and facilitate a transformation.

Now, just over 12 months on, this Annual Report highlights and celebrates progress in our first year of working to this ambitious strategy. The first step was gaining a deeper understanding of our members' priorities. To that end, our members' communications and values survey, undertaken in December 2024, identified where we're making an impact for our members and where the gaps lie.

As a member-led organisation providing a collective voice for Scotland's outdoor learning sector, representation is at the heart of all we do. Our priority for the year ahead is to bring on board new members to represent those six Local Authorities (LAs) who do not currently have an identified SAPOE member. We hope to share the benefits of SAPOE's networking opportunities, training resources, policy representation and individual support with them very soon.

Tim Pickering, Chair

About SAPOE

SAPOE is the forum where Scotland's outdoor learning community collaborates to develop best practice in the design and safe delivery of outdoor learning for all children and young people in Scotland.

We believe that every young person has the right to access quality outdoor learning throughout their time in education and beyond.

View our strategy at sapoe.org.uk/our-strategy

Our vision

A Scotland where outdoor learning is available to everyone.

Our mission

To connect and collaborate with partners to lead, develop and influence outdoor learning policy – for the benefit of all in Scotland.

728,000 pupils

54,000 teaching staff

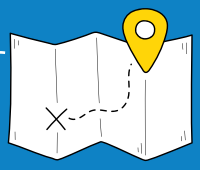
directly supported by our work

We reach countless others through community learning and recreational activity

We are a proud partner in creating and implementing Scotland's framework for off-site visits

GOING OUT THERE

Our membership



26
Local Authorities represented

2
members from the Scottish Council for Independent Schools (SCIS)

2
associate members from the University of Edinburgh

14
key partner members*

Benefits of membership

- **Advice and support** including one-to-one coaching and advocacy on behalf of members and organisations.
- **Resources** including the provision, on request, of bespoke written guidance (e.g. on adventure activity safety, staff training and qualifications) to help develop outdoor learning in schools and other settings.
- **Peer-to-peer support and networking** opportunities including our active WhatsApp group, regular meetings and annual conference.
- **Training** and CPD opportunities, including the Supporting Learning Outdoors (SLO), Teaching Learning Outdoors (TLO) and Educational Visits Coordinators (EVC) courses.
- **Representation** that ensures a strong voice for outdoor learning within key groups and organisations, and a seat at the table to influence policy in Scotland.

We are eager to welcome new members from the six LAs not currently represented.

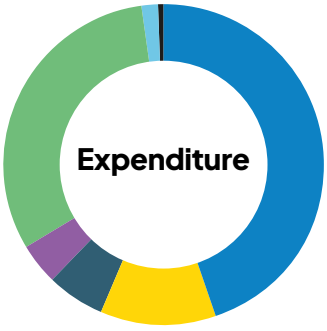
Please get in touch for more information.

* Including representatives of Education Scotland, Scottish Government, sportscotland, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Scottish Adventure Activities Forum, Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres

Our financials in 2024-25

We are a small organisation with minimal overheads, but rely heavily on membership fees to cover our running costs.

- Membership fees **£13,000**
- Going Out There (GOT) grant **£6,205**



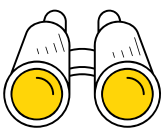
- Officer post **£7,854**
- SAPOE website costs **£2,032**
- Conference costs **£998**
- GOT website costs **£717**
- GOT project costs **£5,490***
- Insurance **£295**
- Other **£77**

* Appromate figure. Exact amount will be available at the end of March 2025.

This year's highlights

What we've delivered against our key strategic themes

In our ambitious five-year strategy for 2024 to 2029, our desired organisational outcomes and planned activities toward a transformation of Scotland's learning landscape are grouped around **three key themes**. Here we highlight just some initiatives, activities and achievements of 2024–25, presented by theme.



Also see the About us page on our website for more about our core workstreams.

Membership

To be the best organisation we can be for our members.

- Our communications and values survey showed that members highly value the individual support SAPOE can provide.
- We supplied supporting statements for Arran Outdoor Education Centre, which faces potential closure.
- Our members' WhatsApp group is active and considered useful, with members regularly requesting and sharing advice.

The value of meetings and networking

Our quarterly meetings (two online and two in-person) are at the heart of members' participation and are well attended, with members reporting them as valuable for networking.

74%

of members rate our meetings as useful or very useful

96%

rated SAPOE support for individual members as high priority

100%

rated networking opportunities as high priority

Our members say...

"Our thanks to all the SAPOE representatives. We really do appreciate all the support they have shown the Centre, the staff team, as well as the Arran Outdoors for All campaign group."

"Thanks again for all your input, it is much appreciated by all the staff at the centre."

Collaboration and representation

To be a welcome collaborator in partnerships, networks and forums and represent the interests of members. This theme includes the evolution of SAPOE training and CPD to meet sector needs

- Attended Scottish Government evidence session for the Residential Outdoor Education Bill in November.
- Representation on the Cross Party Groups for Outdoor Education and Learning for Sustainability.
- Representation on several Scottish Government and Education Scotland Working Groups, including the Scottish Outdoor Learning Strategic Working Group and Scottish Outdoor Learning Group (previously ENFOR).
- Representation on the main UK and Scottish Governing Bodies including RYA Scotland, Paddle Scotland, Mountain Training and Scottish Cycling.

96%

of members agree that representation on Scottish Government groups is a high priority

96%

agree it's a high priority for SAPOE to have direct conversations with public bodies and agencies

Our members say...

"The last few years have seen a huge shift in how the Scottish Government and Education Scotland view and engage with SAPOE. We seem to firmly have a seat at the table now, and SAPOE leadership... are well placed to take this forward."

"Absolute priority and time well spent of SAPOE officers and Executive Committee to influence policy and key messages."

"[We should] Keep promoting the importance of SAPOE as developer of Going Out There, encourage more members to adopt the guidelines, [which] reduce costs for LAs in duplicating and reassures LAs of good practice."

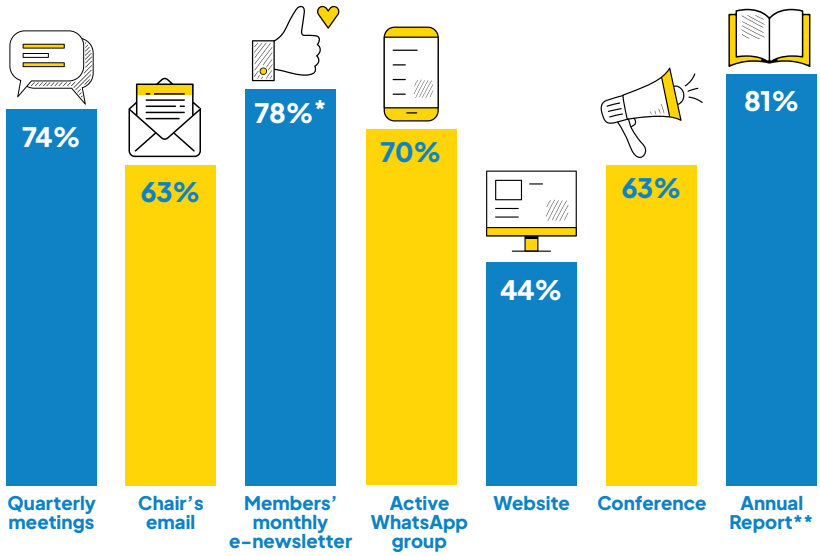
Communication

To connect and engage internally and externally.

- A new communications plan, produced in August 2023, now helps to inform our ongoing communications decisions.
- Our communications channels were reviewed again as part of our 2024 survey.
- New monthly e-newsletter was launched in November 2024.
- The SAPOE and Going Out There websites were moved to a new host in early 2025. This will allow further improvements to drive up engagement.

Engagement with our communications channels

Percentage of members who find these channels useful or very useful, according to the 2024 survey:



*after the first two issues **anticipated usefulness of this report

Our current projects

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. Much of our input and time as SAPOE committee members and officers goes into participating in projects and working groups, collaborating across the sector to develop policy, guidance and resources that help drive high quality and good practice in outdoor learning. In 2025, we are participating in:

Scottish Outdoor Learning Strategic Working Group (SOLSWG)

As part of this Scottish Government ministerial group, we're working with civil servants, the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC), Education Scotland and other partners to provide a written briefing on outdoor learning for Government ministers by mid-2025.

For more about our projects, visit our website.

Residential Outdoor Education High Quality document

Working alongside AHOEC, Education Scotland and other partners, we're contributing to the creation of a framework and supporting resources which will effectively communicate what learners, educators and providers can expect from residential experiences.

Residential OE Instructors Training Resource

Together with AHOEC and Education Scotland, we are producing a training resource similar to the SLO and TLO courses, but specifically aimed at instructors and support staff at residential outdoor centres.

Curriculum Improvement Cycle

This short-term working group is collating a response to the current Education Scotland review cycle to ensure outdoor learning is fully considered.