

Annual Report 2025-26



Chair's welcome

In this report, we celebrate the progress we've made in our second year of SAPOE's five-year strategy for 2024-29, **Curriculum Beyond the Classroom.**

The year has seen some significant steps towards our ambition of transforming Scotland's education landscape, so that every young person in Scotland can access regular, progressive, high-quality outdoor learning experiences.

As a collective voice for the outdoor learning sector, we've supported key legislative development and collaborated at the highest level to help drive policy. Meanwhile, our own working groups have been hard at

work producing updated guidance and training. We've also focused on widening our reach through better use of refreshed communications channels. Our latest members' survey, conducted at the end of 2025, shows the positive impact.

We are particularly pleased to have welcomed four more Local Authority (LA) members in 2025. A priority for the year ahead is to encourage inactive LA members to re-engage and make the most of the networking opportunities, training resources, policy representation and individual support they can benefit from as SAPOE members.



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



Tim Pickering, Chair



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

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.

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.

Celebrating 50 years

This year marked our golden jubilee! In 1975, the outdoor education advisors in Scotland's 12 newly formed regional councils were brought together as the Scottish Advisers Outdoor Education Panel. Since then, we've been championing and supporting outdoor learning across Scotland.

See our timeline and half-century highlights on the website



Conference success

Our 50th anniversary celebration dinner was just one highlight of the SAPOE, SCIS & Partners Conference, held at Comrie Croft in November 2025. Over 40 delegates from around Scotland enjoyed a packed two-day programme of networking, outdoor activities, workshops and talks, including by keynote speaker Ollie Bray, Strategic Director at Education Scotland.

"It was a really useful event and great to be able to spend time with people from across outdoor learning."



See an overview of conference highlights on our website



Our membership



30

Local Authorities represented,
4 more than in 2024-25

2

members from the Scottish
Council for Independent
Schools (SCIS)

2

associate members
from the University
of Edinburgh

13

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 to help develop outdoor learning in schools and other settings (e.g. on whole-school approaches to learning outdoors, adventure activity safety, staff training and qualifications).
- ▶ **Peer-to-peer support and networking** opportunities including our active WhatsApp group, regular meetings and conference.
- ▶ **Professional learning 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 re-engage with currently unpaid and inactive members, and we always welcome new members from Local Authorities and partner organisations.

* 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



**Please get in touch
for more information.**

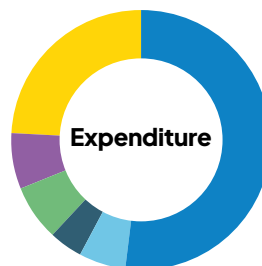


Our financials in 2025-26

We are a small organisation with minimal overheads, relying heavily on membership fees to cover our modest running costs. Additional grant funding enables us to deliver project work, such as maintaining Going Out There and developing training courses.



- ▲ Membership fees **£11400**
- ▲ Going Out There (GOT) grant **£9913.20**
- ▲ Conference **£6565**
- ▲ Other grants **£3700**



- ▲ Officer post **£14396**
- ▲ SAPOE admin **£1547.83**
- ▲ SAPOE website **£1191.99**
- ▲ GOT website and project **£1929.99**
- ▲ Conference **£6632.18**
- ▲ Grants **£1885.05**

Residential outdoor education becomes mandatory



The passing of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill in mid-December 2025 marked a key milestone for our sector.

SAPOE's strategic undertaking to help transform the national learning landscape included our desire to see "a recognition that inclusive residential and adventure experiences are an essential part of progressive

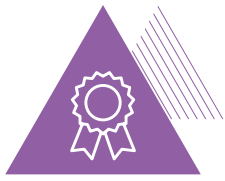
outdoor learning." The new legislation embodies this recognition.

Having contributed to evidence sessions in 2024 in support of the Bill, we stand ready to work with the Scottish Government and partners towards making it a reality, so that every child in Scotland benefits from this legal right to residential outdoor experience.

This year's highlights

What we've delivered against our strategic themes

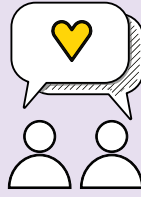
This year we made significant strides towards delivering the activities, initiatives and outcomes set out in our five-year strategy. Here we highlight just some of the achievements of 2025-26, grouped around the **three key themes** in our strategy.



Membership

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

- ▶ Our communication and values survey showed that members and partners highly value the individual support that SAPOE can provide.
- ▶ A growing percentage of members now consider our WhatsApp group useful in requesting and sharing advice.
- ▶ The 40 delegates at our Conference in November gave the event an average rating of **4.85/5** for value for money and **4.15/5** for activities. Workshops covered a diverse range of topics including due diligence, adventure activity licensing, inclusion outdoors and the curriculum outdoors.



Valuable in-person meetings

Our quarterly meetings (two online and two in-person) are a core offering to members and are well attended. The in-person meetings are now rated just as highly as online meetings.



A member says...

"I value being a member and the benefits SAPOE brings to outdoor learning at both a local and national level."

81%

of members rate our WhatsApp group as useful or very useful

90%

rated SAPOE support for individual members as important or very important

100%

rated networking opportunities as important or very important



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 professional learning courses to meet sector needs.

- ▶ As an active member of the Scottish Outdoor Learning Strategic Working Group (SOLSWG), a 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 develop recommendations for Ministers on supporting outdoor learning throughout the next decade. This is due to be delivered in spring 2026.
- ▶ This year, we've made strong representation at the highest level on the Cross Party Group for Outdoor Education and have also provided significant contributions to other Scottish Government and Education Scotland working groups, including the Scottish Outdoor Learning Group (previously Enfor).
- ▶ We're also undertaking several projects alongside Education Scotland, AHOEC and other partners, including the creation of a guiding framework to improve residential outdoor education, and the production of a training resource for residential outdoor education instructors.
- ▶ In May 2025, we published our Curriculum Improvement Cycle guidance document, designed to support members in their own Local Authority areas as they work alongside Education Scotland to continually improve Scotland's curriculum. It was also shared with key partners.
- ▶ SAPOE has representation on the main UK and Scottish Governing Bodies including RYA Scotland, Paddle Scotland, Mountain Training and Scottish Cycling.

100%

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

100%

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





Communication

To connect and engage internally and externally.



- ▶ Informed by feedback from our members, we've continued to review and refine our communication channels over the course of this year. For example, we've been fine-tuning our monthly e-newsletter, launched at the end of 2024. It's proving a valuable way to share project developments, good practice and wider sector news.
- ▶ In October 2025, we joined the professional networking platform LinkedIn. This channel effectively replaces our presence on X, which we have moved away from for ethical reasons.

- ▶ This year, our website has seen a significant rise in perceived usefulness, especially among Local Authority members, who appreciate its simplicity as a useful source of information and news.

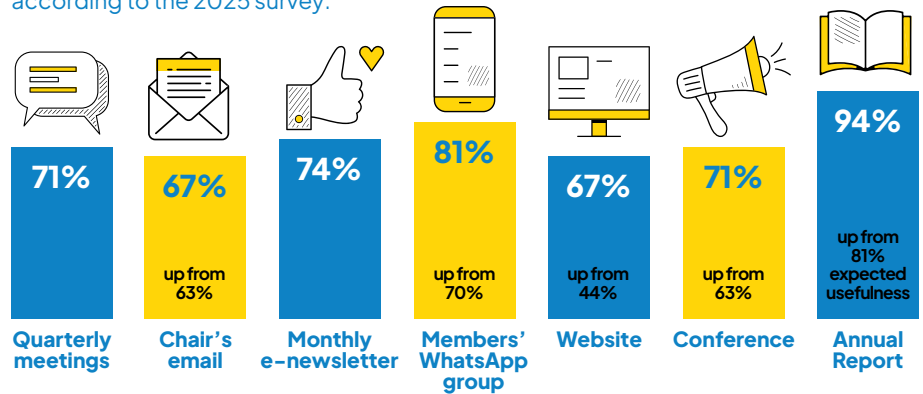
- ▶ The positive response to our first Annual Report, published in March 2025, well exceeded expectations.



Come follow us on LinkedIn!

Engagement with our communications channels

Percentage of members who find these channels useful or very useful, according to the 2025 survey:



A member says...

"Having recently joined SAPOE as a representative, I've found the communications super helpful and supportive."

Key working groups set to deliver

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. Much of the SAPOE Executive committee members' time and input involves participating in projects and working groups, and collaborating across the sector to develop policy, guidance and resources that help drive good practice in outdoor learning. We welcome members' participation on working groups

This year, two of our own key working groups were abuzz with activity – work which will bear fruit in the course of 2026, so keep an eye on our communications for more information!



Going Out There (GOT) working group

During 2024–25, our GOT working group completed a comprehensive update of the GOT guidance. This includes new and updated sections relating to the UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC), Learning for Sustainability, the Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC) role, as well as social media and safeguarding guidance.

This updated material is being added to the GOT website in tranches, and in the coming year we plan to simplify the website, so that content is easy to access and navigate. In addition, we are planning a high-profile campaign in the 2026–27 academic year to raise awareness and increase usage of the GOT guidance.

Training working group

This working group has started reviewing SAPOE's Supporting Learning Outdoors (SLO) and Teaching Learning Outdoors (TLO) courses. It has also begun development of a module-based programme of online courses to provide entry-level support to teachers, probationary staff, support staff and youth workers who are keen to get young people outdoors.

Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) group

Building on the work of this group and publication of the CIC guidance document in May 2025, we're collaborating with ES staff at a high-level workshop in March 2026 to explore how to embed outdoor learning as part of CIC going forward.

Residential Outdoor Education High Quality document

Working alongside AHOEC, ES and other partners, we've contributed to the creation of a framework and supporting resources which will effectively communicate what learners, educators and providers can expect from residential experiences. The document is complete and awaiting publication (as of end February).

Residential OE Instructors Training Resource

Together with AHOEC and ES, we're producing a training resource similar to the SLO and TLO courses, but specifically aimed at residential outdoor centre instructors and support staff. This resource is nearing completion and will hopefully be published in the course of the coming year.

87% of survey respondents either use GOT or have formally adopted it in their Local Authority