

SPOTLIGHT

This issue, the spotlight is on...becoming a Registered Practitioner of the Institute of Outdoor Learning through the Outdoor Activity Instructor Apprenticeship route

By Jim Whittaker

Over the past few months, a group of IOL trustees has been working on an exciting project to bring together the sector's apprenticeship standards and the established outdoor learning professional practitioner route. The clarity and quality of the professional pathways into and through outdoor learning is a key focus for the Institute for Outdoor Learning. This article provides an update on the first very significant step in that work.

History

The Registered Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (RPIOL) accreditation was the natural next step after the establishment and success of the Accredited Practitioner (APIOL) route developed nearly twenty years ago. By 2008 it was possible to be recognised as an early career professional who could prepare and lead safe and engaging outdoor learning sessions to achieve intended outcomes.

The Outdoor Activity Instructor (OAI) apprenticeship standard was approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in September 2018. It recognises when an individual can prepare and run a safe and enjoyable activity session that meets intended outcomes. A key part of the development of the OAI standard by the trailblazer group was to align the standard with RPIOL. Work was done to initially map this to RPIOL by Roger Hopper and Neal Anderson and, thanks to this, IfATE recognised RPIOL as the professional pathway alongside OAI from the beginning.

Why?

Up until now, there has been no formal system to automatically award RPIOL upon successful completion of an apprenticeship. This is the case in most other sectors and with most other professional recognition systems. The OAI standard provides a robust and reflective training progression for those new to outdoor activity instruction. Those who complete it have demonstrated the required knowledge, skills, and behaviours to plan, deliver, and review safe sessions of enjoyable outdoor learning, and have met all the requirements for RPIOL without further evidence.

Where the OAI standard defines the journey to competence, the associated End Point Assessment (EPA) provides a summative assessment that looks very much like the assessment for RPIOL.

For more information on the RPIOL award criteria: outdoor-learning.org/standards/iol-awards-and-accreditation/rpiol.html

For more information on the OAI standard: instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/outdoor-activity-instructor-v1-1



So, why introduce apprentices to the IOL during their training and then award them RPIOL upon completion? Let's explore the benefits...

Support for early career professionals

Support for those in their early years in the sector comes from every angle and is abundant. National Governing Body award courses, local and regional outdoor networks, employer influence, peer support, online forums and webinars, you name it. We work in a world which enables others to be the best version of themselves. But what can the Institute for Outdoor Learning do better to formalise and strengthen support so that it's very clear, structured, accessible and valued from outside the sector?

Challenging diversity issues

We have a diversity issue to address. Our workforce does not reflect the communities it serves and the problem is more chronic the higher up the leadership and management scale you go. It's not uncommon to find a gathering of senior members of our sector with fewer than 5% being female and with no ethnic diversity at all. In contrast, an inspection of the 300 or so strong apprenticeship population in the sector shows over 50% female and 15% from diverse backgrounds. If we can capture the interest of more of these early career professionals, early on in their development, we can hopefully create a more diverse foundation from which to instigate positive change in our workforce. The benefits are clear not only in the quality and diversity of the workforce, but also in the improvement of our membership demographic and talent pipeline.



Employer benefits

Recruitment and retention are high on any employer's list of challenges. Any tool that helps to identify and nurture talent is an attractive one. Many employers choose the RPIOL/APIOL progression as a useful framework for training and development, and for that to be kick-started at the earliest point possible can be of benefit. The outside involvement of the RPIOL mentor and the network that early career professionals can access through this system are powerful positive influences.

Individual benefits

Introduction to your sector's professional body is a very important first step in a career – whether that's a short-term career or a lifelong one. The acceleration of training and development that comes with a well-informed, balanced and properly resourced induction and development programme is both rewarding and motivating. Having clear sight of progression opportunities and a well-structured roadmap is important in making decisions about career direction. We recognise and celebrate the contribution that a short-term career in the outdoors can have for an individual who then moves into another sector; the better we can make those early years, the better that career will be.



How does it work?

Throughout their OAI apprenticeship, individuals gather evidence in many, if not all, of the following ways: e-portfolio evidence; written questions; assignments; project work; webinar attendance; hot topic completion; SWOT analysis; learning journal; observation records; professional discussions; tutor testimony; employer testimony; practical course attendance; NGB qualification; gateway meeting; End Point Assessment.

The full assessment plan can be found here: instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/outdoor-activity-instructor-v1-1.

On completion of the training phase, the gateway meeting between training provider, employer and apprentice agrees progression to End Point Assessment (EPA). If the apprentice passes EPA, they achieve the apprenticeship.

At this point they are now automatically qualified for RPIOL without further evidence. Individuals may now access a further year of heavily discounted membership as an early career professional. Some practical notes:

- Apprentices will be introduced to the IOL and the RPIOL system by their training provider early in the apprenticeship and can join IOL soon thereafter to access networks and resources.
- Employers will be encouraged to support with membership – currently discounted to £3 per month.
- The RPIOL awarding centre may be the training provider, employer or employer provider.
- In the case of a training provider not being an RPIOL centre, the provider/employer may engage with another RPIOL centre to enable accreditation.
- Those that complete the full OAI training phase, but are unable to achieve Functional Skills (and therefore cannot undertake End Point Assessment), can still attain RPIOL through a gateway agreement between themselves, their employer and the training provider. This is in order to not disadvantage those with special educational needs or disabilities.

For training providers that offer the OAI standard to be able to offer RPIOL accreditation, they must:

- be an organisational member of the Institute for Outdoor Learning;
- be listed on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register;
- be registered as an RPIOL awarding centre (nb: there is no charge for this process);
- and have a designated member of staff to coordinate the RPIOL process (that holds either the Accredited Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning or Professional in Outdoor Learning Accreditation).

Development

Getting the foundation right is the key. We will monitor the development of the RPIOL community and seek feedback to improve the offer the IOL can make. Listening to the needs and priorities of early career professionals will help us shape this stage and work on the alignment of the Level 5 Outdoor learning Specialist standard with a refreshed APIOL ▲

If you have any comments, questions or feedback do please get in touch via institute@outdoor-learning.org with the subject line OAI-RPIOL. For more information: outdoor-learning.org/workforce/apprenticeships.html

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