

Regional Outdoor Learning Research Hubs

Update November 2017

Please support the Outdoor Learning Regional Research Hubs Initiative in proving the concept that collating OL research through regional hubs can give us more evidence, more confidence and more influence to support the development of effective practice and policy!

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Regional Outdoor Learning Research Hubs: a briefish introduction

The Outdoor Learning Strategic Research Group (SRG) was set up by Natural England to support research into the impact of OL in the UK. The group currently meets under the auspices of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC). In response to a call from the SRG, several regional hubs set themselves up to bring researchers and practitioners together. At the same time funding was provided by the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) to employ a national OL research coordinator based at the University of Cumbria.

The regional hubs have been asked to:

1. Build links between local research-practice communities with an interest in outdoor learning– universities, providers, professionals, researchers, postgraduate students, etc.
2. Capture the scope of research and delivery projects in their area and feed any publications in the public domain to the research coordinator. (so we can create a picture of the scale and scope of delivery in different areas)
3. Once identified, create plans for supporting amplification of delivery in areas of national priority. (this includes applying existing evidence to improve the quality and quantity of school based outdoor learning, for example by translating learning from



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sources related to projects such as the Natural Connections Demonstration Project and Learning Away, etc)

4. Once identified create plans to support evidence gathering in areas of national priority. (this includes work to better understand the roles of contact with nature and connection with nature in delivering wellbeing and pro-environmental outcomes)
5. Disseminate information about evidence and good practice within their hub area, among the network of pilot hubs and to the SRG through frameworks put in place by the National OL Research Co-ordinator

Regional hubs are autonomous. We ask them to support the initiative and, in addition, they may well develop further agendas of their own. Anyone can attend. You do not need to be an IOL member. IOL and CLOtC will promote regional hub events through IOL membership if you give them the details (see below). Hubs are also encouraged to promote them through their local networks. The greater the reach the better!

National research coordinator appointed

I'm pleased to announce that Carrie Hedges has been appointed as the national OL research coordinator and started in her new role last month. Carrie.hedges@cumbria.ac.uk

Funding has been provided for a part time 10-month appointment to explore whether the coordination of research via the regional hubs is a viable and effective approach that supports practitioners and policy makers alike. This is a 'proof of concept' phase. As a pilot, the coordinator will be working directly with the four existing regional hubs to test whether the following objectives can be fulfilled by a longer term project:

1. Brief the regional hubs on national policy developments and priorities as they emerge. We hope this will make it easier for those conducting research and evaluation to, where appropriate, align their studies with national priorities.
2. Support the regional hub participants in submitting research and evaluation that is less well known - impact studies project evaluations, masters theses, etc. This will provide a clearer and stronger evidence base for what is already understood or supported by research. This will help underpin an evidence base for national policy development and identify key gaps in knowledge.



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3. Summarise the findings in a series of reports available to all to inform their practice, proposals and further research, like the Nature Connections network are already doing in their sector.
4. Analyse the collected evidence base for new findings that become visible when all the evidence is available.

Each hub has at least one Strategic Research Group member chairing or contributing to their group.

Carrie is planning to attend the next hub meetings to begin the process of points 1 and 2 above. Once this is under way, she will be able to test our hopes that the results will form the basis for our third and fourth aspirations.

Please support Carrie in proving the concept that collating OL research through regional hubs can give us more evidence, more confidence and more influence to support the development of effective practice and policy!

Hubs to feed into national policy development

The CLOtC has been informed that Outdoor Learning will be one of several key strategies proposed in the soon to be published Government 25 Year Environment Plan. The ask will be to provide a comprehensive a coherent provision of OL from age five to eighteen.

Progression model in development. Natural England, IOL and the CLOtC have commissioned research to develop a 'progression model'. This will map the diverse forms of OL provided by different institutions such as recreation, youth work, schools, sports clubs, etc, onto a model showing how they could provide a comprehensive provision for all young people in different settings and for different demographics.

Once the model is in its initial form, it can be used to identify research priorities such as capacity, inclusivity, impact and cohesion. It will also act as a framework for the national research coordinator to organise the collation and analysis of the evidence put forward from the field. We hope this will also provide a logical framework for communicating findings to user groups, practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders.



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Regional hubs expanding

The first wave of hubs emerged last year in the SW, NW and Scotland quickly followed by the SE. All these have now met at least twice. Recently, proposals have been made for further hubs in the NE and Northern Ireland.

Contact details can be found on the IOL Hub Research web pages (see below).

IOL Support for Regional Hubs

As one of the partners in the OL regional hub initiative and the funder of the national research coordinator, IOL have created web pages that are quickly developing to:

- Connect people with the regional hubs
- Announce and administer regional hub events
- Disseminate policy and research news via blogs, social media and, in time, our first reports. The CLoTC and Natural England will also promote the outputs from the project.

Please let people know about this valuable new portal for Outdoor Learning research.

Along with the other partners, IOL will use the outputs from the hubs to inform and influence policy and research activity. In addition, plans are afoot for the first national OL research conference in autumn 2018.

If your hub would like to post a blog please submit these to the IOL hub contact Louise Kier louise@outdoor-learning.org

Louise is also happy to help you with promotion and administration of regional hub events so do contact her for this great support.

Visit the developing webpages at:

<https://www.outdoor-learning-research.org/Research/Research-Hub>

To follow the social media posts:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IOLOutdoorProfs>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Outdoor.Learning.Professionals/>



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