

REPORT OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION MANAGER (ACTING)

SUBJECT: IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATION

1. Background

The retirement of Steve Drinkwater in May 2010, combined with the challenging economic climate, provided the Education and Inclusion team with the opportunity to review operations and make improvements. Elaine Jones was asked to act up as Education and Inclusion Manager and undertook a service level review as part of a wider review of the Authority's operations in July 2010. This paper highlights the key improvements made over the last 12 months which have allowed the Education and Inclusion team to deliver a more coordinated and efficient service whilst reducing costs and increasing income.

2. Rationale

A vibrant and robust learning service plays an important role in fulfilling the Park Authority's second purpose as well as helping to ensure that the National Park is both valued and cared for by future generations. Young people are at the heart of local communities and engaging with them provides an effective mechanism for local action and delivery.

Evidence shows that children are increasingly disconnected from the natural environment and are becoming 'entombed in their homes'. This is contributing to major challenges facing society today – including the rise of childhood obesity and mental health issues; the struggle to build a sense of place and community; and the need to address climate change and develop pro environmental behaviours. The 2009 WAG publication 'Creating an Active Wales' estimates that the cost of physical inactivity to Wales is about £650m per year¹. Similarly, a recent literature review entitled "Children in the Outdoors" (Munoz 2009²) refers to links between children being outdoors and mental wellbeing. Consequently, it is clear that National Park Authorities are well placed to take on a role that not only supports schools in providing quality opportunities to learn in the outdoors and use their local green spaces as active learning environments but to also enhance the general development and wellbeing of children and young people.

The value that the Welsh Government places on lifelong learning as a means of National Park Authorities engaging with local communities is reflected in the following two Priority Objectives of the Strategic Grant Letter March 2011:

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/phhs/publications/actiwales/100121actiwalesen.pdf>

² <http://www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/Children%20Outdoors.pdf>

- To utilise the special qualities of the Parks in contributing to lifelong learning, and in particular to support opportunities for schools within the Parks to access learning opportunities outside the classroom.
- Provide for meaningful participation by children and young people, and other protected groups, in the activities of the Park Authorities.

The importance that PCNPA places on lifelong learning is reflected in the National Park Management Plan which states *that “more attention should perhaps be given to targeting effort where the gains will be greatest. For example, some of the biggest and most lasting gains in terms of future environmental protection and social responsibility may come from helping children and young people to explore and enjoy the National Park”*.

The Corporate Strategy 2011 also highlights the role that lifelong learning has in delivering outcomes, as detailed in Outcome 6:

- Residents and visitors from a wide range of backgrounds access opportunities for improved understanding about the National Park.

The challenge faced by the Education and Inclusion team over the last 12 months was how to continue to improve and deliver an effective service while at the same time reducing costs and increasing income. The following text provides an overview of the actions taken to date.

3. Cutting costs while improving the service

The Education budget made a savings of approximately 10% (£17,000) during the 2010-11 financial year. This was largely achieved by restructuring the team and changing working practices. The delivery of the ‘Education and Activities Programme’ was formerly carried out by a pool of approximately 20 casual employees. However administration and coordination of such a large number of employees, to ensure safe and consistent delivery, was also costly in terms of time and resources.

The review of the Education and Inclusion service suggested that rationalising the team would reduce admin’ and improve co-ordination and consistency. Consequently, the decision was taken by SMT to appointment two part-time Discovery Rangers to replace the pool of casual staff who, together with the Park Authority’s Rangers, now deliver the majority of the ‘Education and Activities Programme’. This has not only reduced costs but also allowed the Park Authority to provide an improved service with clear and consistent National Park messages. In addition, because the Discovery Rangers are office based, when they are not delivering in the field, they have been able to commit additional time to develop resources and new partnership opportunities which are helping to further enhance the service.

4. Raising income

As result of the service level review it was proposed that the Authority introduce charges for the ‘Out and About’ (schools based) education programme, thus bringing

it into line with the education activities provided by our historic sites. Local teachers and Head Teachers were consulted with regard to their 'willingness to pay' and last year Members accepted the proposal to charge £1.50 per head per half day for 'Out & About' activities from September 2010 onwards. The introduction of this charge has generated an income, over the academic year, of just over £8000. There was concern that introducing a charge for this service may lead to a fall in numbers but the number of school sessions that have been booked since the charge was introduced has remained constant which, in part, indicates the value teachers place on PCNPA's educational services.

In addition to the income raised from charging schools the team has successfully bid for external funding to support its work: The team has been successful in securing £1500 in grant-aid support from the 'Little Green Grant', administered by PAVS, to support planting fruit and nut trees in school grounds, £400 from the Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) to support climate change work in secondary schools and £5000 from Planed to support a Family Discovery Trail for Saundersfoot.

5. Adding Value

Extensive consultation with teachers has enabled us to respond to the needs of schools and add value to the education service. The programme focuses on biodiversity and sustainable development and sessions have been developed to support the National Curriculum as well as provide opportunities for learning outside the classroom. A CD ROM of resources to support National Park visits has been produced and is provided to schools who book a session. Topic boxes and lesson plans have been developed for each session and are used to support Rangers and ensure consistency with additional information and resources also being made available through PCNPA's website³. Teachers are asked to fill in an evaluation form and the feedback from these has been unanimously positive with over 90% of teachers giving the Authority top scores. The comments below taken from recent evaluation forms give a flavour of the feedback:

Fantastic!It was such fun and yet the children learnt so much. When they returned to school they completed brilliant literacy, science and art work related to the walk. They also have a broader understanding of their local area. Thank you.
Manorbier VC School

An excellent day for all pupils and staff. The presentation given by the tutors was outstanding. A valuable resource for developing thinking skills. ... Look forward to coming back. Diolch yn fawr.
Ysgol Glannau Gwaun

We have attended these sessions for many years. These sessions were certainly the most suitable we have had. Fantastic.
Milford Junior School

³ <http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/Files/files/discover%20your%20park.pdf>

Really good session...Fits in well with 'Our Pembrokeshire' thematic fortnight and it will definitely become part of the Year 6 calendar.

Lamphey Primary School

6. Supporting teachers to deliver

An important aspect of the work of the team is to support teachers to deliver their own out of classroom learning activities. Often the main barrier for many teachers is confidence, competence and capacity in utilising the natural environment as a platform for learning. This is a new area of work which has been successfully developed over the past year by working in partnership with Trinity College, Pembrokeshire County Council and Careers Wales West. Eleven teacher training sessions have been delivered to 400 teachers or trainee teachers. These sessions have provided practical support for teachers to develop their capacity to integrate activities and resources that promote learning outside the classroom and show how barriers can be overcome. PCNPA is also a partner in the PCC 'Outdoor Schools' initiative which we support, not only by providing in-school training, but also by helping schools to identify and use local green spaces.

7. Conclusion

By being proactive and taking decisive action the Education and Inclusion team have made significant improvements to the services provided despite the uncertain economic climate. The revised approach, led by the Acting Education and Inclusion Manager, Elaine Jones, has created savings and generated additional income for the Authority whilst simultaneously delivering new work and driving up standards. The team is committed to a culture of continuous improvement and constantly evaluates activities to ensure efficiency and also effectiveness in helping the Authority to deliver its Corporate Objectives. The Interpretation, Social Inclusion and Activity and Event programmes of work are presently being reviewed and further service improvements are expected over the coming months which will be reported to this committee in due course.

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