

Background and current situation analysis

Delivery against the 2011-14 Plan has been effective and the number of learner experiences delivered so far exceeds targets by just over 10%.

As at the end of the summer holidays we were on target to reach 22,000 learner experiences for 2013 and income generation had been good despite the challenging economic backdrop.

Prospects for repeat, referred and recommended business are very strong with terrific service user feedback and consistent meeting or exceeding of expectations:

| 2013 data | Meeting or exceeding expectations |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Schools | 99.3% |
| Adults | 97.6% |
| Eco Activities | 100% |



The Centre continues to be very well maintained by the City and its contractors with extensive summer works (including refurbishment of toilets) further enhancing the suitability of facilities. The Centre Grounds and nearby learning sites continue to be very suitable for the provision of a nice range of learning experiences.

The Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre are making progress towards:

- becoming an increasingly active community based organisation
- becoming a focal point for volunteering
- increased membership (currently 723 members)
- providing increased fundraising and promotional support for the Centre in 2014.

With a significant sustained workload and staffing levels lower than in 2011 and 2012 there have been pressures on staff and this resource has been over-stretched at times. However a significant reduction in staff time needed for project work in 2014 (and the latter end of 2013) should alleviate this.

Further background to this Plan can be found in the 2011-14 Plan and in the separate report to the JCC on progress in 2013.

Learning delivery

Our aspiration for 2014 is to deliver 22,000 learner experiences meeting or exceeding the expectations of > 90 % of service users. 22,000 learner experiences is 'stretch' target. In recent years grant funded learner experiences have accounted for some 8 -14% of learner experiences. Unfortunately we do not have this sort of funding in place for 2014 and there is no strong likelihood that this will change. Our focus in the past year or so has been on reducing operating costs to move to a more viable business model rather than on investing in limited staff time in speculative income generating work.

The implication of this is that we might need to deliver something like an additional 100 courses beyond those that come from repeat bookings and the normal level of new custom in order to replace all of the learner experiences that would previously have come from externally funded projects. We may be able to achieve this but it is probably best to assume that the number of learner experiences will be in the range of 20,000 – 22,000. [The target in the 2011-14 Plan was to reach an average of 20,000 per year so a lower figure would still achieve this].

Subject to staff continuity, this growth may be achievable by building on project/development work legacies and the improvements made to the website and use of social media together with appropriately targeted marketing. The combination of reduced project development and delivery time in 2014 compared to 2011 might release staff time for this.

We anticipate that these additional learners will come from courses/audiences that are Project legacies and from targeting BTEC and CSR opportunities. We will continue to use valuable volunteer support to ease burdens on tutors and provide enhanced support to learners.

Picking up on recommendations in the report of Consultant on Learning Provision in EF, there is also potential to deliver more 'bushcraft' arts and history courses building on past EFFC activities (charcoal burners, Loughton Camp etc) and current practices (arts and 'bushcraft') . We will also consider again the potential of linking learning with forest products and the stories of the commercial and industrial businesses associated with these in the way that we have done previously in providing leadership to the FEI North London, Essex & Herts. Cluster Group. Freshwater Forensics' resources, developed with Epping Forest Countrycare for a BES Centenary Event is also something that offers future potential.

In the current climate we probably need to focus more on course income and viability (and on quality) rather than overly focussing on high numbers of learning experiences. The figure for 2013 course income in the budget was £271K which we will certainly reach and hope to comfortably exceed. (Course income to date has been better than the budget figure but November bookings are currently down on those received this time last year so the final figure is still unknown). The budget estimate is around a 5% increase on the 2013 estimate and this is seen as achievable with some modest fees increases in the least price sensitive areas of provision together with some additional courses.

Community engagement

We will continue with attempts to foster the growth of the Associates of EFFC as a community based supporter organisation bringing benefits in terms of volunteer engagement, income generation, community links, public relations and promotional activity.

We plan to continue to offer our services close to the communities we serve based on the development work undertaken in recent years including our outreach provision and making good use of the 44 learning sites that we currently use within and outside of Epping Forest.



Communications

We plan to utilise our marketing tools as effectively as we can to ensure that we optimise bookings.

We recognise that a very important factor in communications is to ensure that stakeholders are provided with information in a manner that can best build their understanding of the best way in which they can support the achievement of shared aspirations for learning in Epping Forest.



Communications

Website pages, newsletters, social media and targeted marketing will remain important throughout 2014.

The image shows a collage of communication materials for Epping Forest Field Centre. On the left, there are three newsletters: 'Epping Forest Field Centre Junior Newsletter Winter 2013/12', 'Epping Forest Field Centre school holiday activities', and 'Epping Forest Field Centre January 2012'. In the center is a screenshot of the Epping Forest FSC website, which features a header with the organization's name and a list of tweets. On the right is a screenshot of the Epping Forest Field Centre Facebook page, showing a post about fieldwork and a photo of a fern frond. The Facebook page also displays the number of likes (137) and a location map.

Fundraising, sponsorship and income generation

In addition to course income generation already outlined a range of additional sources of income will be further explored which will include the following.

The Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre, have agreed to follow an agreed protocol and seek funding from Livery Companies and from the business sector (including sponsorship and 'supporter' status following up Ford of Britain funding ten years after receiving a small sum from that company).

Increased accountability (to OFSTED) for the way in which their Pupil Premium is spent is considered to be a marketing opportunity in that we can show how our services can deliver the aims for which this funding is intended.

Project legacies offer opportunities for new funding. We currently have an outline bid prepared to present to the Ernest Cook Trust to follow up previous funding in 2008 for a pilot Lessons from Nature programme.

We hope to take forward the potential growth in the plan relating to Arts sector funding ('Inspired by Epping Forest')

It is possible that this will generate some income (and costs) in 2014 but this is far too speculative to include in estimates. Instead the current pragmatic assumption is that this will be cost neutral with the prospect of longer term benefits.

Project legacies and the future

The Epping Forest Learning Providers Forum will provide an opportunity to continue to explore the Discovering Epping Forest Project legacy together with findings of the Review of Learning in Epping Forest undertaken by consultants for the City. We will fully engage with this.

Ongoing consideration will be given to how we can best take forward the legacies of our other recent projects (including Learning for Biodiversity, Lessons from Nature & Sustainable Schools) focussing on:

- use of the new courses & resources
- pedagogies
- operating systems
- learning sites
- audiences
- partnerships

Key priorities for 2014

Build on our recent achievements and innovations to strengthen the core of our work.

Deliver remainder of EFFC 2011-14 Plan as appropriate including further development of our provision of learning experiences that are more locally available to North and East London with an emphasis on working with schools especially those in disadvantaged communities





Achieve targets whilst responding effectively to new challenges and opportunities in the operating environment

Support the visions of FSC and of the City of London and deliver the City's environmental education service in Epping Forest

Respond imaginatively to the City of London's consultation on learning in Epping Forest

Produce the EFFC 2015-2019 Plan

Target setting: - Key performance indicators for 2014:

| Key performance indicators | 2011 Actual | 2012 Actual | 2013 Target | 2013 Probable | 2014 Target |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|--|--------------------|
| Learner experiences | 23,240 | 22,140 | 22,000 | 22,000 | 22,000 |
| Volunteer days | 388.5 | 465 | 500 | 300 | 350 |
| People: IIP | Standards maintained | FSC awarded:  | Maintain Standards | Standards maintained | Maintain Standards |
| Quality | Standards maintained | Standards maintained. | Exceed the standard for the Quality Badge in external assessment |  Standards Exceeded | Maintain Standards |
| Health & Safety |  Safety Shield Gold 100% criteria met | Standards maintained. | Achieve Safety Shield Gold |  Safety Shield Gold 100% criteria met | Maintain Standards |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Meet/ exceed customer expectations | | >90% of customers recorded 'yes' on feedback forms | > 90% of customers to record 'yes' on feedback forms | >90% of customers recorded 'yes' on feedback forms | > 90% of customers to record 'yes' on feedback forms |
| Increase customer environmental understanding | | >90% of customers recorded 'yes' on feedback forms | > 90% of customers to record 'yes' on feedback forms | >90% of customers recorded 'yes' on feedback forms | > 90% of customers to record 'yes' on feedback forms |

Nb: Experience informs us that focussing on the quality of volunteering brings a better return on staff time invested in recruitment and support.

Our broad objectives for 2014

The broad objectives (below) will generally be achieved by the end 2014, subject to feasibility and resources including staff continuity having been developed into a series of specific and measurable objectives for individual staff.

- Work towards 22,000 learner experiences and achieve target income with ongoing monitoring and with appropriate adjustments to marketing activity to optimise outputs and outcomes.
- Develop and deliver activities for a wide range of learners (especially for North & East London schools) meeting and exceeding needs and expectations
- Ensure that all of our programmes consistently adopt our own internal best practice (and external best practice) and that they engender enjoyment and discovery learning.
- Maintain our reputation for outstanding visitor satisfaction, responding effectively to issues and opportunities arising from feedback
- Work effectively with the Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre to foster meaningful support for the work of the Centre.
- Produce newsletters linked to enhanced web-based content (with search engine optimisation) to include the circulation to adult learners, associate tutors and some more partner organisations with ever increasing utilisation of social media as part of our marketing activity
- Seek support for marketing and publicity from appropriate City and FSC HO staff
- Seek funding to support the development of 'inspired by Epping Forest' (arts) provision
- Implement the Health and Safety plan and continue to meet 100% of the requirements of Northgate Arinso Safety Shield Gold standard
- Embed performance management systems linked to reporting and performance monitoring developed in 2012 and 2013.
- Continue to meet the requirements of IIP, ensuring an effective staff & volunteer team with a commitment to an exceptional level of performance, development and continuous improvement
- Liaise with Voluntary Action Epping Forest, City of London and other partners to share ideas and to seek continued improvements in the relation to support for and benefits from volunteers.
- Collaborate effectively with City of London officers in relation to maintenance of the facilities and improvements to environmental impacts where feasible
- Maintain and improve where possible the Centre grounds for wildlife, learning and enjoyment, including (subject to feasibility) the upgrading the existing Met station to become fully automated with access to live 'data' and the provision of new features (viewing platform, low ropes course, improved access to wheelchair path and pond complex) - subject to permissions and feasibility.

Lower priority and purely internal objectives are not shown in this document.

Staffing and finance

The demand for our services and income from courses remains strong. As at 18 September we estimate that 2013 course income will exceed the estimate in the budget.

Staffing remains the crucial controllable determinant of income as well as expenditure. It is also the resource that determines the degree of success in the delivery of mission and achievement of the objectives in this Plan; as always retention will be of crucial importance.

The key to effective delivery in 2014 depends upon extension/making permanent three temporary posts due to expire at the end of 2013 which are currently held by three highly productive members of our team. The Plan is based on the assumptions that these posts will be extended through to at least the end of 2014.

This may have been challenging to accommodate but with a tutor on 0.4 FTE contract leaving the team in August 2013 we had an opportunity to further cut staff costs adding to savings made earlier in 2013 (replacing a team leader with a tutor) and in 2011/12 (redundancy of Admin Assistant [0.5FTE] and not replacing a tutor and a trainee). This has enabled us to produce staff costs and other expenditure estimates that should enable us to achieve an optimal financial performance that is reflected in the following budget.

Finance: Income & expenditure estimates for 2014

Although the FSC Directors of Finance and of Operations have been consulted in the preparation of these figures it should be noted that FSC's formal budgeting process begins in November and this may have some as yet unknown impact upon these estimates.

| Account Heading | Budget 2014 |
|---|-------------|
| Teaching | £285,000 |
| Grants, sponsorship & restricted funds* | £6,800 |
| Others (staff rent, hire, professional services, sales) | £20,000 |
| Investment fund | £2,500 |
| Sub total | £314,300 |
| City of London Corporation Funding | £52,752 |
| Total EFFC Income | £367,052 |
| Salaries & associate tutor costs | £276,000 |
| Training | £500 |
| Heat & Light | £11,500 |
| Insurance | £8,700 |
| Transport | £2,500 |
| Library & equipment | £2,500 |
| Food | £3,500 |
| Cleaning | £1,300 |
| Uniform | £100 |
| Premises, furniture & estate | £1,500 |
| Administration | £10,000 |
| Rates & water | £7,800 |
| Depreciation | £1,050 |
| HO Costs set at 14% | £45,773 |
| Total Expenditure | £372,723 |
| Operating Surplus/ Deficit | £-5,671 |

Please note that £3k of the food cost is classified as 'additional course expenditure' and is for the costs of lunches at local public houses that are provided on some courses for adult learners. The remaining £500 is to cover the cost of coffee and tea for adult visitors and to provide catering for the April meeting of the JCC.

Expenditure will be effectively controlled and it is hoped that the outcomes of the delivery of the above objectives will lead to additional income that will deliver a surplus in place of the deficit shown. It is considered inappropriate to add such speculative income to this budget.

For comparison the 2013 estimates were:

| Account Heading | 2013 Estimates |
|---|-----------------------|
| Teaching | £271,000 |
| Grants, sponsorship & restricted funds* | £32,500 |
| Others (staff rent, hire, professional services, sales) | £20,507 |
| Investment fund | £2,375 |
| Sub total | £326,382 |
| City of London Corporation Funding | £52,752 |
| Total EFFC Income | £379,134 |
| Salaries & associate tutor costs | £293,000 |
| Training | £650 |
| Heat & Light | £13,000 |
| Insurance | £8,700 |
| Transport | £2,750 |
| Library & equipment | £3,000 |
| Food | £5,750 |
| Cleaning | £1,350 |
| Uniform | £200 |
| Premises, furniture & estate | £1,500 |
| Administration | £10,500 |
| Rates & water | £7,360 |
| Depreciation | £1,050 |
| FSC Central costs | £48,833 |
| (@14% of budgeted expenditure) | |
| Total Expenditure | £397,643 |
| Operating Surplus/ Deficit | £-18,509 |