

Inspiring environmental understanding through first-hand experience



Epping Forest Field Centre Head of Centre's report on activity in 2013



The Centre is managed by FSC for, and on behalf of, the City of London

Purpose of report: to inform the Joint Committee; I recommend that the report be RECEIVED.

In my progress report to the October meeting I referred to operational challenges arising from reduced levels of staffing but indicated that I thought that we had avoided any significant service issues and that we were broadly on track to deliver the 2013 Plan. I am now pleased to be able to confirm this and that the progress against the 2013 Plan was very satisfactory.

Overview

Our operations were highly effective in 2013. We achieved really well against KPIs and important objectives, overcoming the challenges of 9% fewer contracted staff days in 2013 than 2012 and with 63 days lost to sick leave.

22,304 Learner experiences

99.20% Expectations met or exceeded

100% of criteria met (again) for the Northgate Arisno Gold Shield Health & Safety Award

In addition the projected deficit was turned into a modest surplus as predicted in my October report.

We delivered learning experiences to learners of all ability levels, aged from four to 'experienced', from a very diverse range of ethnic/social groups. We used 46 well researched learning sites within and outside of Epping Forest, frequently taking learning nearer to the learners.

Grant funded projects

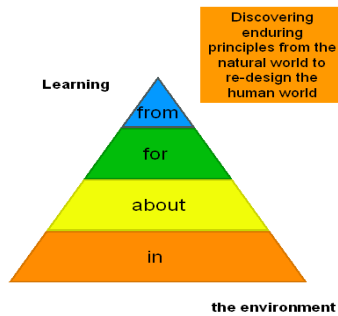
2,664 grant funded learner experiences were delivered in 2013 – (giving rise to a total of 8,620 which, after just three years, exceeds the target figure of 8,000 (10% of target for total learner experiences) in our four year business plan. This provision included:

'Loughton Big Family Pond Dip' - connecting people with natural world, exploring local environment, families learning together - funder Loughton Town Council

'Biodiversity Family drop-in-day' for families of children at Epping Primary School - wide range of fun and explorative outdoor activities to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of biodiversity - funder Epping and Theydon Garnon Joint Charities.



The EU funded **Lessons from Nature (LfN)** project, developed and delivered with our European NGO partners, came to end in the autumn and the EU Assessor has subsequently affirmed that the Project delivery was of an appropriate standard. The project has enabled us to build on LfN learning pioneered at EFFC in 2008. The creation of the LfN website with its very significant learning resources has helped us to take a huge step towards the aspiration in the 2011-2014 EFFC Plan to make LfN a major part of the learning provision of the Centre. The challenge for 2014 and beyond will be to promote this resource and our related services to schools and to other audiences and we hope to secure funding to support this.



For LfN we have developed discovery learning that considers the immense potential of the consistent application of enduring principles of nature to the design of products and industrial and economic systems.

Significant new resources are now online at lessonsfromnature.org



The City Bridge Trust funded '**Learning for Biodiversity for Londoners**' project - delivered targeted provision to learners from 6 partner London schools - with additional informal Family drop in sessions and Adult courses – in school grounds, local parks and in Epping Forest. The project leaves a strong legacy of innovative programme and learning resources, enhanced capacity and improved networking and collaboration.



Winter Wonderland Week – we delivered our 19th annual programme to Special Needs schools with funding support from the Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre.

In May Sarah Etherington returned to Astana, Kazakhstan to work with Nazarbayev University to continue to work on the EU funded FSC Global project in that country.

Service user feedback

99.20% Expectations met or exceeded

Cross-referencing with other data we believe that this was mainly **exceeded**:
2013 feedback 'overall' in the highest category on a 5 point scale was as follows:

Schools	91%
Eco-Activities	93%
Adults	83%

Number of complaints received: **Nil**

'An excellent day. The children loved it, and so did the adults' Teacher

'Excellent tutor. The course was extremely well structured and clear. We have exactly the information that we need for our controlled assessment' Teacher

'Extremely useful in tackling each item of the marking criteria provided by Edexcel for the individual investigations' Teacher

'Fantastic, fun, well-managed, relaxing, approachable, helpful staff' Parent on Family course.

'Very insightful and practical. Clear instructions and really useful to get hands-on experience' Adult learner.

Benchmarking and recognition

Northgate Arinso Health and Safety Assessment:

'Congratulations on being the first centre to achieve 100%.... Congratulations on maintaining the Gold award' Terence Rebanks, CMIOSH, MIIRSM, NorthgateArinso.

Quality Badge Assessment:

'The centre has a strong ethos of dedication and enthusiasm for environmental learning which pervades through the teaching and learning at the centre. ...Sessions are very well organised and examples of excellent group management were seen which helped to maximise learning' QB Assessors.

Recognition for our 'Lessons from Nature' provision:

'I have been hugely impressed by its innovative re-presentation ESD and Learning Outside of the Classroom ... resources are excellent (and) explore unusual and complex ideas through a coherent set of activities (that) ...frequently pose very challenging questions' Cris Edgell, Qualifications Manager Science, AQA.

'These are really valuable materials which fill a gap in provision, giving teachers much needed support to help them tackle the big issues faced by society, and engage young people in real life learning' Beth Gardner, Chief Executive, Council for LOTC.

Recognition for our Learning for Biodiversity provision:

'An example of outstanding learning through well structured and innovative activities and staff who constantly challenged and support pupils to achieve to the highest levels possible' QB Assessors.

Recognition for our contribution to Discovering Epping Forest:

'HLF monitors, Mike Harding and Sharon Goddard, ...use Discovering Epping Forest as exemplar for other HLF learning projects, especially evaluation techniques and data presentation' Catherine Cavanagh, 'Branching Out' Project Manager.

Promotional activity

Web-content improvements included better pre-course and post-course information, updated course descriptors and more photographs and information about our learning sites. Twitter was used to good effect with the LfN Project. Facebook photo galleries have continued to prove popular including 'Autumn Fungi', Death's Head Hawkmoth, Wildlife Spot of the Day and photographs from our grounds. Improvements were made to existing publicity material, newsletters and the use of social media.



Review of Learning in Epping Forest

The quality of learning provision in the Forest was recognised by Sara Hoskins and Sally Williams, in their 'Review of Learning in Epping Forest' for the City of London, March 2013, in which they recommended that:

'The City of London should commit to sustaining the current level learning provision in Epping Forest and to further develop it to build on the strong outcomes of DEF and other programmes including CBT-funded projects'

The work to find the ways in which this might be achieved continues. The Epping Forest Learning Providers Forum continues to provide a means for City Officers to develop proposals for a vision for learning in EF, with strategic intentions and aims and actions to support this.

Gifford Wood Project

Centre staff collaborated with the City of London's Northern Forest Keepers Team to deliver a tree planting and learning session at the newly created Gifford Wood. More than 5,000 trees will be planted on 8 acres to help create the new woodland now added to Epping Forest as a result of the Lord Mayor's Appeal in 2013. We also provided a souvenir leaflet/tree key indicating that 'as part its 70th anniversary year, FSC is pleased to support this exciting vision of the Conservators, by donating staff time, this leaflet and other resources' to help establish this woodland.



Facilities/CO2 reduction/Grounds

The Facilities remain well-maintained City. The refurbishment of visitor toilets, linked to the 20 year maintenance plan, was particularly pleasing. This included installation of light tubes in the staff toilets to provide very welcome natural lighting as well as light sensors in the girls and boys toilets to help with further energy/CO2/cost reductions and to promote positive perceptions of shared commitments to continuous improvement of environmental impacts.



Peter Read longstanding member of the 'Friends of EF' very kindly refurbished the 'Greenwood' bench outside the Centre having installed it some 40 years previously. Peter also kindly provided us with some interesting articles about the first education sessions in the Forest and the opening of Epping Forest Field Centre and has since refurbished a further two benches.

The MET office has installed a new fence for the MET pen which from December has housed automated meteorological recording equipment.

Volunteers and the Associates

We ensured that the outputs of volunteering achieved the anticipated impacts through effective task allocation and mentoring support. However we could only utilise 343 volunteer/days in 2013, against a target of 525, as a consequence of reduced staff time to advertise, recruit, train and manage. I am most grateful to all those who give up their valuable time to support our work.

The Associates 2013 Action Plan approved at Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre AGM on 28 November reveals the continuing transformation of the Associates into an active community based organisation to promote and raise funds for the Centre and to be a focal point for volunteering. In 2013 the Associates transferred £770 to fund activities. There are currently 723 members.

Finance and staff performance

Income and Expenditure is recorded in the table below. The figures in the 2013 Budget column are those that were approved by the Joint Consultative Committee on 26 October 2012. The figures in the 2013 Actual column have been agreed with The FSC Director of Finance and reflect the figures in FSC's audited accounts. These figures exclude maintenance costs borne by the City of London.

Account Heading	2013 Budget	2013 Actual	% Variation
Course income	£271,000	£280,652	4%
Grants and sponsors (including restricted funds)	£32,500	£21,292	-34%
Other (including sales, hire, rent, charging for staff time)	£20,507	£20,868	-11%
Investment fund	£2,375	£2,611	10%
Sub total	£326,382	£325,423	-1%
City of London Payment	£52,752	£52,752	0%
TOTAL EFFC Income	£379,134	£378,175	-1%
Salaries	£293,000	£266,834	-9%
Training	£650	£414	-36%
Heat & light	£13,000	£13,373	3%
Insurance	£8,700	£7,465	-14%
Transport	£2,750	£2,637	-4%
Library & equipment	£3,000	£3,192	6%
Food	£5,750	£3,710	-35%
Cleaning	£1,350	£1,375	2%
Uniform	£200	£301	51%
Premises, furniture and estate	£1,500	£1,975	32%
Admin	£10,500	£10,708	2%
Rates & water	£7,360	£6,862	-7%
Depreciation	£1,050	£816	-22%
Gross EFFC Operating Expenditure	£348,810	£319,662	-8%
FSC Central Costs at 14% of budget (includes auditing, HR, H&S, marketing and promotion)	£48,833	£48,833	0%
Total Operating Expenditure	£397,643	£368,495	-7%
Operating Surplus / Deficit	£-18,509	£9,680	

In the 2013 Plan we indicated that:

'It is hoped that the additional income secured for 2013 will enable us to cover the deficit shown'.

However following the approval of the budget it became clear that there was an opportunity to reduce staff costs further and this was taken to address the projected deficit with to reduce financial risks. We responded to staff turnover arising from the departures of one of our Team Leaders and one of our tutors early in 2013 by appointing replacements at the bottom of the teaching scale.

The impacts of these changes, together with the consequence of reduced staffing levels already emplaced, meant that we were unable to commit time to the generation of 'additional' (non-core) income. This had been predicted in the 2013 Plan:

'the main impacts of the reduced staffing level willbe ... speed at which we can ... progress work of a developmental nature'

We were, however, successful in strengthening our core work and this contributed to increased course income which, together with significantly reduced expenditure, produced a pleasing outturn.

Achieving this financial performance and delivering KPIs alongside ambitious project work arose from huge (unsustainable) efforts by the staff team to try and address the many challenges that we faced in 2013. I am most grateful to them; they were brilliant.

Steve Bunce
Head of Centre

April 2014