

Inspiring environmental understanding through first-hand experience



**Epping Forest Field Centre
Head of Centre's report on activity in 2014**



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

The purpose of this report is to inform the Joint Committee of performance in relation to the delivery of the City of London's environmental learning service in Epping Forest in 2014; I recommend that the report be RECEIVED.

2014 was always going to be a challenging year with a lean staff structure and a challenging operating environment. The challenges became significantly greater with the previously reported heating issues (from January to October) together with a number of broadband drop outs, telephone outages and the loss of data from the main server. Relatively high levels of staff sickness and a greater than 50% turnover of staff heightened difficulties. In the light of this it is very pleasing to be able to report that the 2014 performance was strong especially in relation to the 'key priorities' from the 2014 Plan.

The 2014 Plan had indicated the 'need to deliver an additional 100 courses beyond those that come from repeat bookings and the normal level of new custom' (to replace courses from the externally funded projects of preceding years). Taking this into account, the 21,067 learner experiences delivered in 2014 (table 1) should be regarded as a significant achievement reflecting the huge effort made by all those that worked at the Centre during the year.

Table 1:	2013	2014
Paid for learner experiences	19,640	20,961
Subsidised learner experiences	2,664	115

The figure of 20,961 learner experiences is significantly above long term averages. It is comfortably within the 'range of 20,000 – 22,000' indicated in the 2014 Plan and exceeds the target of 20,000 from the 2011-2014 Plan. The high number of learner experiences reflects a continuation of operations at the Centre that, in term time, are pretty much at practical maximum occupancy.

'Learner experiences' reported to the JCC are taken from the FSC bookings data base. The data is produced following agreed protocols from which all invoicing and audited records are derived. The data provides a reasonably reliable indicator for year on year comparisons. It is broadly equivalent to the 'student/days' data that was reported to the Committee prior to the change to 'learner experiences'. A primary school pupil attending for a course from 10:00 am to 2:30 pm counts as a single learner experience as does an Advanced Level student attending from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. A student attending a five day course would be counted as 5 learner experiences.

FSC now uses learner hours to account for variations in course length (ie teaching contact time); it is envisaged that learner hours will be used as a significant KPI for future reporting. Learner hours in 2014 were at an all time high of 113,179 narrowly beating last year's record of 113,025.

Recognising the implications of reduced funding support, the 2014 Plan had stressed the 'need to focus more on course income and viability rather than overly focussing on high numbers of learning experiences. With this in mind, it is particularly pleasing to report the highest ever number of paying learners (table 1 above). This, together with a focus on higher income generation courses (Advanced and GCSE), led to the highest ever income generation from courses (table 2):

Table 2	2013	2014
Income from courses	£ 280,652	£297,725

The high level of income generation is reassuring. It confirms that there is a strong demand for the services provided by Epping Forest Field Centre and fosters shorter term viability. However, sustaining this level of income in the longer term may prove to be rather too challenging with pressures on staff and very limited time for development work. The ongoing support of stakeholders and the benefits from being part of the FSC London Region will be very important in the future. It is hoped that ways can be found to return to the delivery of more subsidised learning to target particular groups, pilot innovative learning provision and to achieve aims that are significantly broader than meeting the fieldwork needs of Advanced level and GCSE specifications.

Graphically the 2014 profile of learners and course income now looks like this:

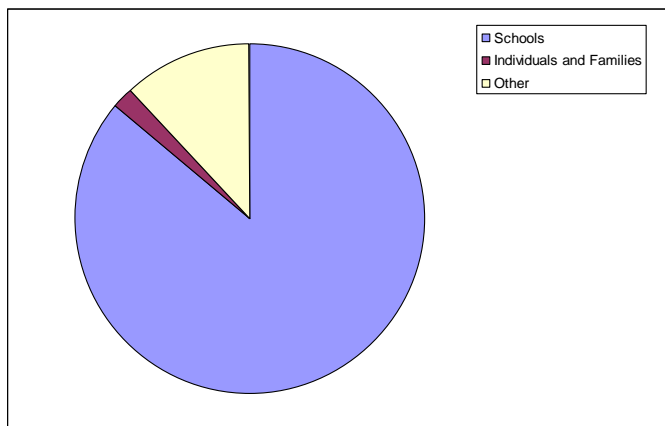


Figure 1: Percentage of learners by school / informal / other

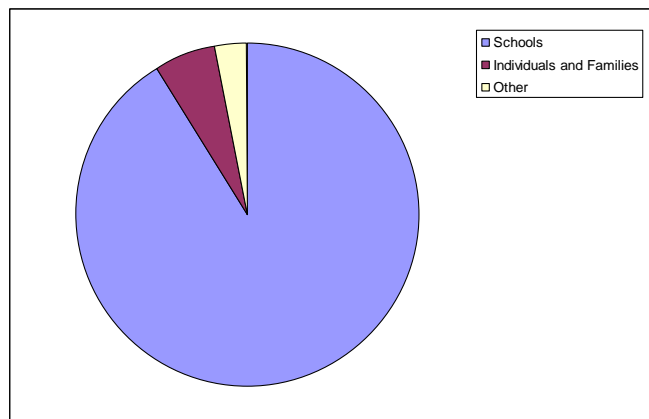


Figure 2: Percentage income by school / informal / other

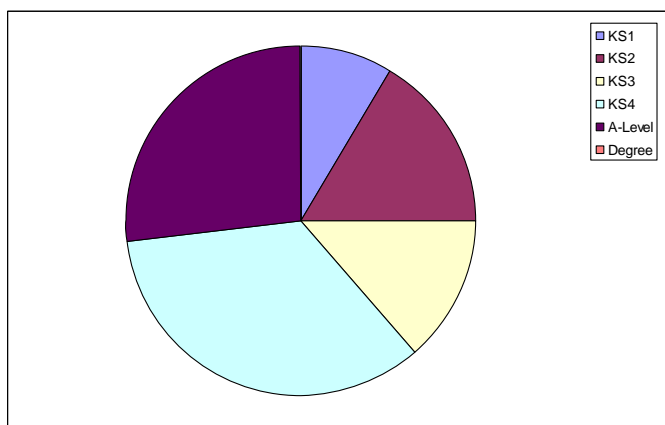


Figure 3: Percentage of school learners by Key Stage

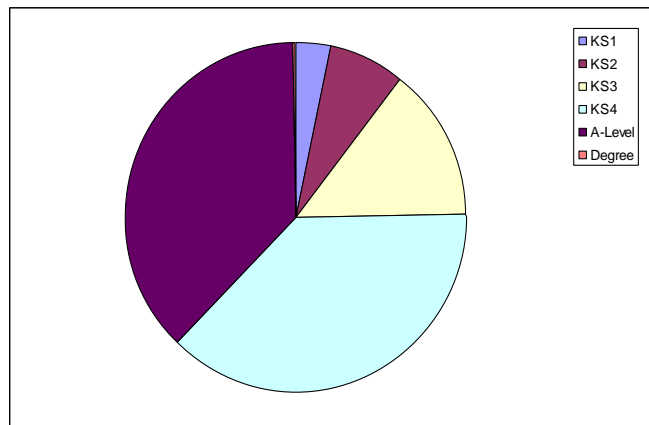
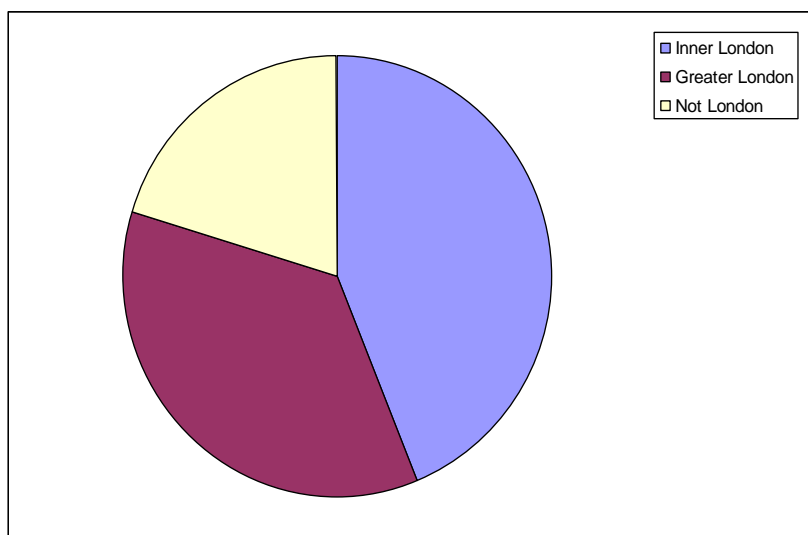


Figure 4: Percentage of school income by Key Stage

The graphical representation of the percentage splits between schools from Inner London, Greater London and beyond Greater London looks like this (figure 5):

A spreadsheet version of these graphs with the data from which they have been produced has been prepared to accompany the agenda papers sent by email



As in previous years we delivered our courses to learners of all ability levels from diverse backgrounds facilitating access and inclusion for the widest range of learners.

Feedback forms indicate that we met or exceeded expectations for **98.92%** of service users. We believe that that expectations were mainly 'exceeded'; **more than 90%** teachers rated our schools provision in the **highest** category on a 5 point scale. No complaints were received.



'Outstanding teaching leading to outstanding learning' – Teacher

'Fabulous! Outdoor learning in an amazing environment' – Teacher

'So good I came back a second time' – Adult learner

'A great learning experience for both adults and children' – Family course participant

Figure 6: Family Course (identifying freshwater invertebrates)

Maintaining and developing the FSC/City of London partnership in financially challenging times remains of crucial importance. The ongoing support for the work of EFFC from Members and Officers from both organisations is greatly appreciated. The developing FSC London Region has been welcomed as an opportunity to foster increased collaboration; reciprocal support arrangements, especially with teaching cover and interviewing, have been enhanced.

Six members of our team left in 2014, one having been with us for ten years and another for six years. The demand for induction training and for coaching inevitably increased with the arrival of new colleagues. This was used as an opportunity to foster the continuous development of services and systems of work. During the summer holidays a series of workshops took place to share best practice and to disseminate knowledge about courses and sites. We ensured that outputs of volunteering achieved very useful impacts through effective task allocation and mentor support. I am most grateful to all those who give up their valuable time to support the work of the Centre.

The Centre continues to be generally well maintained by the City and its contractors. However the breakdown of the boilers in January 2014 and the use of not entirely adequate temporary heating created a number of challenges through to October including overloaded electrical circuits. Conditions improved after the City's contractors installed new boilers and made them operational (subject to snagging, completion of peripheral works and final commissioning) from October onwards.

The Centre Grounds and nearby learning sites continue to be very suitable for the provision of an excellent range of learning experiences.

Of particular note in 2014 was:

- hosting a webinar for SEEd on 'Biodiversity in the new Science Primary Curriculum'
- delivery of a workshop for 15 trainee teachers from the Consortium for School Centred Initial Teacher Training (West Essex)
- delivery of a 'Biology in the New curriculum' workshop for teachers
- a new ICT related adult course 'Wildlife in the Cloud'
- an article relating to curriculum change published in 'Primary Science'

- production of short stop motion animation videos using ‘rushes’ taken by staff and children

The Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre membership has steadily increased and now stands at **over 1,000** compared to 763 in 2013. An Action Plan was approved at the Associates’ AGM on 1 December. This Plan should continue the transformation of the Associates into an increasingly active community-based organisation to promote and raise funds for the Centre and to be a focal point for volunteering. In 2014 the Associates celebrated 21 years of supporting the Centre. The Associates secured £500 to fund Summer SEN sessions in 2015, funded a Winter Wonderland session and also secured a donation of paint. Associate member Anna Galbraith rode in Ride London 100 to raise funds for the work of the Associates.

Our ‘Learning for Biodiversity for Londoners’ project that had been initiated in 2011 came to an end with the submission of the final project report to the funders, the City Bridge Trust (CBT). Tim Wilson, Principal Grants and Social Investment Officer, for City Bridge Trust wrote:



‘It was a comprehensive and extremely well prepared report. The appendices were very informative and it was evident that this has been a popular programme. EFFC clearly has good data capture systems in place. The photos really helped bring the report to life. Thanks to all involved for the time and care taken – the hard work done on the project and the report came across well’.

In December 2014 Keep Britain Tidy renewed our Eco-Centre Award. This award recognised our commitment to careful management and continuous improvement of impacts upon the environment and also the promotion of learning for sustainability in recent years. Key features in our evidence portfolio included the *Lessons from Nature* project and the *Learning for Biodiversity for Londoners* project and also the installation of solar tubes, movement activated lights and push taps when the toilets were refurbished in 2013.



Figure 7: An OWL Electricity monitor (installed for trials in December 2014) will be used to collect energy usage data.



Figure 8: Monitoring of the bin usage accuracy* revealed that this was significantly more accurate for students where more sophisticated looking purpose designed bins were provided. This led to budgeting for a rollout of the new bins to all classrooms in 2015. [*landfill and recycling separation by students from the same schools in different classrooms].



The financial performance in 2014 was much better than anticipated with the exceptionally high level of course income and with some CBT funding reaching the account a little later than had been anticipated at the time of budget forecasting in September 2013. In summary, operations in 2014 were efficient, economic and highly effective with the delivery of a very significant number of high quality and well received learning experiences.

Table 3: Income & Expenditure Account Heading	2013 Actual (JCC 14 May 2014)	2014 Estimates (JCC 9 Oct 2013)	2014 Actual (JCC 15 May 2015)	Notes
Course income	£280,652	£285,000	£297,725	especially from A level and GCSE courses
Grants	£21,292	£6,800	£24,953	final part of City Bridge Trust funding of Biodiversity Project
Other	£18,248	£20,000	£21,785	includes charges for staff time, sales, hire of facilities and rent received from residential staff
Investment fund	£2,611	£2,500	£2,731	
Sub total	£322,803	£314,300	£347,174	
City of London payment	£52,752	£52,752	£52,752	
TOTAL INCOME	£375,555	£367,052	£399,946	
Salaries	£266,724	£276,000	£273,414	staff turnover led to some cost reduction
Training	£414	£500	£935	staff turnover led to increased costs
Heat and light	£13,373	£11,500	£10,307	reduced oil, increased electricity, inadequate heating
Insurance	£7,465	£8,700	£6,708	
Transport	£2,637	£2,500	£2,218	
Library and equipment	£3,192	£2,500	£3,082	individual investigations increased demands
Food	£3,710	£3,500	£2,809	
Cleaning	£1,375	£1,300	£1,679	unexpected repair of floor scrubber and purchase of recycling bins for trial (Eco Centre action)
Uniform	£301	£100	£303	staff turnover led to increased costs
Premises, furniture, estate	£1,975	£1,500	£1,890	unexpected washing machine repairs and purchase of heavy duty microwave
Admin	£10,708	£10,000	£8,550	
Rates and water	£6,862	£7,800	£6,732	
Depreciation	£816	£1,050	£646	
Total Operating Costs	£319,552	£326,950	£319,273	
FSC Central Costs (includes auditing, HR, marketing and promotion)	£48,833	£45,773	£45,773	
Total Operating Expenditure	£368,385	£372,723	£365,046	
Operating Surplus/Deficit	£7,170	-£5,671	£34,900	

Notes:

These figures exclude maintenance costs borne by City of London. The figures in the 2014 Estimates column are those that were approved by the Joint Consultative Committee on 9 October 2013. The figures in the 2014 Actual column have been agreed with the FSC Director of Finance to reflect the figures in FSC's audited accounts.

'2014 income has grown to within a nudge of £400,000 with particular growth in course income. It is very encouraging see that costs have been held not only within budget but also to a lower level than 2013'
(Comment from FSC Director of Finance on the final 2014 figures).

A spreadsheet version of this income & expenditure is also being sent to JCC members with the agenda papers sent by email

