

The state of learning, interpretation and information

Measuring changes in opportunities to learn

The Dower report that proposed the creation of National Parks in 1945 said that they 'should be for people of every class and kind. National Parks are not for the privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population.' This vision is no less relevant in 2006, with the shift away from a rural to a more urban nation and the increasing diversity of our population. It is important that we measure how well this vision is being achieved and how the modern day tools of learning, interpretation and information make their contribution.

Learning may be best described as life-long learning. The National Park provides a broad range of outdoor learning opportunities including field studies, environmental education and adventure activities. A range of events, museums and centres also offer less formal educational experiences allowing people to experience the National Park in many ways. Many organisations provide these opportunities that include guided walks of varying lengths, talks and free activities for all.

Interpretation provides opportunity for people to access specialist knowledge about the National Park from ecologists, archaeologists and others. Leaflets, information boards and signs help to clarify and inform thinking. Exhibits, displays, multimedia and audio tours, and many Lake District attractions, do the same but in more interactive ways.

Information and clear messages about many different aspects of the National Park is communicated in many different ways through local information points, information centres, publications, websites and volunteers.

We are not looking at changes in educational attainment within the National Park in this report. (Information on this is available from www.lake-district.gov.uk – LUC, A Social and Economic Profile of the Lake District National Park 2004). We are looking specifically at how we might measure changes in opportunities to learn 'within' and 'about' the National Park. This is an enormous and complex task and needs careful planning if it is to be achievable and useful.

For this reason, the following key indicators have been chosen as areas for further development and research.

SOP 12

Changes in opportunities for outdoor learning

1. Range of provision in sample areas and value to the economy
2. Number and profile of people taking part in outdoor education and the benefits received

SOP13

Changes in informal learning opportunities

1. Number and type of people attending events, exhibitions or attractions

SOP14

Changes in accessibility to information and interpretation

1. Type and availability of information, which promotes understanding about general or specialist aspects of the National Park, from sample sources.
2. Number and profile of people accessing information from sample sources.

SOP 12 **Changes in opportunities for outdoor learning**

Opportunities for outdoor learning include a broad range of activities from field studies and environmental education to painting courses and adventure activities. Such pursuits help people of all ages to understand, appreciate and enjoy the special qualities of the Lake District National Park.

During 2006, we will research how we can measure the opportunities for people to enjoy outdoor learning. As the breadth of opportunity is so big, it is likely that we will only measure a sample of providers or opportunities, such as outdoor education centres.

For example, there are over 60 outdoor education centres in the Lake District National Park. There are also many providers of outdoor education which are not based at centres but use different facilities or sites. We will clarify this number and find out the type of activities that are taking place at each venue or by each provider. We will also measure the value of the activities within the local economy. This will help us understand the impact on local communities.

Over time, we aim to understand how threats, such as cost, health and safety considerations and curriculum pressures, are affecting the provision of outdoor learning opportunities. We will also understand if the "Education Outside the Classroom Manifesto", due to be published by the Department for Education and Skills in Spring 2006, will contribute to a new impetus for outdoor learning by young people.

2004

12,323 school pupils undertaking informal educational activities at Brockhole, Lake District Visitor Centre.

7000 pupils taught by Lake District National Park Authority Education Service.

16,323 visitor nights at Blencathra Outdoor Education Centre

Source: Lake District National Park Authority, 2005

We will also begin to research the impact that these experiences have upon the individuals. We will try to identify which simple questions can give us a general understanding of what people have learnt from their experience in relation to the National Park.

SOP 13 **Changes in informal learning opportunities**

We will develop a system to measure the number and type of people attending a sample range of events, exhibitions and attractions. We will identify these sample events as regular events, which promote a significant element of learning about the National Park. The guided walks programme provided by many volunteers is one such event.

2005

Number of people attending guided walks - 2,831 (6 month events season)

Source: Lake District National Park Authority, 2005

It will also be important to understand if events and attractions provide opportunity for all. The Countryside Agency has identified four main groups as 'under represented'. These are:

- disabled
- young people (up to 19)
- urban dwellers
- black and ethnic minorities

We shall develop partnerships with specialist agencies, such as the Black Environment Network, to learn how we can measure the extent to which these groups are participating in activities and events. We hope this work will help us identify the change in barriers that may prevent participation and learning. These may be physical, intellectual or financial.

SOP 14 Changes in accessibility to information and interpretation

There are many sources of information and interpretation about the National Park – whether it be information about a specialist subject in a leaflet, on a website or informal opportunities. There are people who prefer just to explore and discover for themselves. Interpretive information out and about in the park (for example located in car parks, or at waterfalls and archaeological sites) plays an important role. We need to know where and how information is available and whether it meets the needs of the resident and visitor.

We will identify sample sources of information and interpretation and research ways of measuring the impact of such information/interpretation. It is likely that sample sources will be information centres and websites.

Increasingly, visitors use a mix of both websites and information/visitor centres to gather information before their holiday. Visitors may call in to information centres with a specific query or to browse, and centres are designed to appeal to their curiosity. By engaging in conversation with staff and by reading the interpretive displays, customers may learn about the National Park. By measuring the use of information centres, we will better understand their effectiveness and their value to the visitor and resident.

Websites can provide widely accessible information about the National Park. They may be provided by organisations that work to promote understanding and enjoyment of different aspects of the National Park. These include Cumbria Tourist Board, the Lake District National Park Authority and The National Trust.

For example, the Lake District National Park Authority will monitor its website and particular locations within it to analyse how many people view the information. The next user survey, to be conducted in 2006, will help discover user opinion of the quality of the information offered online.

2005

57% of visitors to the website are regularly logging on for information.
33% were planning holidays.



Number of under 21 year olds accessing the website has increased since 2003.

Source: Lake District National Park Authority
Website User Survey, 2005

