



**a million
voices for
nature**

Good morning. My name is Suzanne, I am the Education Manager for the RSPB.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Council for allowing us the opportunity to share with you our experience of the Quality Badge Process, which began with the pilot back in 2007.

The work of the RSPB is driven by three passionate beliefs

- The first is that birds and wildlife enrich people's lives
- Secondly, the health of bird populations is indicative of the health of the planet, on which the future of the human race depends
- And lastly, that we all have a responsibility to protect wildlife

Our field teaching scheme is an integral part of these beliefs and our vision. Without education, conservation of the natural world can only be a short-term, single-generation activity. Without mechanisms for creating and establishing values, knowledge and skills, today's conservation efforts remain unsustainable. Within this, first-hand experience of the natural world is an essential component of our education ethos

RSPB provides a variety of programmes of school visits on over 40 sites throughout the UK designed to bring learning outside the classroom to life. Allowing pupils to explore nature for themselves by studying at first hand the birds, animals and plants on nature reserves, visits are designed to encourage curiosity and the process of discovery, through safe, hands on activities.

We aim to provide a quality hands-on experience to all pupils by providing a wildlife encounter that they will remember and a learning adventure that is fun as well as educational. This is realised through our own quality standards. The programmes are crafted to encompass the range of habitats available and link closely to the National Curriculum and the ECM agenda. The fundamental objective of the field teaching is to provide a learning experience that inspires young people about the wonders of the natural world. To spark an interest and concern which can be developed on their own, with their families and through their studies.

An example of one of these sites that some of you will know is Top Lodge about 15 miles west of here, is a Forestry Commission site in Fineshade Wood. 200 square miles of ancient semi-natural woodland forming part of the Rockingham Forest. The RSPB has a partnership with the FC and has run field teaching there since 2007. This site has a wide range of habitats, rich in all kinds of wildlife from red kites to deer, butterflies, orchids and reptiles and pupils can explore substantial areas within these habitats. Top Lodge has certificate No.1 for the LOtC quality badge gained through route 2.

So, we have our own quality standards and procedures so why did we, and why do we want the badge?

For years there have been many barriers to LOTC. From a teachers point of view, these have included things such as Health & Safety, particularly around accidents and risks to the child, the planning time that an off site trip takes and the quality of the service expected, which can feel a bit like a lottery if using a new provider. As part of the Real World Learning Partnership we, and many others have campaigned for something the help promote the many benefits of Learning Outside the Classroom. One of the results is the quality badge. It's aim is to remove barriers and for that reason alone we would support it. But that's not all. The QB process, particularly I believe through route 2 and option B offers even more. So let me explain routes and options.....

There are two routes to gaining the Quality Badge. Intuitively titled, route 1 and route 2.

Route 2 is for organisations whose activities require a degree of technical knowledge and experience. Providers such as the RSPB going down this route meet the same criteria as Route one but additionally are also assessed through an on site visit before they are awarded the badge to ensure that they are

1. Offering high quality teaching and learning experiences
2. Managing risk effectively meeting the quality and safety indicators

Additionally, within route 2 The Natural Environment sector provides the choice of two options

Option A is a systematic on site check by an assessor which confirms whether all of the Quality Badge requirements have been met and takes around half a day,

Option B is potentially up to two days that enables a more thorough evaluation of the provider to be made using a Provider Evaluation Framework (PEF) which is comparable to a school SEF (Self Evaluation Form). This incorporates all of the Quality Badge criteria of Option A plus a greater emphasis on learners' achievement and progress, the Every Child Matters agenda, the curriculum, assessment, leadership and management. This also enables providers to have access through the assessor to comparative data and advice about strengths and areas for further improvement.

RSPB has chosen Option B for all its sites

Further reasons why we work towards the badge...

The process is not a one off nor, with a PEF, is it static. A site/provider must resubmit and reapply after two years if they wish to remain a QB holder and the assessment will take into account what has, or has not happened since the last visit.

Passing it is not just saying it is okay. Passing means, the user can be sure that the provision is of a good standard as a minimum and it may be very good and even outstanding. You can be sure that we use these words in our publicity when awarded!

There are many continual development opportunities through this route for individual staff and sites. The full provider assessment sits within a framework that expects rigorous, honest and even critical evaluation. To highlight a few, this gives opportunities for confirming or firming up priorities, reassessment of resources currently used/needed now and in the future, staff training needs and course developments. It is a robust checklist of what you do and how you do it.

At the end of the day it gives public verification of the quality of delivery. As a service provider, we cannot underestimate this as a benefit for ourselves.

The impacts on us at RPSB are already significant. There has never been any doubt in the why of our offer but now, within a common framework for all our sites we can look at the way in which we work in a more structured and strategic manner. It moves us on in understanding the needs of our users – and how best we can dovetail our messages with their needs.

The QB has raised the profile of Field Teaching within our own organisation, giving a framework for standardising common practices across the UK and really understanding the subtle, and not so subtle variation between sites, regions and countries. It has allowed us to celebrate some of the outstanding work being carried out already. It has also highlighted common issues for future training and development.

We have now implemented this throughout all our sites in England. 7 have already been assessed and another 5 have dates fixed before the end of the summer term. We have also started doing the same in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with one site in each country, hopefully completing their assessments by July.

The process to gain the badge has been a positive one for us.

So, what is the assessment like?

As a National provider there are obviously some processes, information, and procedures that are centralised, for example training records are held centrally, as is CRB information. We also have Internet updates and promotional materials produced or managed from HQ. All of these national aspects have been assessed by a day visit from the assessor to our Central Offices in Sandy. Moreover, thank goodness they passed! Because that would have been embarrassing!!

As mentioned earlier, all our sites, such as Top Lodge, are assessed through Route 2 with the inclusion of a Provider Evaluation Form that is submitted before the assessment and used by the assessor before and during his or her visit. Completing this is not an easy thing to do. It takes work to convince staff that this is a positive process. Everyone wants their site to be perfect, and they worry when it's not...to then say so to an 'outsider' is hard.....Initially.....but what we have found is that most staff can visibly be seen to change their attitude from sceptic to advocate as they move through the process as a whole. It helps the individual or individuals writing the PEF to sort all sorts of things out into a logical, written format that actually gives clarity. It kind of just makes sense. The PEF also offers an opportunity for celebration of what we do, the individuality of a site, alongside a critical self evaluation that says it's alright to say what isn't going as well as we'd like as this leads to ideas and solutions on how to put it right or improve.

The assessor arranges their visit to an individual site when there is a class or school and spends the day conducting a rigorous assessment of processes and procedures, ensuring that you, the provider are delivering what you say you do. They spend time observing the teaching and learning taking place and will talk to staff and visitors as required. We have two staff present with them, one regional and one national to answer questions and provide documentary evidence to support statements made in the PEF. (They also supply the tea, coffee, hot chocolate and cakes with or without

cream depending on dietary situations! A must when blood sugar levels may affect concentration!).

The assessor ensures that the criteria are met and evidenced and if met offers a 'grade' from good, through very good to outstanding for eleven PEF evaluation criteria, including teaching and learning Students' achievement, standards personal development and well-being and of course, Health & Safety. (and again, please indulge me as I refer to Top Lodge who gained and Outstanding for their teaching and learning and H&S),

During discussions the assessor will also offer advice on best practice, potential improvements and comments on the best aspects of that site, giving positive feedback to all those involved on the day. They also write up a summery report which we upload onto the web pages, with the badge, for users to see.

For us it is the process and what comes out of that process that is important. Internal evaluation with external assessment and verification along with invaluable advice from an assessor with experience in LotC. We have found it to be hugely supportive at site level and gives us direction and a clear view to move ahead at a National level.

In conclusion – are we nearly at the end of the road once our English Sites are complete? I think not. We are a National organisation and need to ensure that our processes are standardised across the UK so there are further sites in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to be included. We will use process this to ensure that we are continually moving forward, generating improvements for individuals, the Society and users.

This is a process of change and that is not always an easy one to manage but it's worth it

And from our standpoint, in this, EVERYONE'S A WINNER!