

POSITION STATEMENT

Countryside Education

Introduction

The National Trust is committed to promoting the understanding and enjoyment of its properties through educational use by people of all ages. Increasingly the Trust is developing learning opportunities to meet the needs of all. Properties run a wide range of programmes supporting both formal and informal learning which aim to stimulate understanding, develop skills and encourage creative responses. The scale and variety of landscapes, buildings and habitats in National Trust ownership offer a tremendous resource for environmental education and studies looking at sustainable development as well as many other areas of the curriculum.

The importance of countryside education

The countryside can be inspiring and life changing if barriers to its enjoyment and understanding are removed. People need open spaces and yet every year more habitats and species are disappearing for good because the pressure on the countryside is so intense. Education encourages appreciation and care of the countryside. Engaging the mind and the heart through the experience of learning in the countryside enhances enjoyment and arouses a determination to protect the countryside for the future. Countryside Education helps people to understand their own place in the world.

The Trust's role in environmental education

The National Trust's education programme is designed to meet the needs and raise the awareness of environmental education and countryside issues of children, families and adults from a variety of backgrounds.

Many National Trust properties provide themed school visits, tailored to fulfil the requirements of the national curriculum, led by education officers or education wardens. The day is spent at a site learning about management and issues of sustainability and rural areas, often through hands-on or issue-based activities. All ages are catered for, from reception to university level. Trust staff are also available to help teachers plan their own visits to properties. While the Trust has a range of countryside properties where countryside education can be delivered, it should be noted that many of the built properties can also be studied in relation to the estates around them.

What the Trust would like to see

Amendments to the national curriculum

The National Trust recommends that the national curriculum should include more direct reference to farming, food production, land use and the countryside in general. As many schools find it difficult to justify countryside visits on time grounds, the National Trust recommends that time should also be included in the curriculum for such positive experiences.

Transport

A major obstacle for many schools is the cost and logistical problems of transporting schoolchildren to countryside venues. More funding should be made available to enable school visits to take place. In the Lake District the National Trust has developed a minibus service for schools providing transport from school to countryside sites, where they spend time with Wardens undertaking a range of environmental activities or studies. Minibuses allow us to use sites, which would not necessarily be accessible by coach. Through sponsorship, 50 tours are offered free of charge each season to schools in Cumbria. Otherwise there is a subsidised cost. Feedback from schools has welcomed this initiative and the tours are over-subscribed.

Health and safety

The Trust would like to see LEAs providing more guidance for teachers on health and safety issues arising from countryside visits.

Teacher training

Although there is scope for the national curriculum to be delivered at countryside properties across a wide range of subjects, there is a need for appropriate teacher training in the area; teachers themselves require countryside experience. The National Trust is willing to be involved in initial teacher training courses, covering how to deliver the national curriculum through visits to countryside and heritage properties.

There is also a need to address countryside education issues in continuing development of teachers. The National Trust education staff currently deliver relevant in-service training for teachers at a number of sites. Examples of current and previous in-service training courses are included in the annex. A range of resource books is also available to teachers, detailing ideas for activities in the countryside and a number of projects supporting countryside education.

Examples of good practice

Guardianships

The national scheme of Norwich Union Guardianships involves local schools working in partnership with National Trust properties. Although individual guardianships vary in content they are generally based on a mixture of national curriculum work and opportunities for practical conservation, developed by the National Trust warden and school. Current National Trust Guardianships are run on the coast and in the countryside, and more are planned in urban locations. Details of Guardianships can be found on the National Trust education website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/education>.

Trust in the Future

The National Trust's *Trust in the Future* programme aims to introduce children and young people to the concept of sustainability through the work and properties of the Trust. A series of themed fact sheets provides information about the Trust's management approach to issues such as water, transport and waste. These are supported by resource, activity and work-sheets which encourage children to look at their own lifestyles and environment and to consider strategies to implement positive change for the future.

Fun & Learning in the Countryside

The *Fun & Learning in the Countryside* activity book is a compilation of many successful educational activities offered by the Trust, and is designed to be applicable to any site. The book focuses on interactive activities, stimulating learning through experience and direct participation.

Whose land is it anyway?

This is a participatory educational and environmental theatre performance for primary school children, run by the National Trust. Children arrive in the role of journalists from local papers and are invited to explore the site. They come across a variety of characters including the local farmer, a dog walker and an eco-warrior, becoming involved in debate over issues such as dogs in the countryside, the plight of farmers, dangerous trees and access/ conservation. A workshop then explores the issues raised in the performance.