

QUALITY BADGE
SUMMARY REPORT FOR THE 2007 PILOT SCHEME
The Eagle's Nest (Discover Ltd) France
August 2007



THE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVIDER

Eagle's Nest provides the students who use it with a very high quality of education which exceeds the threshold standards of the Quality Badge.

The main strengths

- All students make good progress in gaining new knowledge, skills and understanding and many make very good progress.
- The centre has a strong reputation both in the UK and mainland Europe for quality residential fieldwork, as shown by high customer satisfaction and repeat bookings.
- Students experience high levels of enjoyment gained particularly from a strong sense of achievement, widened horizons, communal living and self-discovery.
- Health and Safety arrangements are excellent and are confirmed by external verification.
- Courses are multi-faceted, lively and varied and match examination requirements.
- Leadership is clear-sighted, imaginative, enterprising and focused on learning.
- There is consistently a good atmosphere amongst all staff living and working at the Eagle's Nest, which is evident to both visiting staff and students.

The main areas for improvement

- To define learning outcomes more precisely in terms of expectations for students of differing abilities and prior learning and to involve students more directly in discussions about how well these are being met and the next steps to take.
- To recognise and publicise more explicitly the many ways in which the centre promotes aspects of PSHE and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- To gather students' views more systematically about their learning and personal progress and to involve them more in assessing their own achievement.
- To develop the sustainability work of the centre and communicate this commitment to user groups and company directors.
- To provide more training for tutors in how to apply aspects of modern learning strategies such as 'assessment for learning' and interactive questioning.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROVIDER

The Eagle's Nest is a residential field studies centre based in the Cevennes Mountains of Central Southern France. The centre is part of Discover Ltd, a UK based company offering residential trips in France and Morocco. The company has been running a centre in France since 1986 and in Morocco since 1995. The French centre is in a converted *Colonie de Vacances* settlement at the head of a tributary valley to the River Tarn and is in the Cevennes National Park. The site commands exceptionally spectacular views and offers many fine opportunities for local fieldwork in geography and science, together with the chance to learn more about French language, culture and history and to develop personal, social and health education skills and a better understanding of environmental sustainability. All learning activities are conducted in English.

The aids to raising performance include:

- The Eagle's Nest has two senior staff with a great deal of experience of teaching field studies.
- The two seasonal staff in 2007 are extremely conscientious and willing to support and learn.
- A CD-Rom containing all work units for both centre and visiting staff is continually updated.
- The Eagle's Nest has three designated classrooms with computers, projector, white board and OHP.
- There is access to a wide range of excellent fieldwork sites in both the local area and further away.
- This is a very friendly and welcoming centre which helps students to really enjoy their learning.
- A well stocked fieldwork store contains a wide range of both high and low tech equipment.

The barriers to raising performance include:

- The high altitude prevents fieldwork from operating outside of the March to October season.
- The limited number and size of the classrooms leads to cramped conditions at busy times.
- Limitations on space and electricity supply restrict the widespread use of ICT.
- Office and work facilities for teaching staff are very limited, especially when groups are resident.
- The building is rather stark and increasingly seen as basic for modern visitors. National Park regulations restrict any extensions to the property and would be hard to justify on economic grounds.
- Users from UK schools may have to spend up to 24 hours getting to and from the centre.

PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS

Strengths

- All students make good progress in gaining new knowledge, skills and understanding and many make very good progress.
- Comprehensive materials are produced for students both for use in the field and during classroom sessions to assist understanding and skill development. Secondary data is often available to supplement that collected by students so that they get a bigger picture (for example by comparing their results with other groups and seeing what features are like at other seasons).
- Visiting staff are encouraged to be part of the teaching and learning process whilst at the centre. This allows them to monitor the progress of students, without necessarily having to be directly involved in the teaching process. By knowing the students beforehand they can encourage, cajole, threaten, or assist as necessary in order to achieve the highest level of achievement for students. In this way most teaching sessions have more than one specialist with the group at any one time to maximise and personalise the learning experience.
- The unusual nature of the centre and its location is often inspirational to many students. This promotes a sense of "awe and wonder" and is a catalyst for more intensive learning and thinking.

Areas for further improvement

- To do more to assess during and at the end of a course how far students have moved forward and to what extent the aims of the course have been achieved in terms of gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.
- To ensure that students build on clearly understood starting points, for example by gathering more information from visiting teachers and providing more activities that enable students to demonstrate their ability and preferred learning styles at an early stage.
- To define learning outcomes more precisely in terms of expectations for students of differing abilities and prior learning (where appropriate, linked to grade or level descriptions or syllabus specifications), and then to periodically involve students in discussions about how successfully these outcomes are being met and the next steps to take.
- To gain a greater understanding of individual learning needs, especially within large groups of students, to advance the personalised learning agenda.
- To organise a more formal division of roles for visiting staff and centre tutors to accelerate progress further.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

Strengths

- The centre offers a stimulating and challenging, but safe learning environment. This safety is confirmed by external verification and is recognised by visiting teachers as an important reason for using the centre.
- The area is one which very few students will have visited and so is still new and exciting even after a 20 hour coach journey.
- Living in an amazing and sparsely populated rural landscape can be a significant spiritual and emotional experience for many students: living away from their normal lifestyles encourages self-discovery and a greater reliance on other people.
- Students are encouraged to think about local moral and ethical issues, such as conservation, the role of a National Park, fair trade and sustainable development.
- An enjoyable time is a consistent feature of feedback: this enjoyment comes not only from 'having fun' but also a sense of achievement, widened horizons and social/emotional refreshment.
- The centre promotes an ethos of tolerance and support both amongst students and staff: this is assisted by the communal spirit of the centre and the sensible protocols.
- Much is done to encourage a greater understanding of French culture, language and history and to promote international understanding and sweep away unhelpful stereotypical thinking.

Areas for further improvement

- Whilst the centre does a lot to promote aspects of PSHE and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, these are not systematically recognised and publicised.
- There is additional work to be done on creating a fuller approach to sustainability at the centre and in publicising what is already being done.
- To gather students' views more systematically and explicitly about their learning and personal progress.
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THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

Strengths

- The high quality, capable and enthusiastic teaching in an environment which can be variable and unpredictable.
- All tutors working at the centre have a good local knowledge of the area and receive training in field studies techniques. This gives confidence in the materials they are using and the areas in which they are working. This confidence allows staff to adapt their teaching techniques to the requirements of individual groups rather than simply teaching to a set format, so accelerating progress.
- The area lends itself towards the investigation of geography and biology extremely well, but also promotes PSHE, SMSC and sustainability education well. As a consequence courses are multi-faceted, lively and varied.
- Visiting teachers are very happy with the courses provided and are pleased with the ways in which they relate to examination requirements and their own curricular needs.
- Good resources and equipment accelerates and intensifies learning.

- Generally good weather during the peak season helps with outdoor learning: if the weather is inclement, students can borrow waterproof/warm clothing and can use secondary data to enhance their fieldwork observations.
- Courses are based upon the individual needs of users and created in advance by discussion between the centre and the group.

Areas for further improvement

- To investigate ways of stretching more able students, whilst also giving more support to those with learning difficulties.
- To apply the principles of 'assessment for learning' (AfL) more widely.
- To develop more resources and teaching approaches that can be used by students of differing abilities and levels of prior learning;
- To provide more training for tutors in how to apply aspects of modern learning strategies used in the most effective UK schools within the centre.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Strengths

- Leadership is clear-sighted, imaginative, enterprising, flexible and very capable.
- The centre 'knows itself well' and has developed an outstanding capacity for self-evaluation and reflection.
- All staff are committed to the success of the centre and its continued existence and further improvement.
- The centre is very efficiently managed, organised and administered: a hard thing to achieve given its remoteness, the relatively small size of the staff, the peculiarities of the buildings and the multi-national nature of the enterprise.
- The links with the local community are outstanding: these greatly enrich the learning opportunities available and ensure continuing local support for the work of the centre.
- The centre offers very good value for money to its users, allowing it to compete with centres in the UK market effectively.
- Marketing is effective in promoting the centre through publications, web sites and conferences. Centre staff are encouraged to participate in other aspects of promoting field studies. Satisfied customers also promote the centre well.

Areas for further improvement

- To ensure that teaching and learning strategies, resources and courses are in line with ongoing changes in schools and colleges, especially within the UK.
- To provide more CPD for members of staff, especially seasonal staff.
- To develop the sustainability of the centre and communicate this commitment to user groups and company directors.
- To continue to build links within the wider field studies community through exchange programme and participation in NAFSO, GA, ASE (etc.)

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION JUDGEMENTS

aspect	outstanding	very good	good	satisfactory	inadequate
Users' progress and achievement		√			
Users' personal development and well-being		√			
Quality of teaching and learning		√			
The suitability and rigour of assessment			√		
Quality of courses and learning activities		√			
Quality of care, guidance and support		√			
Effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and management		√			
Effectiveness and efficiency of management and administration		√			
Overall effectiveness		√			