

## **EDUCATION POLICY & BATTLEFIELD INTERPRETATION**

**By Chris Scott.**

### **Introduction:**

Education is at the heart of battlefield walking as each site provides opportunities for learning for all its visitors, and the role of an Education brief should be to ensure the quality of the experience throughout these visits. Such an education strategy can only work within a whole-site policy and with the advice and support of the creators of interpretation boards, trail-makers, display designers, site, attendant and shop staff. The ideal is to have all the site team, both its interpreters and operational personnel if appropriate, to work together to create an environment which is welcoming and user-friendly, accessible practically and intellectually, and enjoyable at several levels, and one which encourages exploration and discovery.

The following plan lays down guidelines to support this aim and suggests steps to be taken towards achieving it.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Education brief is to use the evidence of the human and natural worlds to excite the imagination and encourage understanding and enjoyment of battlefield sites by people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

### **Aims:**

To participate in the formation of a national battlefield interpretation policy and strategies, and ensure that education underpins its operation.

To promote the value of battlefield sites as centres of learning and encourage regular visits.

To provide high quality service in terms of advising upon appropriate activities, resource provision and customer care across encompassed sites.

To ensure that quality site provision is fully accessible to all sections of the visiting community regardless of age, gender, social status, ethnic origin or ability.

To advise upon the establishment and maintenance of communications with experts and colleagues at similar sites and within local shared interest institutions such as museums, schools and colleges .

To identify and advise upon the delivery of relevant training for any interpretative or operation staff.

### **Initial (1998) SWOT Analysis:**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Enthusiastic people	Starting from scratch	Starting afresh	Budget
Good Trust team spirit	Initial team links	National Curriculum	National Curriculum
Wide range of expertise	Financial limits	developments	changes
Wide range of experience	Travel to all sites	Increased leisure time	Sponsor dependency
Education expert been a	Other workloads	Expanding audiences	Finance Projection
national award winner		Possible funding sources	Leisure attractions
Growing public profile		Exchange of ideas	
Innovative ideas		New Technology inputs	
Good networks		Development of Programmes	
Good links to museums		Links to TV & media	
Record of sponsor help		Links with publishers	
Flexibility		Links with CDROM	
Record of project involvement		Tourist industry support	
Record of exhibition planning		Education establishment support	
Record of hands-on exhibits		Increased public awareness	

### **Audiences and Services:**

The Education brief is to provide a quality learning experience for each individual visitor. To do this it is first necessary to identify the range of battlefield site visitors and their particular needs. Most sites will attract a similar type of audience, at least initially, but this will vary according to era of battle, importance locally and nationally, the tourist attraction of the nearby region, and the ease of access to the site in terms of pathways and land-ownership as well as roadways and parking. Later, the type and style of interpretative provision - what there is to see and do -, its marketing and reputation will become indicative factors. Set out below is a projected cross-section of a typical audience and the type of activities and interpretative provision each would seek.

- Schools, colleges & other education groups including those for leisure and pleasure interest

*trails and guided walks, handling sessions, workshops, exhibitions, quizsheets, worksheets, loans service, multi-level publications, INSET & teachers' courses, teachers' packs, work experience.*

- Families and children

*holiday and weekend activities, clubs, guided walks, quizsheets, walk guide booklets, interactive and hands on exhibitions.*

- Adults

*friends groups, lectures, courses, seminars, summer schools, enquiries services, guided walks, sound guides, exhibition guided tours, serious level publications and bibliography service.*

- Casual Visitors

*interactive and hands-on exhibitions, factsheets, quizsheets, sound guides, foreign language leaflets.*

- Those with Disabilities

*hands-on and special exhibitions, workshops and activities, handling sessions, large type display, floor guides, sound guides, adapted facilities for wheelchair users, staff trained in signing.*

- Non visitors! Such as old peoples' homes and hospitals

*Outreach projects and services*

**NB** Common to all would be a need for trails with leaflet guide and interpretation board support.

### **Site Collections:**

People need to see objects which tie the human element into the landscape nature of a battlefield experience. Display collections need to be built up steadily as a result of purchase, gift or transfer. Each site should aim at a collection of material for display, ideally exploiting links with local and national museums, local history groups and re-enactment societies, to secure relevant or replica objects and visuals surfeit to requirements but which would stimulate and inform the visitor. Hands-on experience of objects is an invaluable part of the battlesite experience and should be used by staff with all groups. A number of museums hold educational loans collections which a site could borrow or act as a lending agency. It is recommended that the Trust should act as an intermediary between Trust-approved and recognised Battlefield Interpreters and the local museum service for access to their collections and venues.

### **Displays:**

Permanent information panels need to focus upon 'what' took place and 'where'. The 'why' element is useful but not always essential. It is very important to continually link human beings with the landscape and reserve the 'reason' part of the experience to point out and make those connections. Imaginative display is also essential to acquire and keep visitors' attention - dramatic design and colour are imperative while discursive screeds are a 'turn-off'!

Hands-on experiences, manual and high-tec interactives plus other innovative interpretative ideas make ideas accessible to all visitors rather than just children.

The National Curriculum defines precisely what schoolchildren within the state sector will be taught and many institutions in the private sector also follow it as 'guidelines'. If targeting school-children it is crucial that the demands of the NC are taken into account and part of Education's brief is the responsibility to provide up to date information about subjects which could usefully benefit from a visit to a battlefield site - this is NOT restricted to History! Within the History Curriculum information would be forthcoming on age groups, expected targets and levels of attainment and which periods are indicated for study. It will also provide advice of ways of meeting its needs within display, activities and programmes as well as considering other visitors.

All displays should be accessible to people with disabilities and disabled people need to be involved in the design and planning of displays.

Across all display should be an awareness of the spread of gender, age and race of visitors and the need for involving each sector in the display by including such things as women's history, children's involvement and any racial relevance - this is not always possible with British Battles but making these connections will ensure greater audience appreciation and enjoyment.

Temporary exhibitions provide a flexible way of targeting specific audiences and can include touring as an outreach project.

### **Marketing:**

Marketing needs to concentrate upon the experience the visitor gets - what's in it for them. The special nature of the sites requires a cascade of level marketing approach which needs a set of conceptual approaches ranging from the general to the site specific and the open-ended to the target specific.

- The *general* focuses upon the possibilities and learning opportunities opened up by battlefield visiting. It should be targeted at the main areas who can promote visits including Formal Education, Leisure Education, and Tourism, stating in bulletin points, what each area could get out of visiting sites.
- *Open-ended* material promotes the free range and self-selection opportunities of any visit. It ranges across subject areas and audience groups, stimulating a variety of interests in one or series of sites.
- *Site specifics* should outline what is on offer at a particular venue, and what provision there is for learning - what to see and what to do.
- *Target specifics* should tell how everything on offer fits into the needs of a selected target group - such as tea-rooms for OAP coach tours. This can be specially aimed at teachers telling them how a visit and a certain activity could fulfil the demands of a NC attainment target.

**NB** These notional approaches should permeate the full range of professional marketing strategies and operations as implemented by any company.

Educational events and activities can provide marketing opportunities especially photo-shoots, and a strong educational programme supporting a centre or an exhibition can be the hook that attracts sponsorship. Education activities can target specific audiences in a way which a display cannot. Education and teachers are a national informal network, meeting and discussing teaching opportunities frequently - there is a large body of people constantly seeking new and different ways to deliver learning.

Education and Marketing will have the same approach to maximising visitor numbers - a conflict in many similar places.

Above all an education is able to see the service and site provision from the point of view of the consumer's experience and this has to be reflected through the marketing.

### **Access & Customer Care:**

It is the education professional's ability to view the visitor experience in terms of what they receive, and consequently what they take away and remember, that is essential to battlesite interpretation. The education role is to act as audience advocates in the interpretation and display process - to take the part

of the non-specialist and review and comment upon the work of the specialist in the attempt to see it through the eyes of the newcomer. For example the military historian writing the text for a storyboard may use jargon and concepts which are unfamiliar to the visitor, they may also make basic assumptions of pre-knowledge which casual visitors just do not possess. Education expertise can prevent specialists alienating visitors with inappropriate vocabulary, notions and background. This can be a source of team tension but the education brief should be to advise and if necessary make the final decision when considering the needs of the visitors both physical and intellectual - for example on language levels, display size and placement, variety of experiences etc...

Physical access also means taking special needs into consideration, such as ramps instead of steps, slow release, hinged gates and easy to locate markers.

Education should also oversee the methods and processes of assessing customer satisfaction with their visits and monitoring their responses to the site experiences. This also embraces the site acting upon customer suggestions, most visitors know what would suit them, not what suits all visitors! Another important aspect of customer care involves the monitoring of visitor/manager communication and how the site organisers are perceived by the public.

### **Training:**

Education's brief also contains the role of overseeing staff training in four main areas:

- Introductory training on how the management of a site operates and how that fits into any wider scheme or organisation.
- Personal training to meet individual needs such as public speaking training, coping with the public or children, simple account-keeping etc.
- Professional training including the development of specialist and site -relevant knowledge, new techniques in site education, National Curriculum changes and implications, as well as customer care, disability awareness and Health & Safety considerations.
- Informal training such as participation in relevant professional organisation conferences and visits to other sites to shadow best practice.

### **Future Areas of Attention:**

The erection of interpretation panels on every Trust-recognised site in the UK. These to follow guidelines which will be outlined in another paper.

Evaluation and assessment of practice and visitor satisfaction with reference to the following performance indicators:

1. number of visitors to the site
2. records of satisfaction
3. percentage of local educational establishments using the venue
4. range of services offered
5. number of awards won
6. number of requests for help dealt with
7. number of guided tours, exhibitions and outreach programmes undertaken.