

Education and interpretation

This issue of Interpret Scotland looks at some of the issues raised by the relationship between education and interpretation, and at projects that blur the boundaries between them.

It used to be common practice for heritage organisations to see education and interpretation as separate functions, with dedicated managers and even departments for each. This reflected a clear division between the two in terms of their audience: education covered anything provided for people on a formal course of study, whether at kindergarten or post-graduate level; interpretation was for people whose main aim was recreation.

That policy of separate development is starting to change. Several organisations now combine the roles of interpretation and education manager, or have set up departments that cover “Learning”, with interpretation and education staff working more closely together. Cynics might say this change is driven by economics. Funding now emphasises a view of education that is more all-inclusive, rather than tied to specific curriculum links. The number of out-of-school visits has been falling, making it harder to justify staff working solely to cater for them.

But the move towards closer integration between education and interpretation also reflects a shift in our view of what education means. Students are no longer empty vessels waiting to be filled with facts; instead educators should, as Ian Edwards argues on page 4, help them form their own ideas and opinions. Education has also left the classroom, reborn as lifelong learning. These lofty philosophies may seem remote for teachers struggling with the inflexible bureaucracy of the curriculum, but they have prepared the ground for a vision of education that draws on some of the interpreter’s approach. Paulo Freire lamented in 1970 that “Education is suffering from narration sickness.” Let us hope that in future both interpretation and education can get, and remain, better.

James Carter, editor

We have already given up the notion that interpretation ... is direct education

Freeman Tilden