

Research Review

Is it any good?

Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned a research project to evaluate the effectiveness of the interpretation in six visitor centres.

Four of the centres were owned and operated by SNH and the other two had received a grant towards the cost of the interpretation. All the centres had prepared an interpretation plan to guide the focus and content of the exhibition. Strathspey Surveys developed a list of visitor questions specific for each of the centres, based on both the original plans and site visits to assess the final content of the exhibitions.

How did we do?

Starting with the good news ... for all the centres 'the vast majority of visitors found their visit 'very' or 'quite' enjoyable'. However, when it came to analysing visitors attitudes, behaviour, learning and their perceptions of the main messages, each centre fared differently.

The consultants were also able to draw out some specific recommendations:

- Have a clear interpretive framework with a logical hierarchy and unique or significant themes
- Visitors' needs and views need to be considered more throughout the process of developing the interpretation
- Pre- and post-test key interpretive exhibits
- Ensure there is a budget for evaluation that all funding partners are committed to

Perhaps inevitably the results of this research raised more questions than answers, but it has helped us to understand our visitors better, and it is now up to SNH and our partners to take note and act upon these findings.

SNH is committed to the delivery of good quality interpretation to engage with, entertain and enthuse visitors about the 'wonders of the natural world'. SNH now intends to set in place a more rigorous requirement, for ourselves and others, to carry out pre and post-project evaluation and to continually use the knowledge gained to improve our interpretive provision. See www.snh.org.uk or www.interpretscotland.org.uk for copies of the full reports.

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