

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

04 February 2014

Dear Mr Gove,

We are writing to express our concern at the news that the creationist zoo, Noah's Ark Zoo Farm in North Somerset has again been awarded a Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge.¹ As the original initiator of the Quality Badge scheme, and as the body responsible for determining the curriculum in schools, we are writing to urge you to intervene and ask that this award be withdrawn.

The Zoo was first awarded the badge in 2010.² At the time we wrote to the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC). Its reply was that 'The criteria for awarding the LOtC Quality Badge are that the organisation must offer good quality learning outside the classroom and manage risk effectively. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom is very committed to equality and we will award the Quality Badge to an organisation that can demonstrate that it meets these criteria; past awards have included Interfaith Kirklees and Canterbury Cathedral without any implied endorsement of their religious base.

'CLOtC believes that an important aim of learning outside the classroom is allowing children and young people access to education that challenges assumptions and allows them to experience a range of viewpoints; giving them the tools needed to be proactive in their own learning and develop skills to enable them to make well informed decisions.'

Contrary to what the CLOtC states, it is clearly not the case that this organisation offers good quality learning outside the classroom; indeed, the Zoo's approach runs contrary to Government policy on the teaching of creationism. This reply also fundamentally misses the distinction between awarding a religious organisation and recognising a pseudoscientific organisation.

In their own press release, the Zoo has identified Government support for LOtC: 'The LOtC scheme is managed by the government-appointed Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, with the importance of learning away from school first brought to public attention with the Secretary of State's LOtC Manifesto in 2006... Getting students outside of their usual four walls and engaged with learning in new environments has been part of the government's education agenda since 2009, when the Council for LOtC was commissioned... Noah's Ark is a Christian organisation which also offers some discussion of religious perspectives relating to creation and evolution for interested visitors.'³

¹ 'Zoo's education award', *Weston, Worle & Somerset Mercury*, 3 February 2014:

http://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/business/zoo_s_education_award_1_3280680

² <https://humanism.org.uk/2010/07/22/news-605/>

³ <http://noahsarkzoo.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/noahs-ark-zoo-farm-quality-badge-education/>

The Department for Education has made it repeatedly clear that young earth creationism and related theories are incompatible with the established scientific consensus, and therefore should not be taught as such. And yet throughout its materials this Zoo promotes a creationist theory known as 'recolonisation', which rejects both evolution and more common young earth creationism in favour of a third explanation.⁴ Sometimes the Zoo claims to just be presenting people with all the options and allowing them to decide for themselves. Not only does a glance through their materials demonstrate that this is not true, but even if it was, it would be to give undue weight to creationist accounts which run against the scientific evidence and consensus.

It is therefore difficult to see how a school visiting such a Zoo is compatible with the Government's policy on creationism. We urge you to intervene to ask the CLOtC to rescind this award. We also ask if you would request that the CLOtC changes its assessment criteria to properly consider whether awardees promote pseudoscience, and reject those that do.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Copson
Chief Executive, British Humanist Association

Professor Alice Roberts
Professor of Public Engagement in Science, University of Birmingham
President, Association for Science Education
Patron, Association of Science and Discovery Centres

CC Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Childcare

⁴ <http://www.noahsarkzoofarm.co.uk/pages/about-us/earth-history/earth-history.php>