



# Rivers Academy: Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. What is the Rivers Academy?**

The Rivers Academy is a unique outdoor community learning facility, designed to enhance the educational experience and encourage people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to understand more about the river environment. The aim is to deepen students understanding of their environment and the challenges it is facing. It is designed to cater for the increasing requirement and demand for field-based learning centres, which get students out of the classroom and offers a hands-on learning experience.

## **2. Where is the Rivers Academy?**

With permission from the National Trust, the Rivers Academy is established within the grounds of Belton House, a Grade I listed 17<sup>th</sup> century country home, near Grantham in Lincolnshire. There is safe, easy access to the River Witham, which flows through the parkland surrounding the House. Much of the educational activity will take place on the river, however students will have the use of a well-equipped classroom, located at the Old School House at Belton.

## **3. Who is behind the project?**

The Rivers Academy concept was conceived and is managed by East Mercia Rivers Trust (EMRT), a charity which has conservation and education at its heart. A Steering Committee, chaired by EMRT oversees the Rivers Academy, members of the Committee include the National Trust, Anglian Water, The Canal and Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, Lincolnshire County Council & teachers from local schools. The initial feasibility study, business plan and school pilot workshops were funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

## **4. Why has it been set up?**

The benefits of outdoor learning are well documented. The Rivers Academy is a field based educational facility which allows students to have real life experience of the environment they are studying.

## **5. Who can attend?**

Primarily it caters for students from primary school through GCSE and A level, to undergraduates and post-graduate level. It is not restricted to mainstream education as the Rivers Academy is also used by EMRT to train its volunteers

who will then help the charity with its conservation work and citizen science monitoring..

#### **6. When is the Academy open?**

It is available all year round, subject to permission of the National Trust. From time to time Belton House has events on which will mean the Rivers Academy is unable to operate. An experienced project officer is assigned to the Academy and will help facilitate the educational activity. Schools and universities will need to book the facility in advance, and it is likely to be busiest during term-time, but it will be available to other groups including volunteers via a booking system.

#### **7. Is it free for all students?**

EMRT intends to make the Rivers Academy accessible to all so in many cases the costs will range be very low or free. However the cost per pupil will depend on available funding for the particular course at the time.

#### **8. Is equipment provided?**

There will be equipment such as wellington boots, waders and waterproof clothing that has been donated by sponsors. There will also be teaching materials available in the classroom.

#### **9. Will schools within Lincolnshire be given priority?**

The Academy is available on a first come first served basis. Because of its location near Grantham (and the unique nature of the facility), it is envisaged that there will be interest from schools, colleges, and universities, not only in Lincolnshire but also from those in neighbouring counties. Transport costs are the biggest barrier to entry, therefore it is expected that it will appeal to nearby educational establishments initially. However, as the profile grows and given the transport links and available parking, the Rivers Academy is likely to gain interest from people further afield.

#### **10. Are there volunteers there to assist schoolteachers?**

There is a full-time project officer, provided by EMRT, supported by volunteers, to help facilitate visits. The officer will develop the workshop plan, provide guidance to teachers and lecturers as well as provide full health and safety briefings to ensure all procedures are in place and PPE is correctly fitted.

**11. Is there a minimum number of teachers required to accompany the students?**

There are statutory requirements set down by the Department for Education, and schools will be aware of the ratio of teachers to students. The safety of all those on the site is of paramount importance to us. We will always ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure the well-being of both students and teachers. However, But ultimate responsibility for student sits with the teachers/school staff

**12. Will specific practical activities be offered to students?**

The project officer will have detailed knowledge of the river environment and will be able to make suggestions. This may be more appropriate for primary aged children as it is expected teachers use the opportunity to continue curriculum-based learning for GCSE and A level students.

**13. Will there be subsidised transport costs?**

EMRT is mindful that transport costs are an obstacle to educational visits and there are plans in place to create a funding pot to support those schools who are perceived as most in need. Subsidised transport costs will be considered by EMRT on a case-by-case basis.

**For further information contact**

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