



Gove urged to strip 'creationist' zoo of educational award

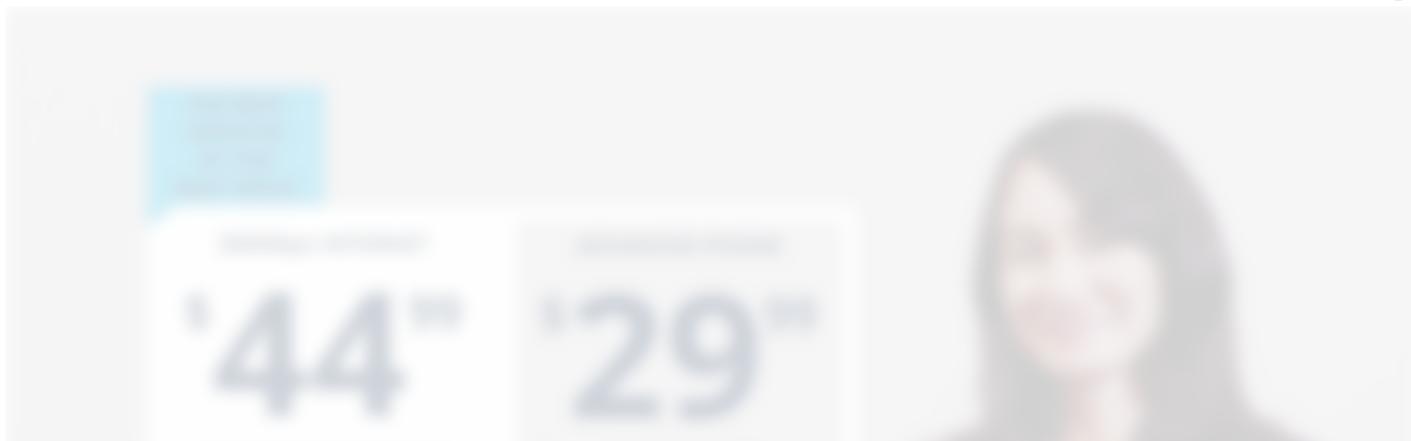
By Richard Vaughan 09 February 2014

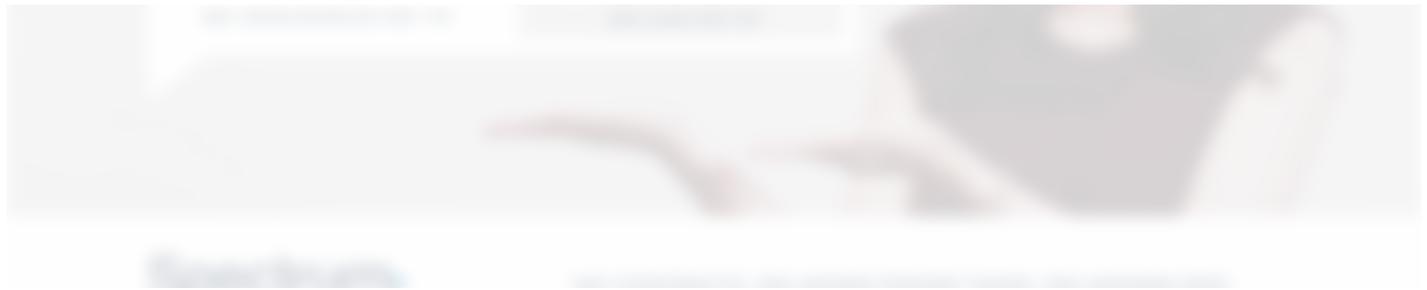


TV academic Alice Roberts and the British Humanist Association have written to Michael Gove raising concerns that a creationist zoo has been handed an award recognising the quality of its educational provision.

The Noah's Ark Zoo Farm in north Somerset was re-awarded a "quality badge" by charity the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC), which accredits venues that hold educational school visits.

— ADVERTISEMENT —





But the move has been heavily criticised by Professor Roberts, president of the Association of Science Education, and the BHA, both of which have urged the education secretary to intervene and withdraw the award.

In their letter to Mr Gove, Professor Roberts and the BHA have panned the awarding of the quality badge to a "pseudoscientific organisation", claiming it contravenes Department for Education (DfE) guidance.

"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," the letter states.

"This reply also fundamentally misses the distinction between awarding a religious organisation and recognising a pseudoscientific organisation."

Speaking to *TES* before the zoo was accredited, Professor Roberts said she had visited the venue and felt uncomfortable with schools taking trips there.

"My beef wasn't that it was a creationist zoo and should be shut down, they're allowed to express their own beliefs. But I don't think they should be allowed to indoctrinate children," she said.

"A lot of Bristol schools go there on school trips, if it's parents taking their own children there then fine, but I don't agree with school going on trips there."

As the *TES* reported last month, Professor Roberts is calling for private schools to be prevented from teaching creationism in science, saying that it amounts to "indoctrination".

According to the zoo's website, it believes in "recolonisation theory", which brings together both creationism and evolution, where life evolved thanks to a creator and over a much shorter period of time.

In a statement, the zoo dismissed the concerns, saying religious education and discussion of Christian views or creation were "not part of our educational package for schools unless specifically requested by teachers and parents".

"There appears to be some deliberate misrepresentation of Noah's Ark Zoo Farm by Prof. Alice Roberts and the BHA, implying the zoo teaches creationism and pseudo-science to school

children as part of their organised visit. This is simply not the case," the statement said.

"We have had no complaints from visiting schools, indeed much the opposite: glowing reports from teachers after a visit are common and we have seen a significant yearly increase in school group bookings. We host a wide range of schools and age groups, including state, private, atheist groups and faith schools," it added.

The zoo did state that it provided some "displays and information boards at the zoo discussing creation, evolution, recolonisation theory and the biblical story of Noah and the Ark".

"These are in areas of the zoo where interested visitors may choose to read them if they wish to and are designed to encourage people to consider whether there is evidence for a Creator in a natural world clearly shaped by evolution," it added.

The CLOtC said it accredits venues on the basis of six different criteria, none of which take note of interpretations or religious beliefs.

"Our accreditation is a rigorous process, which looks at the formal education programme that is on offer," Elaine Skates, CLOtC's deputy chief executive, said. "It does not look at interpretations of any wider issues – we just don't take that into account, and it is not an endorsement of any organisation's religious views.

"Noah's Ark adheres to the DfE's criteria and they do not teach creationism or religion to schoolchildren in their science workshops."

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