

News release

1 July 2008

Media contact: Louella Houldcroft, Newcastle University press office

Tel: 0191 222 7850 Email: louella.houldcroft@ncl.ac.uk

A breath of fresh air for pupils studying local lichens

As part of the national Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) scheme seeking to inspire the next generation of nature-lovers, local pupils have been examining lichen distribution on the County Durham coastline. Their findings will be showcased as artistic interpretations at an exhibition open to the public at Hartlepool English Martyrs School on Friday 11th July..

Newcastle University, an OPAL partner, invited the school to study lichens in a bid to find out more about local air quality. Lichens are a combination of a fungus and an alga that are particularly sensitive to changes in the environment so examining them can highlight differences across an area.

Dr Anne M Borland, Newcastle University, said, "Encouraging pupils to take a hands-on approach to discovering the natural world around them is helping them to really appreciate the diversity of life forms that exist locally. By bringing science and the local community closer together we can benefit from a greater understanding of the environmental factors which affect us all."

The art exhibition will take place between on 11th July at Hartlepool English Martyrs School.

Ends

Notes to editor:

1. The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) network is a new nation-wide partnership initiative that will inspire communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environments

2. OPAL aims to create a new generation of nature-lovers by stimulating interest through local and national projects which are accessible, fun and relevant to anyone who wants to take part
3. OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us, it believes that community participation is vital if the environmental movement is to make a real impact
4. For more information, please visit <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/british-natural-history/opal/index.html>
5. The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. The programme funds a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets, to education projects teaching people about the environment. Imperial College London (the leading OPAL partner) was awarded a **£11,760,783** Changing Spaces grant in August 2007
6. The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. It was established by Parliament on 1 December 2006



LOTTERY FUNDED