

## Press Release

16 March 2009

### PRESTON KIDS GET INVOLVED IN ONE OF ENGLAND'S BIGGEST NATURE SURVEYS

Pupils at St. Anne's C of E primary school in Woodplumpton will be getting their hands dirty this week when the school becomes one of the first to take part in a national soil and earthworm survey, as part of a research project by Open Air Laboratories (OPAL), in association with UCLan's Earthworm Research Group.

Scientists from OPAL are keen to find out more about earthworms and the soils they live in – and have enlisted the help of children from years 5 and 6 at the school to complete a fun, simple survey on the creatures and their habitat. The children's results will help the work of real scientists and eventually be used in the first community-led study of the natural world. OPAL is a nationwide initiative which is being carried out by a number of key partners including UCLan.

The project received a grant from The Big Lottery Fund in 2007 and will be encouraging people across the country to get back to nature and get involved in its valuable research, over the course of a five year programme.

"Earthworms play a vital role in recycling plant nutrients and aerating our soil but we need to build on our understanding of the soil types they live in and their distribution," said Jonathan Taylor, Research Assistant at OPAL.

"We are looking forward to getting the kids involved in the project next week, who will help us discover more about earthworms and the soil they live in – something we know surprisingly little about."

For further information on the project, please visit [www.opalexplornature.org](http://www.opalexplornature.org) or, if you would like to get involved, please call 01772 893 223 or email [nwopal@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:nwopal@uclan.ac.uk).

**ENDS**

#### PHOTO OPPORTUNITY:

Classes 5 and 6 will be available for photographs between 2 – 3pm on 18<sup>th</sup> March.

To arrange, please contact Rachael Howarth on 0161 238 9403

#### Notes to Editors

##### OPAL

- 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

- 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
- OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us
- For more information, please visit [www.OPALexplorenature.org](http://www.OPALexplorenature.org)
- 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
- 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

### **The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)**

- UCLan has developed an enviable reputation as an institution that innovates, evolving its course portfolio to over 500 undergraduate programmes and 180 postgraduate courses. The University has an established research reputation within the areas of Business, Health, Humanities and Science. In the recent Research Assessment Exercise, all 17 subject areas submitted were rated as containing research of international excellence while 11 areas were assessed to be undertaking research which is world-leading. With approximately 32,000 students, the University indirectly contributes close to £250 million into the regional economy every year. UCLan is currently in the process of spending more than £120 million on new buildings and facilities to support teaching, learning and leisure activities.
- For further information, or to arrange an interview, please contact

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