



Chartered
Institute of
Ecology and
Environmental
Management

Principles of Preparing Good Guidance for Ecologists and Environmental Managers

January 2016

PREAMBLE

As the professional body for ecologists and environmental managers, CIEEM encourages high standards of practice by encouraging appropriate use of good practice guidelines.

CIEEM occasionally publishes its own guidance but also contributes to, comments on, and may endorse, relevant guidance produced by other organisations.

There is a wealth of guidance on a range of topics readily available to ecologists practising in the UK and overseas. Whilst extremely useful, navigating this can be daunting for professionals, whether they are seeking to follow these guidelines or check whether others have used them appropriately.

This brief guide sets out seven principles of good guidance for editors and commissioning authorities. It is not CIEEM's intention to be prescriptive about how guidance is written, but it is CIEEM's view that abiding by these principles will ensure that better guidance is produced and it will be more widely accepted within the profession.

PRINCIPLE I - *The need and scope of new guidance is clearly identified by a range of stakeholders.*

Is new guidance necessary? For instance, has professional practice changed, technology improved or new approaches been developed? Is there current guidance that is no longer fit for purpose or has a gap been identified? In order to avoid unnecessary duplication of standards, producing new guidance should only be done where there is a clearly identified need to do so. It may be that existing guidance can be revised and updated, which could be a simpler process than writing new guidance.

Any new guidance should have a clearly written scope of what it covers and what it excludes. It is often useful to reference other guidance, especially where these provide overlapping or relevant additional advice. Care should be taken to avoid conflicting with existing guidance except where it is agreed by stakeholders and users to be out of date and where there is clear evidence to justify a change in approach.

PRINCIPLE II - *Guidance should be clear on its purpose in order to aid professional interpretation.*

Guidance needs to be clear on whether it is:

1. describing minimum standards;
2. describing "best" practice;¹
3. describing "good" practice;²
4. providing advice on a range of methods that are available;
5. describing case studies of individual approaches; and/or
6. advising on interpretation of legislation, licensing or policy.

In many cases, a single guidance document will contain all of the above. The document should make it clear what forms it contains to allow professionals to interpret the content correctly. For example, guidance on minimum standards needs to be concise, specific and unambiguous and should get consensus from a wide range of organisations and professionals before being published. This is because professionals that fail to meet the minimum requirements set out in recognised industry standards without sufficient justification may be in breach of CIEEM's Code of Professional Conduct.

Case studies and examples are useful for illustrating how guidance can be applied, but these should be clearly signposted to avoid situations where a single case study is considered the only way to approach a problem.

The reasons, authority and evidence for any specific recommendations of "good practice" or "best practice" should be clearly explained to allow the user to make an informed decision about their applicability.

Guidance should be clear where it constitutes advice on legislation and licencing from a statutory nature conservation authority, as such advice often has a specific legal standing.

¹ Best practice is defined as a process or methodology that has been shown to be the most effective in achieving the desired outcome.

² Good practice is defined as a process or methodology that has been consistently shown to work well and to achieve reliable results.

PRINCIPLE III - *All guidance should be clear that there is a requirement for ecologists and environmental managers to use their professional judgment.*

Professional judgment is about making sound decisions that are site and situation specific and informed by the evidence available. Professionals should ensure that their decisions are proportionate and, where there is uncertainty, they should apply the precautionary principle. Guidance should support professionals in navigating this decision-making process. Professionals should use guidelines to inform their approach to a task. The foundation of good science is starting with clearly defined objectives and designing an appropriate methodology to deal with them. Deviations from accepted good practice must be clearly explained, with any limitations noted and sound reasons given that can then stand up to scrutiny by others.

It is important to allow professionals flexibility in applying guidance as it is generally written for the most common scenarios. For example, recommendations for optimal survey periods that reference seasonal and weather conditions should make allowance for geographical differences. Regional climate and micro-climatic variations and seasonal weather patterns make it impossible to be definitive about when breeding, hibernation or other 'seasons' start and finish. Broad categories, which include optimal, sub-optimal and unsuitable seasons for surveys, should be used.

PRINCIPLE IV - *Good guidance is based on good evidence.*

All guidance should be evidence-based and should reference original sources, where available, that illustrate that techniques recommended are appropriate. There should be a higher benchmark for evidence to support guidance on minimum standards as these are most likely to be subject to challenge.

Where guidance is based on existing practice, but the scientific evidence supporting it is limited, this should be stated and there should be sufficient flexibility in the guidance to allow for individuals to innovate. Scientific testing, e.g. comparative studies of different techniques, is strongly recommended where new approaches are suggested and the results should be published widely. The process of developing new guidance is an opportunity to identify gaps in the evidence base and to recommend priorities for new research and data gathering to fill these gaps. Respect the intellectual property of others by ensuring that all evidence, concepts and other thinking, even where it is unpublished, is properly referenced.

PRINCIPLE V – *Good guidance is clearly written, consistent and unambiguous.*

Guidance needs to be clearly written and concise. There is considerable merit in standards for sampling rates and survey effort being consistent. Consistency in approach has the additional benefit that long-term monitoring and comparison between different sites or years is easier, which may have a research benefit.

PRINCIPLE VI - *Guidance should involve stakeholders and users and commit to a transparent consultation and review process.*

A transparent review and consultation process is essential to ensure practitioner support. Sufficient time should be allowed for organisations and individuals identified as key stakeholders and users to review and comment upon drafts of the guidance before it is published. Editors should make it clear to consultees how specific comments have been addressed through the review process.

Guidance should carry a publication date and, in most cases, state a proposed review date. CIEEM recommends that the commissioning authority reviews guidance at least every five years to check it remains fit for purpose. As far as is practicable, out of date guidance should be removed from circulation. Where CIEEM has endorsed guidance, it may conduct its own review after five years and publish its findings for members.

PRINCIPLE VII - *Guidance should be written and edited by those with authority in the topic.*

It is CIEEM's view that better guidance is prepared by technical experts and reviewed by other experts, with overall editorial control being the clear responsibility of an individual or small number of appointed people. Where guidance covers a range of topic areas, specialists in those specific areas should be appointed to write and review them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guidance has been produced by members of the Professional Standards Committee on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.



This document should be referenced as CIEEM (2016) *Principles of Preparing Good Guidance for Ecologists and Environmental Managers*. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester