

# The Association of Local Environmental Records Centres

## Accreditation System

### Standard Criteria



## Local Records Centre Accreditation System

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## Why Accredit?

The Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) accreditation system was devised to ensure that recorders and data users have confidence in individual LERCs and the LERC network as a whole. In this respect, becoming an accredited LERC is something that is of benefit to the whole LERC community. As well as benefits to the LERC community as a whole, the accreditation process has proved beneficial to those LERCs who have passed accreditation.

The LERCs which have become accredited so far have attested to the internal benefits of both the accreditation process and of having accredited status itself. Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre (LERC) was one of the LERCs to become accredited by the pilot scheme. As they were a relatively newly assembled team, they gained a lot by working through the fundamentals of the LERC and understanding its roles and responsibilities. They also learned about each other and their own roles and responsibilities within the LERC. Charlie Barnes of LERC says “with both of the staff members involved in the running of the record centre relatively new in post, accreditation provided an excellent opportunity to get fully accustomed with the systems, processes and procedures involved in running a record centre”.

Internal benefits have been found not only for LERCs with new teams, but also with those LERCs that have been established for longer. North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC) recognised the potential benefits of becoming accredited and jumped at the opportunity to do so when accreditation became available to all ALERC members. Mark Wills of NEYEDC described their decision to apply for accreditation as a way of “formalising, reviewing and re-writing policies”. He went on to say “accreditation helped us become a more efficient, more streamlined LERC; one that is not afraid to stand back and critically look at ways it could improve - or to have a third party outside of the LERC community look at how it could improve”.

Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre decided to become accredited “to give the LERC the confidence that the Centre was following best practice and to help secure funding by demonstrating to Partners and data users that the centre is a professional organisation”, according to the centre manager, Jackie Ulllyett. She added that “going through the accreditation process was a great way to ensure that standards were being met and that processes and procedures were in place which specifically helped the LERC to develop and improve services”.

## Introduction

Natural England, working closely with the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), commissioned the development of an Accreditation System for Local Records Centres across the UK. The project ran over the period February to August 2010 and included consultation workshops at the ALERC conference in Birmingham in April, followed by wider consultation in May/June. The principal consultant for the project was former Somerset Environmental Records Centre Director, former National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Trustee and former National Forum for Biological Recording (NFBR) Chairman, Bill Butcher, of WGB Environment.

The criteria agreed for the pilot have been reviewed by ALERC and the Standard Criteria published here are those that will be used for future assessment.

## Background

Local Record Centres are:

Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers.

LERCs in the UK operate under a diverse array of setups and fulfil a range of functions and services in addition to their basic operations. The information provided by LERCs is utilised by a variety of data users, including local authorities and developers for planning purposes, conservation groups for the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity, and by statutory agencies for policy and monitoring purposes. Across the UK the coverage and capacity of LERCs varies to some degree.

In 2009 the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres was formed. One of its original objectives was to develop and promote an accreditation system for local environmental record centres and their staff. Natural England was also interested in the development of an accreditation system to help improve standards across LERCs and to facilitate data exchange with National Schemes and Societies, other members of the National Biodiversity Network and the geodiversity community.

The aims of LERC Accreditation are to identify a minimum level of standards, to build confidence in LERCs as bodies which hold biodiversity information in trust for society and manage public resources well, and to encourage improvement. More specifically, the Accreditation System should:

1. Provide a set of objective criteria against which the LERC operation can be assessed to demonstrate that it is effective and efficient.
2. Outline core levels of products and services that an LERC should provide to assist key users.
3. Ensure that an LERC is actively working with data holders to improve the availability and quality of data across the NBN partnership.

4. Recognise the existing range of models that LERCs operate under, provided these are effective and efficient.

## Accreditation Outline

The system was fully developed and agreed by the ALERC accreditation group and ALERC has been inviting its members across the UK to apply for accreditation from 1 July 2012, with the first assessment undertaken early in 2013.

The accreditation application process is evidence-based and primarily self-assessed, with support of a mentor appointed by ALERC if required.

All 20 accreditation criteria need to be met before accreditation is approved.

On approval, an LERC will remain accredited at the standard level for a period of five years.

ALERC has decided not to implement an advanced level until a significant number of LERCs have achieved the standard level. This is primarily a resource issue and ALERC feels that the limited resource available to the project is better used at achieving a wider level of standard level achievement.

## Standard Level Criteria

Section	No.	Criteria
Organisation Fundamentals	1	The LERC is Stakeholder led.
	2	Engaged stakeholders, as a minimum, include local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders.
	3	Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies.
	4	The LERC complies with all relevant legislation and regulations.
	5	The LERC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation.
	6	The LERC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance.
	7	The terrestrial area covered does not overlap with any other LERC.
	8	The LERC proactively engages with its users and providers.
	9	The LERC employs sufficient staff, including a manager or equivalent, to maintain efficient and effective service to its users and providers.
	10	<b><i>The LERC is a Process Orientated Organisation:</i></b>
	10.1	The LERC has documented procedures for its routine processes.
	10.2	Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known.
	10.3	Adopts continuous improvement of processes.
	10.4	All staff undertake continuing professional development.
Data Custodianship	11	The LERC manages species and habitat data for its area.
	12	The LERC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers.
	13	In its custodianship responsibilities, the LERC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the NBN.
	14	The LERC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems.
	15	The LERC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity.
Products and Services	16	<b><i>The LERC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users, defined as follows:</i></b>
	16.1	Geospatial data search of a project area showing statutory and non-statutory sites and recorded Priority / legally protected species.
	16.2	Geospatial data search of a project area showing recorded habitats.
	16.3	List of all recorded Priority and legally protected species in a defined area.
	16.4	List of all recorded Priority habitats in a defined area.
	16.5	Records distribution map of any recorded species for area.

Section	No.	Criteria
	16.6	Statistics and commentary on coverage, currency, accuracy and precision of species and habitat records.
		<b><i>In delivering these products and services, the following standards are met:</i></b>
	17	<b><i>Species</i></b>
	17.1	Species reporting naming conforms to NBN Species Dictionary, while retaining recorded name.
	17.2	Records are available at variable precision spatially, but held electronically at most geographically precise level recorded.
	17.3	Records are linked with a source.
	18	<b><i>Habitats</i></b>
	18.1	Habitat reporting includes Habitats in GIS, while retaining original records in any classification recognised by the NBN Habitats Dictionary.
	18.2	Habitats are mapped in GIS following recognised mapping standards.
	18.3	Habitat records are available at variable precision, having been digitised at the most geographically precise level available.
	18.4	Records are linked with a source.
	19	<b><i>Sites:</i></b>
	19.1	The LERC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Wildlife Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) boundaries and short descriptions for its area.
	19.2	If the LERC is the agreed custodian of the Local Wildlife Site (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems.
	19.3	If the LERC is the agreed custodian of the Local Geological Site dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Geological Sites. (Not applicable to Scotland).
	20	The LERC promotes and supports high quality species and habitat recording.

## Reasons for inclusion, Interpretation/ Thresholds & Evidence

### 1. The LERC is stakeholder led

#### Reason for Inclusion

The most successful LERCs are those led by broad stakeholder groups, with each stakeholder feeling a sense of joint responsibility for successful outcomes.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

Stakeholders do not necessarily need to be legally responsible for the LERC - indeed under some successful governance models this is not achievable. In all cases, though, there must be opportunities for partners to influence the strategic direction and operation of the LERC, a route for views to be expressed and evidence that partners' views are taken into account.

#### Evidence

Constitution or equivalent document in an LERC hosted by another organisation. Terms of reference of any separate Steering Group/ Advisory Group. Minutes of meetings demonstrating stakeholder influence.

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### 2. Engaged stakeholders, as a minimum include, local authorities, statutory agencies, conservation NGOs and voluntary recorders

#### Reason for Inclusion

These four stakeholder types are always present in successful LERC stakeholder groups and give a broad and balanced representation of key data users and providers.

#### Interpretation/ Thresholds

“Stakeholders” in this context refers to the organisations involved in governance, steering group or equivalent, rather than those with which the LERC has a contractual or other relationship. The wording means at least one representative from each group. LERC stakeholder groups will often include many more stakeholders than this. If one of these four groups is missing from an LERC that seeks accreditation, exceptional circumstances will need to be demonstrated. It will not be necessary to demonstrate that all local authorities in the area are engaged with the LERC.

#### Evidence

Constitution or equivalent document in an LERC hosted by another organisation. Terms of reference of a group or board acting to govern, direct, advise or steer the LERC. Evidence that this group is providing direction, e.g. minutes of meetings. Evidence that any stakeholders outside of the governance board are being engaged, e.g. minutes of meetings, memoranda of agreement, proceedings from stakeholder groups.

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### **3. Impartiality is demonstrated in its constitution and policies**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

LERC credibility to all potential information users relies on an even handed approach to all.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Any in-kind contributions from the host to the LERC, such as office space, management support and administration should be transparent and valued in cost equivalence. Services to paying partners can reflect the level of financial contribution.

#### **Evidence**

Constitution or equivalent document in an LERC hosted by another organisation. Data Access Policy. Data Capture/Management Policy.

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### **4. The LERC complies with all relevant legislation**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Local Records Centres are required to comply with legislation such as the Environmental Information Regulations, 2004 and the Data Protection Act, 1998. Prompt response to enquiries promotes a professional perspective of LERCs.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

At least 90% of enquiries should be answered within 10 working days. Whilst the statutory obligation for public bodies is to answer all enquiries within 20 days, a good level of service is to exceed this. The LERC should give reasons to the enquirer for any that cannot be met in this timeframe. Responses for planning enquiries should normally be automated and made well within 10 days, the standard being set out in Service Level Agreements between the LERC and the planning authority.

#### **Evidence**

Data Access Policy. Data Capture/Management Policy. Management Reports.

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### **5. The LERC has the legal status to be able to enter contractual agreements, either as an independent incorporated body or a part of a larger organisation**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Experience shows that successful LERCs cannot be operated as unincorporated bodies. Funding bodies need to be able to interact with legal entities.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Accreditation will not prescribe the preferred legal entity.

### **Evidence**

Constitution or equivalent document in an LERC hosted by another organisation.

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## **6. The LERC is accountable and transparent for its business and financial performance**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

This is particularly important where the LERC is part of a larger organisation. Effective management and stakeholder engagement can only take place where the performance of the LERC itself, rather than a larger unit of which it is part, is described and reported.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The LERC Annual Report, normally compiled by the Manager for the governing body or stakeholder group, and more frequent management reports, should include numbers on business results, such as records captured and data searches completed, and finance, including income and expenditure against budget. The annual report should be publicly available.

### **Evidence**

LERC Annual Report/ Management Reports.

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## **7. The terrestrial area covered does not overlap with any other LERC**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Clear boundaries between LERCs avoid duplication of effort and confusion among data providers and users.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

LERC boundaries should normally follow local authority boundaries rather than recording areas.

Non-overlapping should be from the users' perspective; LERCs may establish arrangements with neighbouring LERCs to service needs of organisations not following administrative boundaries. For example, a recording group using a vice-county boundary could supply all of its records to the LERC covering the majority of its area, with the LERC passing on relevant records to its neighbouring LERC. Access to records for users would always be on a strict geographical basis following LERC boundaries. Such arrangements should be in the form of written agreements.

This criterion should not preclude:

- Two tier arrangements, where, for example, smaller LERCs engage with their local recorders and work with a regional LERC providing services to users across the region.

- Collaboration between LERCs and established Geological Records Centres and Partnerships, working together in partnership to meet the user requirements of criterion 19.
- LERCs offering short term contract services over wider areas.

Stakeholder groups for coastal LERCs should agree the marine limit for the LERC's geographical coverage.

An LERC seeking accreditation should seek to resolve any overlap issues with neighbouring LERCs before applying for accreditation. It will be required to submit a map of its proposed area and seek to resolve any boundary disputes before applying. Where recording areas (e.g. vice counties) overlap more than one LERC boundary, a data sharing agreement should be in place to ensure that data sent to one LERC reaches all other necessary LERCs.

#### **Evidence**

LERC Boundary Map, including the extent of marine coverage for coastal LERCs. Details of any disputed areas. Data sharing agreements.

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## **8. The LERC proactively engages with its users and providers**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

The LERC concept fundamentally concerns a specific role as part of a complex network linking biodiversity observations with use of biodiversity information. Full engagement with other parts of the network is essential to effective operation.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

"Users" include the full range of national, regional and local users whether supplied through the National Biodiversity Network Gateway or directly.

"Providers" includes individual recorders, local recording groups, National Schemes and Societies, NGOs and Conservation Agencies. Some are both users and providers. LERCs should seek to engage with all relevant providers in order to collate the best possible view of species, habitats and sites data for the area, and make this available to the widest possible range of users for use in decision making, research and education.

The role of data providers/ suppliers is critical to the success of the whole biodiversity and geodiversity information system at local, regional and national levels. In some cases LERCs are more formally linked with other groups in BAP or geological stakeholder groups. For clarity, accreditation is restricted in this scheme to the LERC operation, but the importance of the wider network is fully recognised. Data suppliers and partners are invited to help their LERC meet these accreditation criteria.

Accreditation recognises that engagement is a two way process and not all attempts at engagement will result in positive outcomes; however there will need to be evidence of positive effort on the part of the LERC and a reasonable spread of positive outcomes. Reviews of the degree to which services are meeting user needs should be included in partners' feeding back through the Steering Group or equivalent.

**Evidence**

LERC Annual Report/ Management Reports.

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**9. The LERC employs sufficient professional staff, including a manager or equivalent, to provide an efficient and sustainable service to its users and providers**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Successful LERCs always have sufficient professional staff to deliver effective services. Partners sometimes seriously underestimate the staff resources needed to undertake “behind the scenes” data custodianship, which is essential to underpin robust outputs. The ability to provide a prompt and effective service to users promotes a professional perspective of LERCs.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

This criterion is not prescriptive in terms of staff numbers, which will vary widely according to area covered and user demand. An efficient LERC may well be able to function well with a less than ideal number of staff. Measures of service such as enquiry turnaround times may be a more appropriate method of assessment. The LERC Accreditation Team should use the guidance on this subject available from various sources to assess staffing sufficiency, and unanimously sign off compliance. “manager or equivalent” means a post with responsibility for strategic and operational performance of the LERC, (the post will normally be full-time, but some split posts with a hosting organisation can be effective provided the focus of the post is on the LERC).

**Evidence**

Staff complement review by the LERC Accreditation Team. Job description of manager or equivalent and filled post. Figures for core services such as average turnaround times for enquiries. At least 90% of enquiries should be answered within 10 working days - see criterion 4 for detail.

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**10. The LERC is a Process Orientated Organisation**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Becoming a process-orientated organisation will help LERCs develop effective, professional organisations.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Much of the work of an LERC can be broken down into a series of processes. Examination of these can lead to more efficient and effective organisation-

## **10.1 Independent process steps are identified**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

LERC operation can be usefully broken down into a series of processes and steps within processes.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Processes could usefully be defined under the headings of User Liaison, Data Collation, Data Management, Interpretation and Information Delivery. Accredited LERCs should be able to define steps in at least three processes and show that they are complying with the process steps.

### **Evidence**

List of written procedures & processes and evidence of compliance.

## **10.2 Tasks, responsibilities and authority of individuals are known**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Clarity on the relationship between personnel and processes is crucial to effective delivery.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Evidence of links between individuals and processes in job descriptions or other documents.

### **Evidence**

Job descriptions, annual work plan, line manager identified, annual reporting.

## **10.3 Adopt continuous improvement of processes**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Diagnosis of problems and measures to improve processes result in improved performance.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

At least one example of a process audit trail and a response to improve the process.

### **Evidence**

Audit trail of whatever process is being monitored, continuous improvement.

## **10.4 All staff undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Staff training should contribute to all LERCs attaining new professional standards over time.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Staff CPD summary shows a number of training events to the needs of the individual. The benefits of a targeted training programme for all LERC staff and key volunteers should be recognised.

**Evidence**

Staff CPD summary for previous 12 months.

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**11. The LERC manages species (flora and fauna) and habitat data for its area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Species and habitats are the essential components of biodiversity. There are many drivers that now require an increasing emphasis on habitat data. An LERC capability to provide both species and habitat data, including interactions between them, enhances LERC services.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The LERC should cover the full range of species taxonomic groups and habitats present in its area, including marine biotopes in coastal LERCs where there is stakeholder agreement that the marine environment should be included in the LERC geographical scope. There are no prescribed minimum levels of coverage in the standard level criteria, but the LERC should seek to maximise coverage from available data and coverage of at least the principal species groups and habitats to meet user needs. The word “manage” covers both custodianship and management of copy datasets that the LERC has access to (see criterion 12); it implies that the LERC should have sufficient rights to be able to integrate views of various datasets and present results to users that are most likely to meet their needs. Where an LERC chooses to arrange access to a majority of datasets, rather than holding master or copy datasets, it will need to demonstrate that it can generate comprehensive data products and services to meet user needs. This arrangement may be appropriate, for example, where a regional LERC hub with a reporting focus operates in partnership with several smaller LERCs with a data collection focus. The innovative use of web service and similar arrangements will be encouraged.

**Evidence**

Statistics on species records in database and habitat parcels mapped in GIS, including, separately, those external datasets accessed and included in integrated products and services.

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**12. The LERC is responsible for datasets custodianship, and management of dataset copies, by agreement with its partners and data providers**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Clarity around dataset custodianship and responsibilities is important for efficient data management and transfer. Users need to know which datasets an LERC manages.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Custodianship has rights and responsibilities attached. The custodian, who may or may not be the dataset owner, manages the dataset master copy. If the custodian is not the dataset owner, the rights and responsibilities are agreed between the custodian and owner. The principal right is normally the right to edit. Responsibilities include safeguarding in perpetuity, respecting intellectual property rights and providing appropriate levels of access to users.

Managing a copy dataset carries a different set of rights and responsibilities, and normally does not include the right to edit.

This criterion does not imply that the LERC should be the custodian for every dataset that it holds, but there should be clarity and agreement with partners and providers, and a list of datasets of each sort (custodianship/ management of dataset copy) on the LERC's website. Any significant gaps in data, especially where the data is known to exist but the LERC currently has no access, should be highlighted as part of this commentary, together with the reasons for the lack of access.

For interpretation of “access to datasets” arrangements please refer to criterion 11.

### **Evidence**

List of datasets under custodianship and management on website.

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**13. In its custodianship responsibilities, the LERC observes the Data Exchange Principles of the National Biodiversity Network. These include provision for Data access (13.1), Confidentiality (13.2), Metadata (13.3), Authority transfer (13.4), Transparency (13.5), Personal data 13.6), Charging & Resourcing (13.7)**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

LERCs are part of the National Biodiversity Network. The Data Exchange Principles have been established and well tested over a number of years.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

LERCs will need to provide evidence in the form of policies and additional material as described to show compliance with the principles. Charging policy must be justified as in line with principle 7. Accredited LERCs will need to show that they are working towards preferred data flows as they emerge.

### **Evidence**

13.1 Data access policy on website. Information delivery results. 13.2 Data Access Policy includes confidentiality. Evidence of some data held with controlled access. 13.3 Metadata on website. 13.4 Data Access Policy. 13.5 Data access policy on website. 13.6 Data Access Policy. 13.7 Data Access Policy includes Charging Policy.

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## **14. The LERC ensures quality control of its species and habitat data through validation and verification systems**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Data quality control is essential to LERC credibility across the UK.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Validation is the process of checking if something satisfies a certain criterion. Verification is confirmation: additional proof that something that was believed (some fact or hypothesis or theory) is correct. Validation and verification systems are likely to use the emerging NBN Data Validation toolkit and may be managed in combination with local recording groups and/or National Schemes and Societies. LERCs should apply appropriate validation and verification systems and record the quality status of datasets in metadata and individual records in the database. Invalidated and unverified data should not be supplied, except in exceptional circumstances and then with clear quality warnings in both metadata and individual records.

Verification systems should include consideration of the need to support records of certain taxa with voucher specimens or photographs. Voucher specimens should be deposited with professionally maintained collections. The range of taxa for which additional material is needed should be agreed with National Schemes and Societies and local recording groups.

### **Evidence**

Validation and verification policy. Evidence of policy implementation e.g. dataset attributes.

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## **15. The LERC acts as a secure archive for the data in its care in perpetuity**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Permanence is one of the most valuable LERC attributes for data providers, and historic datasets are very important for monitoring change.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Secure backup and archiving should be applied to all electronic datasets, and also those paper datasets in LERC custodianship that contain significant data unless completely captured electronically. LERCs may also hold other resources of value that should be included in an archiving system. A Business Continuity Plan, including

a Disaster Recovery Plan, should be in place for the LERC or its host organisation. An ALERC Working Party report is available to provide guidance and best practice in this area.

#### **Evidence**

Data Security Policy. Business Continuity Plan.

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### **16. The LERC offers a basic suite of products and services to its users, defined as follows:**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Many users who access LERC data in more than one area will find it helpful to know that there are recognisable basic products and services available from all accredited LERCs.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Most LERCs will be able to offer a much wider range of products and services than this list implies; this is the basic list that all accredited LERCs should be able to offer. While evidence includes statistics on frequency of supply it may exceptionally be the case that the product has not been requested; in such cases evidence of promotion that it is available is sufficient.

#### **Evidence**

See 16.1 to 16.5.

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### **16.1. Geospatial data search of a project area showing statutory and non-statutory sites and recorded Priority / legally protected species**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

This product has many applications, especially in development control and strategic planning and agri-environment scheme support.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Statutory sites means nature conservation sites designated at national or international level. “Non-Statutory sites” means Local Wildlife/ Geological Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland). Priority species means the revised UK 2007 list of species plus any additional species prioritised locally. Legally protected species means any species protected through national or European legislation.

#### **Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

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### **16.2. Geospatial data search of a project area showing recorded habitats**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Increasingly users need access to mapped habitat information. In some cases this can be combined with the sites/ species data search.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Habitats means a habitat category mapped as a parcel (polygon/region, line) in GIS.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

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**16.3. List of all recorded Priority species and legally protected species in a defined area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This product is a basic output for purposes related to biodiversity and land use planning.

**Priority species means the revised UK 2007 list of species plus any additional species prioritised locally.** Legally protected means any species given special protection under domestic legislation or international Directives or Conventions. In some cases this product may be offered as part of a broader product that includes other species status categories.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

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**16.4. List of all recorded Priority habitats in a defined area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

**This product is a basic output for purposes related to biodiversity planning.**

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Priority habitats means the revised UK 2007 list of species plus any additional species prioritised locally. In some cases this product may be offered as part of a broader product that includes other habitat status categories.

**Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

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**16.5. Records distribution map of any recorded species for area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

This product supports survey work and can be combined with other data for a wide range of purposes.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The product should be supplied at least at 10km grid precision, with 1km wherever possible.

### **Evidence**

Product example. Statistic of supply frequency.

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## **16.6 Statistics and commentary on coverage, currency, accuracy and precision of species and habitat records**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

User perceptions of LERC products and services are often based on the relationship between the information supplied and “reality”. An objective assessment of that relationship can be very helpful to users.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

It should be noted that there are no criteria at standard level relating to the quantity of data held. The inclusion of this criterion is a clear statement that it is more important to provide clarity to users on data quality than to accumulate data quantity.

The criterion relates to data held electronically. There is no criterion related to the proportion of data electronically captured, since it is assumed that LERCs will be prioritising data capture to meet user demand. Data held only in paper format is not accessible and is therefore largely irrelevant for most purposes.

Since data quality assessment is a new area of work for most LERCs, a timeline is appropriate to allow assessments to be included in work programmes. For LERCs seeking accreditation before the deadlines included here it will be necessary to show that the work is in hand.

- 1 January 2013 Statistics and commentary on Priority and legally protected species records and Priority habitat records.
- 1 January 2014 Statistics and commentary on all habitat records.
- 1 January 2016 Statistics and commentary on all species records.

Guidelines on the format of data quality reporting should be available well before the deadlines to ensure consistency.

### **Evidence**

Data quality reports (or evidence that the work is in hand if accreditation comes before the stated deadlines).

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## **17. In delivering these products and services, the following standards are met:**

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

All of these standards must be met for data captured or imported from the date of accreditation. For pre-existing data, reports should normally be restricted to data that meets these standards. If an accredited LERC judges that it is in the best interests of users to receive previously collected data that does not meet the standards, a clear quality warning must be given in metadata and against each record in listings.

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## **17.1. Species reporting naming conforms to NBN Species Dictionary, while retaining recorded name**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Nomenclature standards are essential for compatibility between parts of the NBN and consistency across LERC boundaries for users.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

NBN Species Dictionary current recognised name should be used for output, but it is also important to retain the name as originally recorded. For Recorder 6 users the use of the latest update is sufficient. For non-Recorder 6 users, translation to NBN Species Dictionary current recognised name will be essential at the reporting stage to meet this criterion.

### **Evidence**

Species reporting nomenclature, link to dictionary.

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## **17.2. Records are available at variable precision geospatially, but held electronically at most geographically precise level recorded**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Records should be captured once and used many times, so there should be no summarising of precision at data capture stage as a later use might require the greater precision. GIS reporting may need to show the record at a lower precision depending on map scale and purpose required.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Geographical precision relates to a scale, normally from 10km square down to 10m or 1m precision recorded through GPS. 100m, 10m and 1m records are generally more precise than site records. Species records linked to mapped habitat parcels may be an attractive option for georeferencing, provided the parcels are relatively small.

### **Evidence**

Species records in 16.1 product example. Data capture policy.

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## **17.3. Records are linked with a source**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Datasets are often defined by surveys or groups of surveys. This is required for dataset custodianship. Users need to be able to assess whether data is fit-for-their-purpose by reading metadata.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Tools such as Recorder 6 provide such database functionality. Metadata is required through criterion 13 and the wording of 13.3 should be used to determine whether other, non-Recorder 6, terminologies are sufficient. Valid ad hoc records received by LERCs may be assigned to a generic “survey” called “ad hoc records” or similar.

### **Evidence**

Database statistics, populated attribute.

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## **18.1. Habitat reporting in GIS, using classification recognised by the NBN Habitats Dictionary**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

A wide range of uses require habitat data and it is important that consistent habitat data can be aggregated across LERC boundaries at regional and national levels.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

The NBN Habitats Dictionary contains at least ten habitat classifications, including BAP, Phase 1, NVC (National Vegetation Classification) and IHS (Integrated Habitat System). Local customisations of recognised classifications will be acceptable provided the customisation has retained compatibility with its parent classification. An LERC seeking accreditation should aim to translate all habitat data that it manages into a habitat recording system that meets the needs of their users, and to have completed the translation of at least one substantial dataset.

### **Evidence**

Product example 16.2. Statistic of habitat coverage (area by classification).

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## **18.2. Habitats are mapped in GIS to recognised mapping standards**

### **Reason for Inclusion**

Habitat mapping retains its integrity only when produced to recognised standards across all LERCs.

### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Habitat mapping needs to be produced to recognised standards such as those provided by NE in the document ‘Consultation and production of a recommended set of standards for UK BAP habitat data Volume 3: Definitions and rule bases for BAP Priority Habitats, and the South West Pilot’. Guidance on how to map is also given by the NE MoA Appendix 3. National and Local Habitat Action Plans should be consulted for standards. Mapping should use OS MasterMap with the preference for one category per parcel except in the case of complex mosaics or where overlap is

allowed within the mapping guidance. Use of tools such as Integrated Habitat System (IHS) may be useful to ensure standardised mapping products.

**Evidence**

GIS data format for habitat layers.

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**18.3. Habitat records are available at variable precision, having been digitised at the most geographically precise level recorded**

**Reason for Inclusion**

As with species records, habitat records should be captured once and used many times, so there should be no summarising of precision at data capture stage as a later use might require the greater precision. GIS reporting may need to show the record at a lower precision depending on map scale and purpose required.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Habitat data capture projects are normally commissioned, so the specification should follow the standards supplied by the commissioning organisation. In the absence of such specification the digitising should be at the most precise level the survey allows, and normally follow OS Master Map boundaries where appropriate. Reporting may sometimes be at lower precision than captured e.g. 10km habitat distribution map.

**Evidence**

Habitat records in 16.2 product example. Data capture policy.

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**18.4. Records are linked with a source**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Datasets are often defined by surveys or groups of surveys. This is required for dataset custodianship. Users need to be able to assess whether data is fit-for-their-purpose by reading metadata.

**Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Metadata is required through criterion 13.

**Evidence**

GIS database statistics, populated attribute.

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**19.1. The LERC holds and reports on a current copy of the Local Wildlife Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) boundaries and short descriptions for its area**

**Reason for Inclusion**

Users have a reasonable expectation that all LERCs should be able to include headline information on Local Wildlife Sites in their reports, even in areas where the LERC is not the custodian of the LWS dataset.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

Accredited LERCs will have the discretion to exclude sites data that does not meet basic data quality standards from its data supply or to supply it accompanied by a clear data quality statement. Accredited LERCs should never supply poor quality data without quality warnings. If an LERC chooses not to report on a sites dataset for data quality reasons, it should draw the users' attention to the dataset and refer them to the custodian. In such situations the LERC should seek to engage relevant partners in a programme to improve data quality over time.

#### **Evidence**

Dataset included in metadata on web for whole LERC area.

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### **19.2. If the LERC is the agreed custodian of the Local Wildlife Site (Local Nature Conservation Sites in Scotland) dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Where the LERC is the agreed custodian, it needs to apply consistent standards, for credibility of both LERCs and non-Statutory sites systems, and to allow consistent use across LERC boundaries.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

“National guidelines for Local Wildlife Sites Systems” refers to the ‘Defra Local Sites guidance’ (2006) and the ‘Guidance on Establishing and Managing Local Nature Conservation Site Systems in Scotland’ (2009). These guidelines cover both selection criteria and process, covering such areas as landowner engagement and stakeholder involvement. Any local deviations from the national guidelines need to be justified. A reasonable implementation period beyond date of accreditation is allowed, but reports that include sites that have not been re-assessed against the guidelines should include a quality warning.

For interpretation of “custodian”, see criterion 12.

#### **Evidence**

LWS policy. LWS selection criteria. LWS process. Example of selection process. Landowner consent evidence.

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### **19.3. If the LERC is the agreed custodian of the Local Geological Site dataset for its area, it complies with the principal national guidelines for Local Geological Sites (not applicable to Scotland)**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

Where the LERC is the agreed custodian, it needs to apply consistent standards for credibility of both LERCs and non-statutory sites systems, and to allow consistent use across LERC boundaries.

#### **Interpretation/ Thresholds**

“National guidelines for Local Geological Sites” refers to the principles advocated in the ‘Defra Local Sites guidance’ (2006) and the local adaptation of the ‘National Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) guidance’ (1990) on selecting Local Geological Sites (formerly RIGS) (available at: [www.geoconservationuk.org.uk](http://www.geoconservationuk.org.uk) )

For interpretation of “custodian”, see criterion 12.

#### **Evidence**

LGS policy. LGS selection criteria. LGS process. Example of selection process. Landowner consent evidence.

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## **20. The LERC promotes and supports high quality species and habitat recording**

#### **Reason for Inclusion**

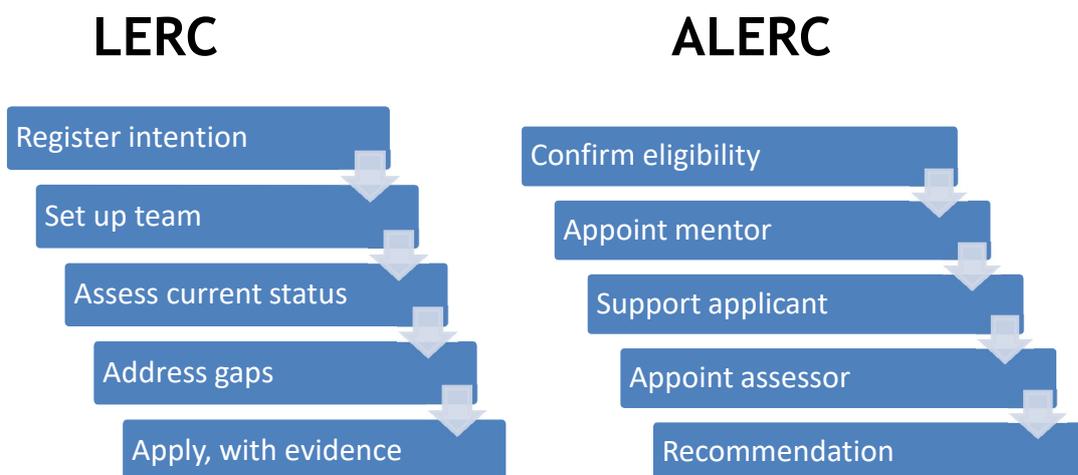
The local promotion of high quality recording is regarded as one of the most valuable roles of LERCs, with extensive influence to the benefit of the NBN, National Schemes and Societies, conservation agencies, NGOs and biodiversity conservation generally.

#### **Evidence**

Website recording guidance. Training event detail or written advice.

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## Accreditation Process Outline



### Standard Level Application Procedure

LERCs wishing to apply for accreditation should notify ALERC at the earliest possible time at which point a mentoring LERC can be appointed.

The LERC will then establish an accreditation team, comprising its Manager, a Local Authority, a Voluntary Recorder and another organisation, such as a Conservation Agency or NGO, drawn from the LERC's governing body or stakeholder group. The role of this team will be to support the LERC staff through the accreditation process and to sign off the final application self-assessment.

The LERC will then complete an initial assessment of current status, indicating which of the criteria it considers itself to be easily meeting already, doubtfully meeting or which clearly need work to address. The LERC will share this with the mentor.

If necessary, the mentor will support the LERC in its work programme to clarify the doubtful points and address the gaps, and advise the LERC when it is ready to make the full application.

Once the full application is submitted, ALERC will appoint an Assessor whose role will be to review the self-assessment. The full application, signed off by the LERC Accreditation Team, will then be ready for assessment. The assessor may ask for clarification or further evidence, either through the receipt of further documentation or through a visit to the LERC.

The Assessor will then make a recommendation to the ALERC Accreditation Committee, and if approved, the LERC will be accredited for a period of five years. If the candidate LERC cannot be accredited at this time, ALERC will offer further support to the LERC to help it work towards accreditation standards.

A sample-based on-site validation system may be included within the process.

### Application for renewal for Accredited LERCs

Four years after accreditation the LERC should inform ALERC that it intends to seek renewal of accreditation and it will have the option of requesting a mentor for the renewal. Four and a half years after accreditation the LERC should submit a full renewed application, with updated evidence, to be approved by an appointed assessor. If approved, the LERC will be accredited for a further period of five years.

### **Changes in Status**

ALERC will maintain a list of Accredited LERCs on its website.

If an Accredited LERC knows that it will fall below accredited standards at any time it should notify ALERC immediately. ALERC will allow the LERC three months to address the issue and will provide support to the LERC in order to achieve the Accredited status again.

ALERC may withdraw Accredited Status with one month's notice if the LERC falls below the Accredited standard; ALERC will give the LERC an opportunity to appeal against the decision and allow it three months to address the issue raised and achieve accredited status again.