

DIPLOMA IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUM ANIMALS GOES INTERNATIONAL

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Learners from across the United Arab Emirates can now study towards the Diploma in the Management of Zoos and Aquarium Animals course (DMZAA) following the successful launch of the programme earlier this year. This International Distance Learning Programme is unique to Sparsholt College who are the only provider of the qualification through its partnership with the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA). The College has run the course very successfully for 10 years and it is well recognised as the industry 'gold standard' by BIAZA (The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums) and the UK Zoo community.

In March Andy Beer, Sparsholt College's Zoo Courses Manager, officially launched the programme at Al Bustan al Zoological Centre in the UAE. He led an 'historic and world first' induction programme with eight delegates from Al Bustan (4), The Breeding Centre Sharjah (2), Emirates Park Zoo in Al Bahia Abou Dabi (1) and Rome (1). All were successfully inducted and are now well on their way to completing the first year of the course. The keepers were very enthusiastic about the course and several said that they had been waiting for this type of course for several years. (The attached picture shows all eight delegates on the Induction Day).

This was the first launch of an International course of study at Sparsholt college to be validated by an awarding body and was made possible by using LEDGE (a College devised extension to a Virtual Learning environment [VLE] Model) where all resources, assignment uploads and assessment are done on line. The delivery has involved establishing a separate DMZAA International 'ledge' page to ensure that electronic delivery and its distance learning mode, have all the hall marks of its current success in the UK, are enshrined in the International course from the beginning. Thus the teaching and learning resources and assessment procedures will be accessed through 'ledge' in an identical way to learners (keepers and aquarists) in the UK. The College has also appointed a separate assessor as a key member of the team to deliver this International course.

In addition to the induction day in year one, there is a further induction activity in year two and a time constrained test on all year one units at the end of the first academic year. All course materials and manuals are provided by Sparsholt College.

In the UK, ten learners are looked after by a regional co-ordinator who also has other duties within the Zoo where they are employed (some are educators, others registrars or Animal Curators). All learners receive 3 hours per year formal tutorial (normally face to face where a written summary of course performance and feedback is completed or alternatively via phone or e mail). These formal tutorials are phased throughout the year and occur approximately every 3 months.

As it follows the model of the UK course, City & Guilds have confirmed that upon successful completion of both years of the course, learners will be fully certificated for the units they have



Andy Beer, Sparsholt College's Zoo Courses Manager

achieved and the overall qualification will be graded at pass, merit or distinction level. Furthermore, the course will also be subject to the same external quality control and scrutiny procedures that are required in all of its courses.

After the intensive induction experience, Andy was able to visit a number of Zoos to 'spread the word' and good progress was made via meeting influential members of the UAE Zoo community.

Potential was also identified in using this base in the UAE as a platform for marketing the College's HE provision. All in all, this visit proved to be a very worthwhile and pioneering endeavour with good prospects of bringing this unique form of CPD for zoo professionals to other collections in the UAE and surrounding countries in 2014 when the next inductions are scheduled.

Further information can be obtained from andy.beer@sparsholt.ac.uk



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