

Principles for Excellence of ZSL Discovery & Learning

ZSL - Engagement through authenticity

ZSL Discovery & Learning aims to engage students in innovative and engaging workshops and activities and pique their curiosity for life and the natural world. Through participating in our activities and events, students will have the opportunity to develop skills and explore concepts including evolution, biodiversity, climate change and conservation in unique learning environments with inspiring educators. Their understanding will be enriched and enhanced by handling real objects from the natural world, meeting live animals where possible and being introduced to conservation in a real world context.

To ensure we create content that achieves the quality standards we aspire to, we have defined five *Principles for Excellence* that underpin all our developments:

1. Living collections... *Engagement with living collections raises motivation, inspiration and helps bring concepts to life*

With living collections over the two sites representing over 850 species, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo have a vast assemblage of engaging animals. These animals are the primary attraction for visiting groups and help ZSL promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats.

The very 'living' nature of a zoo's collections is its most engaging attribute. Access to these collections is an incredibly memorable experience for any visitor, stimulating awe and wonder at the size, scale and sensory experience of being near live animals. Personal experience during a visit to a zoo will vary, but there are endless possibilities for an individual to connect with a story, a species or even an individual animal.



Learning activities are developed to encourage visitors to closely observe the living collections and animal handling is utilised wherever possible. With support from ZSL Animal Sections, Discovery & Learning has a small handling collection formed of invertebrates, small mammals and reptiles that are always a hugely popular element of any guided activity. The handling collections are never used as 'add-ons', but rather to illustrate key content that can range from the threat of the pet trade, to adaptive colouration and the nature of an exoskeleton.

Whether as part of a guided session with an Education Officer or through self-guided resources as part of their visit, school groups will take part in activity that links clearly to exhibits and species on site that bring concepts to life.

2. Conservation in context... *By exemplifying ZSL individuals and projects conservation is put in a real world context*

ZSL is a leading organisation in the field of conservation research. It attracts exemplary researchers who are involved in conservation work in over 50 countries across the world. This provides 'conservation in context' – the most up-to-date examples of research being undertaken in the 'real world' and the personal journeys of the researchers, communities and also the species involved.

A visit to ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo provides a unique opportunity for students and young people to explore exhibits and interpretation showcasing examples of ex-situ Conservation Projects. Where appropriate, Discovery & Learning activities for school groups showcase individual researchers, specific conservation projects and research that all aim for the protection of species. We also aim to provide further information for individuals who are intrinsically motivated to get more involved in conservation work and the protection of species.



3. Objects from the natural world... *A learning experience is enriched by handling real objects that exemplify the content and cater to multiple learning styles*

As important as visual stimuli are, it is not always possible or appropriate to access living collections in a more kinaesthetic manner. By using objects from the natural world, such as feathers, bones, shells and animal skins, in learning activities, students can gain a more well-rounded experience that caters to a number of learning styles.

These objects are unique resources that enrich and enhance content taught at school, where access to such objects is likely restricted. They enable the application of practical skills such as weighing, measuring, close observation and direct comparison amongst others. They also enable the appropriate use of physical attributes, such as texture, not possible without kinaesthetic contact of real objects. These objects also carry a more powerful message as many have been loaned to ZSL by Customs & Excise and exemplify the tragic end result of hunting and poaching.



4. Development and delivery approaches - *A strong development framework and range of delivery approaches ensures we cater to all learner needs*

The Discovery & Learning programme for school groups aims to cater to a range of learning styles and multiple intelligences with strong visual, audio and kinaesthetic stimuli. Our activities encourage individual, small group and whole class work that includes storytelling, hands on workshops, lectures, practical learning programmes in the Zoo and more.



Learning activities are planned to help students meet specific learning outcomes, but the reality of what an individual can experience during activity as part of a zoo visit can vary greatly.

We aim to ensure that visitors are exposed to rich content presented in a variety of formats and have access to a range of resources to maximise the opportunity for an individual to reach any or all of myriad far-reaching outcomes during a visit. These can include gains in knowledge and conceptual understanding, specific practical skill development, self-efficacy, confidence, pure enjoyment, increased interest and more.

At the heart of our learning programme is the aspiration that by participating in our range of activities, visitors will feel more intrinsically motivated or empowered to engage with the natural world – outcomes not always easily defined or measured.

4. Expertise and excellence... *The people working for ZSL are one of its strongest assets and provide the personal stories that bring its work to life*

ZSL attracts leaders in their fields and hence has a wealth of expertise and experience that can be drawn on in the development of Discovery & Learning activities. These individuals are a rich resource in themselves by providing not only their work in context, but their personal, engaging journeys and experiences that bring content to life. They provide role models that inspire and help raise the aspirations of school visitors who are building their own identity.



D&L activities aim to showcase and link to these individuals and their work: scientific staff, Discovery & Learning delivery staff, keepers, veterinary team, horticulture staff and a range of other departments.