



BIAZA Close Contact Policy

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For the purposes of this policy the term ‘close contact’ refers to the close proximity, with direct or indirect contact, of a member of the public to a live animal that is in the care of a BIAZA member, either in the absence of a safety barrier or through or over barriers. This may include but is not limited to: feeding experiences; touch pools; walk-throughs; drive-throughs; displays and presentations; work-experience opportunities; diving and other experiences; live animal educational sessions; free roaming animals and outreach.

The term ‘Zoo’ refers to all BIAZA members and/or as defined in the Secretary of State’s Standards for Modern Zoo Practice (SSSMZP): zoological collections, aquariums, bird parks, farms, safari parks and reptile houses.

‘Staff’ refers to adequately trained employees facilitating or supervising a session or area of close contact.

‘Public’ refers to learners, researchers, visitors, guests, guardians and any other persons that are present in a situation of close contact who are untrained and are not staff or volunteers – i.e. those for whom the ‘close contact’ is designed.

‘Volunteers’ refers to adequately trained volunteers and voluntary workers facilitating or supervising a session or area of close contact.

‘Hand Rearing’ refers to a human/humans looking after a young animal, in place of its parent(s), until it is old enough to look after itself.

This policy must be used in conjunction with other [BIAZA policies and guidelines](#).

Summary

Engaging the public with interactive animal experiences can be invaluable in achieving an organisation’s mission. In providing these experiences it is critical that these three aspects are addressed:

1. **Animal Welfare:** ensuring that the close contact experience does not impede on the general welfare of the animal. It should also be considered that behaviour differs greatly in the same individual over time.
2. **Staff/Volunteers and Public Safety:** all reasonable precautions for staff and public safety must be taken.
3. **Ethical Considerations:** ensuring that the close contact experience achieves clear outcomes for the organisation's mission and vision and manages public perceptions; i.e. is tailored to education.

In providing close contact experiences BIAZA member organisations:

- MUST comply with all relevant legislation (see reference list below);
- MUST have written policies and procedures, including a statement on ethical considerations of close contact and also risk assessments on using animals for close contact which address animal welfare and staff, volunteers and public safety;
- MUST hold appropriate insurances that cover the activity;
- MUST refer to and be guided by taxa-specific BIAZA and/or EAZA guidelines where these are available, including contacting the relevant TAG/WG for info if needed or required.
- MUST ensure that each animal has permanent day to day housing that is guided by Best Practice Guidelines where available and allows for expression of natural behaviours, social groups (where necessary) and environmental needs;
- A [BIAZA Visitor Animal Experiences Assessment \(VAE\)](#) (or equivalent) has been completed while the experience runs in its current format. This MUST be reviewed at least annually and repeated whenever the format of the experience changes or when the animal's environment, health or social state changes. The assessment MUST be accompanied by an action plan to resolve any concerns.
- MUST be able to evidence that animals have ample rest periods and off-show access to retire away from the public/vehicular traffic where applicable, as per the BIAZA VAE guidelines;
- MUST have ongoing monitoring and a communication protocol in place to ensure individual animals are not used when it could be detrimental to their health (e.g. during vulnerable life stages, shedding, moulting or sickness);
- MUST maintain accurate records for each animal or group of animals being used, to include date, time, type of contact, incidents and welfare concerns where applicable, with the exception of walkthroughs. Records MUST additionally be kept of any incidents or welfare concerns from walkthroughs;
- Appropriate measures MUST be in place based on case-specific risk assessment to prevent members of the public causing harm or fear to animals in close contact situations. Supervision for Cat 1 and Cat 2 animals in walkthroughs is essential (as required by the SMZPGB).

- MUST ensure that staff and volunteers supervising close contact are trained and competent to recognise negative welfare states and potential hazardous situations, and empowered to take appropriate action.
- MUST ensure that travel times to outreach events with live animals are kept to a minimum, and that transport containers are appropriate and sized for each individual and the animals are adequately habituated to them, including ensuring correct parameters such as temperature, humidity etc. are maintained whilst in transit and exhibition;
- MUST take appropriate precautions (e.g. adequate hand-washing facilities with clear instructions where appropriate) to prevent zoonotic disease transfer;
- MUST ensure that the message of each close contact situation is documented and linked to education and public engagement and is not purely for entertainment/income generation, and that all staff and volunteers participating are provided training on such messaging;
- MUST not permit surgical procedures solely in order to render them safe for handling (e.g. removal of stings, musk glands, venom glands or fangs etc.);
- MUST ensure no unnecessary hand-rearing of animals takes place solely for the purpose of close contact encounters/interactions; where hand-rearing of animals for close contact does occur, there must be a net welfare benefit and the justification for this MUST be recorded on the individual's record and made available on request. This applies from the date of the introduction of this version of this policy. Any animals hand-reared before this date and used for close contact are classed as historic and not impacted by the policy.
- Animals imported from elsewhere which were hand-reared after the publication of this version of this policy are still subject to the above requirements regarding close contact encounters/interactions, including justification where applicable.
- MUST ensure that when EAZA *ex-situ* management programme animals participate in close contact situations, this does not impact on breeding programme recommendations;

Legislative References

BALAI Directive (1992)

CITES import and export regulations (2018)

COSHH Regulations (1994)

Irish Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (Dept of Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht, 2016)

Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations (2007), The equivalent in Wales and the Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations (2007)

Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice (Defra, 2012)

Welfare of Animals Act (Transport) (2006)

Zoo Licensing Act (1981) and any relevant local authority guidelines

Additional guidance documents

[Access to Farms Industry Code of Practice: "Preventing or Controlling Ill Health from Animal Contact at Visitor Attractions"](#)

Appendix 1 – Colleges and Educational Institutions using animals for animal management teaching

Some full BIAZA member organisations are primarily educational institutions for students learning the skills and knowledge necessary for good animal management practices. Many of these learning opportunities may involve close contact with animals including practical animal handling lessons and carrying out all elements of animal care. While it is acknowledged that this is different to close contact visitor experiences, with student keepers not being visitors, students are also not staff and it is important that the close contact policy is still be followed and animal welfare during student close contact is carefully assessed.

It is not necessary to conduct a full BIAZA VAE document for each session/lesson, only for each type of event (e.g. snake handling, enclosure cleaning). The BIAZA VAE consists of two parts: A – an animal welfare risk assessment, reviewed annually & B – behavioural observations. It is encouraged that students be trained to carry out part B so they can support completion under supervision while developing their welfare assessment skills.

Equivalent welfare assessments can alternatively be used as long as they allow the member to demonstrate written evidence of ethical and welfare assessment of any activities involving live animals as part of student learning. Examples of this can include, but are not limited to:

- Completing BIAZA VAE documents for each general close contact activity
- Ethical review of handleability and educational purpose of species used
- Clear process of ongoing welfare assessment of individual animals that considers the specific welfare implications potentially associated with the activity
- Clear written protocol for record keeping around animal handling including best practice, rest periods and communicating welfare concerns

The member must be able to provide evidence of how they ensure animal welfare is assessed, monitored and any concerns raised are mitigated in relation to animal use in educational activities as part of their accreditation screening.

These members are still required to follow the BIAZA close contact policy, including conducting VAE assessments, for any visitor close contact they offer.