

# New Employment qualification used by Edinburgh Zoo



More than 1500 Scottish businesses have backed a new qualification aimed at tackling youth unemployment.

The Certificate of Work Readiness was launched a year ago to help young people prove they are ready for work – as they only receive the qualification after passing an on-the-job assessment by an employer.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) – the charity that runs Edinburgh Zoo and the Highland Wildlife Park – is the latest business to support the Certificate and has adapted its work experience programme to meet the criteria for the qualification.

The first recruits start their training at the Zoo on Monday and met with the Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment on the first anniversary of the launch of the Certificate of Work Readiness.

Alaina Macri, Senior Education Officer at Edinburgh Zoo, explained: "The Zoo is a fantastic environment for young people to be introduced to the world of work.

"Although Edinburgh Zoo is normally associated with animal care roles, we also have numerous areas of the business – from education to gardens, visitor services to marketing – these all offer great learning opportunities. With this in mind we developed the ZEST (Zoo & Environment Skills Training) programme to give people training an insight into the various industries and job roles within the Zoo."

Investment management company, Baillie Gifford soon backed the ZEST programme and due to its success, agreed to extend funding to support an enhanced version of the training experience and the Certificate of Work Readiness.

Alaina added: “In addition to our existing programme, we are now able to offer ZEST CWR, opening up the Zoo to young people not in education, employment or training, rather than school pupils. We had heard about the Certificate of Work Readiness when it launched and are now delighted to be able to include it in RZSS’s education offering.”

Stephen Woollard, Head of Discovery and Learning for RZSS added: “We are delighted to not only give people valuable work experience at Edinburgh Zoo, but to help them achieve a qualification that they can take with them to show other employers they have the foundation skills needed for the workplace.”

The adapted ZEST programme is offering six placements at Edinburgh Zoo, as well as two places at the Highland Wildlife Park. All participants will have the opportunity to achieve the SQA Certificate of Work Readiness.

Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women’s Employment, said: “It is great to see Edinburgh Zoo, one of Scotland’s most iconic tourist destinations, supporting the long-term career ambitions of young people by developing their own Certificate of Work Readiness model.

“As an employer with a huge variety of positions, the Zoo is a fantastic environment for young people to learn in. Adopting the Certificate of Work Readiness shows organisations are committed to offering high quality training and work experience which benefits future prospective employers, our economy and of course the trainees themselves.

“We will continue to do everything in our power to support employment and training opportunities for young people. The

certificate is an integral part of our unique commitment of an offer of a place in education and training for 16 to 19 years olds through our Opportunities for All commitment and by creating 30,000 Modern Apprenticeships every year.”

Michelle Gibson, Project Manager of the Certificate of Work Readiness at SDS, added: “When we launched the Certificate of Work Readiness a year ago, it was in response to the age old complaint of the business community that those starting their career do not have work experience.

“Our ambition was for employers to embrace this qualification but the response from business has surpassed expectations. It speaks volumes that over 1500 employers have offered work placements and assessments, and it is heartening to see Edinburgh Zoo take the qualification ‘off the shelf’ and deliver a tailored version within their existing training programme.

“The Certificate is not only giving employers the tool they asked for to eliminate questions around new recruits being ‘job-ready’, it’s also helping young people move in to employment and that, in turn, is vital for our economy.”