

The Minsters comments

We welcome the statement from the minister that 'I do not condone the teaching of creationism and the Curriculum should not be used as a vehicle or seen as a route for its promotion' and that 'I do not endorse the teaching of creationism as a factual or scientific explanation of the origin of life' and his encouragement to schools to teach students through 'evidence, robust debate and critical thinking.'

It is clear that Noah's Ark Zoo Farm is in direct contradiction to the Curriculum, as shown in its mission statement: 'To build a place where people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds can come and learn the wonders of Creation through fun, adventure and scientific discovery....'

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279090/NAZF_Business_Plan_2014.pdf (accessed 18/11/2014). There is a great deal of other information available from the Farm's website and other sources that show that NAZF presents Creationism as opposed to valid scientific theory throughout we refer to some below.

We recognise, as the minister says, that schools have the freedom 'to organise and deliver the curriculum in the way that best suits their circumstances and needs', and we are sure that schools understand their responsibility to carry out risk assessments and have confidence in our own children's school and others to undertake this. However, it is clear from our experience, and from the experience of parents with children in other primary schools in Wales gained from the process of developing this petition, that busy teachers, giving in many cases their own free time to research venues for school trips, can be unaware of the implications on the curriculum of visiting NAZF. We are aware of many parents at other schools who only found out about the issues of the zoo when discussing with their children after a visit, and others who, while unhappy with their school's proposed trip were not given the time, or the opportunity to complain.

The Minister for Education and Skills has made it clear in his statement that the selection of venues for education visits is in the remit of Local

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Authorities and consortia but also that there is an expectation from the Welsh Government that this process is conducted rigorously and in line with the curriculum, making explicit that teaching creationism should not be part of that curriculum. Our concern is that information is not sufficiently available to schools to make informed decisions. It is clear from our experience, and from the number of different schools represented on this petition, that teachers are unaware of the issues around this zoo.

We ask that an appropriate department issues a briefing note restating the need to teach evidence based scientific curriculum appropriate to all ages, to draw attention to the underlying dispute between NAFZ and our current scientific understanding of creationism and evolution and to encourage schools to consider this during any planning phase and prior to confirming a booking.

Background

The petition submitted followed a particular experience in a Cardiff primary school where confusion and upset was caused by the booking of a school trip to the site to continue the learning on the curriculum on the theme of animals. Following parents raising concerns about the nature of the zoo the school opted to look elsewhere.

Information about the Zoo

This zoo is created on a basis of a young earth theory commonly known as creationism. Their mission is reproduced in the literature and signage of the park and is in contradiction to education policy.

Information on the website

The Zoo's website presents on first glance like any bright child friendly educational destination. It is no surprise then that at first people may not identify the mission of the zoo. By following the *about us* link from the main page the mission, or theme, of the zoo is set out. This section encourages a discussion on evolution and creationism and offers what they describe as a 'new approach to looking at the natural world.' The zoo offers a view that the date of the earth is 'much younger than 4.5 billion years'. Following the

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pages it is made clear that the zoo is arguing that the ark story is evidenced in the geological record and offer statements such as:

'Through ongoing research, a current estimate proposes that all mammals, living and extinct, can be grouped into fewer than 50 original kinds. As we are still getting to grips with the amazing capacity of species to change form as they diversify and evolve, the actual number is likely to have been even smaller. Similarly there may have been fewer than 20 original kinds of bird and 20 kinds of reptile.'

<http://www.noahsarkzooofarm.co.uk/pages/about-us/earth-history/constructing-the-ark.php>

The site makes it clear that their views contest received scientific understanding noting that 'The [Darwinian](#) view offers a different framework.'

<http://www.noahsarkzooofarm.co.uk/pages/about-us/earth-history/evolution.php>

Readers are encouraged to follow this up to linked sites with a more detailed critique of evolution. The culmination of this set of pages leads to text including the following:

If, after honest inquiry, you find that you cannot explain such things as made by the world itself, it may then be reasonable to ask whether there is a Creator. <http://www.noahsarkzooofarm.co.uk/pages/about-us/earth-history/what-really-happened.php>

In an interview in 2006 the owner is reported to have said:

From the outside, our farm is not overtly Christian. But, from the inside, we are very strongly Christian. I am a Creationist, and we see the farm as a mission station to give people scientific permission to believe in God.

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2006/5-may/features/interview-anthony-bush-co-founder-of->

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[noah%E2%80%99s-ark-zoo-farm-and-former-general-synod-member](#)
accessed 18/11/2014

Public information boards on the site

It is evident that the Zoo aims to challenge evolution. Their mission is reflected within the communication boards and signage at the zoo. Images of the signs with and explanation of how they are distributed throughout the site can be found on the humanist website:

<http://blog.newhumanist.org.uk/2010/08/noahs-ark-redux-counter-educational.html>. To quote the signs include

'Eating meat was allowed after the Flood" but "Before this most people might have been veggies', and that "All the people in the world come from Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. Caucasian from Japheth, Semitic from Shem, and Negroid/Mongoloid/Redskin from Ham.'

The public information boards are discussed in a review of the zoo by Dr Alice Roberts Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University of Birmingham who observed posters in 2013 that stated :

All in all, bacteria do not look as if they were the products of chance. They look as if they have been designed... Why has science closed its mind to the possibility that life was created?" asked one.

Another one presented "30 reasons why apes are not related to man'. She notes that these posters are ' clustered by the picnic tables in the indoor play park - somewhere all the children are almost guaranteed to visit.' <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/08/wont-go-back-to-creationist-zoo-bristol> accessed 18/11/2014

Christianity and scientific evidence

We would like to note clearly here that our views on this zoo are not related to Christianity in any way. We feel it is important to note that the views given at NAZF are completely misrepresentative of mainstream Christianity in that the Anglican and Catholic faiths agree with evolutionary theory, as well as being misrepresentative of more minority established Christian faiths who

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have rather different versions of creationism. This raises more issues for faith schools in terms of visits to NAZF. The views presented on the Church of England website on this point can be found on this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/medical-ethics-health-social-care-policy/darwin/malcolmbrown.aspx>

Animal Welfare

Another issue raised in the petition is animal welfare. The Daily Mail raised a series of concerns in their expose piece of

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1221493/Zoo-skinned-dead-tiger-Tira-stored-head-freezer.html>. Whilst we are not in a position to

comment on the voracity of this article many of the claims are reinforced by this BBC investigation

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/somerset/8391779.stmn> which relate

to inappropriate relationships with circuses and animal welfare issues

including the disposal of dead animals. The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) is the professional organization representing

the zoo and aquarium community in Britain and Ireland. In 2009 the zoo was expelled from the body due to a breakdown of trust. "

"The reasons for termination are due to a refusal to provide BIAZA with information when requested and entering into an arrangement with the Great British Circus, which contravenes the Animal Transaction Policy, despite having been warned of possible consequences.

"Council believes that the behaviour of NAZF has brought the association into disrepute and that there has been a breakdown of trust between BIAZA and NAZF, and this has unfortunately resulted in a parting of the ways." <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/Noah-s-Ark-Zoo-Farm-stripped-BIAZA-membership/story-11285228-detail/story.html#ixzz3JSm5FLZa>

Whilst we would not necessarily suggest that schools should only visit sites registered by lead bodies, a lack of membership would add an additional risk assessment burden as those aspects that the lead body audits as part of

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their professional membership cannot be externally validated, in the case of BIAZA who ensure that:

Member collections must undertake significant work in the field of animal welfare, conservation, education and research. Members must follow and comply with the [Memorandum and Articles of Association](#) (pdf) and Codes of Practice of the Association. All members must adhere to the [Animal Transaction Policy](#) (pdf), which ensures that all animal movements conform to the highest ethical and welfare standards. <http://www.biaza.org.uk/biaza-membership/>

To conclude we hope that the Petitions committee are able to recommend that the Welsh Government pass on this information and advice.

Your sincerely,

Jane Henderson and Ashley Harris on behalf a large group of concerned parents