

5 Implementing an education programme

5.1 Planning the programme

The success of any educational approach depends on good planning but this does not mean that education officers must follow the programme rigidly. The programme needs to be flexible enough to allow students to be creative. Remember learning is fun!

The model on page 12 provides a guideline as to how a programme can be planned, promoted, organised and evaluated.

5.2 Making educational resources available

Educational resources that could be made available to visiting groups and schools include:

- classroom space
- a library of books, slides or videos
- scientific or gardening equipment
- educational packs and materials (E.g. leaflets, interpretative signs).
- staff able to offer help or guidance to visitors

Facilities that can be made available need not depend totally on finance. Even simple facilities such as an area set aside for schools to use for lessons will be appreciated.

5.3 Outreach programmes

Distance, financial constraints, and a host of other factors may mean that certain schools and organisations are unable to visit the botanic garden. Whether or not this is the case the garden may decide to develop an outreach programme that will fit in with the overall education plan. Careful consideration needs to be given to the number of garden staff required to run an outreach programme, and how much time the programme would take up. There may be other equally effective ways of reaching the wider community, such as increased publicity or teacher training programmes.

5.4 Evaluation of education programmes

Education programmes need to be evaluated. Everyone involved in the programme, from the participants to the organisers, should be offered the opportunity to evaluate it. Various evaluation methods can be used. These include:

- written evaluation sheets completed by visitors
- interviews with visitors
- observations of how well learners complete the tasks and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired
- post-visit evaluation. For example teachers could be asked to send samples of students' work pertaining to their visit.

A good evaluation will provide information about how well target audiences are being reached and how effective education programmes are. Evaluations are essential for deciding how a programme can be developed.

5.5 Training and support for education officers

Educators themselves need regular training. The type of training an education officer needs will depend on the audiences he or she works with and the messages he or she is trying to get across.

Education officers may benefit from training in:

- educational approaches and methods
- new techniques in conservation and how they can be applied to botanic gardens.
- management skills

Not every garden will be able to afford formal training courses run by colleges, schools and universities for their educators but less formal methods are also worth considering.

It may be possible to set up exchanges with other botanic gardens, arrange for education staff to attend national and international education congresses and encourage them to share ideas and experiences with educators from other gardens.

One educator working alone in a botanic garden can feel isolated. Education officers need to integrate themselves fully into the staff structure of a botanic garden and play a central role in the decision-making processes. It is vital that the garden fully supports and endorses the efforts and actions of its education staff as part of a total garden-based strategy.

Planning the programme

