Animal Training Instructor

Overview

These standards apply to those individuals who work directly with animals, provide training to those animals, teach clients/handlers how to train animals as well as providing instruction to Animal Trainers ("Animal Training Instructor"). This may involve general training or training the animal to undertake defined and specific tasks.

The standards cover the Animal Training Instructor's interactions with the animal as well as their encouragement and reinforcement of desirable behaviours, their development of training plans, and ongoing evaluation of the training and outcomes to ensure that the training plan continues to be appropriate for the individual animal's needs.

Standards

The Animal Training Instructor shall:

1. Demonstrate positive examples of human interaction, through appropriate social skills, including verbal and nonverbal communication.
2. Comply with current animal welfare legislation, health and safety guidelines and other applicable legislation at all times.
3. Ensure all interactions with animals are in a manner that reinforces desirable behavioural patterns and avoids creating undesirable behavioural patterns.
4. Assess the needs of the animals under their care and adequately provide for those needs.
5. Interact and apply humane training techniques with the animal in a manner that minimises stress and allows training to be carried out safely.
6. Obtain and interpret relevant background information (where available) on the animal from the appropriate sources, including but not limited to:

   ➢ life history
   ➢ physical capabilities
   ➢ age
   ➢ health
   ➢ diet
   ➢ sexual status
   ➢ training history
   ➢ temperament/characteristics
   ➢ breed and parentage
   ➢ medical history
   ➢ motivational drivers and effects.

7. Devise and implement a training plan for an animal that identifies and sets realistic goals for monitoring of progress and assessment of success.
8. Assess the potential welfare consequences of the training plan for the animal.
9. Monitor and evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of the training plan and revise accordingly if needed.
10. Train an animal to do each exercise appropriate to the level/discipline/duties required of the animal, considering the animal's breed, type and physical capabilities. As part of this the Animal Training Instructor shall know and understand:

   a) The natural behaviour patterns, body language and communication methods of the animal.
   b) The suitability, application, welfare, and ethical considerations of training techniques for the species' and animals' physical and mental capabilities.
   c) How training will impact on animal welfare and how to analyse whether it is in the best interests of the animal involved.
   d) How to assess when training might not be appropriate.
   e) The process of establishing measurable goals and objectives for the training of animals.
   f) How to formulate training plans based on the objectives agreed between trainer and client and available resources.
   g) The factors which may affect the progress and success of training.
   h) Learning theory including operant conditioning, its use, effects, and practical application, including the differences between positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment.
   i) The practical effects and consequences of classical conditioning on animal learning and behaviour.
   j) Schedules of reinforcement and how they can be used to establish and maintain desired behaviour.
   k) The need to guard against unintentional classical and operant conditioning creating undesirable behaviour.
   l) How behaviour can be extinguished by the removal of reinforcement and the principle of spontaneous recovery.
   m) The importance of reviewing and revising a training plan to meet the objectives.

11. Recognise their own limitations and seek qualified professional advice (e.g. Animal Behaviour Consultant, Veterinarian) as necessary.
12. Recognise stress/distress in a client and know ways of reducing it.
13. Recognise when a class* situation is not the best option for an animal and be able to suggest more appropriate methods for learning.
14. Identify the information and knowledge that people in a class* session need and why they need it. As part of this, the Animal Training Instructor shall know and understand:

   a) What motivates people generally and individually.
   b) How to adapt exercises to the physical limitations/constraints of the individual person.
   c) How to identify people's reasons and motivations for seeking professional training services.

d) How to establish peoples' preferred communication media, styles, timing and pace.

e) How to take action to minimise any interference or disruption to communication.

15. Use a variety of techniques to gain and maintain people's attention and interest and to help them retain information and knowledge.

16. Communicate clearly, concisely, and accurately in ways that help people to understand the information and knowledge being communicated and its relevance to them.

17. Adjust and fine-tune communication in response to both verbal and non-verbal feedback.

18. State the level of confidence that can be placed on the information and knowledge being communicated, i.e. whether it is based on rigorously-researched evidence, widely-accepted facts or personal opinions.

19. Jargon, technical terms or abbreviations should be kept to a minimum, but where they need to be used, they should be explained carefully to avoid any confusion as to their meaning.

20. Ensure the client understands their role in the delivery of the training programme and maintaining the desired behaviour once it is achieved.

*Class – in this context 'class' means a person or persons with the animals they are responsible for. This can take place in any venue (e.g. home, hall, equestrian centre, outside venue at which such activities are allowed and required or requested).