MSc in Aquatic Resource Development from Stirling: Learning at a distance in Bangladesh

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The programme

The 25 year history of collaboration between the Institute and Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), which was celebrated last year 2004 in October, has received a fresh impulse with the start of a new MSc programme on Aquatic Resource Development through distance learning.

Delivery by distance learning is not a second best option but rather the only viable option to meet the major objectives of the course. The course, probably unique in its kind both in the UK and Bangladesh, is a hybrid approach of a web-based learning environment together with practical components such as analytical kits, face-to-face tutorials, text and CD materials, and summer schools. Each student receives, as part of their study materials, not only a laptop on loan but also a complete water quality test kit and monocular microscope and disease diagnostic materials and a digital camera are part of the course package. The WebCT based course delivery system offers a protected learning environment, i.e. a 'virtual classroom' to which only the participating students and tutors responsible for the day-to-day running of the course have access. The system allows remote facilitation and tutoring on a one-to-one basis or in groups.

The first batch

Students familiarising themselves with water quality kits during the orientation week

On 12th of March this year BAU's Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr M. Aminul Islam, Dean Faculty of Fisheries, Prof. M. Jahiruddin Miah and Director of British Council Bangladesh, Dr June Rollinson inaugurated the programme at BAU.

So far we are half way through the first year and the students are enjoying their course. They are communicating well with their tutors at BAU (lead by the five main tutors Dr Mostafa Ali Reza Hossain, Dr Md. Ali Reza Faruk, Dr Md. Abdus Salam, Dr Nesar Ahmed and Dr Zoarder Faruque Ahmed) and the coordinators and teachers in Stirling.

Each tutor at BAU supports five students, carefully monitoring progression and welfare of each student on the course. The students also have opportunities for face-to-face guidance through tutorials with the BAU tutors, who take responsibilities as tutor on the various course topics as subject matter specialists. Year one final examinations will be held at BAU in March 2006.

Our students reflect a broad range of backgrounds and organisations. Currently we have students from various NGO's for example Md. Alamgir from Caritas Bangladesh who proudly reported through the on-line mailing system; "I would like to share our joy and happiness with all of my tutors and batch mates that Caritas has been awarded the first prize (Gold Medal) in the field of extension of fisheries development all over the country especially among the rural poor". This reflects the feeling of group unity we aim to achieve on this course. At the end of the orientation week another student, Mr. Krishnendu Saha, said "this has changed my life!" Well, that's the positive change we hope to offer, but there is a lot of hard work ahead to achieve it.