Dolphin Diploma Quiz
Answers and notes

1. Species diversity (correct answer is ‘d’)

There are over 30 species of dolphins around the world, with great characteristic variation between them. Irrawaddy dolphins are similar in size to common dolphins but they have no obvious beak. This is not unusual within the dolphin family. Although many species do have a prominent beak, there are a similar number that don’t (including Risso’s dolphins, dusky dolphins and Hector’s dolphins).

2. Communication (correct answers are ‘a’ and ‘c’)

Dolphins live in a world dominated by sound, which travels better than light underwater. Although most dolphins have good vision, they can’t always rely on sight because life underwater can be dark (unlike humans they can’t turn lights on at night or at depth!) and visibility in seas and rivers can be poor. So, vocal communication is very important to them.

Although they don’t have vocal cords, dolphins can produce a range of calls, which might include greeting and warning calls. The variety of noises they make include whistles, barks, squeaks, clicks, croaks and grunts.

They also use body language to signal to one another, including slapping the water, clapping their jaws, and twisting their bodies.

3. Threats (correct answer is ‘c’)

Dolphins face a number of man-made threats ranging from hunting to capture for display in marine parks to prey-depletion to pollution to bycatch (incidental capture in fishing nets).

Of the multiple choice options, the loss and degradation of their habitat is a significant problem faced by a wide range of dolphin species across the globe. Pollution (chemical, noise and litter), the building of docks, dams and marinas, and other industry development can change habitats to such an extent that dolphins may no longer be able to survive there.

Although climate change is likely to negatively affect dolphins, they don’t need to drink like we do. Their main prey (fish and squid), contains large amounts of water and so dolphins gain water from their food. In addition, dolphins don’t actually need to take in very much fluid because, unlike us, they don’t lose water by sweating.

4. Bycatch (correct answer is ‘b’)

Although dolphins look very similar to large fish (especially sharks), they are, in fact, mammals. So, like all mammals, they have lungs with which to breathe air and cannot breathe underwater.

At the surface of the water, a dolphin will open the blowhole on top of its head to breathe through. But, if trapped underwater by a net, the blowhole will remain shut and the dolphin will suffocate.
5. Protecting dolphins (correct answers are ‘a’, ‘b’ and ‘c’)

Campaigning is an important part of conservation, and a successful campaign is often made up of a number of elements.

Research is vital to discover which dolphin species and populations may be under threat and what those threats are. Armed with this knowledge, we are in a better position to tackle issues and lobby for better conservation laws and regulations.

Influencing governments to better protect dolphins obviously requires dialogue with relevant decision makers, so a campaign will usually involve the lobbying of politicians and authorities.

And public support for an issue no doubt helps to influence authority. So awareness raising activities such as the organisation of special events and other publicity are also vital.