

# BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control

## Executive Summary

The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) was introduced in the UK following a series of serious, and in some cases fatal, dog attacks on humans. Its stated aim is to:

*“prohibit persons from having in their possession or custody dogs belonging to types bred for fighting [...] to enable restrictions to be imposed in relation to other types of dog which present a serious danger to the public; to make further provision for securing that dogs are kept under proper control; and for connected purposes.”<sup>1</sup>*

However, the breed-specific legislation contained within the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) does not represent an evidence-based approach to dog control and we consider that the Act more widely has been ineffective in delivering its stated aims.

A review five years after the implementation of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) found no significant reduction in dog bites.<sup>2</sup> Since then, hospital admissions for dog bites and strikes in England have increased steadily. A study<sup>3</sup> published in 2021 also found that the incidence of dog bites in children had remained consistently high from 1989-2018.

All dogs, whatever their breed type or size, are capable of showing aggression. It is important to recognise that multiple factors can influence the development of canine aggression and dog bite incidents, including a dog's socialisation,<sup>4,5</sup> rearing and training,<sup>6,7,8,9,10</sup> environmental circumstances

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents>

<sup>2</sup> Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A. Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department. *Injury*. 1996 Mar;27(2):89-91. doi: 10.1016/0020-1383(96)83411-5. PMID: 8730379.

<sup>3</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2021-22>

<sup>4</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/hospital-episode-statistics-admitted-patient-care-england-2000-01>

<sup>5</sup> Tulloch, J.S.P., Owczarczak-Garstecka, S.C., Fleming, K.M. et al. (2021) English hospital episode data analysis (1998–2018) reveal that the rise in dog bite hospital admissions is driven by adult cases. *Sci Rep* 11, 1767

<sup>6</sup> Serpell, J. and Jagoe, J. (1995). Early experience and the development of behaviour In: J Serpell (eds) *The domestic dog: Its evolution, behaviour and interaction with people*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 79-102.

<sup>7</sup> Appleby, D. L., Bradshaw, J. W. S. & Casey, R. A. (2002) The relationship between problematic canine aggression and avoidance behaviour, and experience in the first six months of life. *Veterinary Record*, 150, 434-438.

<sup>8</sup> Schöning, B. and Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2005). A behavioural test of aggression for adult dogs. *Proceedings of the 37th International DVG Meeting of Applied Ethology, Aktuelle Arbeiten zur Artgemeassen Tierhaltung 2005*, KTBL-Schrift 441. KTBL: Darmstadt, pp. 103-114.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, P.C. and Rohf, V.I. (2007). Owner-companion dog interactions: relationships between demographic variables and potentially problematic behaviours, training engagement and shared activities. *AABS* 102, 65-84.

<sup>10</sup> Blackwell, E.J., Twells, C., Seawright, A. and Casey, R.A. (2008). The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behaviour problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*.

<sup>11</sup> Herron, M.E., Schofer, F.S., and Resiner, I.R., (2009). Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 117, 47-54.

<sup>12</sup> Hiby EF, Rooney NJ and Bradshaw JWS (2004). Dog training methods: Their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Animal Welfare* 13, 63-69

<sup>11,12,13</sup> neutering<sup>14</sup> and human-associated risk factors. <sup>15,16,17,18,19,20</sup> Canine aggression and dog bite incidents should therefore be considered as complex public health and social issues, which require multifactorial prevention strategies.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the potential adverse impact on animal welfare resulting from interventions perceived to address aggressive tendencies need to be considered.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, the UK governments should prioritise an evidence-based 'deed-not-breed' approach to dog control.

## Summary of recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) should be repealed and the UK governments should prioritise an evidence-based 'deed-not-breed' approach to dog control.**

**Recommendation 2: Once Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) is repealed, the UK Governments should ringfence and redirect resources that would have been used to enforce breed-specific legislation towards:**

- **The effective enforcement of individual pieces of dog control legislation;**
- **Provision of appropriate training in dog behaviour for enforcement officers; and**
- **The central collection of data on how these powers are being used to permit ongoing assessment of their effectiveness**

**Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to consolidating the separate pieces of dog control legislation across the UK to simplify enforcement for local authorities, clarify responsibilities for dog owners, and ensure that there are targeted dog control provisions (eg. Dog Control Notices) in legislation.**

**Recommendation 4: A centralised database should be established to collect data on the context and severity of all dog bite incidents that result in medical treatment. This would ideally be part of more general recording of all incidents where dogs are out of control and pose a threat to public health and safety.**

**Recommendation 5: There should be further research into human and dog-associated risk factors for canine aggression.**

**Recommendation 6: In collaboration with the veterinary profession, animal welfare organisations and dog behaviour experts, the UK governments should develop a nationwide education initiative and awareness campaign to promote safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership across all age groups which is built around human behaviour change principles.**

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<sup>11</sup> Appleby, D. L., Bradshaw, J. W. S. & Casey, R. A. (2002) The relationship between problematic canine aggression and avoidance behaviour, and experience in the first six months of life. *Veterinary Record*, 150, 434-438.

<sup>12</sup> Ozanne-Smith, J., Asby, K. and Stathakis, V. (2001). Dog bite and injury prevention: analysis, critical review, and research agenda. *Injury Prevention*, 7, 321-326.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick, G. and O'Rourke, K. (1998). Dog and cat bites: epidemiological analyses suggest different prevention strategies. *Public Health Reports*, 113, 252-257.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.veterinary-practice.com/article/effects-of-neutering-on-undesirable-behaviours-in-dogs>

<sup>15</sup> Rosado, B., García-Belenguer, S., León, M. and Palacio, J. (2009). A comprehensive study of dog bites in Spain, 1995-2004. *The Veterinary Journal*, 179, 383-391.

<sup>16</sup> Cornelissen, J.M.R. and Hopster, H. (2009). Dog bites in the Netherlands: A study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation. *The Veterinary Journal*, doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2009.10.001

<sup>17</sup> Cullinan, P., Blackwell, E.J. and Casey, R.A. (2004). The relationship between owner consistency and 'problem' behaviours in dogs. *Proceedings of the European Society for Veterinary Clinical Ethology*, Cremona, Italy.

<sup>18</sup> Reisner, I.R., Shofer, F.S. and Nance, M.L. (2007). Behavioral assessment of child-directed canine aggression. *Injury Prevention*, 13, 348-351.

<sup>19</sup> Bernado, L.M., Gardner, M.J., O'Connor, J. and Amon, N. (2000). Dog bites in children treated in a paediatric emergency department. *Journal of the Society of Paediatric Nurses*, 5 (2), 87-95.

<sup>20</sup> Kahn, A., Bauche, P., and Lamoureux, J. (2003). Child victims of dog bites treated in emergency departments. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 162, 254-258.

<sup>21</sup> Orritt, R. (2015) Dog bites: a complex public health issue. *Veterinary Record* 176, 640-641.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2020.00388/full>

**Recommendation 7: The UK Governments should place particular emphasis on developing interventions based on human behaviour change principles which are aimed at promoting safe dog-child interactions including:**

- **Building on animal welfare in the national curriculum alongside education about understanding dog behaviour; and**
- **Undertaking a systems analysis of stakeholders to identify interactions and possible interventions to positively impact on human behaviour change relating to dog behaviour and aggression. This is likely to include both children and their carers to promote safe dog-child interactions.**

## Introduction

The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) was introduced in the UK following a series of serious, and in some cases fatal, dog attacks on humans. Its stated aim is to:

“prohibit persons from having in their possession or custody dogs belonging to types bred for fighting [...] to enable restrictions to be imposed in relation to other types of dog which present a serious danger to the public; to make further provision for securing that dogs are kept under proper control; and for connected purposes.”<sup>23</sup>

However, the breed-specific legislation (BSL) contained within the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) does not represent an evidence-based approach to dog control and distracts from the real issues behind dog control and dog related injuries. We consider that the Act has been ineffective in delivering its stated aims.

A review five years after the implementation of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) found no significant reduction in dog bites.<sup>24</sup> Since then, hospital admissions for dog bites and strikes in England have increased steadily from 3,377 in 2000-01 to 8,758 in 2021-22, an increase of 159%<sup>25,26</sup>. It should be noted that there has been a significant increase in the dog population over the same period. Data is only available from 2011, but since then the UK population is estimated to have grown from 8.3 to 11 million in 2023<sup>27</sup>.

All dogs, whatever their breed type or size, are capable of showing ‘aggression’. It is important to recognise that multiple factors can contribute to the development of canine aggression and dog bite incidents, including a dog’s socialisation,<sup>28,29</sup> rearing and training,<sup>30,31,32,33,34</sup> environmental

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents>

<sup>24</sup> Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A (1996) Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department. *Injury*. Mar;27(2):89-91.

<sup>25</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2021-22>

<sup>26</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/hospital-episode-statistics-admitted-patient-care-england-2000-01>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report/uk-pet-populations-of-dogs-cats-and-rabbits#:~:text=Our%202023%20findings%20showed%20that,of%2011%20million%20pet%20cats>

<sup>28</sup> Serpell, J. and Jagoe, J. (1995). Early experience and the development of behaviour. In: J Serpell (eds) *The domestic dog: Its evolution, behaviour and interaction with people*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 79-102.

<sup>29</sup> Appleby, D. L., Bradshaw, J. W. S. & Casey, R. A. (2002) The relationship between problematic canine aggression and avoidance behaviour, and experience in the first six months of life. *Veterinary Record*, 150, 434-438.

<sup>30</sup> Schöning, B. and Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2005). A behavioural test of aggression for adult dogs. *Proceedings of the 37th International DVG Meeting of Applied Ethology, Aktuelle Arbeiten zur Artgemeassen Tierhaltung 2005*, KTBL-Schrift 441. KTBL: Darmstadt, pp. 103-114.

<sup>31</sup> Bennett, P.C. and Rohf, V.I. (2007). Owner-companion dog interactions: relationships between demographic variables and potentially problematic behaviours, training engagement and shared activities. *AABS* 102, 65-84.

<sup>32</sup> Blackwell, E.J., Twells, C., Seawright, A. and Casey, R.A. (2008). The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behaviour problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*.

<sup>33</sup> Herron, M.E., Schofer, F.S., and Resiner, I.R., (2009). Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors. *Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci.* 117, 47-54.

<sup>34</sup> Hiby EF, Rooney NJ and Bradshaw JWS (2004). Dog training methods: Their use, effectiveness and interaction with behaviour and welfare. *Animal Welfare* 13, 63-69

## BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control

circumstances<sup>35,36,37</sup> neutering<sup>38</sup> and human-associated risk factors.<sup>39,40,41,42,43,44</sup> The display of 'aggressive' behaviour that leads to dog bite incidents should therefore be considered as complex public health and social issues, which require multifactorial prevention strategies.<sup>45</sup>

Consequently, BVA believes that the UK governments should prioritise an evidence-based 'deed-not-breed' approach to dog control. This can be achieved through:

- Repealing and replacing Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991);
- Consolidation of existing dog control legislation;
- Adequate resourcing to allow for effective enforcement of existing dog control legislation;
- Establishing a centralised dog bite incident database that would be part of a more comprehensive database which records all incidents where dogs are out of control and pose a threat to public health and safety. The collected data should be used to commission additional research to inform future strategy; and
- Promoting safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership through education and campaign programmes based on human behaviour change science principles.

## The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991)

**Section 1** of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) prohibits the possession, ownership, breeding, sale, exchange or transfer, advertising or gifting of certain of dogs 'belonging to types bred for fighting', including:

- Pit Bull Terrier;
- Japanese Tosa;
- Dogo Argentino; and
- Fila Brasileiro

When authorities suspect that a dog is of a prohibited breed type, they may seize the dog and place it in a police-appointed kennel until it is examined by a Dog Legislation Officer (DLO) to determine the dog's breed type.

DLOs have extensive expertise in UK dog control legislation, and experience in identifying prohibited breed types. Results of a Freedom of Information request in 2016 highlighted that almost 5,000 dogs suspected of being banned breeds were seized by police in England and Wales in the three-year period between 2013-2016<sup>46</sup> Data provided in 2021 by 29 out of 45 police forces in England and Wales indicated that since 2019 at least 5,333 dogs had been seized by police under the Dangerous

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<sup>35</sup> Appleby, D. L., Bradshaw, J. W. S. & Casey, R. A. (2002) The relationship between problematic canine aggression and avoidance behaviour, and experience in the first six months of life. *Veterinary Record*, 150, 434-438.

<sup>36</sup> Ozanne-Smith, J., Asby, K. and Stathakis, V. (2001). Dog bite and injury prevention: analysis, critical review, and research agenda. *Injury Prevention*, 7, 321-326.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick, G. and O'Rourke, K. (1998). Dog and cat bites: epidemiological analyses suggest different prevention strategies. *Public Health Reports*, 113, 252-257.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.veterinary-practice.com/article/effects-of-neutering-on-undesirable-behaviours-in-dogs>

<sup>39</sup> Rosado, B., Garcia-Belenguer, S., León, M. and Palacio, J. (2009). A comprehensive study of dog bites in Spain, 1995-2004. *The Veterinary Journal*, 179, 383-391.

<sup>40</sup> Cornelissen, J.M.R. and Hopster, H. (2009). Dog bites in the Netherlands: A study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation. *The Veterinary Journal*

<sup>41</sup> Cullinan, P., Blackwell, E.J. and Casey, R.A. (2004). The relationship between owner consistency and 'problem' behaviours in dogs. *Proceedings of the European Society for Veterinary Clinical Ethology*, Cremona, Italy.

<sup>42</sup> Reisner, I.R., Shofer, F.S. and Nance, M.L. (2007). Behavioral assessment of child-directed canine aggression. *Injury Prevention*, 13, 348-351.

<sup>43</sup> Bernado, L.M., Gardner, M.J., O'Connor, J. and Amon, N. (2000). Dog bites in children treated in a paediatric emergency department. *Journal of the Society of Paediatric Nurses*, 5 (2), 87-95.

<sup>44</sup> Kahn, A., Bauche, P., and Lamoureux, J. (2003). Child victims of dog bites treated in emergency departments. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 162, 254-258.

<sup>45</sup> Orritt, R. (2015) Dog bites: a complex public health issue. *Veterinary Record* 176, 640-641.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36031843>

Dogs Act<sup>47</sup>. Once a dog suspected to be of a prohibited type is seized by an authorised person, it is assumed that the dog is of a prohibited type unless the owner can prove otherwise.

If the dog is considered to be a prohibited type, an owner wishing to keep the dog must undergo court proceedings to assess whether they are a fit and proper person and that the animal will not pose a risk to public safety. If these court proceedings find in favour of the owner, the dog will then be placed on the Index of Exempted Dogs and its owner must comply with certain conditions, including:

- the dog is neutered and microchipped;
- the owner purchases third-party insurance; and
- the dog is kept on a lead and muzzled in public.

Ownership of a dog placed on the Index of Exempted Dogs cannot be transferred, meaning that if an owner is found not to be fit and proper by a court, or wishes to rehome a prohibited breed type (including once it has been placed on the Index of Exempted Dogs), the dog will either have to be placed in kennels indefinitely or euthanised.

**Section 2** of the Dangerous Dogs Act makes provisions for the Secretary of State to place restrictions on keepers of any type of dog which may present a serious danger to the public, including requiring the dog to be muzzled and kept on a lead when in a public place.

**Section 3** of the Dangerous Dogs Act also makes it an offence for any dog to be dangerously out of control in any space whether private or public, regardless of its breed or type. A dog may be considered dangerously out of control if it injures any person or assistance dog, or if there are grounds for reasonable apprehension that the dog will cause injury to a person or assistance dog.

The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) applies to England, Wales and Scotland. However, any changes to the Act are a devolved matter for consideration by the Scottish Government. The Act does not apply to Northern Ireland, but corresponding provisions are set out in The Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.<sup>48</sup>

## Effectiveness of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991)

**Breed-specific legislation: Lack of evidence to support Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991)**

Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) is an example of breed-specific legislation, which prohibits the ownership of specific breeds or types of dogs that are deemed to be dangerous and are perceived to pose a risk to public safety. Alongside the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)<sup>49</sup>, we do not support breed-specific legislation.

There is a lack of scientific evidence to support breed-specific legislation as an effective tool in tackling canine aggression and dog bite incidents. As explained above, the introduction of breed-specific legislation has not reduced the number of dog bites in the UK. Given the multiple factors involved in the development of canine aggression (socialisation, rearing and training, environmental circumstances, neutering, and human-associated risk factors), research has indicated that the aggressive potential of dogs should be evaluated at an individual level.<sup>50,51,52,53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/hundreds-of-dangerous-dogs-killed-after-being-seized-by-police-but-fears-many-needlessly-euthanised-12498070> accessed 26 October 2023

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1991/2292/contents/made>

<sup>49</sup> Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) Position on Dangerous Dogs. Available at: [https://fve.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/fve\\_00\\_039\\_dangerous\\_dogs.pdf](https://fve.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/fve_00_039_dangerous_dogs.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Collier, S., (2006). Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified? *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 1, 17-22.

<sup>51</sup> Luescher, A.U. and Reisner, I.R., (2008). Canine aggression towards familiar people: a new look at an old problem. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 38 (5), 1107-1130.

<sup>52</sup> De Keuster, T. and Jung, H., (2009). Aggression toward familiar people and animals. In: *BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine*, 2nd ed. Horwitz, D.F. and Mills, D.S. pp 182-210.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/news/english-cocker-spaniels-a-fairly-typical-but-potentially-moody-dog>

## BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control

Whilst some studies have identified particular breeds as having a higher risk of causing bite injury, or displaying aggression, there is a lack of consistency in findings between studies.<sup>54,55,56,57</sup> No studies suggest an increased incidence of aggression or bite injury in breeds listed in the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) Section 1, nor in other 'fighting' or 'bull' type breeds.<sup>58,59,60</sup> Whilst it may be argued that Pit Bull Terrier types or more powerful breeds cause more extensive injury should they bite (fatalities aside) there is no evidence from hospital data in the UK that this is any more the case than for any other breeds of dog of a similar size.

There is a lack of consistency in findings between studies that have tried to identify breeds with an increased risk for aggression. In written evidence to Parliament's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Efra) Committee in 2018<sup>61</sup> Defra stated that since 2005 there had been 31 fatalities involving dog attacks in England and Wales, with seven prohibited pit bull terrier type dogs involved in six of those cases. Defra concluded that this represented a far higher proportion involved in fatal attacks than would be expected from the proportion of such dogs in the dog population as a whole. Determining accurate statistics for dog bite incidents in the UK is however, virtually impossible as data on dog ownership levels are estimated and it is not mandatory to record dog bites. In fact, an independent report published in 2021<sup>62</sup> and commissioned by Defra, found dog bite incident data to be lacking. In 2021, the Dog Control Coalition<sup>63</sup> requested dog bite data from across all 45 police forces covering a five-year period from 2016 to 2020. Of the forces who provided data, only four could provide breed or type information for the dog involved in the incident suggesting the type of information required to be captured needs to be improved.

This data suggests that breed-specific legislation, and in turn Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991), is not an evidence-based, effective approach to preventing canine aggression and dog bite incidents. More effective data recording, together with greater consistency between studies in identifying environmental and human-behavioural risk factors is essential to provide the information required to develop effective evidenced based policy solutions in the UK.

### Identifying breed type

Several studies have brought into question the validity of determining breed identity based on appearance<sup>64,65,66,67</sup>, highlighting a key limitation of Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

According to UK case law, breed type is an animal which approximately amounts to, near to, or has a substantial number of characteristics of a dog as described by a particular standard. Identification of

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<sup>54</sup> Cornelissen, J.M.R. and Hopster, H., 2009. Dog bites in the Netherlands: A study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation. *The Veterinary Journal*, doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2009.10.001

<sup>55</sup> Fatjo, J., Amat, M., Mariotti, V.M., de la Torre, J.L.R. and Manteca, X., 2007. Analysis of 1040 cases of canine aggression in a referral practice in Spain. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 2, 158-165.

<sup>56</sup> Ott, S.A., Schalke, E., von Gaertner, A.M. Hackbarth, H. and Mittmann, A. (2008). Is there a difference? Comparison of Golden Retrievers and dogs affected by breed specific legislation regarding aggressive behaviour. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, 3, 134-140.

<sup>57</sup> Schalke, E., Ott, S.A., von Gaertner, A.M., Hackbarth, H. and Mittmann, A. (2008). Is breed specific legislation justified? Study of the results of temperament test of Lower Saxony. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, 3, 97-103.

<sup>58</sup> Pegram, C., Wonham, K., Brodbelt, D. C., Church, D. B. & O'Neill, D. G. (2020). Staffordshire bull terriers in the UK: their disorder predispositions and protections. *Canine Medicine and Genetics*.

<sup>59</sup> Collier, S., (2006). Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified? *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 1, 17-22.

<sup>60</sup> Kuhe, F., and Struwe, R., (2006). Dangerous dogs in Berlin in comparison to the dog population – ways to reduce the dangerousness of dogs. *Berliner und Münchener Tierärztliche Wochenschrift*, 119, 445-455.

<sup>61</sup> Defra (2018) Written Evidence submitted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/83473.html> Accessed September 2023

<sup>62</sup> Defra (2021) An investigation of measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible ownership amongst dog owners with dog control issues in the UK. Available at:

<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=19861> Accessed September 2023

<sup>63</sup> The Dog Control Coalition is comprised of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Blue Cross, the British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust, RSPCA and the Scottish SPCA, whose operations (rehoming and euthanasia) are impacted by Section 1 (S1) of the Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) 1991, and The Kennel Club.

<sup>64</sup> Hoffman CL, Harrison N, Wolff L, Westgarth C (2014). Is that dog a pit bull? A cross-country comparison of perceptions of shelter workers regarding breed identification. *J Appl Anim Welf Sci*;17(4):322-339.

<sup>65</sup> Voith, V.L., Ingram, E., Mitsouras, K. and Irizarry, K., (2009) Comparison of adoption agency breed identification and DNA breed identification of dogs. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 12, 253-262.

<sup>66</sup> Webster C, Farnworth M (2018) Ability of the Public to Recognize Dogs Considered to Be Dangerous under the Dangerous Dogs Act in the United Kingdom. *J Appl Anim Welf Sci*; 22(3):240-54.

<sup>67</sup> Allcock, T, Campbell, MLH (2021) The UK Dangerous Dogs Act: Improved, but legally and ethically flawed. *Vet Rec*; e24.

prohibited breed types is therefore based on a subjective assessment of appearance against a particular standard, as opposed to the sharing of genetics with a specific breed. Dogs are assessed instead on their physical characteristics, measured against a 100-point scale, of which only 10 points are allocated to the dog's attitude and behaviour, which are likely to be the most indicative determinants of risk.

Further, the UK Kennel Club does not recognise the Pit Bull Terrier as a breed and therefore does not have a breed standard to assess individual dogs against. Dog Legislation Officers therefore have to assess appearance against the American Dog Breeders Association standard of conformation as published in the Pit Bull Gazette in 1977. To be considered 'of type' the dog must meet a substantial number of characteristics so that it is 'more' of Pit Bull Terrier type than any other<sup>68</sup>.

Notably, in a Home Office circular from 1991, it was recognised that: "identification of pit bull terriers is not straightforward, and it may be most easily confused with the Staffordshire bull terrier, which is smaller."<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, this can result in bull breeds or terrier cross breeds being identified as a prohibited type.

#### Increase in the numbers of prohibited breed types

Data on the number of dogs registered on the Index of Exempted dogs is held by Defra and is not readily available. However, responses to Freedom of Information requests<sup>70,71</sup> and Defra's written evidence to [the Efra Committee inquiry on controlling dangerous dogs in 2018](#), shows a clear increase in the total number of prohibited breed types registered on the Index of Exempted Dogs between 2014 and 2020. Subsequent figures have showed a continued increased trend to 2021 with figures for total IED dogs in 2022 still showing a 35% increase on figures in 2014 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the total number of dogs registered on the IED in 2014, 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2022 breakdown by breed type. Until 2021, with the exception of the Fila Brasileiro, numbers of each breed type registered on the IED have increased or remained the same, with the largest increase seen in Pit Bull Terrier types.

**Figure 1: Breakdown of dogs registered on the Index of Exempted Dogs in 2014, 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022 broken down by breed type.**

Prohibited breed type	Number of dogs on the IED in 2014 <sup>72</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED in 2018 <sup>73</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED 2020 <sup>74</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED 2021 <sup>75</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED 2022 <sup>76</sup>
Pit Bull Terrier	2652	3514	3556	3639	3571
Dogo Argentino	4	13	19	20	21
Fila Brasileiro	0	0	0	0	0

<sup>68</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. *Dangerous dogs law: Guidance for enforcers*. 2009. Available at: <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/cruelty/documents/dogs-guide-enforcers.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402172715/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/cruelty/documents/ddcircular67.1991.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/83473.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Defra response to FOI request submitted by BVA requesting up-to-date data on the number of dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs and breakdown by breed type. Response received via email on 23 December 2020.

<sup>72</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/83473.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Defra's written evidence to [the Efra Committee inquiry on controlling dangerous dogs in 2018](#)

<sup>74</sup> Defra response to FOI request submitted by BVA requesting up-to-date data on the number of dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs and breakdown by breed type. Response received via email on 23 December 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Defra response to FOI request requesting up-to-date data on the number of dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs and breakdown by breed type. Response available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/983316/FOI2021\\_11763\\_Response\\_Redacted\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/983316/FOI2021_11763_Response_Redacted_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1099090/FOI2022\\_15735\\_Response\\_Redacted.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1099090/FOI2022_15735_Response_Redacted.pdf)

Japanese Tosa	2	3	3	3	3
Total:	2658	3530	3578	3662	3595

Notably, numbers of Pit Bull Terrier types, the most commonly owned breed type on the IED, have increased by around a third, and the number of Dogo Argentinos, while far less in total, has increased nearly five-fold.

#### No reduction in the incidence of aggressive behaviour and dog-bite incidents

A review five years after the implementation of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) found no significant reduction in dog bites.<sup>77</sup> Hospital admissions for dog bites and strikes in England increased steadily from 3,377 in 2000-01 to 8,758 in 2021-22, an increase of 159%<sup>78,79</sup>. A study published in 2021 also found that the incidence of dog bites in children had remained consistently high<sup>80,81</sup>. The study looked at the incidence and socio-demographics of patients admitted to English National Health Service (NHS) hospitals for dog bites (1998–2018) and estimated their annual direct health care costs. The incidence of dog bite admissions rose from 6.34 per 100,000 population in 1998 to 14.99 admissions per 100,000 population in 2018. In terms of cost, between the financial years 2009/2010 and 2017/2018 the total estimated direct costs of dog bite admissions to hospitals were £174,188,443.

Further, research estimates that only a third of those suffering a dog bite subsequently sought medical treatment<sup>82</sup>, suggesting that the total number of dog bite incidents are likely to be significantly higher than hospital admissions figures suggest.

In addition, in its submission to the [2018 Efra Committee inquiry on the control of dangerous dogs](#), Defra indicated that dog attack fatalities in England and Wales have unfortunately also increased since the introduction of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991). While exact figures are not clear due to different reporting metrics and sources, Defra reported that there had been 31 fatalities involving dog attacks since 2005, and data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recorded a total of 67 fatalities following dog attack incidents between 1991 and 2015, with 37 fatalities occurring between 2005 and 2015.<sup>83</sup> Figure 2 demonstrates the rise in dog fatalities in England and Wales between 1981-2020 based on ONS statistics with overall fatalities tripling during that period<sup>84,85</sup>. In 2021 5 fatal dog attacks were recorded.<sup>86</sup> In 2022 there were 10 recorded fatalities and 8 attacks had occurred by October 2023<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A (1996). Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department. *Injury*. Mar;27(2):89-91

<sup>78</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2021-22>

<sup>79</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/hospital-episode-statistics-admitted-patient-care-england-2000-01>

<sup>80</sup>

<https://bmjpaedsopen.bmj.com/content/5/1/e001040>

<sup>82</sup> Westgarth et al, (2018). How many people have been bitten by dogs? *Epidemiol Community Health*. Available at:

<https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/early/2018/01/08/jech-2017-209330.full.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) Deaths from dog bites, England and Wales, 1981 to 2015. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhocs/006077deathsfromdogbitesengland1981to2015>

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual number of deaths from dog attacks or bites. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/annualnumberofdeathsfromdogattacksorbites>

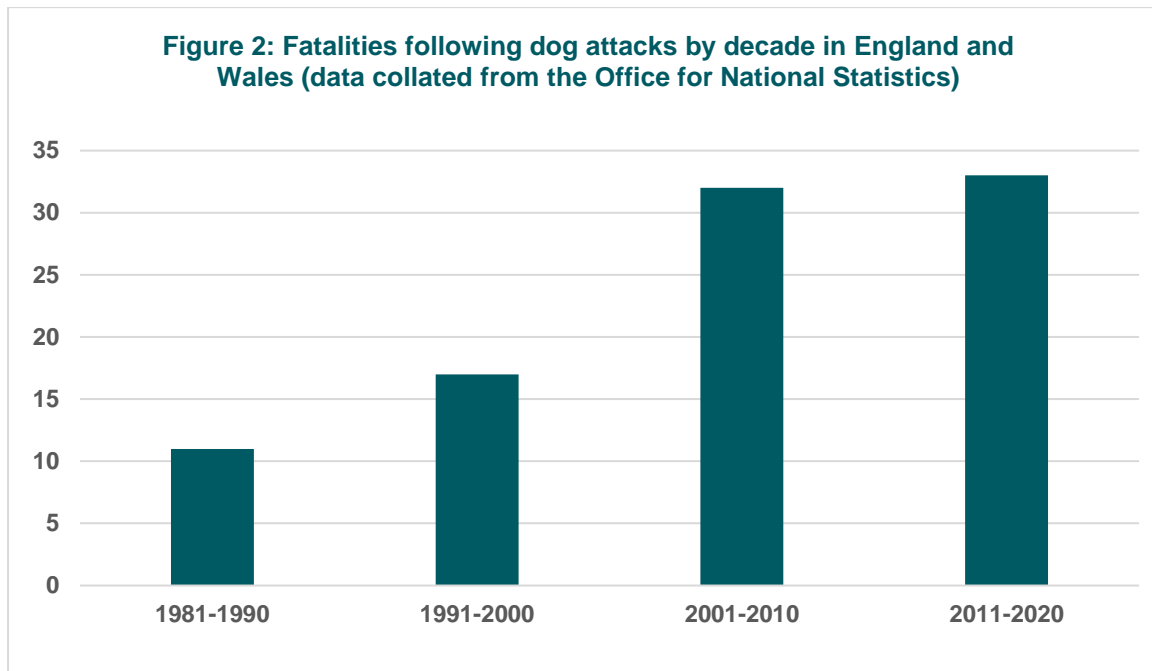
<sup>86</sup> <https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2023/08/15/dog-attacks-on-adults-are-rising-but-science-shows-its-wrong-to-blame-breeds/#:~:text=Over%20a%20similar%20period%2C%20fatal,was%20a%20tragically%20anomalous%20year.>

<sup>87</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_fatal\\_dog\\_attacks\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fatal_dog_attacks_in_the_United_Kingdom)

## BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control



**Figure 2: Fatalities following dog attacks by decade in England and Wales (data collated from the Office for National Statistics)**



A review commissioned by Defra as part of a project to investigate measures to reduce dog bite incidents and promote responsible dog ownership found that BSL had not proven effective in reducing dog bite incidents internationally<sup>88</sup>.

Studies have shown that BSL has not reduced dog bite incidents in most instances in Ireland<sup>89</sup>, Spain<sup>90,91</sup>, Florence (Italy)<sup>92</sup>, Canada<sup>93</sup>, the Netherlands<sup>94</sup> or Berlin<sup>95</sup>. A reduction in dog bites was found in both Catalonia<sup>96</sup> and Manitoba<sup>97</sup> but major limitations were noted in the studies including the potential for other factors to have led to a reduction in dog bites. Legislation introduced in Calgary seems to have had some success in tackling aggressive anti-social behaviour exhibited by dogs<sup>98,99</sup> Further analysis should be carried out to establish how those interventions have impacted dog control.

<sup>88</sup> Nurse, A., Guest, C., Miles, L. (2021) AW140: Investigation of measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible dog ownership amongst dog owners with dog control issues in the UK. Middlesex University London.

<sup>89</sup> Ó Súilleabháin, P.Ó. (2015). Human hospitalisations due to dog bites in Ireland (1998–2013): Implications for current breed specific legislation. *The Veterinary Journal*. 204. 357-359.

<sup>90</sup> Rosado, B., Garcia-Belenguer, S., Leon, M., Palacio, J. (2007). Spanish dangerous animals act: Effect on the epidemiology of dog bites. *Journal of Veterinary behaviour: Clinical Applications and Research*. 2, 166-174.

<sup>91</sup> Mora, E., Fonseca, G.M., Navarro, P., Castano, A., Lucena, J. (2017) Fatal dog attacks in Spain under a breed specific legislation: a ten year retrospective study. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, doi: 10.1016/j.jveb.2018.03.011.

<sup>92</sup> Mariti, C., Ciceroni, C., Sigheri, C., (2003). Italian breed-specific legislation on potentially dangerous dogs (2003): assessment of its effects in the city of Florence (Italy). *Dog Behavior*. 2, 25-31.

<sup>93</sup> Clarke, N.M., Fraser, D., 2013. Animal control measures and their relationship to the reported incidence of dogs bites in urban Canadian municipalities. *Canadian veterinary Journal*. 54, 145- 149.

<sup>94</sup> Cornelissen, J.M., and Hopster, H. (2010). Dog bites in The Netherlands: a study of victims, injuries, circumstances and aggressors to support evaluation of breed specific legislation. *The Veterinary Journal*. 186. 292-8.

<sup>95</sup> Kuhne, F., Struwe, R. (2006). Dangerous dogs in Berlin in comparison to the dog population – ways to reduce the dangerousness of dogs. *Berl Munch Tierarztl Wochenschr*. 119. 445-55.

<sup>96</sup> Villalbí, J.R., Cleries, M., Bouis, S., Peracho, V., Duran, J., Casas, C., (2010) Decline in hospitalisations due to dog bite injuries in Catalonia, 1997–2008. An effect of government regulation? *Injury Prevention*. 16(6):408–10.

<sup>97</sup> Raghaven, M., Martens, P.J., Chateau, D., Burchill, C. (2013). Effectiveness of breed specific legislation in decreasing the incidence of dog-bite injury hospitalizations in people in the Canadian province of Manitoba. *Injury Prevention*. 19, 177-83.

<sup>98</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/91199/pdf/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.calgary.ca/bylaws/responsible-pet-ownership-updates.html>

### Causing misconception around 'dangerous' dogs

Research has shown that the ability of the public in the UK to identify banned breeds of dogs is generally poor.<sup>100</sup> In addition, defining particular breeds as “dangerous” can create the misleading assumption amongst the public that canine aggression\* and dog bite incidents are inherently related to breed type, and consequently that breeds not listed within legislation are “not dangerous” and will not exhibit aggressive-type behaviour. It can also lead to a lack of understanding that aggression is a natural part of canine species specific behaviour<sup>101</sup> and of emphasis on the importance of responsible ownership in preventing canine aggression and dog bite incidents

#### Canine aggression

"The term aggression is descriptive and not diagnostic; it should be interpreted as a general observation and not an objective description of behaviour unless qualified further operationally by reference to specific behaviours considered to be aggressive in the context of the current work. It indicates merely that a behaviour has taken place that someone believes might have resulted in harm and does not indicate a cause, nor necessarily that there was harmful intent on the part of the individual expressing the aggressive behaviour (e.g accidental injury in the context of play may be labelled by some as aggressive behaviour)."

*(For further discussion of this important philosophical point see Chapter 1 in Mills, D. S., & Westgarth, C. (2017). Dog bites: A multidisciplinary perspective. 5m Books Ltd.)*

### The rise of new dog 'types'

Since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been considerable media coverage linking a rise in the popularity and breeding of the American XL Bully (ABXL) to the increase in dog related injuries and deaths. However, as it is not mandatory for police to record dog bites or the breed type involved in any incidents it remains challenging to verify the evidence supporting those claims. Data<sup>102</sup> that has been used in an attempt to quantify the issue has been collated from incidents reported on social media with no way of verification of the incident itself having taken place or the breed of the dog/s involved. Even in cases investigated by police<sup>103</sup>, the breed of the dog is frequently not conclusively determined<sup>104</sup>. An independent report commissioned by Defra and published in 2021 found dog bite incident data to be lacking and inconsistent<sup>105</sup>.

The ABXL is currently not recognised by the UK Kennel Club as a breed and therefore does not have a breed standard to assess individual dogs against<sup>106</sup>. The typing of dogs by specialist DLOs can also often result in different classifications. In evidence presented to the Defra committee inquiry into XL Bully dogs in October 2023, an expert witness explained the process by which “a dog that is bred from two animals, mother and father that are definitely not [a specific breed] and are recognised as two completely different breeds, but you end up with a puppy, when it is typed at about a year of age, that is of type just because by combining those two breeds you have created a dog that looks like a [banned breed] and types out as a [banned breed]”<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> Catherine A. Webster & Mark J. Farnworth (2019) Ability of the Public to Recognize Dogs Considered to Be Dangerous under the Dangerous Dogs Act in the United Kingdom, Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, 22:3, 240-254,

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8833765/>

<sup>102</sup> <https://bullywatch.link/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Aug-2023-Breed-Specific-Violence-and-the-American-Bully.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_fatal\\_dog\\_attacks\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fatal_dog_attacks_in_the_United_Kingdom)

<sup>104</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13703/pdf/> Answer Q293

<sup>105</sup> <https://randd.defra.gov.uk/ProjectDetails?ProjectID=19861>

<sup>106</sup> The Government announced plans to introduce a Breed standard for American XL bullies prior to the end of 2023

<sup>107</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13703/pdf/>

### BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control

The increased demand for dogs in general and rise in popularity of some breeds including XL Bully dogs coincided with a rise in irresponsible dog breeding and rearing, manifested by the significant increase in unregulated businesses offering canine breeding services<sup>108</sup>.

The Government announced in September 2023 that XL Bully type dogs would be added to section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act as a prohibited breed type by the end of 2023. The process of adding those types of dogs to Section 1 of the DDA is already taking up time and resources that could be used to address the real causes of dog bite injuries and deaths.

Many responsible owners and their dogs are likely to get caught up in BSL resulting in considerable anguish for owners and welfare harms for the dogs involved. It is likely that those who have chosen to keep a dog as a status or weapon dog for the purpose of intimidation will simply move on to other breed types that fall outside the revised Schedule 1.

We recognise the potential harm caused by large, powerful types of dogs if they display aggressive behaviour is of greater concern than that caused by smaller dogs which may be more easily restrained. There is only limited published scientific research around bite style and force available. While breed has not been found to be a good predictor of behaviour, nor of dog bite related deaths, the literature does suggest some biomechanical features that increase bite force, such as jaw size and shape, and indeed body weight<sup>109</sup>. However, there are many factors influencing the severity of a dog bite. Factors which impact on the extent of injury aside from size and power include where the bite is delivered on the victim's body and how it is delivered. Recent UK studies found no difference observed between legislated and non-legislated breeds in the medical treatment required following a bite or in the severity of bite and the type of dog that bit<sup>110</sup>.

The risk of aggressive behaviour in a dog is due to a multitude of factors. A legislative regime that focuses on breed/type risks dismissing the evidence around the complexity of aggressive behaviour and discouraging the public from taking appropriate care when interacting with smaller or 'less powerful' dogs or those with smaller jaws. It also has the potential to increase the desirability of certain types of dogs by labelling them as dangerous<sup>111</sup>.

#### Negative welfare impacts for dogs of prohibited breed types

Consideration must also be given to the potential negative welfare impacts of Section 1 of the Act on dogs of, or suspected to be of, prohibited breed types. Under Section 1 of the Act, dogs suspected to be of a prohibited type are usually seized and placed in police-appointed kennels where a qualified expert will determine its breed type and whether or not it is prohibited under Section 1 of the Act.

As the RSPCA's 2016 report [Breed Specific Legislation: A Dog's Dinner](#) highlighted, this process may negatively impact on the welfare of seized dogs in several ways:

- **Seizure** – can be stressful for dogs, resulting in anxiety and a potential increased risk of aggression towards those trying to seize the animal.<sup>112</sup>
- **Kennelled environments**- research has shown that many animals find kennelled life challenging and it is difficult to sufficiently meet the welfare needs of dogs in long-term kennelled environments. In addition, studies have shown that specific aspects of this environment eg. noise

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<sup>108</sup> <https://naturewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Breeding-beyond-dogs-limits-Canine-Fertility-Clinics-in-the-UK-October-2022.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> [https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2018.00076/full#:~:text=The%20bite%20force%20was%20calculated,the%20carnassial%20teeth%20\(35\).](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2018.00076/full#:~:text=The%20bite%20force%20was%20calculated,the%20carnassial%20teeth%20(35).)

<sup>110</sup> Creedon, N., Ó Súilleabháin, P.S. Dog bite injuries to humans and the use of breed-specific legislation: a comparison of bites from legislated and non-legislated dog breeds. *Ir Vet J* **70**, 23 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13620-017-0101-1>

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/news/2015/04/link-between-status-dogs-money-and-crime-discovered-on-britains-streets>

<sup>112</sup> Shepherd, K. (2011). Handling and restraining aggressive dogs. *Veterinary Record*. 359-360.

levels, lack of environmental enrichment, small kennel sizes may negatively influence dogs' behaviour patterns and social interactions.<sup>113,114,115</sup>

If the dog is then placed on the Index of Exempted Dogs, its owner must comply with certain conditions, including:

- the dog is microchipped;
- the dog is neutered;
- the owner purchases third party insurance; and
- the dog is leashed and muzzled in public.

Implications for dogs and their owners:

- **Microchipping:** legally every dog already has to be fitted with a microchip by a trained professional and the details registered on a database that meets Government standards<sup>116</sup> by the time the dog is 8 weeks old.
- **Neutering:** Recent academic research has raised the question whether early neutering of dogs can have a negative impact on their health and in particular an increase in cases of joint-disorders and cancer was noted for some breeds<sup>117</sup>. Under the terms of the ban, some dogs will have to be neutered when they are less than 18 months old, however a growing body of research suggests that dogs the size of a ABXL should only be neutered when they are over 23 months old.<sup>118</sup>

Additionally, there have also been research findings potentially indicative of a connection between early neutering and an adverse impact on behaviour in particular increased fearfulness and related behavioural responses<sup>119</sup>.

- **Insurance:**
  - Third party liability insurance is currently available via membership of Dogs Trust. However, it is unclear whether the provision will continue to be feasible with the large number of additional insured animals being of a banned type.
  - Medical insurance for dogs belonging to a banned breed is difficult to obtain with most providers not offering this product<sup>120</sup>. This can impact on their welfare if as a result, timely access to veterinary care is not sought by owners.
  - Business insurance for dog trainers, walkers, groomers and sitters routinely contains restrictions on providing services to dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs. Owners of such dogs are therefore faced with problems accessing such services.
- **Muzzling and being kept on a lead:** Dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs must be muzzled and kept on a lead when in a public space. Getting a dog successfully used to muzzling requires careful training to avoid creating a negative association with the muzzle. Owners should speak to their veterinarian or seek out other expert advice on how to get their dog used to wearing a muzzle and avoid negative behavioural traits developing from muzzling.

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<sup>113</sup> Shepherd, K. (2010). Behavioural, legal and welfare implications of the DDA in the UK – a case history. *Journal of Veterinary Behaviour* 5, 39-40.

<sup>114</sup> Hiby, E.F., Rooney, N.J. & Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2006). Behavioural and physiological responses of dogs entering rehoming kennels. *Physiology and Behavior*. 89, 385–391, and Rooney, N.J., Gaines, S.A. & Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2007). Behavioural and glucocorticoid responses of dogs (*Canis familiaris*) to kennelling: Investigating mitigation of stress by prior habituation. *Physiology and Behavior*. 92, 847–854.

<sup>115</sup> Gaines, S.A. (2008). Kennelled dog welfare – effects of housing and husbandry. *University of Bristol, PhD thesis*. Taylor, K.D., Mill, D.S. (2007). The effect of the kennel environment on canine welfare; a critical review of experimental studies. *Animal Welfare*. 16, 435-448.

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/get-your-dog-cat-microchipped>

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2020.00388/full>

<sup>118</sup> Hart BL, Hart LA, Thigpen AP and Willits NH (2020) Assisting Decision-Making on Age of Neutering for 35 Breeds of Dogs: Associated Joint Disorders, Cancers, and Urinary Incontinence. *Front. Vet. Sci.* 7:388. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2020.00388

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.veterinary-practice.com/article/effects-of-neutering-on-undesirable-behaviours-in-dogs>

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.lv.com/pet-insurance/dangerous-dogs>

### Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act

Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act<sup>121</sup> makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper, making it an offence for dogs of any breed or type to be dangerously out of control in any place (including private property) and pose risk of injury to another person or assistance dog. However, we are concerned that there is a lack of awareness amongst dog owners about their legal responsibilities under this section of the Dangerous Dogs Act, in addition to a lack of resources for police enforcement.

The Dangerous Dogs Act is predominantly associated with the prohibition of specific breed types (Section 1), and there may be a lack of awareness that Section 3 applies to any dog, regardless of breed or type, that becomes dangerously out of control. Figures from the Metropolitan Police for 2022 indicated that breeds not listed in Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act accounted for around 96 percent of incidents ( 574 dogs seized in total) involving Section 1 and 3 'dangerously out of control' offences.<sup>122</sup>

Figure 3 sets out the number of prosecutions between 2013-2017 for allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control under Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1,141	1,366	1,511	1,327	1,120

**Figure 3 the number of prosecutions between 2013-2017 for allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control under Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (Ministry of Justice data)<sup>123</sup>**

These figures suggest that the number of prosecutions under Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) has remained largely static over this period, with small increases and decreases over time.

However, as available data suggests that dog bite incidents have increased across all breeds since the introduction of the Act<sup>124,125,126,127,128</sup>, we are concerned that owners are unaware of their responsibilities under the Section 3 of the Act, and that Section 3 of the Act is not being effectively enforced.

### Failure to protect public safety and animal welfare

Consequently, we consider that the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) has failed to protect public safety and poses risks to animal welfare.

Particularly with regard to Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991), the 2018 [Efra Committee inquiry on controlling dangerous dogs](#) concluded that:

“The Government has maintained that the breed ban is essential to public safety, arguing that these prohibited dogs pose an inherent risk. Our inquiry found insufficient evidence to substantiate this claim. We agree with the Government that it would be irresponsible to amend the breed ban immediately without adequate safeguards. That does not mean that the Government should continue to sit on its hands. Changing the law on Breed Specific Legislation is desirable, achievable, and

<sup>121</sup> In Northern Ireland this provision is applied through Article 4 of The Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/disclosure-2023/january-2023/dogs-seized-mps-2022/>

<sup>123</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/83473.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A. Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department. *Injury*. 1996 Mar;27(2):89-91.

<sup>125</sup> BBC, 2015. Rise in dog bite admissions. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32912084>

<sup>126</sup> HSCIC statistics [www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB17615/prov-mont-hes-admi-outp-aeApril%202014%20to%20February%202015-toi-rep.pdf](http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB17615/prov-mont-hes-admi-outp-aeApril%202014%20to%20February%202015-toi-rep.pdf) cited in RSPCA, 2016. *Breed Specific Legislation: A dog's dinner*. Available at: [https://www.rspca.org.uk/webContent/staticImages/Downloads/BSL\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rspca.org.uk/webContent/staticImages/Downloads/BSL_Report.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> Westgarth et al, (2018) How many people have been bitten by dogs? *Epidemiol Community Health*. Available at: <https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/early/2018/01/08/jech-2017-209330.full.pdf>

<sup>128</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) Deaths from dog bites, England and Wales, 1981 to 2015. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhocs/006077deathsfromdogbiteseotland1981to2015>

## BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control

would better protect the public. The Government’s lack of action on this front shows a disregard for dog welfare.”

To ensure public safety, prevent dog bite incidents and safeguard dog welfare, the UK government should therefore repeal Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991), and prioritise an evidence-based, ‘deed-not-breed’ approach to dog control.

**Recommendation 1: Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) should be repealed, and the UK governments should prioritise an evidence-based ‘deed-not-breed’ approach to dog control.**

## Deed-not-breed

All dogs, whatever their breed type or size, are capable of showing aggression. It is a natural part of canine species specific behaviour<sup>129</sup>. While it is true that any dog has the capacity to be dangerous if irresponsibly bred, reared and socialised, there is no conclusive evidence that shows any breed as being more aggressive than another or inherently aggressive, although we acknowledge that the larger the breed the greater the capacity for harm if they display aggressive behaviour.

Data referenced in this document shows that the number of exempted section 1 dogs has not reduced since at least 2014. All of those dogs had to undergo successful behavioural assessments confirming that breed is not a sufficient indicator of a dog’s temperament and behaviour.

In some cases, aggression in dogs may be indicative of wider issues within a household or their use as status or weapon dogs<sup>130</sup> but the demand for such dogs has continued rather than being successfully addressed by BSL<sup>131</sup>. BSL has also failed to bring about a reduction in the number of dog bite incidents and fatalities which have continued to increase since its introduction. Hospital admissions for dog bites and strikes in England increased steadily from in 3,377 in 2000-01 to 8,758 in 2021-22, an increase of 159%<sup>132,133</sup>.

BSL has proven to be a distraction from dealing with the root causes of the problem. It is a blunt tool that provides the general public with a false sense of security but has failed in its aim to protect public health and safety. Resources should instead be made available to address the root causes of the problem, including application of Human Behaviour Change science to understand and address the factors influencing the problem.

### Existing ‘deed-not-breed’ approaches in the UK

The legislative framework for a ‘deed-not-breed’ approach in the UK already exists with myriad pieces of dog control legislation across the four devolved administrations. Figure 4 sets out the different pieces of dog control legislation currently in force.

England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
<b>Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991)</b> - makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper	<b>Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991)</b> - makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper	<b>The Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991</b> – Article 4 makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper
<b>Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953</b> – makes it an offence - if a dog worries	<b>Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953</b> - if a dog worries livestock on any	<b>The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern</b>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8833765/>

<sup>130</sup>Harding, S. (2012) *Unleashed: the Phenomena of Status Dogs and Weapon Dogs*. The Policy Press, Bristol, UK. 4

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/news/2015/04/link-between-status-dogs-money-and-crime-discovered-on-britains-streets>

<sup>132</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2021-22>

<sup>133</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/hospital-episode-statistics-admitted-patient-care-england-2000-01>

<p>livestock on any agricultural land, the owner of the dog, and, if it is in the charge of a person other than its owner, that person also, shall be guilty of an offence</p>	<p>agricultural land, the owner of the dog, and, if it is in the charge of a person other than its owner, that person also, shall be guilty of an offence. The Act was amended in 2021 by <a href="#">the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) to increase maximum penalties for livestock worrying and expand the definition of livestock to reflect modern farming practice.</a></p>	<p><b>Ireland) 2011</b> – make provisions for dog licensing, and offences for livestock worrying and dog attacks on people, as well as fixed penalty notices.</p>
<p><b>The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (England and Wales)</b> – grants authorities in England and Wales powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, including for incidents involving dogs.</p>	<p><b>The Control of Dogs Act (Scotland) Act 2010</b> - local authorities are able to issue Dog Control Notices (DCNs) to assess and impose restrictions on an owner whose dog is out of control</p>	<p><b>Part 5 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011</b>- Councils are able to issue Dog Control Orders to address specific dog control issues on designated land.</p>
<p><b>Dogs Act (1871)</b> - Makes provisions for any court, having received a complaint that a dog is dangerous or not kept under proper control, to make an order to direct the owner to keep the dog under proper control or for the dog to be destroyed.</p>		

**Figure 4: Dog control legislation across the UK administrations**

While we welcome and support the ‘deed-not-breed’ approach in the 2014 legislation, we are concerned that this approach is too fragmented, and, as a consequence, these pieces of legislation are not effectively utilised or enforced. Where reviews of individual pieces of legislation are planned, we would suggest their approach is uniform to minimise inconsistencies in application.

#### [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 \(England and Wales\)](#)

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 granted authorities in England and Wales greater powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, including for incidents involving dogs. Powers introduced to tackle offences involving dogs include:

- **Acceptable behaviour contracts (ABC)** – used by local authorities to address potential issues early and reduce the need for more formal measures. An ABC is a non-legally binding, non-statutory agreement, allowing authorities to engage with an individual about their inappropriate behaviour by speaking to them and offering appropriate advice, as well as providing insight into the consequences of the individual’s actions.
- **Public Space Protection Orders** - An order to restrict persistent anti-social behaviour with dogs in a public space eg. restricting access to parks or imposing a requirement to keep dogs on leads.
- **Community Protection Notices** – Used for low-level incidents involving dogs, eg owner failing to control dog and causing nuisance to others/other animals.
- **Injunction** – Used for higher level incidents eg intimidation, attacks or incidents involving other animals
- **Criminal Behaviour Order** – used for serious and continuing anti-social behaviour with dogs. For example where dogs are used to intimidate people.

#### **BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control**

These powers can be applied to any breed or type of dog, however they are not intended to replace Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act in situations that meet the threshold for dogs being 'dangerously out of control'.

While we welcome the 'deed-not-breed' approach to dog control in the powers granted under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, it is important to recognise that these powers are very general and [require extensive guidance](#) to ensure they are applied consistently and effectively by the authorities. In addition, since their implementation, it is not clear how effective enforcement of these measures has been as there is no centrally collected and reported data on how these powers have been used.<sup>134</sup> Such a centralised and reported approach would be of benefit to allow for an assessment of their effectiveness.

### Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010

The Scottish Government introduced the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 to help identify out of control dogs before they became dangerous so that the behaviour of the dog and the dog owner could be encouraged to change to help avoid future dog attacks occurring. Under the Act, trained officers within local authorities are able to issue Dog Control Notices (DCNs) to assess and impose restrictions on an owner whose dog is out of control. DCNs represent a proportionate, evidence-based way of addressing unacceptable dog behaviour and reinforcing the importance of responsible ownership. The potential advantages of Dog Control Notices include:

- They can be served immediately, avoiding the costs associated with prosecution, and the welfare consequences to dogs of kenneling after being seized.
- They can be tailored to the circumstances of individual cases and dogs, with flexibility in the type of measures suggested and potentially the timescale over which measures should be applied.
- They can be supplemented with additional support for responsible ownership including mandatory education and training courses for minor offences.

However, in its post-legislative scrutiny of the effectiveness of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010, the Scottish Parliament Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee concluded that the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 had had limited effect in preventing or reducing the number of dog attacks in Scotland. Evidence and data received as part of the scrutiny process indicated that dog attacks had increased since its implementation, local authorities and police officers were not aware of their respective responsibilities under the relevant legislation, there was an insufficient number of dog warden to implement the legislation, and insufficient public awareness of how powers could be used.<sup>135</sup>

The Committee also concluded that current dog control law is not fit for purpose and recommended that the Scottish Government undertake a comprehensive review of all dog control legislation without delay, with a view to introducing modernised, fit for purpose, consolidated dog control legislation. In the interim, the Scottish Government is considering ways to improve the operational effectiveness of the Act to support local authorities with enforcement.<sup>136,137</sup>

### Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953

In addition to legislation to protect public safety, legislation is also in place to protect livestock from dog attacks, dog bite incidents and worrying. Dog attacks, dog bite incidents and worrying can have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of livestock. It is important to recognise that the impacts of livestock worrying do not always manifest in instant physical injuries eg. abortions in pregnant ewes and stress. Under [the Dogs \(Protection of Livestock\) Act 1953](#), if a dog worries livestock on any agricultural land, the owner of the dog, and, if it is in the charge of a person other than its owner, that person also, shall be guilty of an offence. 'Livestock worrying' is defined as:

- attacking livestock;

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<sup>134</sup> House of Commons Library, 2020. Briefing paper on Tackling anti-social behaviour. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7270/>

<sup>135</sup> Post-legislative Scrutiny: Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010. Available at: <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/PAPLS/2019/7/18/Post-legislative-Scrutiny--Control-of-Dogs--Scotland--Act-2010/PAPLSS052019R4.pdf>

<sup>136</sup> [Steps to Improve the Operational Effectiveness of the Control of Dogs \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)

<sup>137</sup> <https://dcn.scot/>



- chasing livestock in such a way as may reasonably be expected to cause injury or suffering to the livestock or, in the case of females, abortion, or loss of or diminution in their produce; or
- being at large (that is to say not on a lead or otherwise under close control) in a field or enclosure in which there are sheep.

The effective implementation of this Act relies on sufficient resource for enforcement, regular reporting of suspected offences, and dogs owners' awareness of their responsibilities under the act. Proposals tackling livestock worrying were contained in the Kept Animals Bill but have not been taken forward by Government as of October 2023.

In Scotland, in 2021 [the Dogs \(Protection of Livestock\) \(Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) was passed by the Scottish Parliament. The Bill amends the 1953 Act in Scotland to:

- increase the maximum penalty to a fine of £40,000, imprisonment for 12 months, or both
- allow the courts to ban a convicted person from owning a dog or allowing their dog to go on agricultural land
- give the police greater powers to investigate and enforce livestock worrying offence. This includes by going onto land to identify a dog, seize it and collect evidence from it
- extend the "livestock worrying" offence to cover additional types of modern farmed animal

It is hoped that these amendments to the 1953 Act will enable legislation to be implemented more effectively, and encourage owners to keep their dogs under control. As part of the Bill, it was also recognised that the language used around livestock worrying offences should be updated to better reflect the often-devastating impact dog attacks have on the health and welfare of livestock and clarify an owner's responsibilities for keeping their dog under control under the Act.

### Enforcement and consolidation

While the legislative framework to implement a 'deed-not-breed' approach in the UK is available, current evidence suggests that it is not being effectively implemented.

In the short term, if Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act were to be repealed, this would present an opportunity to ringfence and redirect resources that would have been used to enforce breed-specific legislation towards:

- The effective enforcement of individual pieces of dog control legislation;
- Provision of appropriate training in dog behaviour for enforcement officers; and
- The central collection of data on how these powers are being used to permit ongoing assessment of their effectiveness.

In the longer term, to simplify enforcement for local authorities, clarify responsibilities for dog owners, and ensure that there are targeted dog control provisions in legislation eg, Dog Control Notices, consideration should be given to consolidating the separate pieces of dog control legislation across the UK. Consideration should also be given to clarifying the definition of 'dangerously out of control' as specified in Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act.

As part of this consolidation, dog bite incidents and canine aggression should be recognised as complex public health issues, which require a 'One Health' collaborative approach.<sup>138, 139</sup>

In some cases, aggression in dogs may be indicative of wider issues within a household or their use as status or weapon dogs<sup>140</sup> and dogs or their owners may need to be removed from a household to safeguard the dog's own health and welfare.<sup>141,142</sup> In addition, the fact that socio-economic factors play a part in the incidence of dog bites is underpinned by research which indicates that the incidence of dog bites in deprived areas is higher than in less deprived areas.<sup>143</sup> With these complexities in mind, social

<sup>138</sup> Orritt, R. (2015). Dog bites: a complex public health issue *Veterinary Record*; 176, 640-641.

<sup>139</sup> Read our case study on a One Health approach to preventing dog bites, involving collaboration between veterinary and human healthcare professionals, in the [BVA One Health in Action Report](#).

<sup>140</sup>Harding, S. (2012) *Unleashed: the Phenomena of Status Dogs and Weapon Dogs*. The Policy Press, Bristol, UK. 4

<sup>141</sup> The Links Group. Available at: <http://www.thelinksgroup.org.uk/>

<sup>142</sup> Grant, D., (2011) Political and practical problems with dangerous dogs. *Veterinary Record*; 168, 133-134.

<sup>143</sup> HSCIC (2014) Dog bites: hospital admissions in most deprived areas three times as high as least deprived. Available at:

services, local authorities, police forces and welfare organisations should work collaboratively to identify early animal health and welfare risk factors, as well as wider human health and social care issues. This would require knowledge exchange and training, as well as clear channels of communication and reporting between social services, human healthcare professionals, local authorities and police forces and welfare organisations to ensure the early identification of both animal and human health and welfare risk factors.

Read our case study on a One Health approach to preventing dog bites, involving collaboration between veterinary and human healthcare professionals, in the [BVA One Health in Action Report](#).

**Recommendation 2: Once Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) is repealed, the UK Governments should ringfence and redirect resources that would have been used to enforce breed-specific legislation towards:**

- **The effective enforcement of individual pieces of dog control legislation;**
- **Provision of appropriate training in dog behaviour for enforcement officers; and**
- **The central collection of data on how these powers are being used to permit ongoing assessment of their effectiveness**

**Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to consolidating the separate pieces of dog control legislation across the UK to simplify enforcement for local authorities, clarify responsibilities for dog owners, and ensure that there are targeted dog control provisions (eg Dog Control Notices) in legislation.**

#### [A centralised database and additional research to inform future strategy](#)

To ensure that future dog control policy is informed by a robust, up-to-date evidence base, there should be further research into human and dog-associated risk factors for canine aggression and dog bite incidents.

As part of this, it is necessary to better understand the nature, context, and prevalence of all incidents where dogs are out of control and pose a threat to public health and also, any that result in the dog biting. Therefore, a centralised database should be established to record full details of all incidents that relate to 'aggressive', threatening behaviour and also, incidents which result in medical treatment. Given that 'aggressive' behaviour and dog bite incidents are complex public health issues, such a database should collect as much relevant information as possible about the dog's 'aggressive', threatening behaviour and where applicable, the dog bite incident. In the case of the former, the system would capture reports of incidents made to the designated local enforcement authority eg LA, police or similar, and would be similar to current reporting of anti-social behaviour or similar type incidents. All incidents would include the nature of the behaviour, the breed type, the age of the victim, postcode, and relevant circumstances leading up to the incident. Where an incident results in a bite, the data captured would also include the severity of the bite, type of treatment (eg GP visit, accident and emergency visit, or long-term hospitalisation).<sup>144,145,146</sup> The proposed system would not only support sections 3(1) and 10(3) of the DDA but would potentially act as an early warning system for 'aggressive' dogs. It would also support the hierarchy of enforcement by providing an early opportunity to issue a warning to a dog owner and perhaps minimise risk of escalation to a dog bite incident. It might also increase awareness and educate both owners and the public as to the actions that can be taken and the consequences for irresponsible owners. The database itself, would enable the analysis of both human and dog-associated risk factors for dog aggression to inform future prevention strategies eg whether 'aggressive' behaviour and dog bite incidents are more prevalent across certain breed types, amongst certain socio-economic groups, in specific social situations or following certain human behaviours.<sup>147</sup>

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<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180328131950/http://content.digital.nhs.uk/article/4722/Dogbites-hospital-admissions-in-most-deprived-areas-three-times-as-high-as-least-deprived>

<sup>144</sup> Oxley, J. et al, (2010) Contexts and consequences of dog bite incidences. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* Volume 23, January–February 2018, pp. 33-39.

<sup>145</sup> Mannion, C. and Graham, A., (2016) Dog bite injuries in hospital practice. *British Journal of Hospital Medicine* 77: Sup10, C165-C168.

<sup>146</sup> HSCIC (2012) HES on dog bites and strikes. Available at:

<https://files.digital.nhs.uk/publicationimport/pub06xxx/pub06338/hes-on-dog-bite.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> Total number of hospital admission episodes for dog bites and strikes in England from December 2015 to April 2016, by age group. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/297523/dog-bite-victims-occurrences-in-england-by-age/>

**BVA and BSAVA position on the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and dog control**

(Page 18 of 21) December 2023

**Recommendation 4: A centralised database should be established to collect data on the context and severity of all incidents where dogs are out of control and pose a threat to public health and safety and also, any that result in a dog bite which requires medical treatment. This would ideally be part of more general recording of all incidents where dogs are out of control and pose a threat to public health and safety.**

**Recommendation 5: There should be further research into human and dog-associated risk factors for canine aggression.**

## **Promoting safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership**

Alongside legislation, it is paramount that education programmes are effectively utilised to reduce the risk of human-directed aggression in dogs, encourage responsible dog ownership and promote safe interactions between humans and dogs.<sup>148</sup> For example, research found a significant change in the behaviour of young children in a potentially risky situation with a dog after watching the 'Blue Dog' education CD as part of the Blue Dog Programme to promote safe relationships between children and dogs.<sup>149</sup>

There are already a number of initiatives delivered by animal welfare organisations that could be built upon, including the, [FEDIAF educational materials](#), [the Kennel Club's Safe and Sound scheme](#), [AWF/RSPCA Puppy Contract and Puppy Information Pack](#), [the Dog Safety factsheets by the Child Accident Prevention Trust](#), and [the Dogs Trust school visit programme](#). However, as noted in the 2018 [Efra Committee inquiry on controlling dangerous dogs](#), there is currently no national requirement for schools to make use of these materials, resulting in fragmented and piecemeal educational interventions across the UK. In addition, the role of adults who are responsible for supervising and managing the interactions of children and dogs requires greater focus. Information based solutions need to be supported by interventions based on human behaviour change principles and consider the role of those adults as their style of supervision is key in addressing the risks associated with child-dog interactions. This should lead to the development of behaviour modification strategies aimed at those adults.

In collaboration with the veterinary profession, animal welfare organisations and dog behaviour experts, the UK governments should therefore develop a nationwide education initiative and awareness campaign to educate the public about safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership.

The UK Governments should place particular emphasis on developing educational interventions for children<sup>150,151,152</sup> based on human behaviour change principles which are aimed at promoting safe dog-human interactions from an early age, including:

- Building on animal welfare in the national curriculum alongside education about understanding dog behaviour; and
- Undertaking a systems analysis of stakeholders to identify interactions between stakeholders and possible interventions to positively impact on human behaviour change relating to dog behaviour and aggression. This is likely to include education of both children and their carers to promote safe dog-child interactions.

We note that dog bite prevention strategies have mainly focused on children or those who come in close contact with dogs as part of their work eg postal workers. However, hospital admissions for dog bites and strikes in England increased steadily from in 3,377 in 2000-01 to 8,758 in 2021-22, an

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<sup>148</sup> De Keuster T, Lamoureux J, Kahn A (2006) Epidemiology of dog bites: a Belgian experience of canine behaviour and public health concerns. *Vet J. Nov*;172(3):482-7.

<sup>149</sup> Meints, K. and de Keuster, T. (2009). Brief Report: Don't Kiss a Sleeping Dog – The first assessment of "The Blue Dog" bite prevention programme. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 34 (10), 1084-1090.

<sup>150</sup> Reisner, I.R., Shofer, F.S. and Nance, M.L. (2007). Behavioral assessment of child-directed canine aggression. *Injury Prevention*, 13, 348-351.

<sup>151</sup> Bernado, L.M., Gardner, M.J., O'Connor, J. and Amon, N. (2000). Dog bites in children treated in a paediatric emergency department. *Journal of the Society of Paediatric Nurses*, 5 (2), 87-95.

<sup>152</sup> Kahn, A., Bauche, P., and Lamoureux, J. (2003). Child victims of dog bites treated in emergency departments. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 162, 254-258.

increase of 159%<sup>153,154</sup>, despite four types of dogs being banned. In fact, a study<sup>155</sup> published in 2021 also found that adult hospital admission rates for dog bites tripled in England between 1998-2018, and the incidence of dog bites in children had remained consistently high from 1989-2018. The same study found that between the financial years 2009/2010 and 2017/2018 the total estimated direct costs of dog bite admissions to hospitals were £174,188,443.

This suggests that more work is needed to promote safe dog-human interactions in adults and children alike.

It also highlights the need for responsible dog ownership throughout the dog's lifetime. This includes a focus on the selection process both in terms of choosing a dog that is suited to the prospective owners living circumstances and lifestyle as well as responsible sourcing be it via a breeder or rehoming organisation. [The Government's Petfished information campaign](#) and the [AWF/RSPCA Puppy Contract and Puppy Information Pack](#) are valuable existing tools but consideration should be given to how more information on responsible dog ownership could be targeted at new owners for example when a puppy's registration on a microchipping database is changed over to the new owner.

In the absence of a centralised register for dogs, which could assist in fostering better understanding of the UK's dog population and potential resulting welfare and public health issues, the information held on microchipping databases is the most comprehensive source of information on the UK dog population. We would therefore reiterate our call for the need to set up a single point of entry to allow for querying of existing multiple real-time databases and more work to be carried out to ensure the accuracy of the information held<sup>156</sup>.

Additionally, the issue of irresponsible dog breeding needs to be addressed by the Government. Existing dog breeding regulation and other animal welfare regulations are currently not adequately enforced due to a lack of resources. Issues around enforcement of existing animal welfare legislation have been highlighted in a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW)<sup>157</sup>.

It should also be considered whether the licensing regime should be extended to bring more dog breeders under its scope. Currently anyone breeding three or more litters in any 12-month period is required to be licensed. Additionally, a 'business test' is applied which extends the licensing regime to anyone breeding dogs as a business. However, the application of the business test is not consistently actioned across LAs which should be addressed by the creation of standards and guidelines and improved data sharing. According to evidence provided by Dogs Trust to Parliament's Efra inquiry into pet welfare and abuse, 90% of dogs in the UK are from unlicensed breeders<sup>158</sup>.

**Recommendation 6: In collaboration with the veterinary profession, animal welfare organisations and dog behaviour experts, the UK governments should develop a nationwide education initiative and awareness campaign to promote safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership across all age groups which is built around human behaviour change principles.**

**Recommendation 7: The UK Governments should place particular emphasis on developing interventions based on human behaviour change principles which are aimed at promoting safe dog-child interactions including:**

- **Building on animal welfare in the national curriculum alongside education about understanding dog behaviour; and**
- **Undertaking a systems analysis of stakeholders to identify interactions between stakeholders and possible interventions to positively impact on human behaviour change relating to dog behaviour and aggression. This is likely to include education of both children and their carers to promote safe dog-child interactions.**

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<sup>153</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/2021-22>

<sup>154</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-admitted-patient-care-activity/hospital-episode-statistics-admitted-patient-care-england-2000-01>

<sup>155</sup> Tulloch, J.S.P., Owczarczak-Garstecka, S.C., Fleming, K.M. et al. English hospital episode data analysis (1998–2018) reveal that the rise in dog bite hospital admissions is driven by adult cases. *Sci Rep* 11, 1767 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-81527-7>

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/4153/bva-position-on-microchip-scanning-dogs-and-databases.pdf>

<sup>157</sup> <https://apgaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-Animal-Welfare-Enforcement-Report.pdf>

<sup>158</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/13459/pdf/>

