

# BVA position on animal welfare

## Executive summary

Recognising animals as sentient beings provides the basis for our moral concern for the welfare of animals. Animals are living beings with the capacity to have feelings, including pain and pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Enhancing, protecting and securing the health and welfare of animals is the fundamental purpose of the veterinary profession. Animal welfare is a rapidly evolving social concern, and the veterinary profession plays a leading role in an interdisciplinary community seeking to promote the best interests of animals and improve their treatment, wherever they are used or impacted by people.

The importance of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons is conveyed in the declaration that each veterinary surgeon makes upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons: "...ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."

The veterinary profession has a crucial role to play in advancing of animal welfare at individual, community, national and international levels. The [BVA Animal Welfare Strategy 'Vets speaking up for animal welfare'](#) provides a framework to help vets advocate good animal welfare outcomes for all animals.

With developments in animal welfare science, we are now better able to characterise animal welfare, and frameworks for assessing and managing animal welfare have evolved.<sup>2</sup> Historically, animal welfare assessment and management has centred on identifying and minimising negative effects on animal welfare. More recently, animal welfare science has shifted towards models that strive not only to minimise negative welfare effects but also to maximise positive welfare effects. Such approaches recognise that animals used by humans should have, at least, 'a life worth living', with a growing number of animals having a 'good life'.<sup>3,4</sup>

In light of these advances in understanding, in this position we set out how key stakeholders can work together to protect, advocate and enhance animal welfare. Our recommendations cover:

- Defining and assessing animal welfare
- Human-animal interactions
- Animal welfare in UK legislation
- The role of the veterinary profession in advocating for animal welfare
- Veterinary training and education in animal welfare

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<sup>1</sup> British Veterinary Association, 2021. BVA position on the recognition of animals as sentient beings. Available at: <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/4052/bva-policy-position-on-the-recognition-of-animals-as-sentient-beings.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Mellor, D. J., 2016. Updating animal welfare thinking: Moving beyond the "five freedoms" towards "A life worth living." *Animals*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani6030021>

<sup>3</sup> FVE/AVMA/CVMA, 2020. Joint AVMA-FVE-CVMA statement on the roles of veterinarians in promoting animal welfare. <https://fve.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/FVE-AVMA-CVMA-position-statement-on-animal-welfare-Clean-Version.docx.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Mellor, D. J., 2016. Updating animal welfare thinking: Moving beyond the "five freedoms" towards "A life worth living." *Animals*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani6030021>

## Summary of recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** To have a ‘good life’, and at least a ‘life worth living’, animals must have the opportunity to have positive experiences. Over time, positive experiences should outweigh negative experiences. This should encompass the whole of an animal’s life.

**Recommendation 2:** To protect, advocate and enhance animal welfare, the welfare of sentient animals should be assessed using up-to-date concepts, tools and scientific approaches. This includes awareness and assessments of behaviour as both a welfare indicator and welfare determinant, and assessment of mental wellbeing.

**Recommendation 3:** Animal health and welfare should not be unnecessarily compromised to address human want or need. Wherever animals are used for human benefit, including for food, clothing, entertainment, sport, scientific research, education, transportation and companionship, this should be exercised responsibly, with compassion for the animals concerned, and due regard for animal welfare, including decisions on breeding and selection. Any use of animals for human benefit should minimise negative welfare impacts, promote positive experiences and work towards positive welfare outcomes for all animals involved.

**Recommendation 4:** Efforts to control wildlife should predictably and effectively cause the least animal welfare harms to the least number of animals. We support the seven consensus principles for ethical wildlife control, as described by Dubois et al. (2017)<sup>5</sup> as valuable tools for assessing the ethical considerations associated with wild-life control methods and their impact on animal welfare.

**Recommendation 5:** UK governments should reconceptualise characterisations of animal welfare in legislation. Management of welfare should not be limited to mitigating negative consequences but also promoting positive experiences and enhancing welfare. Animal welfare should therefore be defined in UK legislation in line with the Five Domains model.

**Recommendation 6:** A named individual within government should be tasked with regularly engaging with research and declaring when the evidence suggests species are sentient. This would ensure that sentient species are afforded appropriate legislative welfare protections.

**Recommendation 7:** Improving animal health and welfare should be the veterinary profession’s primary aim and motivation. The veterinary profession should provide strong and visible leadership on animal welfare at individual, community, national and international levels.

**Recommendation 8:** Veterinary schools should continue to integrate awareness and enhance training in animal welfare, science, ethics and law (AWSEL) across veterinary undergraduate curricula.

**Recommendation 9:** For the veterinary profession to justifiably position itself as animal welfare focussed, awareness and training in animal welfare advocacy at undergraduate and post-graduate level should be strengthened.

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<sup>5</sup> Dubois et al. (2017) International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control