

## 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> In fact, a study published in 2021 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Further, ONS data shows that dog attack fatalities have in fact increased since the introduction of the Act.<sup>5</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 biting incidents, including a dog's socialisation,<sup>6,7</sup> rearing and training,<sup>8,9,10,11,12</sup> environmental circumstances

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

2 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.

3 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>

4 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>

5 Ibid.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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 Artgemässen Tierhaltung 2005*, KTBL-Schrift 441. KTBL: Darmstadt, pp. 103-114.

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

10 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*.

11 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.

12 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>13,14,15</sup>and human-associated risk factors. <sup>16,17,18,19,20,21</sup> Canine aggression and dog biting incidents should therefore be considered as complex public health and social issues, which require multifactorial prevention strategies.<sup>22</sup>

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

- Repealing Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991);
- Effective enforcement and consolidation of existing dog control legislation;
- Commissioning additional research and establishing a centralised dog biting incident database; and
- Promoting safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership through education and campaign programmes.

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

13 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.

14 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.

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

16 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.

17 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

18 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.

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

20 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.

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

22 Orritt, R. (2015) Dog bites: a complex public health issue. *Veterinary Record* 176, 640-641.

<https://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/176/25/640.citation-tools>

**Recommendation 5:** A centralised dog biting incident database should be established to collect data on the context and severity of all dog biting incidents that result in medical treatment.

**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.

**Recommendation 7:** The UK Governments should place particular emphasis on developing educational interventions for children that promote safe dog-human interactions, including:

- Introducing animal welfare to the national curriculum; and
- Developing standardised educational materials on safe dog-human interactions, which are made readily available in all schools.

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### 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 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>24</sup> In fact, a study published in 2021 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> Further, ONS data shows that dog attack fatalities have in fact increased since the introduction of the Act.<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 biting incidents, including a dog's socialisation,<sup>28,29</sup> rearing and training,<sup>30,31,32,33,34</sup> environmental

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

24 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.

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27 Ibid.

28 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.

29 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.

30 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.

31 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.

32 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.

33 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.

34 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

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circumstances<sup>35,36,37</sup> and human-associated risk factors.<sup>38,39,40,41,42,43</sup> Canine aggression and dog biting incidents should therefore be considered as complex public health and social issues, which require multifactorial prevention strategies.<sup>44</sup>

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

- Repealing Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991);
- Effective enforcement and consolidation of existing dog control legislation;
- Commissioning additional research and establishing a centralised dog biting incident database; and
- Promoting safe dog-human interactions and responsible ownership through education and campaign programmes.

### **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 its 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>45</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:

35 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.

36 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.

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

38 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.

39 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

40 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.

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

42 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.

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

44 Orritt, R. (2015) Dog bites: a complex public health issue. *Veterinary Record* 176, 640-641.

<https://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/176/25/640.citation-tools>

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

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- 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) does not apply to Northern Ireland, but corresponding provisions are set out in The Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.<sup>46</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>47</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 biting incidents. Given the multiple factors involved in the development of canine aggression (socialisation, rearing and training, environmental circumstances and human-associated risk factors), research has indicated that the aggressive potential of dogs should be evaluated at an individual level.<sup>48,49,50</sup>

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>51,52,53,54</sup> No studies suggest an increased incidence of aggression or biting injury in breeds listed in the Dangerous Dogs

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1991/2292/contents/made>

<sup>47</sup> Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) Position on Dangerous Dogs. Available at:

<https://www.fve.org/publications/dangerous-dogs/>

<sup>48</sup> Collier, S., 2006. Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified? *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 1, 17-22.

<sup>49</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>50</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>51</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>52</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>53</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>54</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 the permanent test of Lower Saxony. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, 3, 97-103.

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Act (1991) Section 1, nor in other ‘fighting’ or ‘bull’ type breeds.<sup>55,56,57</sup> Whilst it may be argued that Pit Bull Terrier types cause considerable damage should they bite, there is no evidence from hospital data that this is any more the case than for any other breed of dog of a similar size.

In addition, in a study which examined legal cases brought under the Dangerous Dogs Act between 1992 to 2019, only 8% of cases involved a banned breed being dangerously out of control.<sup>58</sup>

There is a lack of consistency in findings between studies that have tried to identify breeds with an increased risk for aggression, together with greater consistency between studies in identifying environmental and human-behavioural risk factors. This therefore indicates 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 biting incidents.

### Identifying breed type

Several studies have brought into question the validity of determining breed identity based on appearance<sup>59,60,61,62</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 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 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>63</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>64</sup> Ultimately, this can result in bull breeds or terrier cross breeds being identified as a prohibited type.

55 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*. doi.org/10.1186/s40575-020-00092-w

56 Collier, S., 2006. Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified? *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 1, 17-22.

57 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.

58 Allcock, T, Campbell, MLH. The UK Dangerous Dogs Act: Improved, but legally and ethically flawed. *Vet Rec*. 2021;e24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/vetr.24>

59 Hoffman CL, Harrison N, Wolff L, Westgarth C. Is that dog a pit bull? A cross-country comparison of perceptions of shelter workers regarding breed identification. *J Appl Anim Welf Sci*. 2014;17(4):322-339. doi:10.1080/10888705.2014.895904

60 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.

61 Webster C, Farnworth M. 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*. 2018;22(3):240–54.

62 Allcock, T, Campbell, MLH. The UK Dangerous Dogs Act: Improved, but legally and ethically flawed. *Vet Rec*. 2021;e24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/vetr.24>

63 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Dangerous dogs law: Guidance for enforcers. 2009. <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/pets/cruelty/documents/dogs-guide-enforcers.pdf> [Google Scholar]

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

### 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>65,66</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.

Figure 1 shows the total number of dogs registered on the IED in 2014, 2018 and 2020 and breakdown by breed type. With the exception of the Fila Brasileiro, numbers of each breed type registered on the IED have increased, 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 and 2020 broken down by breed type.**

Prohibited breed type	Number of dogs on the IED in 2014 <sup>67</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED in 2018 <sup>68</sup>	Number of dogs on the IED 2020 <sup>69</sup>
Pit Bull Terrier	2652	3514	3556
Dogo Argentino	4	13	19
Fila Brasileiro	0	0	0
Japanese Tosa	2	3	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2658</b>	<b>3530</b>	<b>3578</b>

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-biting incidents

A review five years after the implementation of the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) found no significant reduction in dog bites.<sup>70</sup> In fact, a study published in 2021 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.<sup>71</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>72</sup>, suggesting that the total number of dog biting 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

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

66 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.

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

68 Defra's written evidence to the Efra Committee inquiry on controlling dangerous dogs in 2018

69 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.

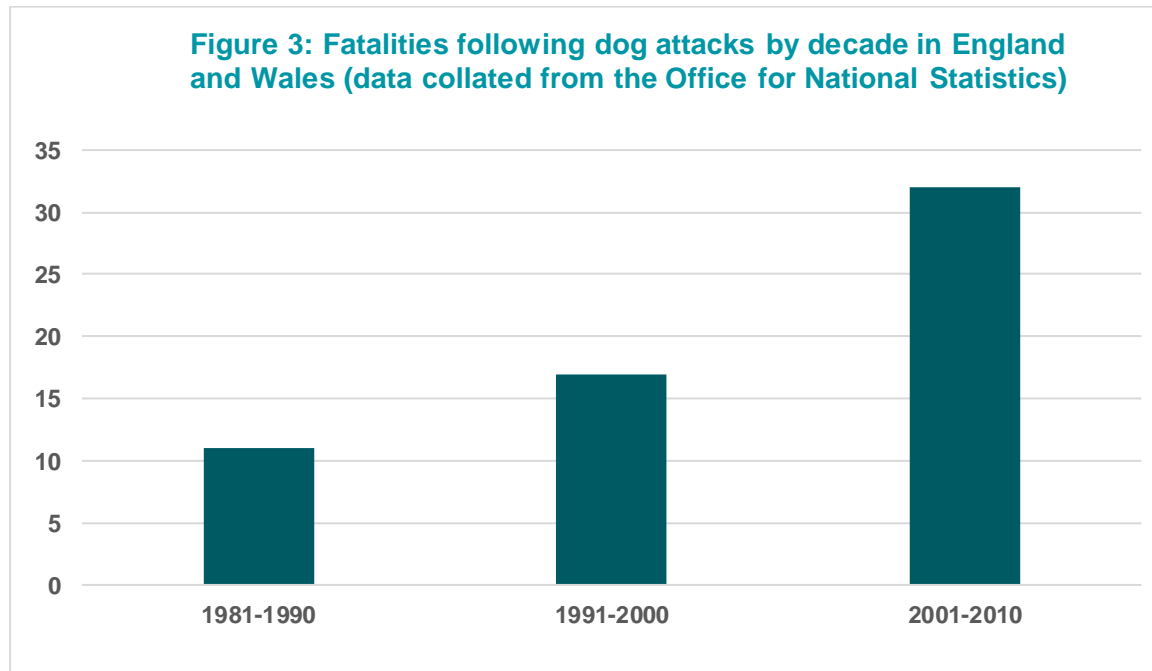
70 Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A. Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department. *Injury*. 1996 Mar;27(2):89-91. doi: 10.1016/0020-1383(96)83411-5. PMID: 8730379.

71 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>

72 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>

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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>73</sup> Figure 3 demonstrates the steady rise in dog fatalities in England and Wales between 1981-2010 based on ONS statistics.<sup>74</sup>



### Causing misconception

Research has shown that the ability of the public in the UK to identify banned breeds of dogs is generally poor.<sup>75</sup> In addition, defining particular breeds as “dangerous” can create the misleading assumption amongst the public that canine aggression and dog biting 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 emphasis on the importance of responsible ownership in preventing canine aggression and dog biting incidents.

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

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

As the RSPCA’s 2016 report [Breed Specific Legislation: A Dog’s Dinner](#) highlighted, this process

<sup>73</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>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</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, DOI: 10.1080/10888705.2018.1476864

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>76</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 levels, lack of environmental enrichment, small kennel sizes may negatively influence dogs' behaviour patterns and social interactions.<sup>77,78,79</sup>
- **Conditions of exemption posing risk** – dogs on the Index of Exempted Dogs must comply with a series of conditions such as being muzzled and on a lead when in a public space. Keeping a dog on a lead at all times in public or isolating dogs to particular areas is likely to reduce their ability to show a normal range of behaviours and therefore negatively impact on their welfare. Ultimately this could prove counterproductive, as dogs are more likely to show aggression when exposed to unexpected or unknown events.<sup>80</sup> Muzzling can also compromise welfare by limiting the ability to interact with dogs and people, and preventing dogs from visibly expressing important facial communication signals, reducing another dog or human's ability to read body language and react appropriately.

### Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act

Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act<sup>81</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.

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 2015–16 indicated that breeds not listed in Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act accounted for around 80 percent of incidents (468 incidents in total) involving Section 3 'dangerously out of control' offences.<sup>82</sup>

Figure 4 sets out the number of prosecutions between 2013-2017 for allowing a dog to be dangerously out of control under 3 Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

76 Shepherd, K. (2011). Handling and restraining aggressive dogs. *Veterinary Record*. 359-360.

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

78 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.

79 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.

80 BVA, 2017. Policy position on dogs in public amenity spaces. Available at:

[https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News\\_campaigns\\_and\\_policies/Policies/Companion\\_animals/Policy%20position%20on%20dogs%20in%20public%20amenity%20spaces.pdf](https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policies/Policies/Companion_animals/Policy%20position%20on%20dogs%20in%20public%20amenity%20spaces.pdf)

81 In Northern Ireland this provision is applied through Article 4 of The Dangerous Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1991

82 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/85655.pdf>

**Figure 4 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>83</sup>**

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

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 biting incidents have increased across all breeds since the introduction of the Act<sup>84,85,86,87,88</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 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 biting 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.**

### 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 5 sets out the different pieces of dog control legislation currently in force.

Figure 5: Dog control legislation across the UK administrations		
England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Section 3 of the Dangerous	Section 3 of the Dangerous	The Dangerous Dogs

<sup>83</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/dangerous-dogs-breed-specific-legislation/written/83473.pdf>

<sup>84</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>85</sup> BBC, 2015. Rise in dog bite admissions. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32912084>

<sup>86</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>87</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>88</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>

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

<b>Dogs Act (1991)</b> - makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper	<b>Dogs Act (1991)</b> - makes provisions to ensure that all dogs are kept under proper control by their keeper	<b>(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 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	<b>Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953</b> - 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. 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>	<b>The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011</b> – make provisions for dog licensing, and offences for livestock worrying and dog attacks on people, as well as fixed penalty notices.
<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.	<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	<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.
<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.		

While we welcome and support this ‘deed-not-breed’ approach, 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.

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

- **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.

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 have been as there is no centrally collected and reported data on how these powers have been used.<sup>89</sup>

#### 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 kennelling 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>90</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>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> House of Commons Library, 2020. Briefing paper on Tackling anti-social behaviour. Available at:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7270/>

<sup>90</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>91</sup> Steps to Improve the Operational Effectiveness of the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010

### 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 biting incidents and worrying. Dog attacks, dog biting 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;
- 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.

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**

Consequently, 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 biting incidents and canine aggression should be recognised as complex public health issues, which require a 'One Health' collaborative approach.<sup>92, 93</sup>

92 Orritt, R., 2015. Dog bites: a complex public health issue Veterinary Record 176, 640-641.

93 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](#).

In some cases, aggression in dogs may be indicative of wider issues within a household or their use as status or weapon dogs<sup>94</sup> and dogs or their owners may need to be removed from a household to safeguard the dog's own health and welfare.<sup>95,96</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 incident of dog bites in deprived areas is higher than in less deprived areas.<sup>97</sup> With these complexities in mind, social 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.**

#### **Additional research and a centralised database**

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 biting incidents.

As part of this, it is necessary to better understand the prevalence of dog biting incidents. Therefore, a centralised dog biting incident database should be established to record all incidents that result in medical treatment. Given that dog biting incidents are a complex public health issue, such a database should collect as much relevant information about the dog biting incident as possible, including the severity of the bite, breed type, type of treatment (eg. GP visit, accident and emergency visit, or long-term hospitalisation), the age of the victim, postcode, and relevant circumstances leading up to the incident.<sup>98,99,100</sup> This would enable the analysis of both human and dog-associated risk factors for dog aggression to inform future prevention strategies eg. whether dog biting incidents are more prevalent across certain breed types, amongst certain socio-economic groups, in specific social

94Harding, S., 2012. Unleashed: the Phenomena of Status Dogs and Weapon Dogs. The Policy Press, Bristol, UK. ISBN 9781447300274

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

96 Grant, D., 2011. Political and practical problems with dangerous dogs Veterinary Record 168, 133-134.

97 HSCIC, 2014. Dog bites: hospital admissions in most deprived areas three times as high as least deprived. Available at:

<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>

98 Oxley, J. et al, 2010. Contexts and consequences of dog bite incidences. Journal of Veterinary Behavior Volume 23, January–February 2018, pp. 33-39. Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1558787817301168>

99 Mannion, C. and Graham, A., 2016. Dog bite injuries in hospital practice British Journal of Hospital Medicine 2016 77:Sup10, C165-C168. Available at:

<https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/abs/10.12968/hmed.2016.77.10.C165?journalCode=hmed>

100 HSCIC, 2012. HES on dog bites and strikes. Available at:

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

situations or following certain human behaviours.<sup>101</sup>

**Recommendation 4: There should be further research into human and dog-associated risk factors for canine aggression.**

**Recommendation 5: A centralised dog biting incident database should be established to collect data on the context and severity of all dog biting incidents that result in medical treatment.**

### **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>102</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>103</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](#) and the [AWF/RSPCA Puppy Contract and Puppy Information Pack](#). 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 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>104,105,106</sup> that promote safe dog-human interactions from an early age, including:

- Introducing animal welfare to the national curriculum; and
- Developing standardised educational materials on safe dog-human interactions, which are made readily available in all schools.

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, evidence published in 2021 indicates that the incidence of dog bites resulting in hospital admissions for adults has tripled in the 20-year period between 1998-2018, with that of children remaining stable but high.<sup>107</sup> This suggests that more work is needed to promote safe dog-human interactions in adults and children alike.

<sup>101</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: [There is already evidence on this in relation to age](https://www.statista.com/statistics/297523/dog-bite-victims-occurrences-in-england-by-age/) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/297523/dog-bite-victims-occurrences-in-england-by-age/>

<sup>102</sup> De Keuster T, Lamoureux J, Kahn A. Epidemiology of dog bites: a Belgian experience of canine behaviour and public health concerns. Vet J. 2006 Nov;172(3):482-7. doi: 10.1016/j.tvjl.2005.04.024. Epub 2005 Jul 1. PMID: 15996492.

<sup>103</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>104</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>105</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>106</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>107</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>

**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.

**Recommendation 7:** The UK Governments should place particular emphasis on developing educational interventions for children that promote safe dog-human interactions, including:

- Introducing animal welfare to the national curriculum; and
- Developing standardised educational materials on safe dog-human interactions, which are made readily available in all schools.