

Policy position: animal welfare

The Lisbon Treaty states that ‘in formulating ... policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals’. It is recognised that sentient animals are capable of experiencing positive and negative feelings such as pain, frustration and contentment and so deserve consideration and respect.

Where animals are used for human benefit, including for food, clothing, entertainment, sport, scientific research, transport and companionship, we believe that this should be exercised with responsibility, and with consideration and compassion for the animals concerned.

Definition of animal welfare

We believe that animal welfare relates to both the physical health and mental wellbeing of the animal, as encapsulated by the five welfare needs:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

There is a legal duty of care placed upon all animal keepers and owners under UK animal welfare legislation,¹ and in line with this, we believe that the five welfare needs are essential to the welfare of any animal.

¹ [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#), [Animal Health and Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#), [Welfare of Animals Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

The role of the veterinary profession in relation to animal welfare

The veterinary profession is part of an interdisciplinary community seeking to promote the best interests of animals and improve their treatment, wherever they are used or impacted on by people. Indeed, veterinary surgeons in the UK make a declaration upon registration that '**above all**, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care.'

Veterinary surgeons have opportunities and responsibilities to advocate for animals' best interests at the level of the individual, having direct contact with animal keepers and owners; at the community level, for example veterinary practices offering animal welfare expertise through local media and outreach activities; and at the national level, through veterinary associations formulating policies and lobbying.

It is recognised that neither sentiment nor economic factors can be entirely divorced from animal welfare considerations, yet they should never be paramount in its consideration. We consider that improving animal welfare should be the profession's primary aim and motivation.

Taking a lead on animal welfare

We regard the veterinary profession as an animal welfare-focused profession, providing strong and visible leadership on animal welfare. Of course after animal welfare, vets also need to take their and their clients' needs into account as all three are interlinked. By working with their clients and ensuring their veterinary activities are economically viable, veterinary surgeons are able to achieve their primary aim of improving animal welfare.