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The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2013, 22: 239-253
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.22.2.239

A survey of stakeholders' opinions on the priority issues affecting the welfare of companion dogs in Great Britain

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Abstract

An online survey, using open and prompted response questions, was undertaken to collate the views of stakeholders on the priority welfare issues currently facing companion dogs (Canis familiaris) in Great Britain and on dogs' general quality of life. The stakeholder sectors targeted broadly comprised Education, Government, Industry, Charity and Veterinary. Overall, respondents described companion dogs as, at minimum, having a life worth living. Whether welfare issues were openly described or ranked within a set list, those of high priority in the perceptions of stakeholders matched those cited in published scientific literature; particularly, exaggerated physical features, inherited disease, obesity and inappropriate socialisation. Puppy farming and status dogs, which have been highlighted recently in the media, were also viewed as important. Lack of appropriate mental stimulation, irresponsible ownership and inappropriate environment were raised as priority issues by stakeholders and are under-reported in scientific literature. Significant differences between stakeholder sectors in ranking of welfare issues perceived importance, urgency to rectify, impact (on the individual) or prevalence in Britain may be explained by vested interests, organisational roles, differences in terminology and the contexts within which stakeholders came into contact with companion dogs. Pet travel, dew claw removal and complementary and alternative medicines were amongst those issues thought to be of least urgent welfare concern. Issues perceived to enhance welfare included the quality of veterinary care, physical stimulation, educational resources, responsible ownership, the high status of dogs in society and the work of welfare organisations.

Keywords: *animal welfare, companion animal, dog, quality of life, stakeholder, survey*