Mapping farm animal welfare education at university level in Europe

G Illmann*, L Keeling‡, M Melišová†, M Šimečková§, V Ilieski#, C Winckler¶, L Košťál¥, M-C Meunier-Salaün¢, Š MihinaÞ, H Spoolder§, G Fthenakisá, R Šárová† and M Špinka†

† Department of Ethology, Institute of Animal Science, Prague, Czech Republic
‡ Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Animal Environment and Health, Uppsala, Sweden
§ Biometric Unit, Institute of Animal Science, Prague, Czech Republic
# Department of Functional Morphology, Faculty for Veterinary Medicine, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
¢ University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Division of Livestock Sciences, Vienna, Austria
Þ Faculty of Engineering, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia
¥ Institute of Animal Biochemistry and Genetics, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Ivanka pri Dunaji, Slovakia
INRA-Agrocampus Ouest, UMR 1348 PEGASE 35590, Saint-Gilles, France
§ Wageningen UR Livestock Research, Lelystad, The Netherlands
¶ Veterinary Faculty, University of Thessaly, Karditsa, Greece
* Contact for correspondence and request for reprints: gudrun.illmann@vuzv.cz

Abstract

The aim of this study was to map farm animal welfare university education in an enlarged Europe with emphasis on identifying existing differences and gaps. Information on 210 courses dealing with farm animal welfare from 98 universities in 26 European countries were obtained. Statistical analysis was carried out on 155 of these courses within animal science or veterinary programmes, at Bachelor and Master level and with the countries grouped into five regions (North West Europe, Mediterranean, West Central Europe, East Central Europe and Balkans). There were significantly more hours of teaching in animal welfare in the North West region of Europe. This region also had more ‘interactive’ education methods, eg group discussion and farm visits, whereas West Central Europe had most ‘transmissive’ methods, eg lecturing. A course was more likely to be given in English in North West Europe (even when the UK and the Republic of Ireland were excluded from the analysis) and East Central Europe compared to West Central Europe and the Balkans. There appeared to be no regional differences in the content of the courses although the focus was significantly more ‘applied’, ie towards welfare assessment and legislation in the veterinary education and more ‘fundamental’, ie oriented towards ethology, physiology and ethics, in the animal science education. In summary, the main differences in farm animal welfare education across Europe seem to be in the reduced number of hours of education, less interactive teaching and fewer courses in English available to students outside the North West region.

Keywords: animal science, animal welfare, Europe, farm animals, university education, veterinary medicine

Introduction

There are an increasing number of courses completely or partly dedicated to farm animal welfare within European university education. Up until now most of the research into education on animal welfare has been directed to what and how it should be taught (Lord & Walker 2009; Molento & Calderon 2009; Main 2010; Abood & Siegfard 2012). These studies are important because the science of animal welfare is inextricably linked to values (Fraser 1995) and the approach and content of courses dealing with animal welfare may influence later attitudes and perspectives towards the subject (Paul & Podberscek 2000; Clark 2010; Hazel et al 2011). This paper, however, also addresses where it is taught, which up until now has been rather neglected because of the obvious difficulties of locating all the different courses. There have been surveys focusing solely on teaching in animal welfare in veterinary programmes; eg investigating 16 veterinary schools worldwide (Hewson et al 2005) and 43 veterinary schools in Europe (Briyne 2011) or focusing on postgraduate teaching (Lund 1997). A large-scale survey focusing on animal welfare education, irrespective of the programme in which it is taught, has not been attempted before.

Phillips et al (2012) recently concluded there are significant regional and national differences in attitudes to the welfare and rights of animals. That study involved students from eleven European and Asian countries. Differences in societal attitudes and awareness of animal welfare issues across Europe have also already been well documented (Evans & Miele 2007, 2008). Given these differences in