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Establishing consensus on the best ways to educate children about animal welfare and prevent harm: An online Delphi study

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Abstract

Many animal welfare organisations deliver education programmes for children and young people, or design materials for schoolteachers to use. However, few of these are scientifically evaluated, making it difficult for those working in this field to establish with any certainty the degree of success of their own programmes, or learn from others. There has been no guidance specifically tailored to the development and evaluation of animal welfare education interventions. Accordingly, a three-stage online Delphi study was designed to unearth the expertise of professionals working in this field and identify degree of consensus on various aspects of the intervention process: design, implementation and evaluation. Thirty-one experts participated in Round 1, representing eleven of 13 organisations in the Scottish Animal Welfare Education Forum (SAWEF), and eleven of 23 members of the wider UK-based Animal Welfare Education Alliance (AWEA). Seven further professionals participated, including four based in Canada or the US. Eighty-four percent of the original sample participated in Round 2, where a high level of consensus was apparent. However, the study also revealed areas of ambiguity (determining priorities, the need for intervention structure and degree of success). Tensions were also evident with respect to terminology (especially around cruelty and cruelty prevention), and the common goal for animal welfare to be part of school curricula. Findings were used to develop a web-based framework and toolkit to enable practitioners to follow evidence-based guidance. This should enable organisations to maximise the quality and effectiveness of their interventions for children and young people.

Keywords: animal welfare, animal welfare education, children, cruelty prevention, Delphi, young people