

© 2021 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2021, 30: 197-209
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.30.2.197

The challenges and future development of animal welfare education in the UK

JC Muldoon and JM Williams*

Caar (Children, adolescents and animals research), Clinical & Health Psychology, University of Edinburgh, Doorway 6, Medical School, Elsie Inglis Quad, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, UK

* Contact for correspondence: janine.muldoon@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

At present, UK schools are not required to teach children about animal welfare. This undoubtedly contributes to widespread deficiencies in knowledge, and misconceptions about animals' needs, likes, and dislikes. Aware of the issues at hand, animal welfare organisations create their own materials for teachers to use, and/or deliver educational programmes directly to children and young people. As the design, content, processes and outcomes associated with these interventions are rarely documented publicly or systematically evaluated, there is little evidence to guide the development of animal welfare education. A three-stage online Delphi study was used to identify who current interventions target, what delivery methods are being used, and how expert practitioners describe priorities and challenges in the field. Thirty-one experts participated in Round 1, with 84% of the sample (n = 26) also taking part in Round 2. Qualitative analysis revealed passionate accounts about the far-reaching potential of educating children about animals. However, we also identified ambiguities and tensions that could thwart the future development of effective animal welfare education. Alongside the production of a web-based framework and evidence-based toolkit to support practitioners, findings will be used to encourage animal welfare professionals to work towards producing shared terminology, definitions, and outcomes' frameworks; focusing on positive education and the idea of harm as opposed to cruelty. This should facilitate collaboration with schoolteachers and education policy-makers to assess the ways in which animal welfare might be successfully incorporated within formal education in the future. These data suggest many potential avenues for inclusion, although a holistic approach emphasising the links between humans, animals and the environment, within the context of young people's recent activism and contemporary health, societal and environmental issues, may be most successful.

Keywords: *animal welfare, animal welfare education, children, cruelty prevention, Delphi, evaluation*