



## UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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### PRESS RELEASE

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## Time for Change: New Study Calls for Dog Breeding Practices to Put Welfare Over Appearance

A [new study](#), published in the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) journal *Animal Welfare*, published by Cambridge University Press, presents a compelling call for reform in dog breeding practices. Led by Associate Professor Helle Friis Proschowsky and Professor Peter Sandøe of the University of Copenhagen, in collaboration with colleagues from the UK, the US and Canada, the study challenges the dominance of appearance-driven breeding and advocates for a stronger focus on canine health and welfare.

Titled *A New Future for Dog Breeding*, the study highlights the rising concerns over the genetic health of purebred dogs, from inherited disorders to problems linked with selection for extreme physical characteristics. It also examines trends such as the diminishing influence of traditional kennel clubs, the rise of designer breeds—deliberate crosses of two established breeds such as Cockapoos (Cocker Spaniel x Poodle) and Labradoodles (Labrador x Poodle), and the increased popularity of mixed-breed dogs. The study challenges assumptions about the advantages of designer breeds and mixed breeds, noting that while genetic diversity can mitigate certain inherited disorders, these dogs are not immune to health or behavioural problems.

The study's findings echo concerns recently outlined by the UK Government's Animal Welfare Committee [in their published opinion](#) on specialised canine reproductive practices. The Committee highlighted the urgent welfare implications of breeding for extreme physical traits and the need for systemic reforms to prioritise animal welfare.

In their study, the authors propose a balanced scientific framework for reform, urging breeders and regulators to:

- Refrain from a knee-jerk shutting down of all kennel and breed clubs, but to retain a formal

dog breeding register to improve genetic diversity and reduce uncontrolled dog breeding, thereby providing traceability and transparency.

- Remove traits in breed standards that promote extreme physical characteristics detrimental to health.
- Ensure that legislation is introduced so that changes apply to the entire population of dogs and not simply to pedigree dogs, as is often the case with breed-specific health schemes administered by the kennel clubs.
- Support the use of modern genetic tools to select against disease-predisposing genotypes and phenotypes.

**Commenting on the findings, Associate Professor Proschowsky said:**

*“With the paper we want to stress the urgency of action in the field and present some ways to move forward. Next, we wish to add some evidence-based nuances to some of the statements that are often heard in the public debate. This includes the argument that mixed breeds or designer breeds are always healthier, and that the whole concept of breeds should be abandoned. Our main message here is that what is needed is not to give up organized breeding of dogs but to breed with the aim of having future dogs who are healthy.”*

**Professor Peter Sandøe said:**

*“It is not only important that the dogs are healthy, they should also function well with their prospective owners. Relating to this last point, we engage in the recent discussion concerning behavioural differences between dogs of different breeds. Some researchers claim that the different dog breeds are “just looks” while others have argued (in our view convincingly) that despite most modern dogs being bred for looks, they still significantly differ in their behavioural repertoire related to the purpose for which they were originally bred (hunting, herding, guarding etc).”*

**Joint Editor-in-Chief of *Animal Welfare*, Dr Birte Nielsen, added:**

*“This is a very timely publication, that gives an excellent summary of dog breeding throughout the ages, leading to how we ended up with the current situation where, for many breeds, health and welfare have been sacrificed in favour of looks. As a Horizon Paper, this article is a useful reference tool for anyone working with the breeding and genetics of dogs, either in theory or in practice.”*

The study emphasises the need for a collaborative approach among breeders, veterinary professionals, geneticists, and policymakers to implement reforms that balance welfare and practicality. It also stresses the pressing need for change in dog breeding, urging a shift from prioritising physical appearance to focusing on health and welfare.

The full study, titled A New Future for Dog Breeding, is available to read open access [here](#). Full article reference: Proschowsky HF, Arendt ML, Bonnett BN, Bruun CS, Czycholl I, Fredholm M, O’Neill D, Serpell JA and Sandøe P (2025). A new future for dog breeding. *Animal Welfare*, 34, e1, 1–16 <https://doi.org/10.1017/awf.2024.66>

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### Notes to Editors:

#### About the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare:

[The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare \(UFAW\)](#) is an international, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity and membership organisation. UFAW's vision is a world where the welfare of all animals affected by humans is maximised through a scientific understanding of their needs and how to meet them. UFAW promotes an evidence-based approach to animal welfare by funding scientific research, supporting the careers of animal welfare scientists and by disseminating animal welfare science knowledge both to experts and the wider public.

UFAW offers an extensive resource on genetic welfare issues in companion animals, designed to inform prospective pet owners. These webpages are being actively revised and updated to reflect the latest science-based information. To view the current content, click [here](#).

UFAW's work relies on the support of members, subscribers, and donors. To learn more about our work, to become a member of UFAW, or to donate, please visit [www.ufaw.org.uk/](http://www.ufaw.org.uk/)

#### About the UFAW Journal - *Animal Welfare*

[Animal Welfare](#) is an international scientific journal. It publishes the results of peer-reviewed scientific research, technical studies, surveys and reviews relating to the welfare of kept animals (eg on farms, in laboratories, zoos and as companions) and of those in the wild whose welfare is compromised by human activities. Papers on related ethical and legal issues are also considered for publication. The journal also includes letters to the editor, opinion papers, horizon topics and commentary on topical issues such as developments in legislation and codes of practice relating to animal welfare, as well as book reviews.

*Animal Welfare* is published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of UFAW.

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