



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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Media Release

**From the
Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)**

For Immediate Release:

New UFAW website on genetic welfare problems in companion animals

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is today launching a new website to provide information about welfare aspects of genetic problems in companion animals.

In the development of companion animal breeds, many genetic problems have arisen through selection for particular features (eg the short muzzles of Pekingese dogs and Persian cats) and because of inbreeding. Some of these problems affect animals throughout their lives, and cause significant pain and distress. For examples of significant welfare problems, see the clinical and pathological effects and welfare aspects of dystocia in Boston terriers, brachycephalic airway obstruction syndrome in the bulldog, and brachycephaly in Persian cats at www.ufaw.org.uk/geneticwelfareproblems.php.

UFAW Chief Executive, James Kirkwood, said “The purpose of the resource is to provide clear information about the welfare consequences of hereditary problems – the ways in which they affect the animal’s quality of life. We hope this will be of help to breeders in efforts to avoid or tackle problems and prospective pet owners in assisting them to decide which species, breed or strain to choose, and to ask the right questions when choosing so as to avoid unintentionally perpetuating known genetic problems”. This follows a key recommendation of the Companion Animal Welfare Council, and of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) and the Bateson Enquiry which examined and reported on breeding and welfare in November 2009 and January 2010 respectively.

Many genetic conditions are already described on the site and work is in progress to add many more. Information on a breed by breed and condition by condition basis will cover, in due course, as wide a range of companion animals (dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish), and as wide a range of genetic diseases as possible.

The problem of health issues related to unsuitable breeding was listed as the top welfare concern of vets and vet nurses in the PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2011* released last month. PDSA Senior Veterinary Surgeon, Sean Wensley, says: “Our report confirms that there are many health and welfare issues facing pets in the UK today, but the issues surrounding unsuitable and pedigree breeding emerged as the top concern for vets and vet nurses. A key aspect of tackling these problems is informing prospective owners about the health conditions that certain breeds are prone to, so that they can then choose healthy pets. If more healthy animals are bought, then more healthy animals will be bred. The new evidence-based information on UFAW’s website provides an excellent resource for prospective owners, as well as being a reliable and trusted source for anyone with an interest in, and concern for, the genetic welfare problems facing companion animals.”

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SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Chief Executive and Scientific Director: James K Kirkwood BVSc PhD CBiol FIBiol MRCVS

Secretary: Donald C Davidson

Registered Charity No. 207996 (Registered in England) and Company Limited by Guarantee No. 579991



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Since the world has begun to awaken to the nature and scale of these problems, many efforts have been initiated to try to tackle them. These involve breeders, vets, geneticists and others. Pet-buying society as a whole has a key part to play and UFAW hopes that this new web resource will be helpful to everyone in efforts to tackle these serious welfare problems.

-ENDS-

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Note to Editors:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

This work relies on the support of members, subscribers and donors.

* PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity. The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report produced in conjunction with YouGov, is the largest report of its kind to measure the wellbeing of the UK's most popular pets (dogs, cats and rabbits). To download a copy of the Report visit www.pdsa.org.uk/pawreport

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