



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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Media Release

From the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

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For Immediate Release:

‘Education is key to tackling genetic welfare problems in dogs and other animals’ says UFAW

As the BBC television programme last night emphasised again, genetic problems in companion animals arising from breeding practices are a very major welfare concern. The pet-buying public, breeders and others need to be aware of these problems and their effects on welfare so that, through pet purchasing decisions and better breeding strategies we can reduce their detrimental effects. Education is a key element of tackling this problem.

We have been breeding dogs for arbitrary aspects of appearance, such as size, shape and colour, for thousands of years. It is only very recently, through developments in veterinary science, that serious welfare consequences of this have become apparent. We are so used to seeing dogs with, for example, shortened (brachycephalic) head shapes that these tend not to be perceived as the major pathological abnormalities that they are. To tackle these problems, they first have to be recognised as problems, so it is important that breeders and pet owners are aware of the nature of the disease processes and the discomfort and pain that they can cause.

During the past two years, UFAW has been working to develop a website to provide clear information about the welfare consequences of hereditary problems in companion animals: to explain how these problems affect the quality of animals' lives. Reactions to this website (which is at www.ufaw.org.uk/geneticwelfareproblems.php) have been positive. Feedback from visitors indicates that people have found it to be very helpful in explaining the problems and their welfare consequences.

UFAW's Scientific Director, James Kirkwood, says:

“It is early days, but the indications are that this site is helping people to understand how breeding for aspects of appearance can have very serious consequences to the resulting animal's quality of life, and that welfare should be the top consideration in animal breeding.

These problems have been creeping up and getting worse for decades but perhaps there are signs that, at last, the tide may be beginning to turn thanks to shifting attitudes and the work of many scientists and vets in developing diagnostic tests and breeding strategies for tackling genetic diseases. However, there is a long way to go. Television programmes such as Pedigree Dogs Exposed have and are playing a major role in stimulating this shift, and we must now build on this through education.”

-ENDS-

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SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

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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.

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