



**AGENDA**  
**APGAW Meeting Notes**  
**6<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

**NB: These notes are not a full record of the discussion and only a very brief overview**

**Chaired by:**

Lord Trees

**Panel:**

Marisa Heath (APGAW)

Dr Dan O'Neill (VetCompass/ RVC)

Dr Jane Ladlow (Cambridge University)

Dr Alison Skipper (Canine Health Historian)

Malcolm Morley (President of BVA)

Prof Clare Rusbridge (University of Surrey)

Bill Lambert (Head of Kennel Club)

Dr Dan O'Neil – [VetCompass](#) and Chair of the [UK Brachycephalic Working Group](#)

The progress to date in relation to welfare issues related to brachycephaly in dogs in the UK offers lots of potential but the current reality for the hundreds of thousands of UK dogs born each year into lives of brachycephaly is that not a lot has changed.

Two key messages from 2009 'A Healthier Future for Pedigree Dogs' report included:

- 1) 'No doubt there is a serious problem' but this was caveated at that time by 'a lack of information available about the scale of the problem';
- 2) Specific and distinct breeding strategies were needed to redress the welfare issues of different breeds of dogs

In relation to progress on point 1, we have achieved good progress, with the practising arm of the veterinary profession showing its willingness to contribute data as recommended in the report to help fill the information gap. The VetCompass programme now shares anonymised clinical data with over 30% of vet clinics in the UK, covering over 20 million companion animals. With over 100 peer-reviewed papers published to date, VetCompass has substantially enhanced the evidence base on breed health and welfare in the UK.

VetCompass has provided overwhelming evidence on the level of welfare issues related to brachycephaly in dogs. with even an entire book now published exploring 21 perspectives on the severity and offering some routes forward: 'Health and welfare of brachycephalic (flat-faced) companion animals: a complete guide for veterinary and animal professionals' Longevity is a useful summary metric of lifetime health. The life expectancy of dogs overall in the UK is 11.2 years whereas many of the key brachycephalic breeds can expect to live around 7.5 years on average. This suggests that being born into brachycephaly costs these dogs around a third of their lifespan. VetCompass has published extensively on the various disorders that contribute to these overall health issues in dogs with brachycephaly.

In terms of developing plans for specific types of dogs. the UK is currently following a collaborative approach to find a mitigation to the brachycephalic crisis. This is different from the confrontational approach that has been adopted in many other countries. The UK Brachycephalic Working Group has adopted a policy that decision-making is led by the evidence. The BWG publicly acknowledges that 'the brachycephalic conformation is frequently associated with health problems in dogs', that 'when present, health problems associated with the brachycephalic conformation .... can cause dogs to suffer' and that 'the animal health and welfare problems linked to breeding for the brachycephalic conformation are one of the UK's leading canine welfare priorities. This acknowledgement means that we no longer need to spend time discussing if there is a problem or about whether the problem is serious; instead we can move towards working to resolve these issues. The wider message from the BWG to the public is to 'Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog.'

Dr O'Neill recommended that any update to the 2009 report should move from using the term 'pedigree dogs' to instead speaking about 'purebred dogs' or even 'dog breeds' as it is not just about dogs with some form of recorded parentage.

Dr O'Neill suggested three key areas to focus on:

1. Reduce the popularity of dogs with brachycephaly – stop and think before buying, ban advertising and use of these dogs in the media and increased public awareness of the welfare issues and financial cost from owning these extreme conformations
2. Move dogs to a more moderate phenotype with muzzles, tails, flexible spines, eyelids that can blink fully – application of the existing welfare legislation could help with this, even if this was just to create greater public awareness of what this legislation requires of anyone who keeps a dog.
3. Protecting the health of dogs that already exist – 25% of dogs in UK are brachycephalic

In summary, Dr O'Neill concluded that substantial progress has been made on evidence collection and on processes that could support real change. But sadly, he also concluded that but there is still a long way to go to safeguard the welfare of dogs with brachycephaly. The public are a key player in this brachycephaly issue, and he suggested that progress requires greater public awareness of the welfare-protection intent behind existing UK welfare laws that are currently largely being ignored.

Dr Jane Ladlow: Senior Lecturer in Soft Tissue Surgery at the University of Cambridge and clinical lead of the BOAS Working Group (BWG)

The BWG is looking at 13 different brachycephalic breeds - many of these don't have straightforward, brachycephalic complications and not all brachycephalic breeds have the same issues/ suffer with the classic brachycephalic respiratory issues so wouldn't be right to take a broad brush approach to all brachy breeds. My main focus has been Pugs, French bulldogs and English bulldogs.

We should not be accepting of health conditions in breeds just because we are used to them. There has been some progress at dog shows in terms of brachys showing respiratory issues not being present. Banning breeds or making it very prescriptive to breed them is not the way forward. There is more of a need to affect the public perception of breeds and also target hobby breeders/ breeders who currently fall outside of the regs.

I would question cross breeds being healthier as it does not always work out. Netherlands banning breeds has allowed more imports. We need to squash the demand. I would suggest actions such as only 5 puppies per car rather than per person, vets to report caesareans, and charities to declare dogs which cannot be re-homed owing to health issues.

Dr Alison Skipper: Vet with PhD in the history of breed-related disease in pedigree dogs and vet at Crufts

From the 2009 report, the problem with breed health has been broadened and diversified since then owing to the rapid rise of commercial breeding. Therefore any intervention now needs a broader remit and needs to be extended beyond pedigree dogs and cover dog conformation in general. Many of the problems faced by pedigree dog breeds are historic and are not new. You can find historic references to problems with some breeds that are very similar to the current issues and therefore it is not the case that overnight we have seen a major change in dog breeds – there have been concerns expressed in relation to some dog breeds that date back to a long time ago. These are complex human problems that will not be easy to solve.

I am wary of legislation to deal with conformation issues as there are problems with enforcement and how you enshrine in legislation what the exact issues are especially if they keep evolving. We should instead try to work with the existing breeding legislation and tighten up accountability, traceability and transparency in the dog breeding world and also utilise guidelines to support the regulatory framework.

Bill Lambert: Senior Health and Welfare Manager at the Kennel Club

The landscape is very different now from 2009. Kennel Club has done a lot of work but influences outside of us also need to be considered. 50,000 French bulldogs were registered last year when 30 years ago there was less than 500. Brachycephalic issues were not regarded as that significant at the time of the 2009 report owing to the sheer fact there were significantly less of these dogs being bred and what the KC had not foreseen was the explosion in popularity of these breeds. The ABS has been upgraded and health testing for Assured Breeders is mandatory. The KC has been involved in and launched 5 new health testing schemes, they have banned close matings, they have developed breed specific strategies/ health conservation plans. They could consider popular sire ban but further thought needs to be given to this

Pug popularity seems to have peaked and is now flattening out as is the English bulldog but French bulldog popularity has really increased and is still on the rise. Legislation is not the solution as it is a blunt tool and we would just see new breeds with new problems popping up. Better enforcement of licensing rules would help and the main tool is to educate the public. Far too many puppies are bought on the spur of the moment and it might be prevented by a cooling off period whereby people have to visit a breeder twice before they can commit to buying

Malcolm Morley: President of the British Veterinary Association

The issues surrounding dog breeding are incredibly complex with lots of underlying issues. The BVA has highlighted issues around breed conformation – they launched the Breed to Breathe campaign. There is merit in the removal of brachycephalic dogs from marketing campaigns and in advertising. In BVA's 2017 Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey, vets reported that 56% of the brachycephalic dogs they see in practice need treatment for breed-related health issues. But only 10% of dog owners could recognise these issues, and 75% were unaware these potential problems even existed before deciding on the breed. BVA has recommended that all breeders be required to register with their local authority.

This issue is fundamentally about social science and not just about breed standards/ veterinary science/ law – we need a team of social scientists to help us to find a solution to raising public awareness about the breed related health issues and alter the choices the public are making with their puppy buying.

Prof Clare Rusbridge: Professor in Veterinary Neurology and Diplomate of the European College of Veterinary Neurology and a RCVS Specialist.

The top issues within breed health are diseases with a high burden i.e. the sum of mortality and morbidity for example

- Diseases with many years of pain requiring many years of medication
- Disease affecting the ability to breathe
- Diseases affecting the ability to walk
- Heart disease.

We should make all breeders accountable and traceable. There should be a basic dog licence for anyone who breeds dogs and advertise dogs for sale (even those hobby breeders who have only had one litter) or an online registration system for those who have less than 3 litters a year. Dog breeders should be traceable through the dog's microchip. Breeders who repeatedly produce sick dogs could then be traced and have their licenses revoked. All breeders should be accountable and traceable through registration or licensing and this requires a unified database.

We can encourage breeders to be more responsible, for example, make the star rating more rigorous, ensure that every dog has to be declared fit to breed by a veterinary surgeon before breeding (must have had DNA tests and screening for high burden diseases). Puppies should all be sold with the puppy contract. The Assured breeders scheme is not enough to protect some dogs and their owners. Many of the breeders do not require all tests to be done and too many 'recommended' tests – more diseases need to be required to be health screened for. ABS is good for some breeds but not all and it should go further particularly for King Charles Spaniels, Pugs, French Bulldogs and CKCS

We need to avoid matador (popular sire) breeding and actively encourage careful crossbreeding....some breeds simply need more genes.

Owners are angry when they find out that the registered KC paperwork doesn't mean that the parents were fully screened and this anger is often vented/ directed at the vet professionals treating the dogs when they come in.

#### Q&A/ Comments from the floor:

There was discussion of what health is and how we can measure it. The BWG have worked on this question in relation to extreme conformation and specifically in relation to brachycephaly. They now have a novel concept of [Innate Health](#) that is agreed on by all members of BWG so this means they have a universal system that can be used to assess types of dogs on whether they meet an acceptable standard of innate health moving conformations in dogs away from extremes.

Thoughts on artificial insemination and would restricting use of this help? Bill Lambert – it has a place for broadening genetic diversity but it has also become a problem due to the commercial nature of it and the huge money that is now associated with it. Jane Ladlaw – fertility clinics are not properly regulated and are not under the remit of RCVS/ BVA and there is an issue with this lack of regulation/ scrutiny. Malcolm Morley – this is high on the BVA's agenda as there is currently a total lack of regulation in this remit.

Real problem with pregnant bitches being brought into the country, giving birth then being removed from the country to get in pup again and the cycle continues. Dogs Trust have seen a significant increase in pregnant bitches coming in.

Could we limit/ put a cap on puppy prices? Do we have to fulfil the demand for puppies? Shouldn't we be looking more at preserving dog health in general rather than looking at supply and demand.

Can we look at the Canadian dog licensing scheme as a model?

The inappropriate use of imagery of brachycephalic dogs in media and advertising needs to be addressed and the [BWG have a position](#) on this. By being agreed by all the key stakeholders, this means we can move to sharing the message with the public and with media/advertisers.

DBRG Breed Conformation Guidance and breed posters – these could be better utilised/ publicised

Lord Trees:

There is an agreed need to educate the public via role models/ influencers

The problem isn't breed specific

Need to consider looking at ways of strengthening consumer protection

Marisa Heath:

The action plan from this meeting is:

- APGAW can support the notion of registration for all breeders and also look into traceability and speak to DEFRA about this.
- APGAW already have a focus group on enforcement with a recently published report calling for dedicated animal welfare inspectors. and we will continue to work on this in relation to breeding.
- Can also be asking for a campaign from DEFRA on what a healthy dog looks like
- CFSG in collaboration with BSAVA and BVA produced an outline Fitness to Breed requirement and this can be picked up again through a small working group
- Use of dogs in advertising can be directed through PAARG
- We are using the LAIAR impact assessment to push the case for strengthening and clarifying the wording in the breeding schedule.
- CFSG, LGAWG and APGAW will look at how to utilise the breed posters that DBRG have already produced.
- CFSG to look at better ways of using the non-statutory best practice codes for breeding of dogs and the dog conformation as well as the breed posters