

Recognising excellence in animal welfare within veterinary education



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Animal producers, governments, consumers and the public increasingly expect high standards of animal welfare, and veterinary graduates are expected to advise on this in their professional capacity. Furthermore, animal health is a key part of animal welfare, and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) recommends that all new veterinary graduates must have a good understanding of animal welfare as a Day 1 competency. And that's where we come in.

Making animal welfare central to veterinary education

For over 15 years, World Animal Protection has worked globally with veterinary educators to provide authoritative and trusted educational and teacher training materials in animal welfare. With the support of the World Veterinary Association, we have been working on an initiative to establish a system recognising good practice in animal welfare across veterinary education globally.

This World Animal Protection initiative aims to:

- 1 Develop a consensus on the key standards of excellence through which veterinary schools can demonstrate good animal welfare practices.
- 2 Embed these standards in all veterinary schools.
- 3 Influence future vets to have a thorough grounding as advocates for animal welfare.

Gaining consensus within the profession

To establish the standards of excellence, World Animal Protection launched a global consultation with the veterinary profession on World Vet Day (26 April 2014) and was open until October 2014.

This survey was conducted online and we received 2,614 responses from 97 countries and territories.

The respondent sample was made up of 455 educators, 1,308 students, 323 veterinarians in private practice and 528 individuals working in business, government, NGOs, research and other animal professions. More than half of respondents were female (57%) reflecting the changing gender balance of the profession.

The survey investigated three key topics to help us develop our standards of excellence in veterinary education.

1 The benefits of improving animal welfare education

Respondents were presented with a list of ten perceived benefits of improving animal welfare education in vet schools. The benefits were ranked order of importance on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is least important and 10 the most important).

'What do you see as the main benefits to vet schools of improving animal welfare education?'

Mean rank*	Benefit
7.9	It reduces harm and suffering of animals.
7.7	It creates a culture of animal welfare practice in the veterinary profession (for both students and professionals).
6.1	It ensures that all students achieve OIE Day 1 vet competencies.
6.0	It improves the quality of veterinary education through animal welfare science.
5.7	It provides a model of animal welfare principles in practice.
5.4	It will increase knowledge of animal welfare science.
5.4	It ensures graduates with greater understanding of animal welfare have better employment opportunities.
4.9	It makes the school more attractive to students.
4.5	It improves status and respect for the school.
1.5	Other

1 = least important 10 = most important

Respondents ranked the intrinsic benefits for animals as the two most important factors. 60% of respondents ranked, 'It creates a culture of animal welfare practice in the veterinary profession' as one of their top three perceived benefits, and 62% put 'It reduces harm and suffering of animals' in their top three.

This shows that professionals who work with animals value the ethical outcomes of animal welfare education more than extrinsic or anthropocentric factors such as employability and institutional reputation.

"I wish to express the support of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) for the efforts of World Animal Protection relating to the global survey on suitable standards of excellence in applying animal welfare principles in veterinary education institutions."

Bernard Vallat, Director General, World Organisation for Animal Health

"The World Veterinary Association (WVA) welcomes these findings, which reflect the commitment of the veterinary profession to animal welfare. WVA supports the work of World Animal Protection to promote standards of excellence in animal welfare for veterinary schools."



Presenters
Kaewta Satayaprasert (left),
Dr Dan Ventura (right)

2 The criteria for animal welfare standards of excellence

In consultation with veterinary professionals around the globe, World Animal Protection drafted ten criteria for standards of excellence in applying animal welfare principles in veterinary education.

Using a five-point Likert scale, we asked survey respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each standard was a good measure of best practice in animal welfare education.

'To what extent would you agree or disagree that these are good criteria to measure best practice in animal welfare education?'

Ten standards of excellence in applying animal welfare principles in veterinary education	'Somewhat agree'	'Strongly agree'	Total agree
1 Faculty shows competency in animal welfare	30%	55%	85%
2 Effective ethics committee	30%	56%	86%
3 Humane use of animals	24%	63%	87%
4 Animal welfare is taught across the curriculum	26%	58%	84%
5 Senior team commitment to animal welfare	28%	56%	84%
6 Continuous professional development	26%	59%	84%
7 Extension /community programmes	28%	57%	85%
8 Student involvement	26%	60%	86%
9 Research in animal welfare	28%	56%	84%
10 Effective quality assurance of animal welfare across all provision	27%	55%	83%

The response showed strong support for all ten criteria, with 80% or more of participants expressing a positive response of 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree'.

3 How to assess the standards

We asked survey respondents to rank three methods of assessing the standards in order of usefulness. The global data showed no preference for any of the methods of assessment.

'What kind of assessment process would help veterinary schools to improve animal welfare standards?'

Assessment method	Ranked no. 1
Peer assessment: Animal welfare experts from different schools visit another school and make an independent assessment, which is compared to reach a joint assessment.	34%
Integrated assessment: The assessment process is made part of existing processes of accreditation by veterinary statutory bodies.	31%
Independent consultants: Trained and accredited consultants make an independent assessment.	35%

There was a slight variation between groups based on profession. Educators preferred integrated assessment; students preferred peer assessment, and vets in private practice preferred assessment by independent consultants.

Asian vet schools piloting the standards of excellence in animal welfare

Throughout the development of the standards of excellence in animal welfare, World Animal Protection has been working with two Asian veterinary schools to pilot this approach:

1 The College of Veterinary Medicine, University of the Philippines Los Baños, The Philippines

This is the oldest and top performing veterinary school in the Philippines. Now the mission of the vet school is "To provide quality education to veterinary students and professionals in order to support national and global animal health, production and welfare, and safeguard public health". The use of live animals for educational purposes with alternative models.

2 The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia

This vet school has successfully developed two animal welfare courses for no less than a yearly cohort of 100 third and fifth year students that will start running in September 2016.

Further information about World Animal Protection's direct work with these and other veterinary schools and veterinary educators is available on request.

Next steps

A final set of guidelines for the criteria for standards of excellence in animal welfare have now been produced. World Animal Protection proposes that veterinary education community works towards implementation of these standards in order to develop a global holistic and cultural approach to animal welfare training at schools and colleges of veterinary medicine. This will help future veterinarians comply with OIE intergovernmental animal welfare standards.

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