

Animal Welfare

Overview

This module will provide a comprehensive appreciation of welfare and ethical issues connected with farm animal practice, animal breeding, transport and slaughter, companion animals, laboratory animals, animals used in competition and wildlife.

Subject areas: An introduction to veterinary ethics; the physiology of pain, distress, fear and anxiety; the effects of genetics on animal welfare; welfare issues in animal husbandry systems; transport and slaughter; and specific welfare issues in companion, farmed, laboratory, wild and competitive animals.

Welcome to the course

Animal Welfare is an optional course in the Livestock Health and Production Programme of the Royal Veterinary College. It may also be studied as 240-hour individual module.

Animal welfare is a big subject, and the issues addressed in the course range, for example, from the methods used by farmers and producers handling many thousands of animals, to individual cases brought to the veterinarian in small animal practice. The setting is worldwide, embracing both industrialized and developing countries.

What will you learn from this course?

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- analyse ethical dilemmas more clearly and apply existing scientific knowledge to resolve issues in animal welfare
- explain how confinement of animals can cause abnormal behavioural and physical development
- discuss how to manage amputation procedures and how you can contribute to development of good practice in these situations
- discuss welfare issues in a wide range of situations where animals are kept as companions, farmed for economic reasons, used in competitions, or for scientific research, or exist in the wild and in free-living conditions

Course structure

The course consists of 14 units of study, grouped into three modules. You should complete all the units in Modules 1 and 2 and five units from Module 3.

Module 1: Introduction to Animal Welfare and Veterinary Ethics

In this module (Units 1-3) ethical dilemmas facing the veterinary profession will be explored and you will be challenged to reflect on your own opinions. Different forms of suffering under conditions of disease and stress will be addressed in detail and you will examine how advances in genetics have led to welfare problems.

Module 2: Welfare Issues in Husbandry Systems and Transport

The second module (Units 4-7) explores current issues in animal welfare when animals are kept in confinement, raised under extensive farming systems, undergo common procedures, such as amputations on farms, and are transported and sent for slaughter. You will learn how suffering in these conditions can be reduced or alleviated by adopting proper pain management, implementing good husbandry practices, and giving priority to the animal in order to lessen fear and stress.

Module 3: Welfare Issues of Selected Species and Groups

The final module consists of seven units (8-14), from which you will select and study five. The module deals in detail with the welfare of animals kept as companions, animals used in competitions, farmed animals in both developed and developing countries, free-living animals in the wild and animals kept under laboratory conditions.

Tutor-marked assignments

In addition to your work on the 14 units, you are required to complete and submit at least one tutor-marked assignment (TMA) for assessment. If you submit more than one - and you may submit up to two - your best TMA will be used in the calculation of your final mark. Full information on how to approach and submit TMAs is provided in the Programme Handbook. You should bear in mind that your TMA will count for 20 per cent of your final mark for the course.

Study time

The entire course, including revision and examination, is designed to take approximately 240 hours to complete. The time taken to study the units varies depending on the individual units you select and on your prior knowledge of the subject. It is expected that you will spend 10-20 hours' study time for each unit, including 5 hours for the TMA(s), any remaining time to be used for personal study and revision.

Assessment

Your work for this course will be assessed by means of a three-hour unseen written examination paper which will take the form of essay questions. In addition, you must submit at least one and up to two TMAs. There are TMA submission deadlines and you should refer to the Programme Handbook for information. The grade awarded will be based on the mark obtained in the written examination (80 per cent) and on the mark for the compulsory assignment (20 per cent).