

Animal Welfare

Introduction to the Course

Welcome to the course

Welcome to *Animal Welfare*. This is an optional course in the Livestock Health and Production Programme of the Royal Veterinary College.

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.

As you embark on this course, take a few moments to consider some fundamental questions.

Is animal welfare a concern that can only be afforded by wealthy nations? If not, then how should poorer nations view animal welfare?

The answer lies in the interrelationships between animal and human suffering:

What is good for animals is also good for their owners.

As an example, take the situation in poorer parts of Africa. Livestock are an important means of accumulating wealth, and so animal morbidity and death represent investment failure. A family can starve if it loses the herd. Livestock are also an essential source of fertilizer, they make cultivation and transport less burdensome, and they are used as bride price. In other words, there is a strong dependency on livestock in everyday life and if the animals are not fit for purpose, the benefits diminish. In these ways, animals serve the community and help ensure human survival. Without them, life is difficult, especially in rural communities where there is no alternative employment. So, when livestock welfare is compromised, for example through starvation or disease, people are disadvantaged as well.

The situation is different in industrialized society. The reason for caring about animal welfare is not because of human survival. People have investments or savings accounts at their banks, and so they do not need to store their wealth in livestock in case of harder times. Inorganic fertilizers can be bought from agro-chemical companies, and livestock are no longer an important source of power. Instead, the main reason for worrying about animal welfare is moral concern. There is a sense of obligation in looking after domesticated animals because of their dependency on humans. This moral value is similar to the one people have for their children. The strength of the concern inevitably varies between individuals. Some people care, while others do not.

So there is an even broader question to think about:

Why worry about animal welfare when there is so much human suffering in the world?

You have chosen to study this course on animal welfare, but should you instead be thinking about human problems and human suffering? On the other hand, is the high prevalence of human suffering in the world today sufficient justification for not caring about animal welfare? If it is not, how do you organize your priorities?

This course is designed to help you develop and establish your values on animal care and welfare. It will provide you with a technical base upon which you can make judgements and form opinions. It will not, however, tell you what your values should be. That is your choice.

There is one piece of advice you should carry with you through the course. When you think you are reaching a moral viewpoint on an issue, ask yourself why you hold that opinion. What is the basis for your view, and can it be upheld for almost all situations? You need to remember this because the overriding aim in this course is clarity in your thinking, and that clarity is based on reasoning.

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 three – 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 your *Student Handbook* and in the assignments themselves. 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 three TMAs. There are TMA submission deadlines for each module and for details please refer to your *Student Handbook*. 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).