



UK Brachycephalic Working Group - Strategy 2022 – 2025

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Introduction

The UK Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), comprised of organisations representing the major dog welfare stakeholders in the UK, was established in 2016 to address the health and welfare problems associated with selectively breeding for brachycephaly (a flattened face) in dogs. Conformation-related welfare impacts vary across breeds. Individual dogs within each brachycephalic breed may be affected by conformation-related problems to a greater or lesser extent. Health and welfare problems related to brachycephaly are recognised as one of the UK's leading canine welfare priorities.

BWG activities to date have been guided by actions laid out in the Group's [Framework for a partnership approach to improving brachycephalic dog health and welfare](#). While progress has been made, we recognise there is still a long way to go to safeguard the welfare of dogs with brachycephaly – both to reduce the negative impacts of brachycephaly on the current generation of dogs and to breed towards healthier dogs for future generations.

How we have undertaken this review

A plan to develop an updated BWG strategy was approved at the full BWG meeting in January 2021. A strategy subgroup was convened and held its first meeting in May 2021. The subgroup developed a Vision and set of Shared Beliefs; following consultation with the full Group, this was adopted in October 2021 (Appendix 1).

The subgroup undertook a consultation of internal (BWG members) and external (groups that take an interest in the health and welfare of dogs with brachycephaly, but are not currently BWG members) stakeholders. A questionnaire was approved by the full BWG (Appendix 2) following the May 2021 meeting and circulated for completion by BWG members in July 2021. An external consultee list was approved by the full Group after the September 2021 full BWG meeting. The questionnaire was circulated for completion by those on the agreed list of external consultees in December 2021.

The consultation questionnaire asked consultees to think about both the individual member organisations within BWG and also BWG as a collective group. For each, they were asked what they felt was being done well, what they felt could be done better, what they felt had been done badly or had failed to be addressed and if they had any further suggestions.

The questionnaire was sent to 47 stakeholders, including dog breed clubs and dog registering bodies, veterinary and academic bodies, all-party parliamentary groups, charities, media representatives and others. Overall, 14 completed questionnaires were received, giving a 30 per cent response rate.

Responses were forwarded to a PhD student based in the Animal Welfare Science and Ethics Group at the Royal Veterinary College, who undertook content analysis of the questionnaire responses. Identifying information on the consultee was removed from questionnaire responses prior to analysis, meaning the researcher was blinded to the identities and organisation affiliation of respondents. From this analysis, the researcher identified themes and broad ideas prompted by the questionnaire responses.

Consultee views on BWG progress

Multiple stakeholders responding to the consultation welcomed the following:

- The forum that BWG provides for multi-stakeholder dialogue and information-sharing, and how these are fostered and supported
- The development and publication of consensus position statements on topics such as obesity in brachycephalic dogs and avoiding the use of brachycephalic dogs in advertising and the media
- The sharing of latest, high quality research on the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs, including through infographics
- The development and dissemination of the Kennel Club and University of Cambridge's Respiratory Function Grading Scheme
- The unified and coordinated action to engage with Disney to mitigate health and welfare risks associated with the 2018 film *Patrick the Pug*
- The response of private and charitable veterinary practices to the increased ownership of dogs with brachycephaly over recent years; for example, upskilling staff to provide indicated respiratory surgery for several affected dogs every week

“The RVC VetCompass project is doing a brilliant job of clearly explaining the issues of these breeds and the infographics they produce are simple, clear and great for social media sharing.”

BWG principles underpinning next steps

- The BWG's vision is a world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the brachycephalic conformation. The Group's shared beliefs include that:
 - At a population level, the brachycephalic conformation is frequently associated with health problems in dogs
 - When present, health problems associated with the brachycephalic conformation reduce quality of life and can cause dogs to suffer
 - There is a societal ethical obligation to promote a good life for dogs under human stewardship
 - Members of BWG – by virtue of our shared responsibility, opportunity, and mandate – must work to promote a good life for dogs and to eliminate health and welfare problems related to brachycephaly

- Overall, BWG firmly believes that **‘Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs.’**
- BWG promotes the concept of ‘innate health’ of dogs – that is, that there are some fundamental health, welfare and temperament attributes (e.g. capacity to breathe in a way that is silent and relaxed at rest) that should typically be expected in all types of domesticated dogs.
- The Group strongly endorses the message that anyone considering getting a brachycephalic breed should “Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog”.
- BWG is concerned by the rapid rise in ownership and number of some breeds of brachycephalic dogs in the UK - both those that are Kennel Club-registered and also those in the wider dog population, including unregistered purebred brachycephalic dogs and so-called designer crosses that include brachycephalic parent breeds.
- The group wants to see a complete reduction in the number of dogs affected by BOAS and other brachycephaly-related health problems. This can be approached by reducing the negative impacts of brachycephaly on the current generation of brachycephalic dogs and by breeding healthier dogs for future generations.
- The UK BWG notes that in recent years, there has been significant development and introduction of legislation pertaining to issues around the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs in countries outside of the UK. BWG supports the greater use of existing UK legislation (i.e. the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 and (Scotland) Regulations 2021) that is effectively and reasonably enforced using currently available scientific evidence.
- Organisations join BWG because they believe that the Group’s collective positive impacts for dog welfare will be greater than those arising from the sum of its parts. Each organisation makes compromises in pursuit of this overall aim, but the positive impacts must be assessed and realised in order for these compromises to be justified and made in perpetuity.
- The group influences and supports moves by The Kennel Club and the pedigree dog breeding community to provide global leadership in ethical, animal welfare-focused dog breeding.
- Progress on reducing the negative welfare impacts from brachycephaly on dogs in the UK has, to date, been slow. There is a need for renewed urgency - to reduce popularity of brachycephalic dogs and promote the veterinary and breeding tools available to improve the health of the current population, given the unacceptable animal welfare impacts of breeding for brachycephaly and the potential for legislative action in the absence of meaningful welfare change.

- Decision-making within BWG is evidence-led. BWG is committed to supporting the generation, dissemination and application of good evidence for optimal outcomes.

Next steps: BWG Strategy 2022 – 2025

BWG will now work towards designing and implementing solutions on three core challenges:

1. Dramatically reducing numbers and popularity of dogs with brachycephaly
2. Promoting a more moderate and healthier phenotype of the remaining animals with brachycephaly
3. Reducing the negative impacts of brachycephaly on the current generations of dogs with brachycephaly

These solutions are derived, in particular, from consultation responses to questions asking what BWG should do differently, or had failed to address to date.

	Aspiration	Actions	Coordinated by	By when
Reducing numbers and popularity of dogs with brachycephaly				
1	Effective communication of 'Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog' message resulting in it being heard and acted upon	<p>All BWG members, and BWG as a whole, to use the message in media, on websites, on social media channels and in all public-facing materials</p> <p>To develop BWG brand and communication assets</p> <p>To explore possibilities of funding streams to create clear, consistent and widespread messaging received by target audiences, especially the general public.</p> <p>To design and deliver an effective, collaborative campaign, if funding secured</p>	<p>All</p> <p>BWG Communications Subgroup</p> <p>BWG Communications Subgroup</p>	Ongoing
2	Stop images of dogs with brachycephaly being used in advertising, marketing or social media unless there is a direct welfare link for the dogs	<p>Work to prevent the gratuitous use of imagery of brachycephalic animals to advertise products, services, brands and personalities</p> <p>Contact organisations when they use unjustified images of brachycephalic dogs, to highlight linked welfare harms</p> <p>Secure commitments from relevant industry umbrella bodies that they will highlight welfare harms to their members</p>	<p>BVA (#BreedToBreathe and #HealthOverLooks campaigns and advertising guidelines)</p> <p>Blue Cross (#EndTheTrend campaign)</p>	Ongoing
3	Stop the illegal importation of brachycephalic dogs.	Lobbying and other approaches to tackle illegal importation of dogs, including brachycephalic dogs	Dogs Trust	Ongoing
Promoting a healthier phenotype of dogs with brachycephaly				
4	Increase proportion of dogs bred and bought that are health tested	<p>To promote relevant health testing schemes and research available to breeders and would-be owners and drive uptake of the Assured Breeder Scheme with breeders and puppy buyers</p> <p>Review the uptake of health-testing with a view to introducing mandatory health testing of all Pugs, French bulldogs and English bulldogs where uptake is</p>	<p>All</p> <p>KC and breed clubs</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2022</p>

		<p>insufficient, detailing which test(s), when and acceptable thresholds.</p> <p>To support and disseminate research about brachycephalic health to reach would-be puppy buyers, breeders and current owners as part of tackling all three core challenges identified</p> <p>To liaise with pet insurance companies to map current linking of premiums to health screening status and explore new approaches, e.g. linking to Kennel Club Assured Breeders Scheme</p>	<p>All</p> <p>Kennel Club</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2022</p>
5	To reduce incidence of welfare-limiting health conditions where there is evidence of limited genetic variation within a brachycephalic breed	<p>Support judicious evidence-backed means, including the use of worldwide sub-populations or alternative gene pools, to reduce incidence of welfare-limiting health conditions in Pugs, French Bulldogs and English Bulldogs.</p> <p>Produce recommendations and action plan (incorporating the use of sub-populations and alternative gene pools, where required) for Pug, French bulldog and English Bulldog, to support health improvements in these breeds.</p>	<p>University of Cambridge BVA Kennel Club</p> <p>University of Cambridge BVA Kennel Club</p>	<p>May 2023</p>
6	Ensure the hobby of dog showing promotes and rewards healthy dogs	<p>Assess, review, and recommend changes to brachycephalic breed standards to ensure they promote a healthy phenotype through continual evolution, and are in line with BWG innate health position.</p> <p>Make breed standard review process available, in full, for all BWG members, including dates of all relevant decision-making meetings.</p> <p>Ensure a position on The Kennel Club Breed Standards and Conformation Sub Group is always filled by at least one</p>	<p>BWG breed standard subgroup Kennel Club Breed clubs</p> <p>Kennel Club</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>December 2022</p>

		<p>person with professional knowledge of canine health and disease. For each breed under consideration the person taking this role should have access to specialist knowledge of the known health conditions in that breed.</p> <p>Review vet check process and criteria for awarding of 'champion' at dog shows and make recommendations to feed into Kennel Club ongoing strategy development to ensure only healthy and fit brachycephalic dogs are rewarded.</p> <p>Recommend requirement that 'Champion' title only be bestowed on dogs who have undergone agreed health tests applicable to their breed.</p> <p>Review and make recommendations about training requirements for judges at Kennel Club shows, and processes for judges who reward extreme conformation that contravene revised standards, to feed into Kennel Club ongoing strategy development.</p>	<p>Kennel Club</p> <p>BWG show judging review subgroup</p> <p>BWG show judging review subgroup</p> <p>BWG show judging review subgroup</p>	<p>December 2022</p> <p>December 2022</p> <p>November 2022</p> <p>December 2022</p>
Reducing the negative impacts from brachycephaly on the current generations				
7	All dog-buyers source healthy, happy pets, responsibly	All BWG members to increasingly promote Puppy Contract and The Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme through all public-facing channels.	All	Ongoing
8	All veterinary practices made aware of BOAS surgical guidelines	<p>Promote BOAS surgical guidelines to veterinary practices and implementation of recommendations</p> <p>Create and deliver communications plan to increase awareness and uptake of guidelines</p>	<p>BVA</p> <p>BSAVA</p> <p>PDSA</p> <p>Blue Cross</p> <p>RSPCA</p>	Dec 2022

9	Increase number of respiratory function grading assessments carried out by vets	<p>Create communication plan to increase awareness and uptake of respiratory function grading training</p> <p>Recommend vets to use respiratory function grading scheme to assess any dog put forward for BOAS surgery, and to report veterinary BOAS surgery to The Kennel Club.</p> <p>Facilitate and drive more veterinary discussions around breed-related health with owners of brachycephalic dogs by developing and promoting a Brachycephalic Health Assessment veterinary consultation framework - to help improve the welfare of the current population of brachycephalic dogs, and inform breeding decisions</p>	<p>BVA BSAVA University of Cambridge Breed Clubs</p> <p>BVA</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>June 2023</p>
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Impact assessment: Collecting the evidence on progress

BWG will use three main metrics to assess impact –

1. Numbers and proportion of dogs with brachycephaly registered by The Kennel Club, and numbers and proportion of dogs with brachycephaly registered at primary-care veterinary practices in the UK within the VetCompass Programme (both used as indicators of wider ownership trends).
2. Prevalence trends of specified health conditions in populations of Pugs, French Bulldogs and English Bulldogs (through breed health reporting databases/research). We will also monitor:
 - a. use of brachycephalic imagery in advertising
 - b. media coverage of 'stop and think' message
3. Take-up of breeding tools and schemes designed to reduce the overall levels of severity of brachycephaly in breeds with brachycephaly e.g.
 - a. Uptake of Respiratory Function Grading Scheme
 - b. Proportion of KC-registered brachycephalic breeds bred and bought within the Assured Breeder Scheme

Communication

There was widespread support for continued collaborative working, though a theme also emerged that members should not be afraid of engaging in challenging conversations and topics. There was also broad support for a funded, strategic communication strategy, utilising different voices for different audiences and utilising social media and influencers. The tone of all outputs should be progressive, conveying brave new approaches and reflecting the taking of firm, evidence-based stances to improve brachycephalic dog health and welfare. It should convey a bold, leadership position.

Appendix 1

BWG Vision and Shared Beliefs

Our vision

A world where no dog experiences health-related welfare problems attributable to having been selectively bred for the brachycephalic conformation.

Our beliefs

We as BWG have a shared belief that...

1. Our area of concern covers the actions of humans, and their consequences for dogs, in relation to the brachycephalic conformation
2. At a population level, the brachycephalic conformation is frequently associated with health problems in dogs
3. When present, health problems associated with the brachycephalic conformation: a) Reduce quality of life b) Compromise a dog's welfare c) Can cause dogs to suffer
4. Suffering, and poor quality of life/welfare in dogs, are important attributes of a dog's life to assess and recognise
5. The animal health and welfare problems linked to breeding for the brachycephalic conformation are one of the UK's leading canine welfare priorities
6. There is a societal ethical obligation to promote a good life for dogs under human stewardship
7. Therefore, the members of BWG – by virtue of our shared responsibility, opportunity, and mandate – must work to promote a good life for dogs and to eliminate breed-related health and welfare problems, especially in relation to brachycephaly
8. Rising populations of certain brachycephalic breeds, because of high current appeal of the brachycephalic conformation to many people, are exacerbating the overall health and welfare problems related to the brachycephalic conformation
9. Addressing the animal health and welfare problems linked to the brachycephalic conformation is a priority for all our organisations
10. Reduction in suffering attributable to health problems associated with the brachycephalic conformation in dogs is achievable
11. The suffering attributable to health problems associated with the brachycephalic conformation can eventually be eliminated

Overall, BWG considers that **“Maximising good health, welfare and temperament overrides all other considerations for dogs.”**

Appendix 2



Your View: The **Brachycephalic Working Group's** current and potential future roles in promoting improved health and welfare for all brachycephalic dogs

This is your opportunity to help shape the work of the [Brachycephalic Working Group \(BWG\)](#). Issues around brachycephalic dogs are one of the most pressing welfare issues of dogs in the UK. The BWG has been working collaboratively for the past 5 years to better understand these issues and to contribute to activities that mitigate these problems. To improve the impact of our work we **would value your views** on how well you feel the BWG and its member organisations are advancing the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs and what more BWG could do to become as effective as possible in fulfilling this role.

The **BWG's members** are:

- Royal Veterinary College
- University of Cambridge
- Dog Breed Clubs (Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug)
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Association
- The Kennel Club (KC)
- Dogs Trust
- PDSA
- RSPCA
- DEFRA

The BWG's **remit** includes all dogs with brachycephaly – regardless of breed and whether or not they are Kennel Club (KC)-registered. We aim to generate positive change for the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs. We work as a collective with shared goals and follow the majority view within BWG.

To improve our work and outcomes over the coming years, we are consulting with organisations that share our interest in the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs. We kindly ask that you provide your **name and the organisation** you represent. We will not include responses from respondents who have not provided these details, but no respondents will be individually identifiable in any final reports. For practical reasons, we are only able to accept one response (the first received)

per organisation. Your answers can be as long or as short as you like; please type them in below the questions.

Please email completed questionnaires to BWG member, Sean Wensley – wensley.sean@pdsa.org.uk. Thank you.

Your name:

Organisation you represent:

1. Thinking about the BWG's **individual member organisations** (listed above) -

- What do you feel these individual organisations are doing well to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs? Please give any notable **examples** of certain activities and the organisations that these refer to

- What do you feel these individual organisations could do differently or better to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs? Please give any notable **examples** of certain activities and the organisations that these refer to.

2. Now please think about the **BWG as a collective group**. Based on what you know about the BWG's work so far –

- What do you feel BWG is **doing well** to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs? Please give some examples and reasons.

- What do you feel BWG could do **differently or better** to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs? Please give some suggestions and explanations.

- Within the remit of reducing health and welfare problems associated with brachycephaly in dogs, what, if anything, do you think the BWG has done **badly or failed to tackle** at all? Please give some examples and reasons.
3. Thinking broadly and openly, **what else** (if anything) would you like to suggest or add about the current and potential future roles of BWG and/or its member organisations in improving the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs?

Thank you very much for your time