

BRIEFING PAPER

DOG TRAINING AND THE USE OF ELECTRIC SHOCK COLLARS



THE KENNEL CLUB
Making a difference for dogs

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Training should be an important part of every dog's life as it provides the vital physical and mental stimulation needed to ensure a dog's wellbeing and welfare – poor training or a lack of training has implications for both animal welfare and human safety. The Kennel Club encourages and promotes positive, reward-based training to strengthen the bond between a dog and its owner.

However, there are many 'mixed messages' with regards to dog training with some 'professional' dog trainers and behaviourists using outdated practices and techniques, and a range of extreme negative dog training devices on the market for use by the general dog owning public.

This lack of consistent messaging on the correct way to train a dog, to ensure dog welfare and human safety, needs to be addressed by the government.

IMPLICATIONS OF POOR TRAINING

Human understanding of dog welfare and behaviour has advanced significantly in the past ten to fifteen years and is now a well-established scientific discipline. Some previously accepted aversive theories and techniques, based on the principle of applying something painful or frightening to reduce the likelihood of an unwanted behaviour occurring, are no longer considered necessary or acceptable to train dogs.

In particular, the Kennel Club opposes the use of electronic shock training devices (ESTDs) which have a proven negative impact on animal welfare, and in some cases make problems worse. A ban on the sale and use of ESTDs is widely supported by nearly three quarters of the public according to a recent Kennel Club survey¹ and the sale and use of ESTDs has already been outlawed in Wales by regulations introduced under the Animal Welfare Act. It is worth noting that even when these regulations were challenged under Judicial Review instigated by the Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association (ECMA), the Royal Courts of Justice found in favour of the Welsh Assembly. We believe the rest of the UK should follow suit based on extensive evidence based research.

1 Censuswide survey, January 2014



Recent research commissioned by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) showed that there were significant long term negative welfare consequences for a proportion of the dogs that were trained with ESTDs – namely electronic shock collars. 1 in 4 dogs showed signs of stress compared to less than 5 percent of dogs reacting to positive training methods. Furthermore, 1 in 3 dogs yelped at the first use of an electric shock collar and 1 in 4 yelped at subsequent uses.

The studies concluded that even when electronic shock collars were used by professionals following an industry set standard of training approved by the ECMA, there were still long term negative impacts on dog welfare. Lastly, the studies also demonstrated that positive reinforcement methods were effective in treating livestock chasing, which is the most commonly cited justification of their use, and where they are unnecessary given farmers' advice to keep dogs on leads around sheep.

In a written submission to the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee in May 2015 (post-publication of the Defra research), the ECMA stated that even in their view, ESTDs should only be used under qualified supervision. Acknowledging that *"their misuse that has given rise to incidents which have raised concerns for all animal welfare stakeholders including reputable collar manufacturers and retailers"*.²

PROPOSED STANDARDS FOR DOG TRAINING – THE KENNEL CLUB ACCREDITED INSTRUCTOR SCHEME

The problem of the availability of extreme negative training devices is compounded by the fact that there are still practitioners that use aversive theories and techniques. The dog training industry is unregulated and anyone can set up a business training dogs without appropriate qualifications, knowledge and skills.

However, standards for those in the behaviour and training industry do exist and are embodied in the Kennel Club Accredited Instructor scheme (KCAI) which we believe delivers a high standard of education, guidance and support for all those who work with dogs. The scheme assesses and accredits trainers who comply with appropriate standards which we believe all dog trainers and behaviourists should be required to adhere to across the globe, and we have worked with Lantra to develop National Occupational Standards.

The KCAI scheme is now the only scheme in the UK which is approved by City & Guilds NPTC which ensures its members have a nationally recognised, credible and externally verified qualification. With a growing membership of 2,000 trainers and behaviourists working under the Kennel Club code of practice for Accredited Instructors, the Kennel Club is well positioned to be the leading canine organisation for dog training and behaviour. To demonstrate this, we already have a partnership in place with Battersea Cats and Dogs Home in order that they offer KCAI as a training programme to a selection of their staff.

² Electronic Collar Manufacturers Association submission to Scottish Public Petitions Committee 26 May 2015
www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_PublicPetitionsCommittee/General%20Documents/20150526_PE1555_D_ECMA.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING DOG TRAINING

Given the mounting evidence that exists on the welfare implications of ESTDs, we believe the government should review the Codes of Practice under the Animal Welfare Act at the earliest opportunity to include a prohibition on the use and sale of ESTDs.

With a wide range of positive training tools and methods available, as well as extensive research on the welfare implications of ESTDs, we do not believe it is necessary to train dogs using fear or pain as inducement. Neither is it worth potentially damaging the relationship between dog and handler.

In order to ensure that dog trainers and behaviourists are qualified to provide the most reliable, up-to-date training techniques, we believe that the government should develop an industry standard based on the Kennel Club Accredited Instructor programme.

IN SUMMARY, TO IMPROVE HOW DOGS ARE TRAINED WE BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Prohibit the sale and use of electronic shock training devices
- Adopt the KCAI requirements as an industry based standard that all dog trainers and behaviourists must comply with

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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